

Turning for Home - Racing Commentary



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He also contributed to the text, *Racehorse Breeding Theories* (2004). His last book, *Samuel Riddle, Walter Jeffords and the Dynasty of Man o' War*, was published in 2005.

More of his work is available at <http://www.equcross.com>

A rose by any other name might not be the right rose

For a sport that loves to harken upon its rich history, it has been a source of mild consternation for this racing fan why some of America's most important stakes races have been saddled with names whose race conditions do not reflect the attributes of the horse they were meant to celebrate.

It would seem only appropriate that these marquee events, worthy of a title, receive the namesake of a remarkable racehorse whose own career highlights reflect the conditions specific to that fixture.

Specifications such as distance and surface as well as the age range and gender of the race's annual participants would be considered of primary concern in the selection of that well-deserved namesake.

One might then expect the commemorated runner, if still in training today, would have excelled—indeed, often triumphed—in that event which bears his or her name.

The whole process of applying a namesake seems rather misleading, if not haphazard, otherwise.

Yet here in the U.S., for example, there currently are at least nine different major racetracks that run at least one graded stakes race carded for the turf that has been named after a horse who not once in their career even ran on grass.

A prime example of this would be the Man o' War Stakes (G1) at Belmont Park, a Grade 1 race for three-year olds and older going 1 $\frac{3}{4}$ miles on the turf.

Of course, Man o' War, the "Babe Ruth of horse racing," never set foot on a grass course for there was no turf racing in America in the post-World War I era. As such, the honor represents a rather misleading tribute to one of the greatest racing stars of all time.

Perhaps this issue does not qualify among racing's biggest dilemmas, but it does point out some discrepancies in a sport that claims such a close bond to its past. What often is happening is that a worthy recipient is getting the wrong award. More importantly, a misconception is created and then perpetuated.



GIO PONTI WINNING 2010 MAN O' WAR

An analogy would be if baseball had decided to present the annual Cy Young Award to the league's best hitter because he was a great former ballplayer.

New fans could not be faulted in then assuming that the sensational athlete must have been primarily known as a great batter and not the phenomenal pitcher for which he is celebrated.

To this point, the Forego Handicap (G1) at Saratoga Race Course has been written for three-year olds and older, going seven furlongs on the main track. Why on earth would the track name their meet's premier sprint event after Forego? He appeared only twice at the Spa and ran unusually poorly both times.

A three-time Horse of the Year, Forego won a total of 24 graded stakes but only three were at sprint distances. By virtually any standard, this race was not the best way to remember him.

Out here in Southern California, a real head-scratcher has been the Gamely Stakes (G1), a Grade 1 race for fillies and mares, three-years old and older, going 1 $\frac{1}{2}$ miles on the turf at Hollywood Park.

Gamely was a brilliant champion at three, four, and five, but she did not make her way into Racing's Hall of Fame as a turf specialist. She was soundly beaten in all three of her career attempts on grass.

And while we are at it, why does the great Citation figure prominently with a key race in Hollywood Park's Autumn Turf Festival? In his 45 career starts, he never ran on grass once.

Really, it should not be a huge chore to maintain namesakes that are appropriate, if not totally "spot on" for the occasion.

Throughout the U.S., there are plenty of examples of stakes with names that show ample thought behind them, including the Cicada, the Go for Wand, the Davona Dale, the Salvator Mile and the Landaluce.

Now those were some glorious namesakes, who surely would have captured a good number of their own renewals.