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## *Gives Views on Sport Before TCA*

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# **'Mr. Fitz' Receives Scroll and Gold Pin**

*by Joe Thomas*

LEXINGTON, Ky., Oct. 21.—James "Sunny Jim" Fitzsimmons, kind and generous as always, last night humbly accepted a scroll and gold pin, signifying life membership in the Thoroughbred Club of America, at the dinner held in his honor at Keeneland. "I am very grateful, happy and proud to be with you," the 81-year-old dean of American trainers said, following the reading of the

scroll by TCA president Ira Drymon. "Hearing this scroll makes me think I'm quite a guy, something I didn't think I was. God bless you all."

A capacity crowd was on hand to pay tribute to the "Sage of Sheepshead Bay," whose ready wit and twinkling eyes belied his 70 years on a racetrack. Many turf notables were present, including William Woodward, Jr., owner of Belair Stud, whose horses Mr. Fitz has trained for more than 30 years.

The guest of honor did not give a prepared speech. Instead he was interviewed by J. B. Faulconer, director of publicity of Keeneland and the Breeders' Sales Company.

### Notes Problems

Mr. Fitz pointed out several problems of racing today, in answer to a query regarding things the sport should attend to in order that it may continue to prosper.

"We're slipping around a bit in the secretary's office," he said, "and once you've won two races with a horse and he's not a stakes horse or a claiming horse, you're out of luck." There are just two categories, Mr. Fitz continued, claiming and stakes, and whereas a \$5,000 horse can win \$15,000, a \$15,000 horse is lucky to win \$1,000.

He also emphasized the shortage of good riders. He said that everybody in the horse business should try to make jockeys and suggested that apprentices be allowed 10 pounds until they've ridden 20 winners; five pounds for a year, or until they've won 40 races. The good boys could go on, he added, the others could become exercise boys who also are getting scarce.

are getting scarce.  
"Sunny Jim" also called for all the 2 and 3-year-old races that a secretary can put on, and a lot more longer races after July for 2-year-olds.

### Cool, Clear Voice

Responding to Faulconer's questions with the enthusiasm of a youngster and in a loud, clear voice, Mr. Fitz related that his parents were born in Ireland and that his father was a huckster around Sheepshead Bay. His family consisted of five boys and two girls. In 1881, he married the daughter of a "mother who ran a boarding house where I was one of the boarders." He added that he felt Mrs. Fitzsimons had regretted the marriage many times after, but she never said it. He is the father of six children and his son, John, who assists him, was among those present last night. He has 17 grandchildren and 17 great-grandchildren, and there "may be two or three more before I get back to New York."

Faulconer asked him where he picked up the nickname "Sunny Jim," and the honored guest replied that George Daly, of the New York Sun, created the name for him in 1920 and that it has stuck ever since.

Mr. Fitz revealed that his first job on a racetrack was at the age of 10 and paid him \$4 a month. He first was employed by a racing stable as sort of a "second a

cook." About four years later he embarked on a riding career.

"I was vaccinated for a jockey, but it didn't take too well," he said and his three years in that profession were hard and lean. He termed his first winning ride "very bad and I won by a sixteenth of a mile whipping like the devil." This was September 13, 1890.

After hanging up his tack, he nearly took a "trolley car job," but instead turned to the training profession and saddled his first winner at Brighton Beach, August 7, 1900.

"How did it feel as your training paid off for the first time?" Faulconer asked. "I was very happy and got the big head like anyone else. It took me quite a while to get my feet back on the ground again," was the answer.

Queried about the great horses he has handled since then, Mr. Fitz said that Dice was the best 2-year-old he had trained until Johnstown came along. These two were about equal. Then came Nashua, who he guessed was the best of the three. Diavolo was the best 4-year-old he has trained and Gallant Fox was the best 3-year-old until Nashua. And Nashua probably was the better of the two.

#### Names His 'Greats'

The "great or near great" horses of his time were Sysonby, Colin, Man o' War, Citation, Native Dancer, Gallant Fox and Tom Fool.

The final question concerned Mr. Fitz' advice to a young man seeking a career as a trainer: "First, hit the jackpot like I did. I have had the most wonderful bosses who have stuck with me. Buy Preston Burch's book on training. And once you get a job with a good owner, take care of the boss."

Drymon presided at the affair and read congratulatory messages from Mr. and Mrs. John Hertz, Bryan Field, Irving Gushen and Humphrey Finney. All wished Mr. Fitz the best and expressed regrets that they couldn't be present.

The program ended with a color film prepared by Washington Park of the match race between Nashua and Swaps—one of Mr. Fitz' greatest triumphs.