

Little Class In Flamingo, Says Mr. Fitz

MIAMI BEACH, Feb. 23.—Just reading the announcement was a star-spangled thrill. It conjured up images of that dreadful winter at Valley Forge, of the heroic leader standing defiantly in the boat crossing the Delaware, of Martha, in a comely Virginia home, pouring tea.

The announcement read: "In commemoration of the birthday of the father of our country, the Miami Beach Kennel Club honors the memory of this great patriot in dedicating the feature event of tonight's program of greyhound racing . . . no minors allowed."



Joe Williams

This was a stirring ceremony no red-blooded American would want to miss and we, for one, certainly didn't plan to. Simply as a spectacle, it would be memorable. We felt sure the dogs, of course, would be attired in buckled shoes, velvet knickers and gold-trimmed coats; the officials would affect powdered wigs, a fife-and-drum unit would musically simulate the Spirit of 1776.

We set out to enlist fellow patriots. Eddie Burke's forefathers had fought against perfidious albigion, too.

"A dog race for George Washington!" he screamed at the other end of the phone. "What have you been drinking? I wouldn't go across the street to see one of those things, even if it was in my honor."

Not Much to Beat.

We hoped for the safety of the old Celtic basketball star and long-time friend that no FBI men were listening in. What, with the Castro situation, and Cuba only a mashie shot from the Florida coast, subversive inferences can lead to trouble down here.

Next we tried Johnny Dolan, in whose ancestral New Jersey home the general had once slept, a historical distinction which we believed would pamper his ego and at the same time stimulate his nationalism.

"I got news for you," snapped Dolan. "The general scrambled without paying his bill."

We hadn't really expected Sunny Jim Fitzsimmons to go. Not at 86. But at breakfast on the backside at Hialeah we had shown the timeless trainer the announcement.

"You know, there was one thing the general and I had in common. I liked to chop down cherry trees, too. Maybe that warning about no minors is meant for me," racing's Grand Old Man chuckled, and his eyes danced as they always do when he's in a merry mood.

With the \$100,000 Flamingo only two days off we frisked Mr. Fitz for his opinion on the year's first important Kentucky Derby preview.

"There isn't a good 3-year-old down here," he said. There is, he's still in the barn. I guess Carry Back is a logical favorite. He doesn't look much to me, but he wins his race and that's what counts.

"I don't know much about the others and I doubt that anybody else does. No, I haven't got a Derby horse in my barn. Wish I did; I'd like to make another trip to Louisville. It's real pretty out there in the spring."

The Swaps Reversal.

One must suppose there were some springs out there that were prettier than others to Mr. Fitz. The years he won with Gallant Fox, Omaha and Johnstown. It's been more than 20 years now since he won the Big One.

"But I should have won with Nashua in '55," he said. "And it was nobody's fault but mine that I didn't. Some of you sports writers blamed Eddie Arcaro. All Eddie did was follow my instructions and that's what got him beat.

"I was more afraid of Summer Tan than Swaps. So I told Eddie to keep his eye on Summer Tan, and not to make his move until he did. Eddie took care of Summer Tan all right, but in the meantime, Swaps got away from us."

Later that year, however, Mr. Fitz got hunk when Nashua and Swaps met in a match race in Chicago. . . . "Despite the Derby, I was convinced Nashua could not put Swaps away from this time I told Eddie to get off fast. I was confident Swaps would run out of the race. And that's how it worked out."

It takes a real big man to be a very competent one to rectify it in both categories.