

Thrilling Display of Skill

In my time, the finest tribute to Mr. Fitz as a trainer occurred in 1956. That was the year he saddled the late Bill Woodward's Nashua to a victory in the Widener Handicap. While most trainers whine about the necessity of giving horses races, Mr. Fitz showed them what it was all about that afternoon at Hialeah Park.

Nashua had been away from the races since Oct. 15, 1955 when he beat Thinking Cap by five lengths in the two-mile Jockey Club Gold Cup. On Feb. 18, 1956 at Hialeah, Nashua packed topweight of 127 pounds in the mile and one-quarter Widener in his first start as a 4-year-old. Nashua won one of the most thrilling races I've ever seen. Bill Winfrey must have appreciated the Old Man's skill that day. He trained Social Outcast for that race with Nashua beating him a head for \$100,000.

Mr. Fitz' finest moment and the one that gave him the most satisfaction was the six and a half length defeat of Swaps by Nashua in the match race the Summer before, at oven-hot Washington Park. Everyone remembers the great job of training Mr. Fitz did, getting Nashua ready at Saratoga. I remember Eddie Arcaro working Nashua a mile and one-eighth in 1:55 over the deep Saratoga track and declaring with awe, after dismounting under the trees, "that's the greatest work a horse ever gave me . . ."

For a dramatic impact, the match itself was a Jovian thunderclap. But the thing that keeps coming back to me was the sight of Mr. Fitz in the sultry infield, wearing a Panama, silhouetted against an oyster-gray sky. After Nashua was unsaddled and feted in the infield, a groom took him by the head and started the long walk—at least a half-mile away—back to the barn. A Pinkerton rushed up to Mr. Fitz and said something. Mr. Fitz listened politely and you wondered how the man carried on with his back so cruelly bent, his lungs and heart more constricted for space than the workings of a wafer thin watch. Mr. Fitz shook his head negatively and walked off behind his horse into the suffocating infield heat. It made you doubt, as he limped along, who had the toughest afternoon, Nashua in the mile and one-quarter or his trainer taking him home.

The Least He Could Do

The Pinkerton aroused my curiosity. I asked Mr. Fitz about it later on.

"He was a nice young fella," Mr. Fitz said. "He asked me if I wanted a station wagon to take me back to the barn. I said, 'No, the horse ran today. The least I can do is walk back with him'."

And then, before the match race, talking with Mr. Fitz. Not that he was interested really, but he had the courtesy to ask me what I thought of the race. I expressed grave doubts and gave all the reasons . . . shipping to the West and meeting Swaps on his home ground . . . the hot weather . . . race over the track and so on. Finally, Mr. Fitz fixed his pale blue eyes upon me and winking one said:

"Tell you what, Pat. You write the stories and I'll train the horse. Between us we'll win this damn match race."