

Old Timer's Corner

A drama that remains indelibly etched on the minds of racing fans occurred almost twenty years ago when the 1957 Kentucky Derby brought together one of the most illustrious fields of Thoroughbreds ever seen in the Churchill Downs classic.

Bold Ruler, Round Table, Gallant Man... these three alone would have made any race worthy to be titled the "Race Of The Century." In addition, a non-starter named Gen. Duke was considered on Derby eve, a "horse to beat" and Calumet had entered him with an erratic stablemate... Iron Liege.

A bruised foot caused Calumet to abandon the notion that they had the Derby in their pocket, and Jockey Hartack was asked by the trainer, Jimmy Jones, if he wanted to stick around and take a shot with Iron Liege or travel to Garden State and ride Fabius in a New Jersey stake the same day.

Chick Lang at the time was Hartack's agent, and he persuaded the rider to remain in Louisville although Hartack disliked Iron Liege and his habit of stopping when a horse ran inside or threatened to pass him on what is known as the "near side."

With Gen. Duke out of the race, Gallant Man loomed the choice especially with the brilliant Shoemaker engaged to do the booting.

Johnny Nerud, who trained Gallant Man, was concerned about replacing regular rider John Choquette with Shoemaker when a steward's decision to set Choquette down for an infraction settled Nerud's problem of how to diplomatically substitute riders.

The path was clear for Gallant Man: Gen Duke out of action... incidentally, never to race again. Most horsemen were ready to admit that nothing was going to stop Gallant Man.

Federal Hill, who made the pace in that 1957 Derby, began to tire after the field had travelled a fairly brisk mile, and Gallant Man was making his run at this point, quickly moving from far back to assume command in mid-stretch. While this was going on, Iron Liege was being patiently steered along the inside by Hartack, and when the tiring Federal Hill drifted out from the rail, Har-



Shoemaker looks grim after the running of the 1957 Kentucky Derby. Guess why.

tack was there to push his mount along under ideal circumstances.

Shoemaker suddenly started to pull up just past the sixteenth pole under the mistaken impression that the race was won. He immediately saw his error and settled down to ride again but the damage was done. In that split second his rival, steaming along the inside rail, zipped him on the wire. It was close... but that tiny margin which a photo developed was enough to cost Gallant Man and Shoemaker a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity.

A sure winner turned into a sure loser by a freak happening which never has been repeated by Shoemaker or any other rider in the Run for the Roses. A magazine article, written years later, reports that Ralph Lowe, owner of Gallant Man, had a dream about a week before the Derby and in this dream... or nightmare... Choquette had pulled up Gallant Man before the wire.

When told of Lowe's vision, Harry Silbert, Shoemaker's agent, laughed and said: "Forget it! You've got Shoemaker on your horse, and you can sleep well. He doesn't make mistakes!" And, aside from that one horrible miscalculation several decades back, I'd have to agree that he doesn't!