

## Monmouth Park

# 90 Candles Today for Mr. Fitz, Still on the Sunny Side of Life

by **Joe Hirsch**

MONMOUTH PARK, Oceanport, N. J., July 22.—Some 10 years ago, Monmouth Park officials inaugurated the delightful custom of a birthday party honoring Sunny Jim Fitzsimmons, then the very active dean of American trainers. Mr. Fitz came down from Long Island with his children, his grandchildren and his great-grandchildren for a tasty luncheon, a huge cake, a glass of champagne, a round of gifts and a rousing chorus of "Happy Birthday, Mr. Fitz" from the thousands on hand. The ceremonies have continued in ensuing years without change, and tomorrow the Grand Old Man will be on hand once again to celebrate his 90th birthday.

It's hard to believe he is really 90. He is so vibrant and youthful in his outlook, his spirit, his manner.

He is legendary for his cheerfulness. When they began to call him Sunny Jim, more than half a century ago, it wasn't an idle gesture. His physical condition—a crippling arthritis—would make the average man a perpetual grouch, but Fitz is not an average man.

"My legs have gone back on me," he said the other day, "but otherwise I feel great. Sitting down, I am just as good as I was 20 years ago."

He has always made a strong point of common sense and hard work, and an appreciation of those about him. He came up the hard way, living in the barn with his one-horse stable, often going without food to feed his horse. Racing has meant everything to him and he is grateful.

"There are only two groups of people that we in racing have to cater to," he has often said, "and they are the only two groups that can't win. They are the owners, who buy and maintain the horses that provide the show, and the public, who supports the game. All the rest of us are just making our living their efforts, and I mean jockeys, trainers, officials and others."



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## Charitable Man, in Quiet Modest Way

He has been a charitable man all his life, in a quiet, modest way. He has helped many old friends in need of financial assistance, and he has contributed generously to the church and to other worthwhile causes. Once, if memory serves, he sent a donkey, by request, to a missionary in India or Burma. He got a chuckle out of a subsequent thank-you note, which read in part: "You may be amused to learn I fell off your ass and onto my own."

He is the first to admit he has been very fortunate in life. He enjoyed tremendous success as a trainer AFTER he turned 80, at an age when man active men are forced into reluctant retirement by the absurd customs of our society.

It is peculiarly appropriate that, coincidental with the arrival of his 90th birthday, comes news that two of his greatest horses, whom he developed as an octogenarian, are leading the American sire lists. Nashua is currently the No. 1 stallion standing in the United States, while Bold Ruler is the No. 1 sire of 2-year-olds.

He had many good ones before and since Nashua and Bold Ruler came along, but those two brilliant sons of Nasrullah will be the ones associated with him as long as men go racing.

They were both superb racehorses, but anti-types. Nashua was the most muscularly developed racehorse we have ever seen, and the soundest. He also had a will of his own, and no one was going to make him do something he did not want to do.

## Arcaro Rode Bold Ruler and Nashua

Bold Ruler, a beautifully balanced and attractive bay, was continually troubled throughout his career, first by a bad back and later by a cracked shinbone. He was the most generous of horses, was always willing to expend every effort in pursuit of victory.

Eddie Arcaro rode them both. To this day he thinks Nashua probably had as much physical talent as any horse, and that Bold Ruler tried as hard as any horse.

Nashua was the greatest responsibility of Mr. Fitz's career. We were with him when Nashua arrived at Hialeah, in the winter of 1956, for his 4-year-old campaign that began with a brilliant victory in the Widener. The Old Man brought him up to that one off works alone, you may recall. We were with him, too, on the railroad platform at Belmont Park that fall, when Nashua, owned by a syndicate in the wake of William Woodward's tragic death, was sent home for the last time. When the great horse finally loaded onto his car, Fitz breathed a sigh of relief.

Even the match with Swaps he had faced with quiet confidence. He wanted to win it badly, he admitted last summer, but he was confident Nashua could do the job, and he was right.

In retirement, he reads The Morning Telegraph daily, enjoying the successes of the sons and daughters of Nashua and Bold Ruler, and otherwise keeping up with the times. Fitz has always preferred to look forward, rather than back. He grew up with the game, from Gutenberg and Gloucester to Aqueduct and Arlington. He is, as he has always been, Sunny Jim, and we salute him today at 90.