

Sunny Jim Fitz Is Dead at 91

By Jim McCulley

James Edward (Sunny Jim) Fitzsimmons, the patriarch of American thoroughbred trainers, is dead at the age of 91 and the sport of kings, of which he was one of the princes, cannot possibly forget him. He was, really, a memorial to himself.

Mr. Fitz died at 4:20 A.M. yesterday morning in Cedars of Lebanon Hospital, Miami, of "infirmities of old age." He was admitted to the hospital last Saturday after a three weeks bout with the flu.

FITZSIMMONS' body was flown to New York late yesterday. It will repose at the John J. Healey Funeral Home, 2977 Ocean Ave., Brooklyn. Friends may pay their respects tonight and from 1 P.M.-10 P.M., tomorrow and Monday. There will be a solemn requiem Mass at St. Mark's Church, Ocean Ave. and Ave. Z, at 9:30 Tuesday morning. Burial will be at Holy Cross Cemetery, Brooklyn and Tilden Avenues, Brooklyn.

Sunny Jim retired from active work on the race track in June of 1963, after 78 years as stablehand, exercise boy, jockey, trainer and sometime owner. Arthritis had bowed Mr. Fitz' back, but up until that day in June, he was a daily visitor to any race track where the horses in his care were running.

FITZ HAD JUST turned 11 years of age when he gave up a job delivering milk on the backstretch to become an all-around stablehand for Brannon Brothers Stable at old Sheepshead Bay.

"I started with the horses when I didn't weigh much more than a 10 cent piece of liver," Sunny Jim once said.

"Sometimes I had to walk the horses 14 miles up and back from Sheepshead Bay to Jamaica," Fitz once recalled. "No vans. We did all the traveling by hand."

FROM EXERCISE boy, Sunny Jim went on to become a jockey. Increasing poundage ended Sunny Jim's career as a rider, and subsequently he became a conditioner of thoroughbreds after almost becoming a streetcar motorman to earn his living.

Mr. Fitz saddled 2,275 winners as a trainer, maybe a lot more because he never kept track in the early days. Gallant Fox and Omaha won the Triple Crown (Kentucky Derby, Preakness and Belmont Stakes) for him, and his horses, trained mostly for famed Belair Stud and Wheatley Stable, earned \$13,032,911.

SUNNY JIM'S charges won the Derby three times, the Preak-

Nino Winner

—Italy's Nino o Benvenuti, 157- $\frac{1}{4}$, world junior middleweight champ, floored Clarence James, 162, three times tonight in scoring a lopsided victory over his San Francisco opponent in a 10-round non-title bout. Benvenuti, holder of the European middleweight crown, dropped the Californian for eight counts in the first, seventh and eighth rounds.

Rome, March 11 (UPI)—Piero Del Papa won the European light-heavyweight title from fellow Italian Giulio Rinaldi tonight in a fast and furious 15-round fight. Each weighed 178 $\frac{1}{4}$. Rinaldi, 31, who two months ago admitted he was thinking of retiring because of poor health, fought gamely but took a fearful beating from the 27-year old Del Papa.

Italy's Bruno Arcari outpointed Joe Brown of New Orleans, La., in a 10-rounder.

ness four times, the Belmont six times, and hundreds of other stakes, including the Wood Memorial eight times. His stakes winners totaled 149. Besides Gallant Fox and Omaha, other great runners trained by Fitz were Nashua, Bold Ruler, Johnstown, Granville, Isolater, Fenelon, Bussanda, Yagrancy, Misty Morn, High Voltage, Fighting Fox, Diavolo and the sensational sprinter, Apache.

Sunny Jim was born on July 23, 1874, in the Sheepshead Bay section of Brooklyn. The Sheepshead Bay track was built on the site of the house where Jim was born. He was present at the opening of old Aqueduct in 1894, and until the Big A was built, he always stabled at Aqueduct. After that he moved to Belmont Park, where the stabling area was more spacious.

FITZ WAS ELECTED to racing's Hall of Fame in '58. One of the big moments of every racing season was his annual birthday party, in recent years held at Monmouth Park, for friends and some 70-odd descendants.

Mr. Fitz is survived by four

sons, John, James J. Jr., George and Harold; a daughter, Mrs. Edith Carr; a brother, Thomas; a sister Nora, 17 grandchildren and 43 great-grandchildren. His wife, Jennie Harvey, died in 1956. He also lost a son, Harvey.

In lieu of flowers, the family has requested that donations be made to the Shrine of the Immaculate Conception in Washington, D.C.

Mr. Fitz never looked back on the past and was a ceaseless fighter to see that everyone on the backstretch got a fair shake in racing, from the lowly groom to the influential owners who paid the bill.

His frank opinions delighted reporters. "A man can't get old when there is always next year's crop of 2-year-olds to test," he used to say.

He liked to sip a cocktail or two before dinner and was a TV fan.

"IT'S A BLESSING to an old codger like me who cannot get around too much any more," he said in his later years when walking became a burden and he got around with the aid of two canes, or in a wheelchair.

He had a bubbling spirit that kept him young despite his years.

Of Mr. Fitz' passing, James Cox Brady, chairman of the board of trustees of the New York Racing Association, said:

"Mr. Fitz was associated with the best in racing during his brilliant career. He trained for leading stables and foremost owners and developed some of the best thoroughbred horses in America. He was a credit to the sport in every sense. I heard the news of his passing with great sorrow and deeply regret the termination of a very full life and the end of a personal association that goes back many years."

Fletcher Tops Graebner

Cairo, Egypt, March 11 (AP)—Ken Fletcher of Australia, defeated Clark Graebner of Beachmatch of the United Arab Republic tennis tournament today, 6-1, 6-1, 6-3. Jan Lundquist of Sweden defeated Metrevelli Alek of Russia 7-5, 6-1, 6-2, in the other.