



JIMMY
BURNS

Herald Sports Editor

Racing Loses a Staunch Friend In Death of Amazing Mr. Fitz

REPORTERS CLUSTERED around famed trainer Sunny Jim Fitzsimmons on the back lawn at Hialeah a few years back.

A pompous track official hurried up and inquired, "Mr. Fitz are these newspapermen bothering you?"

"No," snapped Mr. Fitz. "The only time they'll bother me is when they quit coming around."

Mr. Fitzsimmons died here Friday morning at the age of 91 and horse racing lost a staunch friend. Sunny Jim was a standout in a sport which has produced many stalwarts.

Sunny Jim had three Kentucky Derby winners, Gallant Fox, 1930; Omaha, 1935, and Johnstown, 1936. The former two were Triple Crown winners.

In his book, "Sunny Jim: the life of America's most beloved horseman, James Fitzsimmons," Jimmy Breslin wrote on the fly leaf: "At Belmont Park one afternoon a few years ago, just after the horses had thundered over the finish line with the fabulous Nashua in the lead, someone pointed to James Fitzsimmons and said, 'In what other business could an eighty-year-old man win something called the Futurity.'"

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Owner Went to See Trainer

NASHUA WON the Flamingo at Hialeah in 1955 and I remember the late William Woodward walking back to the stable area to talk with his trainer, Mr. Fitz. This spotlighted Woodward as a big man, too. Most million-

aire owners would have waited for the trainer to come to them.

Mr. Fitz had gone to the barn to personally supervise cooling off his champion horse.

"Take all you want," Mr. Fitz shouted happily as the photographers kept asking him to put the Flamingo blanket on Nashua for one more picture.

'He Wasn't Good Enough'

MR. FITZ had gone north when Florida Derby day came up wet and drippy at Gulfstream. The track looked like a dirt road in my native Mississippi and the Donns feared that Woodward might not risk injury to Nashua.

Woodward called Sunny Jim in New York and told him about the conditions. Said Mr. Fitz over the telephone wire, "Nashua is fit . . . he could run on a tin roof." Nashua won the Florida Derby.

The next year Nashua failed in the Gulfstream Handicap. Mr. Fitz watched the race from the entrance to the track. He turned and started walking back to the stands after making the cryptic comment, "He wasn't good enough."



Spoke Frankly and Honestly

MR. FITZ was one of the finest men I've ever known in any sport or walk of life — not just horse racing. He was gentle, frank and honest.

Once on the late Ed Lane's "Tops in Sports" TV program we asked Mr. Fitz about night horse racing which at the time was being sought.

Mr. Fitz amazed us by revealing that in his days as a jockey, he'd ridden at night — under eerie gas lights.

"Night racing will come, and I'll tell you why," Mr. Fitz said, "Because of the greed of some track owners."

