
GRAHAM'S CORNER

By Frank Graham

THIS, TOO, IS RACING

OCEANPORT, N. J., July 24.—A visitor joined a rapidly growing group on the uppermost partierre level of the towering clubhouse at Monmouth Park. That's where the split-level boxes are so spacious and so comfortably furnished that you practically could set up light housekeeping in them.

"Where's the birthday child?" he asked.

"I think he's playing in the sand box," someone said, "or, maybe, wading in the pool."

But he wasn't. He was making slow progress up from the pool side, where he had played the leading role in the making of a film soon to be released by the Thoroughbred Racing Association, for he is Mr. Fitz and the occasion was the birthday party tossed for him each year by Amory Haskell, president of the Monmouth Park Jockey Club.



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There was a proper big cake for him, and friends and relatives all about him and a fine luncheon served by the Stevens clan and no one ever had a nicer party nor enjoyed it more than he did. Recently self-retired at the age of 89 but with the mark of eternal youth still upon him, he's still reaping the spiritual rewards of a busy and rich and happy life.

The Voices of Young and Old

Relatives? There were, by actual count, 103 of them gathered there and countless friends besides and one of them was Jimmy Stout, whom he developed as a jockey to ride some of the great horses that carried the silks of the Belair and Wheatley Stables for whom he trained. Now a slim, dapper, graying and distinguished little man, Jimmy is a patrol judge at this meeting.

There was a charming young woman named Susan Valentine, a music teacher in the town, playing an accordion and leading in the singing of Irish songs and, when, inevitably, she got around to "Happy Birthday," it was warming to hear the voices of them all, unto the third and fourth generation, raised in melodious greeting to him.

There were, of course, many gifts for him. One was a portable TV set.

"Some of these things, I know," Amory Haskell said, "are terribly heavy but this one isn't, Mr. Fitz. You can carry it easily—and so can your youngest great-grandchild."

A Day for Memories

It is odd that Mr. Fitz, born in Sheepshead Bay and always to be best remembered for the many winners he saddled on the New York tracks . . . Gallant Fox, Bold Ruler, Nashua, Johnstown, Faireno, for instance . . . should be so honored in New Jersey? Not exactly, for he belongs not only to New York racing but to racing everywhere in this broad land and Amory Haskell and his associates were the first to think of setting aside this one day each year to pay homage to him.

"Besides," he said, "I rode my first winner, a horse called Crispin, in New Jersey, at Gloucester in 1890, and saddled my last winner, King's Story, in the Miss Woodford Stakes here at Monmouth on June 15th. So you might say I started and finished in New Jersey."

And so he did, starting on the bush tracks, when he was a frying-pan horseman, cooking meals on the shed rows and sometimes foraging for fruit and vegetables in the nearby fields and coming, in the years of his greatness, to Monmouth, one of the plushiest courses in the country. This day, to stir another memory within him, Rajam, winner of the fifth race is owned by Mrs. Edith W. Bancroft, daughter of the late William Woodward Sr., and carried the old Belair silks: white, red dots, red cap.

There was a final sentimental touch to the afternoon when, as he stood in the winner's circle to present a trophy to Jimmy Jones, whose Calumet colt Saraston, was first under the wire in the eighth race, the crowd stood and sang "Happy Birthday to You."