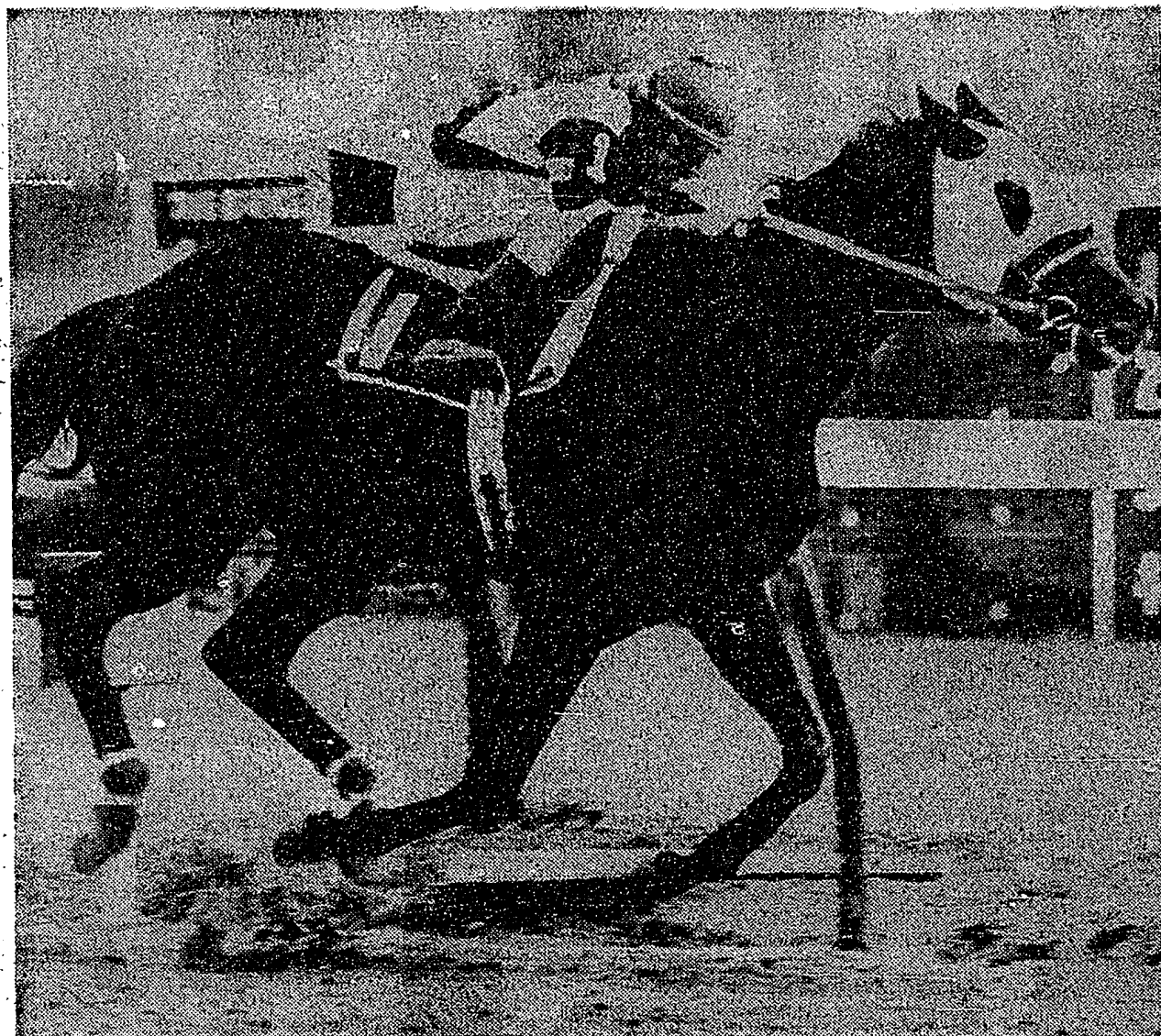


It's Still Their Turf

Gerald Strine

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Sandy Hawley scores his 500th victory aboard Charlie Jr. in third race, then waves to his wife, Sherri, in the Laurel Race Course crowd.

It's Still Their Turf

Two new offbeat racing books are recommended for your holiday reading pleasure.

The first is "Their Turf" by Bernard Livingston. Forget the horse information, which often is faulty, and concentrate on the people involved in the Whitney, Widener, Phipps and Vanderbilt dynasties.

"This is the Establishment's Establishment," Livingston maintains. He should know, having been the film Boswell for the "horsey set" for 25 years.

"Now they tell me I didn't objectively report what I observed all those years," the author said this week from his New York office. "They're particularly upset over what I said about their discrimination against ethnic minorities."

"They say they'd put a black boy up on their horses if one showed up who had ability. I don't believe that. Racing is the last sport to let down the barriers. Black jocks don't get nursed along by the important stables. They're not sponsored, so they don't get a chance to develop their talent."

"What they do differentiate between is the American black and the foreign black. I've even had them tell me how the American black has grown too big-boned, too large, as a result of having been fed so well during slavery. That's the official explanation in some quarters."

Livingston believes the Establishment (Establishment's Establishment) has been forced to make certain token moves to "democratize" racing.

"But I see no real changes, except in format," he says. "Look at the way the old families still have a stranglehold on the top bloodlines. Just look at the Secretariat syndicate. It's polluted with the dynasties' names, plus a few straw men here and there. And this holds true whenever a top horse goes to stud."

"The top horses repeatedly are offered to the same group. It's as obvious as that."

I asked Livingston to handicap the four dynasties.

"The Phippses are the most patrician, and the stuffiest," he replied. "The Whitneys really are the most democratic of the group. The Wideners, I would say, are the most bourgeois. The Vanderbilts—which really boils down now to Alfred G.—are the most pseudo-democratic."

"Alfred comes off as the most democratic guy at first, but it turns out to be mostly a front and a facade."

The second book is Lynn Haney's "The Lady Is A Jock," and the young writer has done her homework as well as having done time at the University of Pittsburgh, the Sorbonne, and the New York Times. Haney focuses on about 10 of the 60 women riding at the nation's tracks.

Mary Bacon is "a daredevil Oklahoma cowgirl who earned money for riding lessons by jumping out of cakes at parties." Robyn

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Smith is "the top woman rider in the world who, like Scott Fitzgerald's Gatsby, is inclined to glamorous fabrication." Sandy Scheiffers is "a pugnacious ex-nun who makes the sign of the cross before breaking from the starting gate."

What this book shows is that women's lib has arrived. Definitely:

"The tomboys are coming out of the woodwork," Haney declared in a phone conversation from New York. "It used to be a girl wanted to marry John Wayne and ride off into the sunset. Now they don't want to be the woman in that little drama; they want to be John Wayne. It's more exciting. And they love horses. Many of them, given a choice of Gregory Peck or Man o' War, would pick Man o' War."

Haney admires the girls because "they're not parasites leeching off somebody else's achievements, and then turning around and complaining about their loss of freedom. Like when Mary Bacon was helping train horses in New Orleans, in addition to riding."

"An old racetracker saw her Toronado and said, 'You got some man supporting you to be able to afford a car like that?'"

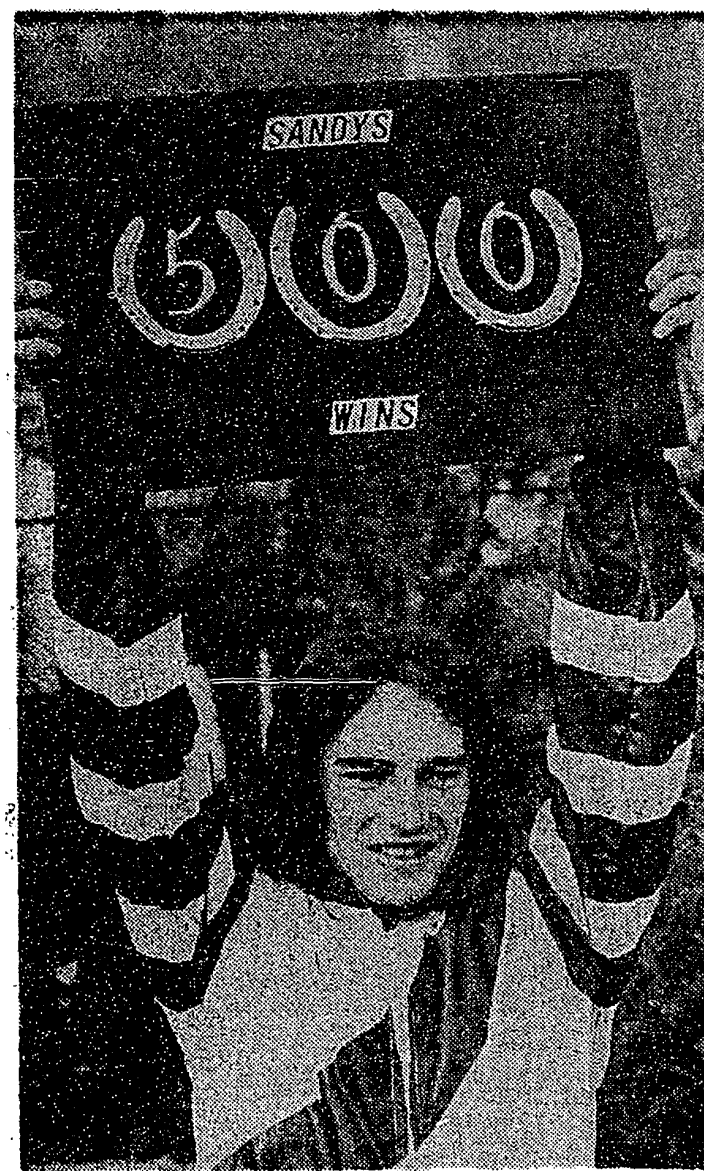
"Yeah," Mary retorted, 'He's got four legs and he's standing in barn 43. His name's John The Hiker. All you got to do is hit him and he runs. You hit a two-legged one and he just stands there.'"

It is Haney's contention that the girls swarming to the backstretch are better looking than the average woman. She's right about that. She also may be right in observing:

"There's quite a bit of sex developing between the girls and the horsemen who can help them. I find that sad, because here was an area that was a breakthrough for women, but in reality it has placed women in a role like the starlets traditionally assumed in the Hollywood film industry."

So much for auditions. The casting couch has given way to the hay.

It is apparent, however, that the girls still have a way to go in capturing the nation's popularity. "The Lady Is A Jock" sells for \$5.95, published by Dodd-Mead. Livingston's book from Arbor House goes for \$12.50, which is only right inasmuch as racing is still "Their Turf."



Sandy Hawley has the Laurel laurels to himself.