

Selling the Game: Pure Competition

The rich history of Thoroughbred racing and the thrill of competition make our sport unique

By Fred Taylor Jr.

This is part one of Selling the Game, a series of articles about the excitement of Thoroughbred racehorse ownership and how to attract new owners, by Fred Taylor Jr. He is the founder and managing partner of Mojo Thoroughbred Holdings LLC, which operates Mojo Racing Partners offering affordable opportunities for newcomers and veterans to become involved in Thoroughbred ownership. Taylor serves as a liaison to the Department of Transportation for a major airline and was a co-recipient of the Allen Bogan Memorial Award from the Texas Thoroughbred Association for member of the year.



The stretch battle between Tiznow (inside) and Giant's Causeway in the 2000 Breeders' Cup Classic at Churchill Downs exemplified the competitive spirit of the Thoroughbred.

Season Greetings, American Racehorse readers! I'm excited to share with you my thoughts about what's right with the sport of horse racing, particularly the thrill and excitement of Thoroughbred ownership. We have a wonderful opportunity ahead of us to introduce horse racing and racehorse ownership to thousands of people who may not otherwise be thinking about the sport as a practical hobby. Before we dive into what I call the "how to" logistics of racing and ownership (costs, roles and responsibilities, and strategies), in this issue of American Racehorse, I want to focus on the fundamental elements that form the passion for the game, particularly the three things that make this sport unique: the spirit of pure competition, the unrivaled history of racing and the sanctity of the breed. I hope you enjoy this first op-ed and will take part in the discussion. And, of course, I wish you and your family Happy Holidays!

The Purest Form of Competition

Thoroughbred racing is the most thrilling and personally satisfying sport that anyone can participate in because genuine competition is at the core of its very existence. Consider this: "The field comes off the turn; Tiznow on the outside, Albert the Great along the rail; the two of them continue to go at it. Here comes Giant's Causeway for Ireland on the outside. They're coming into the final furlong; Tiznow tough as nails, Giant's Causeway on the outside. Giant's Causeway and Tiznow battling head-to-head, in a heart-pounding, pulsating stretch drive...and Tiznow prevails! Tiznow has won it by a nose over Giant's Causeway!"

That was legendary track announcer Tom Durkin's description of the stretch run of the 2000 Breeders' Cup Classic (G1) at Churchill Downs. Reading those words again still raises the hair on the back of my neck because that race is one of the greatest moments in the history of horse racing.

When Giant's Causeway drew up to Tiznow and those two horses battled head-to-head that November evening under the Twin Spires, it was the culmination of over 300 years of Thoroughbred history—in that moment, the very essence of why this sport exists was on full display. That race is a quintessential example of pure competition. And it, like many races before and after, is the paramount reason why people go to the races and own racehorses (or at least take an ownership interest in a racehorse). As a writer for the *Daily Iowan* named Tork Mason once asked about horse racing: "Honestly, is there a purer form of competition?"

One of the many great things about horse racing is that these thrilling moments happen over and over again. Every day of every meet in every year, horse racing serves up another purely competitive moment for us to enjoy.

As an event, the Breeders' Cup features some of the best horses from around the world, and the 2000 Classic turned out to be a showcase of Europe's greatest champion, Giant's Causeway, competing in the cathedral of racing, Churchill Downs, against America's top talent that year, including Kentucky Derby (G1) winner Fusaichi Pegasus, defending Breeders' Cup Classic winner Cat Thief and Tiznow, a gutsy horse from California with tons of stamina who rose up to prove he was the best in the world. (He would do so the following year, as well, to become the first, and only, two-time Classic winner with a scintillating victory at New York's Belmont Park the month following the September 11 attacks.)

The 2000 Breeders' Cup Classic isn't the only race ever run that has generated such a thrilling experience, but I think that race is one of the extra-special moments in horse racing history to capture the sport in all of its glory.

Horse Racing Transcends the Ages

Racing horses is timeless—as a sport, it has transcended the ages. For as long as man has been competing against his fellow man, he has also been using horses in his quest for glory. Racing horses is older than all modern-day sports—it's even older than the ancient Olympic Games (which are presumed to have begun in 776 BC). Horse racing is the only sport to have been embraced and enjoyed by both ancient and modern civilized societies around the world.

The concept of racing horses dates back to the ancient Greeks and Romans (and likely the ancient Egyptians). There have been many depictions of chariot races on ancient pottery, and the first written evidence of the sport is said to have appeared in Homer's *The Iliad* (the modern dating of the book is approximately 1240 BC) when he describes a race that was organized by the Greek hero Achilles for the funeral games of Patroclus and was won by another Greek hero, Diomedes.

The ongoing desire to use horses to produce a competitive experience carried forward for several millennia after the Greco-Roman period. In England, flat racing (races over a distance with riders on the horses' backs) dates back to at least the 12th century. By the late 17th century, based on public popularity and the support of English monarchs who fancied the competition, horse racing became sanctioned and standardized with the creation of published records of racing events, purses offered and handicapping (both in terms of adding weight to equalize the horses' chances during a race, as well as bookmakers' incentives provided for wagers being made).

The Sanctity of the Breed

During the 17th century, the Thoroughbred breed was developed by several generations of British monarchs who acquired Arabian colts to be bred with English mares for the purpose of creating a superior flat racehorse. The breed standards were set in the early 18th century and still represent Thoroughbreds around the world today.

Thoroughbreds were designed to run fast and maintain their speed over a long distance. To this end, they are tall (average of 16 hands or 64 inches at the withers) with long, lean legs. Their shoulders and hindquarters are muscular, and their chests are wide and deep to accommodate their massive lungs. These equine creatures were intentionally bred to be sleek so they could cover a route of ground faster than their predecessors, who were stockier and designed to be work or war horses that pulled carts or went into battle carrying soldiers clad in full armor.

Of the Arabian horses acquired during the late 17th century and early 18th century, three are considered to be the "foundation" sires of the breed: the Byerley (also Byerly) Turk, the Darley Arabian and the Godolphin Arabian.

The Byerley Turk is believed to have been captured by Captain Robert Byerley at the Battle of Buda in 1686 and served as Byerley's mount during the Williamite War in Ireland, including the Battle of the Boyne in 1690, before he went into stud service. Racehorses descending from the Byerley Turk include Jigg, Herod, Diomed, Sir Archy, Boston and Lexington.

In 1704, Thomas Darley bought an Arabian colt in Aleppo, Syria, and shipped him back to England as a present for his brother. The horse stood as a stallion to the family's private mare, but he also was offered to outside mares. The Darley Arabian became the leading sire in Great Britain and Ireland in 1722 and is considered the breed's most important foundation

sire in large part due to his tail-male descendants, Flying Childers and Eclipse.

Of the three foundation sires, the Godolphin Arabian had the most colorful journey into the annals of Thoroughbred history. The Godolphin Arabian is believed to have been foaled in Yemen in 1724 and then given as a gift to King Louis XV of France. Legend has it that the colt did not find favor with the king and subsequently became a cart horse before being acquired by Edward Coke, who then sent the horse to his estate in England. After Coke's death in 1733, the horse was acquired by the 2nd Earl of Godolphin. Another part of the legend holds that the horse was considered to be too small to be a stallion and was first used as a "teaser" (the horse that excites the mare before she is covered by the stallion) and that after one of his own offspring turned out to be a successful runner, the Godolphin Arabian became a stallion in his own right. The latter part is certainly true.

While the Godolphin Arabian's progeny didn't flourish in Europe, many great American racehorses can trace their tail-male roots directly back to him, including Man o' War, War Admiral, Seabiscuit and Tiznow.

According to a recent genetic study, all of the approximately 500,000 Thoroughbred racehorses in the world today are thought to have descended from 28 ancestors that were born in the 18th and 19th centuries. Research further indicates that 13.8 percent of all modern Thoroughbred pedigrees can be traced to the Godolphin Arabian and 6.5 percent to the Darley Arabian when all lines of descent (maternal and paternal) are taken into consideration. It's also believed that up to 95 percent of modern Thoroughbreds can be traced back in their tail-male line to just one stallion: the Darley Arabian.

In addition to developing the breed, the English also started the record-keeping standards in their *General Stud Book* (GSB) for producing offspring that would carry forth the bloodline's distinctive traits. These standards were carried over to the *American Stud Book*, which is maintained by The Jockey Club, as well as to many other countries that have Thoroughbred racing and breeding.

Even though other commercialized means of producing livestock are available, Thoroughbred registries around the world remain united in the strict adherence to the traditional manner in which Thoroughbreds have to be reproduced—by live cover of a stallion to a broodmare (i.e., artificial insemination, cloning and other forms of genetic replication are prohibited). Only a Thoroughbred is allowed to be mated with another Thoroughbred to be officially registered in the GSB or with The Jockey Club

for racing or breeding. As such, there is no way to produce an "exact copy" of a successful racehorse.

By design, Thoroughbred offspring, even from the same sire and dam combinations, are not intended to be like products coming off of an assembly line. Young racehorses may have the same bloodlines, but, like human children, their levels of talent and ability will be different. In this regard, the competitive spirit of each racehorse remains unknown and untapped until it begins training or even until it breaks from the gate in its first race. It's all part of the great game of horse racing and one of the reasons why it has intrigued humans for hundreds of years.

If you have a topic you'd like to see Fred cover, a comment on attracting new racehorse owners or a memory you would like to share about your favorite "competitive" racing moment, send an email to info@americanracehorse.com. Part two of the series will be published in the January/February issue.



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