

August 27, 2012

This is Jill Duffy, with Community Comment

Saturday, August 18 found me, Johanna Rodoni, Loretta Nickolaus and Kat Hayes in a box seat at the Humboldt County Fairgrounds getting ready for the first race.... We compared our betting strategies which ranged from 'I like the name', to a horse's color, the jockey or sentimental wagering' to 'there's a strategy to betting?' Typical nerdy me, I had my Daily Race Form in hand, studying the upcoming races, horses and their respective history statistics.

A field of six mules and their riders broke out of the gate for the first race – six mules swerving and wavering, jockeys urging their steeds to stay in a straight line as they sprinted 220 yards towards the finish line. Upon crossing the line, runner up mule saw the new white fence whereupon she promptly and unceremoniously dumped her rider. Sure enough, ⁱⁿ the second mule race ^{we} saw another rider dumped after the finish line with the mule sprinting in the opposite direction which of course creates lots of drama for the audience in the grandstands, and cheers of comradie when the jockey would stand.

But the best races were the 4th and the 6th – Using our array of strategies we named our picks. Planet Janet was a name favored by a couple, and I commented 'never put money on a horse named with astronomical themes – they aren't grounded". Sure enough, Planet Janet dropped her rider April Boag just before the first turn. It was a scary few moments

because we could see the jockey lying motionless on the track. By the time the pack headed round the last turn and into the stretch, April was able to stand to wonderful cheers from the crowd. While my head had said Random Luck would be the winner of the 4th, my heart won out at the last moment and I bet on County Wexford. Why? Because my great-grandfather immigrated from Wexford in the early 1900's. County Wexford took the race.

At one point I asked Johanna, who is also a Fair Director, why the programs had little icons of hunter jumpers printed on the bottom of some of the pages. And in the 6th race 'My Man's No Lady' demonstrated exactly why. As the horses broke out of the gate, the horse and riders bolted onto the track. Well, all but one horse without rider. As the pack turned, I trained my camera on that riderless horse, and watched in amazement as the gelding, knees and forelegs tight to his chest jumped over the rail twisting his hindquarters so his hind legs could clear the rail. That horse has a calling in the sport of eventing.

So how did I do at this year's races? Well, I'd have done better if I'd remembered to bring my wallet with me, but I managed to triple the money I had in my pocket. But, more importantly, I was able to spend a perfect sunny afternoon at the 116th Humboldt County Fair with 3 incredible women and sharing, bantering, laughing and just having a wonderful day.

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