

May 17, 2017

TODAY MARKS 20 YEARS SINCE CAPTAIN BODGIT'S EPIC CAREER FINALE THIRD BY A HEAD IN PREAKNESS THAT WAS VOTED RACE OF THE 1990S THOROUGHBRED COMMENTARY PRINTS EXCERPT FROM B. IRWIN'S BOOK

Thoroughbred Commentary commemorated today's 20th anniversary of the epic Preakness Stakes that was voted as the Race of the 1990s by running an excerpt of Barry Irwin's book, detailing Team Valor's involvement in Captain Bodgit, who finished second by a head in the Kentucky Derby and third by a head in the Preakness:

Team Valor boss Barry Irwin has never been one to back off when there are significant obstacles seemingly preventing him buying a racehorse he really wants. His determination to find a way was very much in evidence over one potential purchase in early 1996. Here, in an extract from Irwin's book 'Derby Innovator: The Making of Animal Kingdom', he explains how he came to buy an animal who would become one of the most exciting Thoroughbreds in America.

In my search for viable horses to market, I became increasingly impressed with a Maryland-based 2-year-old named **Captain Bodgit**. The name 'Bodgit' is a slang word used in England. *Bodgitting* is handyman-speak for using unconventional materials and methods to fix something around the house. This Bodgit proved a fix for Team Valor's lapsed syndication business.



Captain Bodgit, Silver Charm and Free House duel in the Preakness.

Captain Bodgit developed into a very accomplished 2-year-old on the Maryland circuit under the tutelage of young Gary Capuano, the lesser-known brother of leading Mid-Atlantic claiming trainer Dale Capuano. Dale had an outgoing personality and the drive to maneuver his clientele through the treacherous waters of the claiming game. Gary was a quieter, more reserved young man of 33 who did things in a methodical manner that belied his youth.

After finishing third first time out in a July sprint at Laurel, Captain Bodgit reeled off five successive wins. Being ridden by a little-known jockey named Frankie Douglas and trained at the dilapidated barn area across the street from what once was Bowie racetrack did not stop Captain Bodgit from developing into a big-time horse.

Sensational figures

In his final outing at two, Captain Bodgit roared home in a sub-12-second final furlong to win the Laurel Futurity, running a mile and an eighth in 1:49²/₅, which was excellent time for a 2-year-old on a deep track in his first try around two runs.

He only won by three-quarters of a length, but the colt he beat, named **Concerto**, was held in the highest regard by his savvy tainer, John J Tammaro III. Racing for New York Yankees owner George Steinbrenner, Concerto put a nice shine on the Laurel Futurity by winning the G3 Kentucky Jockey

Club Stakes at Churchill Downs, where five months later he would enter the starting gate for the Kentucky Derby riding a five-race winning streak.

Captain Bodgit ran a 101 *Beyer* speed figure and a 6½ on the *Ragozin Sheets*, which were sensational figures for a youngster going a mile and an eighth over a deep-surfaced racing strip. Like my peers, I had heard rumors that the colt had bowed a tendon and would not pass the vet.

Through my bloodstock agent, I made an offer well into seven figures, but the colt's owner, Phyllis Susini, was a well-seasoned veteran with 40 years of ownership experience, and her deceased first husband had been a hard-knocking Maryland trainer. Mrs Susini knew exactly what she had, and she turned down the offer.

Imposing appearance

I must have watched the video replays of Captain Bodgit dozens of times in the next couple of months. I could not get the horse out of my mind. He was an absolute beast of a horse and he had already done enough to convince me he could be a Kentucky Derby horse. I wanted him.

Capuano knew what he had as well, so he took Captain Bodgit south to Florida to spend the winter in a warmer climate as he continued to train the colt for the First Saturday in May. Ten weeks after the bay colt had stamped himself as a classic hopeful in the Laurel Futurity, Capuano sent him post-ward for the G3 Holy Bull, Gulfstream Park's first two-turn race of the season for the classic generation.

Captain Bodgit made an imposing appearance in the Gulfstream Park paddock and was bet down from 10-1 to 3-1, with 8-5 favoritism going to the Breeders' Cup Juvenile runner-up **Acceptable**. The last-named, like *Concerto*, was owned by his breeder, George Steinbrenner.

Steaking speed horse **Arthur L**, with John Velazquez up, won easily, with Acceptable second and Captain Bodgit third, beaten 6½ lengths. He broke in a tangle, lurching out of the gate with his head positioned at an awkward angle. A slow pace hurt his chances. He tried to mount a bid around the stretch curve, but it was short-lived and he looked particularly in need of the exercise as he was hard-pressed to hold on to third.

Crafting a deal

I called my agent, Don Brauer. "Offer Phyllis Susini \$500,000 for Captain Bodgit."

Don said: "No way. I am not going to do that after she turned down our offer last year for all that money. It's insulting."

I said: "Don, there is every chance this race scared the hell out of her. Did you see how lousy he looked coming down the stretch? Look, this horse already injured a tendon. This woman was married to a trainer. She knows how fragile these things are. A race like this might just jolt her back to reality. She might jump at this offer. Just call her, for Chrissakes."

When Don Brauer phoned me back he said, "Hey, we just might be live here. She's definitely thinking about it." I quickly swung into action, crafting a deal to give the seller \$500,000 plus a one-time \$50,000 bonus for a Grade 1 either at three or four. This time she took the offer.

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