

The Final Turn

By Rob Whiteley

Listen to Trevor

Jay Hovdey's feature on Trevor Denman in the March 15 edition of *The Blood-Horse* (page 1528) gives us a welcome glimpse of a remarkable man. What we find inspirational in our best horses we also find in Trevor—immense talent, enthusiasm, focus, consistency, total effort, and an obvious love of racing. Truly a gifted person, he is a genuine treasure in the midst of a struggling industry.

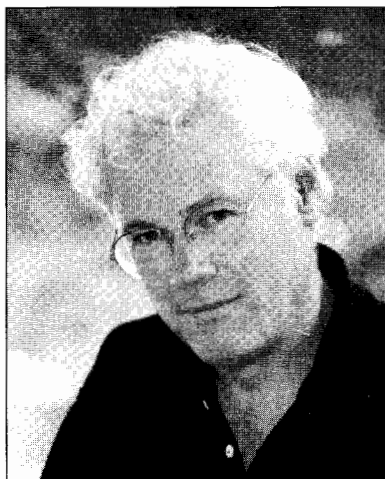
The man is also a keen and sentient observer of a zillion races. Few people concentrate on the nuances of a race like Trevor, and we should pay attention to what he sees and comprehends. In particular, I refer to his comments related to restricting the use of the whip which caused me to pause and reflect on several of my own experiences.

A couple of years ago, I was so busy preparing for the November sales that I chose not to attend the Breeders' Cup. Instead, I invited an assortment of neighborhood friends to my home for a party to watch and share my favorite day of afternoon television. All of my guests knew I was involved with horse racing on a daily basis, but most had never attended the races.

At the end of the day, I casually asked several of them independently what they made of the day. One of them said he "thought the horses were beautiful but that the spectacle of people on their backs beating them was ugly." Another asked me, "If horses are bred to race and want to run, why was it necessary to hit them a dozen times?" A third one said, "It was exciting to see them run, suspenseful and sort of violent, like the Indianapolis 500 with people waiting for something bad to happen."

That night, after my guests had gone and my family was in bed, I slipped my videotape into the VCR and sat quietly trying to watch a couple of the races as someone who was seeing racing for the first time might see them. I tried to strip away and obliterate the things that personally and subjectively connect me to each race—my knowledge of the horses' families and their owners and trainers as well as my fascination with trying to prove myself right in the face of uncertainty for the sake of monetary gain (sometimes referred to as handicapping and gambling).

I tried to simply see the raw footage through a stark lens, without the romantic coloration of my usual preoccupations. Seen in this harsh light, I saw many of the horses tiring as they swept off the turn and, as they tired, I saw several being hit more often and with increasing force, and the whole



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we'll talk about this in the morning."

Well, it's morning now. And it seems to me that we're the ones who need to get our heads off the pillow before the animal rights activists give us a wake-up call that ruins our dream. We know that the activists are watching and we know that they're concerned. We are very lucky, thus far, that they have been distracted by other projects. (For reference, please review Bill Finley's detailed warning in "The Final Turn" of Feb. 12, 1994, page 850.)

At a time when we are desperate to attract new fans, especially young fans, we need to change the things that are simply wrong. Although we may need to keep some form of whip in the hands of jockeys for safety purposes, we clearly need specific guidelines to ensure that whips are not instruments of abuse.

Restrictions will also reduce the dangers of horses ducking in or out when feeling the sting of the whip. Furthermore, our excitement will not diminish as sound and genuine horses will continue to give their best with mild urging and one will always win.

Trevor Denman has the keen eye and prescience to call developments in a race almost before they develop. I think he's making another accurate call in speaking out for "kinder" whips and strict rules for their use. Trevor has the best eye to mouth coordination in the business. We should listen. ■

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