

The Search for Aqueduct at the New York Times

Looking for an article on live horse racing at Aqueduct at the New York Times? Well, if you were looking for an article on the six month horse racing meet that ended on April 30, 2006 at what used to be known as the “Big A,” you’re probably out of luck. You would have been nearly as likely to see an article on the Croton Aqueduct (the venerable 19th century project that brought fresh water from the Croton River in Westchester to Manhattan) than you would on horse racing.

During this time period (NYRA raced at Aqueduct from November 2, 2005 until April 30, 2006.), there was really only one New York times article that focused on live horse racing at Aqueduct. That was Joe Drape’s April 9 article on the Wood Memorial.¹

Other than this article, live horse racing at Aqueduct was not the focus of any articles in the New York Times during the entirety of the six month meeting.

Aqueduct was mentioned in several other stories about horse racing but generally only in passing. It was mentioned as part of the overall pre-Kentucky Derby coverage on four occasions. On April 24, it was mentioned in the 11th paragraph of Bill Finley’s notebook on the Derby.² It was also mentioned in Joe Drape’s April 10 review of the Triple Crown in the tenth paragraph³ and Bill Finley’s articles on the Triple Crown on March 20 (in the tenth paragraph)⁴ and on March 19 (in the second paragraph as part of an overview of the four three year old stakes run the previous day).⁵ In none of these articles was live racing at Aqueduct the center of attention.

Other than these mentions, the closest thing to a racing article mentioning Aqueduct was an AP sports briefing that mentioned that the horse, Achilles of Troy, would not run in the Kentucky Derby.⁶ The Aqueduct mention was in the twentieth paragraph.

All other mentions of Aqueduct in the New York Times had nothing to do with live horse racing. Bill Finley mentioned Aqueduct as part of a general article on track surfaces.⁷ He also mentioned Aqueduct in two articles involving the financial problems of the New York Racing Association.⁸ An AP article also mentioned Aqueduct in discussing NYRA’s financial condition.⁹ Aqueduct was mentioned in Jeff Hooke and

¹ “Trip East for Baffert's Colt Pays Off in Wood Memorial,” April 9, 2006.

² “Contender for Derby Euthanized After Illness,” April 24, 2006.

³ “As Big Race Nears, a Few Smell the Roses,” April 10, 2006.

⁴ “Phone Call Alters Prospects for a Trainer and a Horse,” March 20, 2006.

⁵ “Finally, a Kentucky Derby Contender Wins,” March 19, 2006.

⁶ “Sports Briefing,” April 6, 2006.

⁷ “New Synthetic Surface for Thoroughbreds Hits Pay Dirt,” February 8, 2006.

⁸ “State Grants Ailing NYRA A Bailout of \$30 Million,” December 31, 2005; “Struggling NYRA Kept From Selling Paintings,” December 3, 2005.

⁹ “Sports Briefing,” November 11, 2005.

Thomas Firey's op-ed piece on how New York State should dispose of the NYRA franchise,¹⁰ and as a part of the obituary of trainer John Campo.¹¹

On the obscure side, Aqueduct was mentioned in an article about a 9/11 detainee who once had a stand at Aqueduct's flea market."¹² It was also mentioned in an article on a cantor who had once run away to Aqueduct in 1946.¹³

Overall, the track Aqueduct was mentioned, according to a Nexus search, 14 times in the course of its six month meeting. On eight of these occasions, the mention has nothing to do with live horse racing. On five other occasions, the article concerned the overall Kentucky Derby picture, and Aqueduct was a small part of the article. Only two horse races at Aqueduct – the Wood and the Gotham – were ever mentioned. Only one article was devoted to actual live racing at Aqueduct. There were no articles even mentioning horse racing at Aqueduct from the time that Aqueduct opened in November until March 19, 2006.

By contrast, in the 1985 -1986 racing season, a Nexus search of the New York Times during the Aqueduct meet (in conjunction with other racing terms) yields 293 hits. While the Breeders Cup was held in Aqueduct in 1985, and there were numerous times that Aqueduct racing was just mentioned as one of the overall sporting events for the day in the sports desk feature, there was regular coverage of Aqueduct racing. There were articles specifically on the Withers, Carter, Fort Marcy, Wood Memorial, Bold Ruler, Excelsior, Gotham, Manassa Mauler, Gravesend, Gallant Fox, Demoiselle, Remsen, Ladies, Miss Grillo, and the Discovery. Even in the 1995 -1996 season, there were 71 Nexus hits on Aqueduct in conjunction with racing terms.

From November 1, 2005 to May 1, 2006, the Times mentioned the Croton Aqueduct in four pieces. In two instances, the aqueduct was the crux of the articles.¹⁴ In the two other pieces, the Croton Aqueduct was prominently featured in letters to the editor.¹⁵ By now, New York Times readers may be as likely to think of Aqueduct as being a carrier of water than a racetrack.

¹⁰ Jeff Hooke and Thomas Firey, "Betting on the Future," February 26, 2006

¹¹ Richard Goldstein, "John Campo, Trainer of 1981 Derby Winner, Is Dead at 67," November 22, 2005.

¹² Nina Bernstein, "U.S. Is Settling Detainee's Suit In 9/11 Sweep," February 28, 2006.

¹³ Anita Gates, "A Voice That Heralds a Culture, And a Legacy Caught on Film," March 26, 2006.

¹⁴ Dan Barry, "Wriggling Through the Cracks in the Urban Façade," March 29, 2006; David Rivel, "Walkway From Manhattan to the Bronx," November 27, 2005.

¹⁵ "Woods Rehabilitation At an Unwanted Price," March 26, 2006; "Eager for a Stroll Over the High Bridge," December 25, 2005.