

Barbaro and Belote

There is no reason to feel anything but pain, grief, and sorrow over what happened to Barbaro at the Preakness on Saturday May 20. We all can only hope and pray that the horse lives a long, tranquil, and pain free life.

Yet, slightly more than an hour away from Baltimore, at Harrington Raceway in Delaware, a fatal tragedy in racing occurred without any significant public outcry. On the evening of Monday, May 15, an accident at Harrington Raceway caused the death of long time harness driver Hal Belote. Belote's horse fell; he was unseated and then trampled by the horses and sulkies that trailed him. The drivers of the other horses that were impacted by the collision - Brandon Givens and Steve Warrington – were also seriously injured in the accident.

Belote had been driving harness horses for nearly 30 years. He was 51 years old and left a wife and two children. He won 1,986 races. His horses earned nearly \$11 million.

The injury to Barbara has created a media frenzy. Nexus reports 425 articles on Barbaro from Sunday May 21, 2006 until the morning of Tuesday May 23. Google News reports 2,979 articles on Barbaro. There are editorials on Barbaro in the New York Times, Baltimore Sun, Boston Globe, Boston Herald, and St. Petersburg Times,

There was no such outcry over Hal Belote. Nexus reports 27 articles since the time of his death until May 23. Google News reports 86. Except for the accounts out of the Delaware media, almost all the mentions of Hal Belote are contained in digests or compilations of overall sports news from wire services. He rates a paragraph in passing. In the earliest wire accounts of his accident, Belote's story is prefaced as "Harness Jockey Killed."¹ There are no articles that mention both Belote's death and the injury to Barbaro.

Nobody is saying that the outpouring of sympathy and support for Barbaro is misplaced. But shouldn't some decent fraction of the concern felt for Barbaro be extended on behalf of poor Hal Belote and his family?

¹ "The Highlights," York Dispatch, May 16, 2006, "Harness Racing Jockey Hal Belote 51, Killed in Track Accident," AP, May 15, 2006 at <http://www.canada.com/topics/sports/story.html?id=31a863b0-c278-441e-bce0-215b41e555fd&k=73233>