

## New York Racing Disappears in the New York Times

The New York Times has two of the nation's top racing reporters in Bill Finley and Joe Drape, and now it is fair to say that it has no local thoroughbred racing coverage. Harness racing coverage in the New York Times disappeared many moons ago. Over the past several years, the Times had stopped basic coverage of Aqueduct racing. Now, it has stopped coverage of Belmont Park.

The 2007 Belmont fall championship meeting ran for 6 ½ weeks or 33 days from September 7 through October 21. During that time period, the Times ran no bylined stories that covered racing at Belmont. Several stories did mention Belmont Park but generally only in connection with either governmental activities or in connection with the national thoroughbred racing picture.

Only two bylined articles even came close to covering racing at Belmont. Two days after Rags to Riches finished second in the Gazelle Stakes, Joe Drape on September 17, filed a 262 word story that Rags to Riches would not race for the rest of 2008. The only similar story was Bill Finley's 355 word report on the contenders for the Breeders' Cup Classic entitled "Breeders' Cup Classic Is Full of Favorites" which was written on October 1, the day after Curlin won the Jockey Club Gold Cup at Belmont.

Other than that, Belmont was mentioned in four stories written by Bill Finley in connection with the Breeders' Cup held at Monmouth Park in New Jersey. Two were on War Pass who had won the Champagne Stakes at Belmont and who would win the Breeders' Cup Juvenile. The other two, which were about the history and atmosphere at Monmouth, simply contrasted Monmouth with Belmont.

After the Breeders' Cup, Joe Drape mentioned Belmont Park in an October 29 story about the future racing prospects of the horse Curlin. In that story, Belmont Park was mentioned only in connection with Rags to Riches victory in the 2007 Belmont.

Other than that, Belmont Park only appeared in the political/ regulatory environment surrounding the determination of New York's racing franchise. Thus, it was mentioned in an article about New York City OTB's finances (November 16), the effort of the Shinnecock tribe to run VLT's and/or a casino (October 15), an article about NYRA's former federal monitor testifying in an inquiry about Republican Senate Majority Leader Joseph Bruno (September 30) and the overall franchise award (September 5, 9, 13).

Two other feature stories did mention Belmont. One story was about the nearby hamlet of West Hempstead and mentioned that the Metropolitan Transportation Authority had bus service to Belmont (October 28) and a story about a man who wanted to create an independent Long island and who lived in a neighborhood near Belmont (September 22).

There were seven unbylined AP stories that ran in the Times mentioning horses and racing at Belmont. Collectively, these five stories had 598 words. The longest story was 208 words. The median length of the AP stories was 64 words.

After a month of the Aqueduct meet, there have been no stories about everyday racing at Aqueduct. There was one lengthy feature story entitled, "The Blue-Collar Thoroughbred," which ran on November 18 about the Karakorum racing syndicate and some of its members.

But that's all we can expect from Times coverage about racing at Aqueduct for the next five months. Of course, there will be coverage of the racing franchise/VLT story. But the Times has obviously made the conscious decision not to cover local thoroughbred horse racing. Only horse racing stories with national championship implications will get covered in bylined stories by the Times.

That means on a practical basis that the only stories about horse racing at Aqueduct that we will see are: (a) stories about horse/races/ or trainers that have Triple Crown implications; (b) stories about calamities at the racetrack, and (c) Damon Runyonesque stories about the fans at the racetrack. You can almost visualize story (c) now. As the time for a choosing a new franchisee for the tracks gets closer, a Timesman or woman will interview a prototypical grizzled fan at Aqueduct who will probably say he doesn't care who wins the franchise race as long as he has the winner in the next race.