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THE SMARTY COME LATELIES

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The Smarty Come Latelies

By now, it's a cliché that the American media has been surprised by the success of Smarty Jones. But it's hard to find a media that was more surprised by his success than Smarty's hometown media in Philadelphia. They were the ultimate Johnny Come Latelies to the Smarty Jones saga.

Philadelphia is dominated by two newspapers, both owned by the Knight Ridder chain. There is the large Philadelphia Inquirer with a weekday circulation of 387,000 and a Sunday circulation of 769,000. Its smaller sister paper is the Philadelphia Daily News with a circulation of approximately 140,000. The Daily News is not published on Sunday.

With Smarty Jones, you had a Pennsylvania-bred horse who first ran at and was stabled at Philadelphia Park. You had a horse whose owner, trainer and jockey are all based in the Philadelphia area. You might have thought that these papers would have been all over the Smarty Jones story from the get-go. You would be wrong.

Smarty Jones was first mentioned in the Philadelphia newspapers on February 26, 2004 in one sentence of an article in the Inquirer.¹ That article summarized the horses of the year at Philadelphia Park. Smarty Jones was cited as Philadelphia Park's two year old of the year. The first Philadelphia article about Smarty ran in the Inquirer on March 27. It was a medium length article by Craig Donnelly entitled, "At Long Last Phila. Horse Has a Shot at the Roses." By that time, Smarty was 5-5, and had won the Count Fleet Stakes, the Southwest Stakes, and the Rebel Stakes in 2004. It's not as if Smarty was an unknown on March 27. By March 27, Smarty, according to Nexis had been mentioned in 267 articles. Even before February 26, Smarty had been mentioned in 75 articles.² In fact, the first mention of Smarty Jones was in the Sydney, Australia Morning Herald of November 28, 2003. That article mentioned that Elusive Quality, standing in Australia, had produced in Smarty Jones, a 15 length winner of a race in Pennsylvania.³

The Daily News was even more reticent in its notice of Smarty Jones. He was first mentioned in an AP article in the Daily News on April 9 which previewed the three prep races that weekend for the Kentucky Derby. Another AP article in the Daily News on April 12th noted Smarty's victory in the Arkansas Derby. It wasn't until April 14 that Smarty merited a by-lined article in the Daily News.⁴

Nor did the Philadelphia newspapers concentrate on Smarty Jones in the two weeks after his Arkansas Derby victory. With one week remaining until the Derby,

¹ Craig Donnelly, "Filly Mum's Gold Voted Phila. Park's Top Runner," Philadelphia Inquirer, February 26, 2004 p. E02.

² A check of Westlaw, an online database which has fewer media outlets than Nexis, shows 35 mentions of Smarty before February 26 and 160 before March 27.

³ John Holloway, "Rogerson Launches Magic Millions Campaign and There's Not a Single Doubt He's in With a Chance," Sydney Morning Herald, November 28, 2003

⁴ Dick Jerardi, "Smarty Pants," Philadelphia Daily News, April 14, 2004 p. 94.

Smarty Jones had been mentioned in a grand total of seven articles in the Inquirer and four in the Daily News.

In the week before the Derby, the Inquirer increased its coverage of Smarty. The horse was mentioned in 24 articles in the week leading to the Derby.⁵ The Daily News continued its hands off coverage. During Derby week, it only cited Smarty Jones in four articles.⁶

After the Derby, the sky has been the limit for Smarty coverage in Philadelphia. In the three weeks since the Derby, Smarty has been cited in 125 articles in the Daily News and 118 articles in the Inquirer. The papers have more than made up for lost time. They have turned Smarty Jones into a combination of Julius Erving, Lefty Grove, Joe Frazier, Rocky Balboa, and Bobby Clarke. He is far more beloved than the 1985 Villanova NCAA champs. Smarty Jones has now authored more pieces for the Daily News on his own weblog⁷ than the Daily News wrote about him before he won the Kentucky Derby.⁸

The infatuation between Smarty Jones and the Philadelphia media shows no signs of stopping. While the papers were late arrivals to Smarty worship, they show no signs of dropping off the Smarty bandwagon any time soon. You don't want to be anywhere near the New Jersey Turnpike between Philadelphia and Belmont Park on Saturday June 5. Just the crush of staffers from the Inquirer and the Daily News should be enough to cause a massive traffic tie-up.

⁵ These counts are based on a Westlaw review of the articles.

⁶ Nexis counts articles slightly differently, and there are multiple editions of the Daily News. There are seven separate articles mentioning Smarty Jones in the Daily News on Derby week according to Nexis. In any event, the point is that, the Inquirer was far deeply involved with Smarty Jones than the Daily News.

⁷ See

http://www.philly.com/mld/dailynews/news/special_packages/phillycom_front_dn/8587030.htm?template=contentModules/printstory.jsp

⁸ The one paper that did cover Smarty well in advance of the Derby was the Arkansas Democrat-Gazette which ran many stories on Smarty between January and April of 2004. Smarty was being profiled in the Democrat-Gazette even before he ran at Oaklawn. See Robert Yates, "Oaklawn Countdown: 2 Days to First Post Servis Feels Oaklawn Smart Fit for Derby Run," Arkansas Democrat-Gazette, January 21, 2004.