
HOTALING, EDWARD. *They're Off!: Horse Racing at Saratoga*. Syracuse, N.Y.: Syracuse University Press, 1995. Pp. xiv, 368. Notes, photographs, bibliography, index. \$45.00.

Horse racing books usually cover famous racehorses (*The Triple Crown Winners; The Story of America's Nine Superstar Race Horse, Ruffian; Burning from the Start; and Big Red of Meadow Stable*), famous races (*Portrait in Roses: 109 Years of Kentucky Derby Winners*), owners (*Their Turf: America's Horsey Set & Its Princely Dynasties*), stables (*Wild Ride: The Rise and Tragic Fall of Calumet Farm, Inc., America's Premier Racing Dynasty*), trainers (*Sunny Jim: The Life of America's Most Beloved Horseman—James Fitzsimmons*), jockeys (*The Shoe and The Kid*), pictorial coffee-table books (*American Racetracks and Contemporary Racing Art and Great American Thoroughbred Racetracks*), general histories of racing (The Racing in America series sponsored by The Jockey Club), encyclopedias (*The Complete Book of Thoroughbred Horse Racing*), breeding (*Florida's Thoroughbred*), and numerous handicapping books. Only a handful of racetracks have been recognized as important enough to warrant a full-length monograph (*Hialeah Park: A Racing Legend*). Edward Hotaling—a television writer and producer, radio broadcaster, newspaper contributor, and Saratoga native—has written a

comprehensive account of the thoroughbred racetrack at Saratoga Springs, New York, and its relationship to that resort town.

This social history of Saratoga begins with George Washington's visit to, and attempt to purchase, the springs, and continues through the various notables who vacationed at the spa and frequented the racetrack. Hotaling writes about the famous horses, jockeys both black and white, and important and colorful races. From Lady Suffolk ("That Old Gray Mare"), Regret, Man O'War, Gallant Fox, War Admiral, Citation, Kelso, Forego, Secretariat, Ruffian, Affirmed, Alydar, and John Henry to Holy Bull, the most renowned racehorses grace these pages with their victories and defeats at the track known as the "graveyard of champions." Inclusive of overlooked African American trainers and jockeys and their contributions to the sport, Hotaling introduces trainer Ed Brown and jockeys Alonzo Clayton, James "Soup" Perkins, and the famous Isaac Murphy, along with many others. He details the long and grueling four-mile heats, as well as the modern milers and such well-known races as the Travers. Hotaling places Saratoga in the context of events transpiring in downstate New York and the rest of the country. The track and the town are justifiably important to the history of the sport and leisure.

The major weakness of the book is Hotaling's use of irritating hackneyed phrases. For example, he inserts corny "firsts," such as the timing of the rising of springwater bread for George Washington being the first Saratoga clocking (p. 1). Hotaling's attempts at levity fall flat: ". . .Vanderbilt's rage, which was so extreme it could have been mistaken for a weather development" (p. 61) and "George Washington schlepped here, but he never slept here" (p. 2). Trite phrases, including "a horse of another color," also litter the text.

Hotaling relies heavily on secondary sources and newspapers, which can be notoriously inaccurate, partisan, and written as publicity pieces by the participants; the bibliography lists only four primary manuscript sources, two of which were published, yet the footnotes reveal more primary sources. The book would have benefited from formal oral history interviews with older and/or retired owners, trainers, and jockeys. He sparingly uses unpublished correspondence and diaries throughout the period of coverage from 1783 to 1994, one must discover them among the footnotes since they do not appear in the bibliography. The discrepancies between works cited in footnotes and their lack of inclusion in the bibliography may result from the publisher's desire to save space. Hotaling's footnotes mostly provide complete citations; however, his occasional lapses glaringly fail to document the source of his quote (i.e., "Gleaned from newspaper accounts," chapter 4, footnote 9, p. 314). He adds a touch of the corny irrelevancy here as well ("The author's copy of this remarkable work by the head usher at the United States [hotel], replete with portraits of its wealthy guests, well merits its gilded edges," chapter 8, footnote 5, p. 316).

Despite some of the author's choice of phraseology, *They're Off!* is a welcome addition to horse racing literature and sport history. Hotaling's writing style will appeal to casual readers, and his documentation should satisfy most academicians.

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