

Seabiscuit vs. War Admiral

GRANTLAND RICE

It was rather fitting that the greatest race he "ever saw" was run on Granny Rice's 60th birthday. It was my own first important sport-publicity promotion and was the occasion of my meeting, for the first time, practically all the great sports writers of the past three decades. Of all the many fine accounts of the 'Race of the Century' no one will begrudge the selection given here, for Rice was the acknowledged dean of sports writers.

A LITTLE horse with the heart of a lion and the flying feet of a gazelle yesterday proved his place as the gamest Thoroughbred that ever raced over an American track.

In one of the greatest match races ever run in the ancient history of the turf, the valiant Seabiscuit not only conquered the great War Admiral but, beyond this, he ran the beaten son of Man o' War into the dirt and dust of Pimlico.

Head and head around the last far turn, Seabiscuit, ably ridden by George Woolf, beat War Admiral by a full three lengths down the last furlong with a dazzling burst of speed that not only cracked the heart of the Admiral but, in addition, broke the track record, set by Pompoon. Seabiscuit took a fifth of a second from the track record, which he now holds at 1:56 $\frac{3}{4}$.

The drama and the melodrama of this match race, held before a record crowd keyed to the highest tension I have ever seen in sport, set an all-time mark.

You must get the picture from the start to absorb the thrill of this perfect autumn day over a perfect track. As the two Thoroughbreds paraded to the post there was no emotional outburst. The big crowd was too full of tension, the type of tension that locks the human throat.

You looked at the odds flashed upon the mutual board—War Admiral one to four, Seabiscuit

two to one. Even those backing War Admiral, the great majority of the crowd, felt their pity for the son of Hard Tack and Swing On, who had come along the hard way and had churned up the dust of almost every track from the Great Lakes to the Gulf, from the Atlantic to the Pacific.

After two false walking starts, they were off. But it wasn't the fast-flying War Admiral who took the lead. It was Seabiscuit, taking the whip from Woolf, who got the jump. It was Seabiscuit who had a full-length lead as they passed the first furlong. The Admiral's supporters were dazed as the 'Biscuit not only held this lead, but increased it to two lengths before they passed the first quarter.

The 'Biscuit was moving along as smoothly as a southern breeze. And then the first roar of the big crowd swept over Maryland. The Admiral was moving up. Stride by stride, Man o' War's favorite offspring was closing up the open gap. You could hear the roar from thousands of throats—"Here he comes—here he comes!"

And the Admiral was under full steam. He cut away a length. He cut away another length as they came to the half-mile post—and now they were running head and head. The Admiral looked Seabiscuit in the eye at the three-quarters—but Seabiscuit never got the look. He was too busy running with his shorter, faster stride.

PIMLICO MATCH RACE

WAR ADMIRAL AND SEABISCUIT TO BE RACED ON A FALL TRACK

DISTANCE: - One mile and three-sixteenths (1 1/16)

DATE: - First of November or third of November track must be fast
Decision by 8:30 to be made by Jervis Spencer.

START: - Walk-up start, no stalls, from a flag. George Cassidy
to start the race, no assistant starters to be on the
track, a man suitable to both owners to use a recall flag
in the event of a false start.

PRIZE: - \$15,000. to be added by the HARBAND JOCKEY CLUB, all to
the winner. In the event of a walkover, the HARBAND
JOCKEY CLUB to pay \$5,000. to the horse walking over.

DEPOSITS - \$5,000. Each owner to deposit a certified check for
that amount with the HARBAND JOCKEY CLUB to be held in
the event of one horse not competing. *which will
be given to the horse walking over.*

CARRIAGES - Fresh horse to carry 140 lbs.

Both horses to be examined by a veterinary both before
and after the race.

I agree to the above conditions:-

*Charles S. Howard
Samuel D. Riddle
Alfred Vanderbilt*

SIXTH RACE 1:30 P.M. (Pumpkin)—Mar. 11, 1938—(1:58 1/2—4—118). Second Running
PIMLICO SPECIAL. \$15,000 added (winner take all). Weight, 120 pounds.
68445
Nov. 1, 38—Fm Net value to winner, \$15,000.
Index: Horses A B C D E F G H I J K L M N O P Q R S T U V W X Y Z
120 SEABISCUIT 5 120 2 1 15 15 15 11 15 G Woolf C.S. Howard 2 20
120 WAR ADMIRAL 4 120 1 2 2 2 2 2 C Keston's Ohio Belle Farms 25
Time, 2:19, 2:19, 1:58 1/2, 1:58 1/2, 1:58 1/2 (new track record) Track fast.
\$2 Mutuels Paid Odds to 11
Official Pay-Off { SEABISCUIT 4 00
NO PLACE OR SHOW MUTUELS SOLD. 2 20
Winner—B k, by Hard Tail—Sueing On, by Rhick Broom II, trained by T. Smith; bred by Wheatley
518 1/2.
SENT TO POST—4:01. OFF AT 4:04 NEW YORK TIME.
Start good from a walk-up. Starter, G. Cassidy. Won diving; second same. SEABISCUIT and
WAR ADMIRAL broke to a walking start with SEABISCUIT being sent into immediate command under
pressure and down clear going to the first turn. He barged the rail rounding the bend and was placed to
foreure after being straightened into the backstretch. Going to the half mile mark WAR ADMIRAL moved
up strongly to drive ahead and he made repeated bids, under punishment until the stretch was reached,
in the last quarter mile SEABISCUIT was lightly punished after stalling all early efforts, then came out
readily when Woolf urged his mount along at his last clip. WAR ADMIRAL, after joining SEABISCUIT at
the half mile mark, failed to get to the front and he fell back after reaching the stretch.

The signed agreement (above) which culminated in the famous War Admiral-Seabiscuit race at Pimlico on November 1, 1938, is a remarkable document. It is undated but was signed about mid-September of 1938, by Charles S. Howard at Belmont Park and by Samuel D. Riddle at the Information Desk in Pennsylvania Station, New York City, where Alfred Vanderbilt waited to waylay the Philadelphia sportsman.

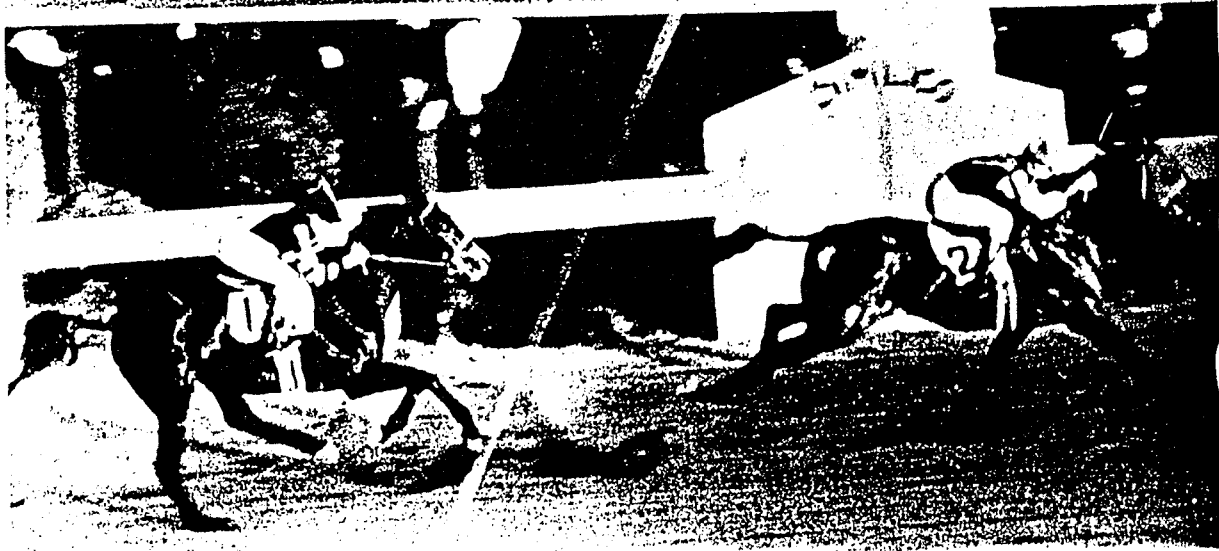
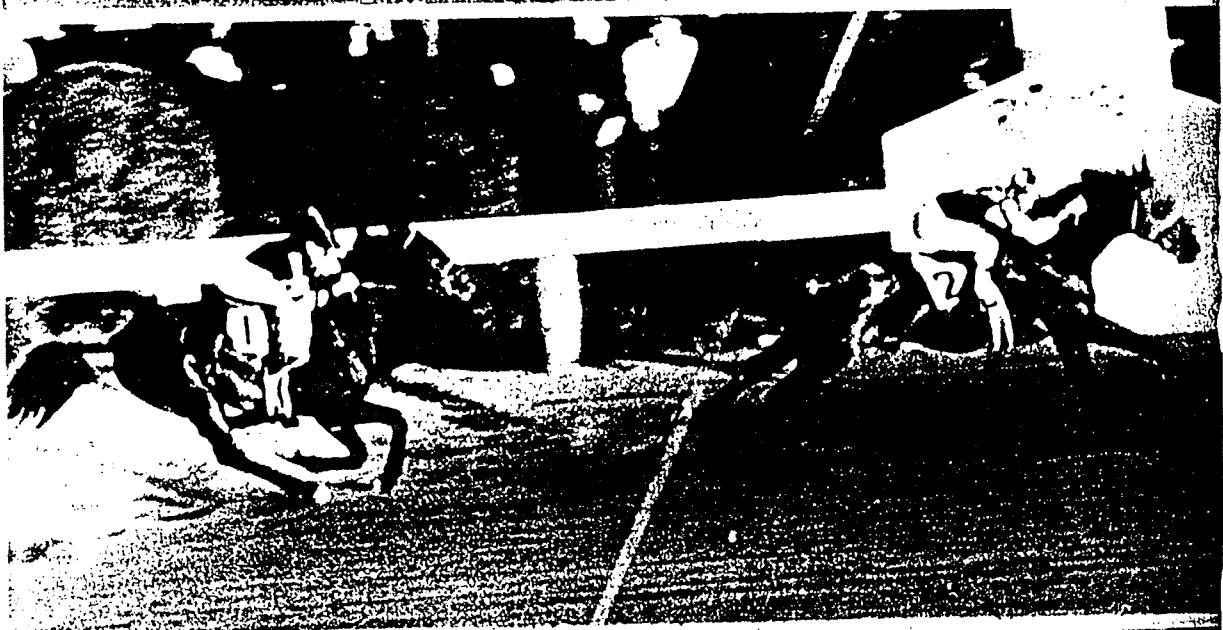
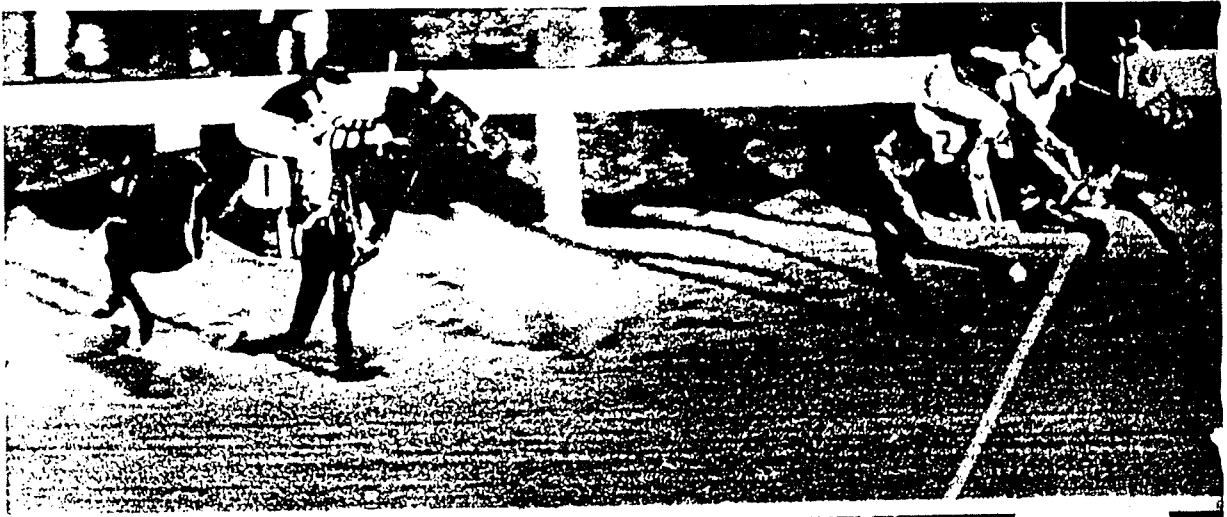
Riddle, it was generally felt, would have preferred not to have his colt meet Seabiscuit at that particular time. A similar match—for a \$100,000 purse—scheduled for Belmont Park in May, had fallen through. Vanderbilt got the race

for Pimlico, of which he was president, for a mere \$15,000, and racing people today still shake their heads and wonder how he persuaded the two owners to agree. What combination of guile and psychology Vanderbilt used on Howard and Riddle isn't known, but he had one thing going for him. He knew his men, and he himself had been through the experience of owning a great horse and having to meet the pressures that go with it. His Discovery had faced similar challenges. In any case, Vanderbilt arranged what is still considered "the match of the century."

[PHOTO BY LAWRENCE MCNALLY, BALTIMORE News-Post]



[UPI]



For almost a half mile they ran as one horse, painted against the green, red and orange foliage of a Maryland countryside. They were neck and neck—head and head—nose and nose.

The great Admiral had thrown his challenge. You could see that he expected Seabiscuit to quit and curl up. But Seabiscuit has never been that brand of horse. I had seen him before in two \$100,000 races at Santa Anita, boxed out, knocked to his knees, taking the worst of all the racing luck—almost everything except facing a firing squad or a machine-gun nest—and yet, through all this barrage of trouble, Seabiscuit was always there, challenging at the wire. I saw him run the fastest half-mile ever run at Santa Anita last March, when he had to do it in his pursuit of Stagehand.

So, when War Admiral moved up on even terms and 40,000 throats poured out their tribute to the Admiral, I still knew that the 'Biscuit would be alongside at the finish. The 'Biscuit had come up the hard way. That happens to be the only way worth while. The Admiral had known only the softer years—the softer type of competition. He had never before met a combination of a grizzly bear and a running fool.

Head and head they came to the mile. There wasn't a short conceded putt between them. It was a question now of the horse that had the heart. Seabiscuit had lost his two-length margin. His velvet had been shot away. He was on his own where all races are won—down the stretch.

He had come to the great kingdom of all sport—the kingdom of the heart.

The Admiral had shown his reserve speed. From two lengths away he was now on even terms. But, as they passed the mile post with three-sixteenths left—the vital test—the stretch that always tells the story—where 40,000 looked for the fleet War Admiral to move away—there was another story. Seabiscuit was still hanging on. Seabiscuit hadn't quit. With barely more than a final furlong left, the hard-way son of Hard Tack must have said to the Admiral—"Now let's start running. Let's see who is the better horse."

Foot by foot and yard by yard, Woolf and Seabiscuit started moving away. Charlie Kurtzinger gave the Admiral the whip. But you could see from the stands that Admiral suddenly knew he

had nothing left in heart or feet to match this wild, crazy five-year-old who all his life had known only the uphill, knockdown devil-take-the-loser route, any track—any distance—any weight—any time. And who the hell are you?

War Admiral had no answer. Down the final furlong the great-hearted 'Biscuit put on extra speed. He moved on by. Then he opened a small gap. Forty thousand expected the Admiral to move up, close the gap again. But the Admiral was through. He had run against too many plow horses and platers in his soft, easy life. He had never tackled a Seabiscuit before.

He had never met a horse who could look him in the eye down the stretch and say to him, in horse language, "Now let's start traveling, kid. How do you feel? I feel great. This is down my alley."

Yard by yard Seabiscuit moved on ahead. Then it was length by length. Seabiscuit left the Admiral so far behind that it wasn't even a contest down the stretch. War Admiral might just as well have been chasing a will o' the wisp in a midnight swamp. He might just as well have been a fat poodle chasing a meat wagon. He had been outrun and outgamed—he had been run off the track by a battered five-year-old who had more speed and heart.

The race, they say, isn't to the swift. But it is always to the swift and the game. It so happened that Seabiscuit had these two important qualities in deep abundance. War Admiral could match neither flying feet nor fighting heart. Man o' War's brilliant son hung on with all he had until it came to the big showdown—to the point when the hard-way Thoroughbred, the horse from the wrong side of the track, began really to run.

As a result of this race, Seabiscuit moves up into second place for total lifetime winnings with \$340,000—just back of Sun Beau with \$376,244. But there is only one Seabiscuit—the next one to him is Exterminator. These have been the two great horses, year by year, of the American turf.

I nominate Seabiscuit for heart and speed, for all it takes at the top for one of the greatest competitive efforts I have ever seen in a matter of forty years.

Quite a horse, this Seabiscuit. None was a better, gamer, or faster one over the route.

Maxims from Methuselah

GRANTLAND RICE

Much of Granny Rice's reporting was sheer poetry and much of his poetry was philosophical. He was as fast with a piece of original verse as Don Meade was out of the gate on a two-year-old.

Take your pick from the tipsters, who give you
the winning horse.
But kindly remember the answer in the heart of
your black remorse.

Horse racing's an opium dream beyond all dreams
ever spun,
Where every sad bloke in the mob should have
won every race that was run.

Did you ever notice, my friend, in the race
track's grotto of tears,
How many go to the seller's maw—how few to
the lone cashier?

Did you ever notice, old pal, in the race track's
dizzy spin
There are ninety ways that a horse can lose—
with only one way to win?