

Connally's dream lives on

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In the end, the celebrated life of one of this nation's most complex and charismatic citizens came down to one dream — the dream of well-bred horses in splendid and powerful motion, running in respectable company for suitable compensation on beloved Texas soil.

John Connally knew all about dreams, and the risk-taking required to bring one's dreams to fruition. His death on June 15 occurred just one cruelly brief month after the former Texas governor had revealed plans to lead an ambitious \$75 million effort to get a stalled Class I racetrack financed and out of the gate in Houston.

The risks, he knew, were considerable. Armed though he was with the backing of a \$6 billion corporation, the 76-year-old Connally could not ignore the fact that two other Texas tracks of similar size were experiencing various degrees of difficulty getting underway.

But darn it, he just couldn't shake the dream.

Officials at MAXXAM, the Houston-based corporation that Connally represented and the force behind the Class I track's new endeavor, have declared that in the spirit of their fallen spokesman, the company will go forward with initial plans to sell high-yield private bonds to fund the venture.

Sam Houston Race Park will get built, they insist, and further claim it will be the first of the three major Texas tracks to open. John Connally's dream will become a reality in 1994, they confidently predict.

I hope they're right. Thousands of Texas horseracing supporters hope they're right. The project has an arguably good chance for success. But the dream has suddenly lost a great deal of its luster.

John Connally won't be here to turn that first shovelful of dirt or to present the trophy for the John Bowden Connally Jr. Stakes. The finished product will be devoid of his personal touch. Most tragically of all, Connally's vision of a track that still exists at the dream phase will remain forever unknown.

Thirty years ago, a promising young state leader was a front-seat witness to the death of an American dream. Three weeks ago, Americans were front-page witnesses to the death of a Texas dream. Sam Houston Race Park may well prevail. But John Connally's final dream went out with the man.

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