

Hunch Bet Pays Off For Governor Richards In Her Namesake Event

By ANNE LANG

The scene in the winner's circle was a racing feminist's dream.

On hand was a female state leader, presenting the trophy to the female owner/breeder of the female race winner. Only the presence of Hilary Clinton could have made the moment more significant.

But the presence of Gov. Ann Richards, who attended Texas Day not only to mark the inaugural running of the stakes named in her honor but to enjoy herself as well, was rewarding enough for her 10,000-plus patrons. And for Ruth Brightbill, whose gray four-year-old Jovial Wings made a late rally to capture the \$27,400 one-mile event, the whole thing was a dream come true.

"This is just great," the Fort Worth resident beamed as she clutched her winner's plaque. "It couldn't get any better than this. I think I'm going to go home and give thanks."

If the bank had been open on that homeward trip, Brightbill could have deposited the first-place check of \$16,440 in the Jovial Wings account, which now totals \$49,277. And winning the Gov. Ann Richards Stakes meant that by mid-year, Brightbill had already surpassed her entire 1992 Accredited Texas-bred program earnings of \$12,827 (which ranked her in fifth place on last year's overall ATB list).

Governor Richards, who cashed a winning ticket on Jovial Wings (later explaining to turfwriter Gary West that she "wanted to see two gray women in the winner's circle"), seemed nearly as delighted as Brightbill.

"I think it's just terrific that a



TTBA's Jo Ann Weber, winning owner Ruth Brightbill, Governor Richards and TTBA's Clay Murray show off some hardware in the winner's circle.

woman owner won the race," she declared, moments after deftly sidestepping a rambunctious Jovial Wings in the winner's circle.

That Jovial Wings had energy to spare after being pulled up was notable in itself. The daughter of Northern Jove/Mitchagumi, by Riverman, broke from the six-hole and lingered toward the rear of the eight-horse field for the first three-quarters of a mile, conserving her energy and waiting for a signal from jockey Mark Guidry. The pair seemed content to let Closer She Moves and Joanie's

Lace set the pace.

At the head of the stretch, Jovial Wings angled rapidly to the far outside, passing the early leaders and responding to a late challenge by Dans Miss, who ended up one length behind at the wire.

"Everything just set up good," said Chicago's leading rider Guidry, who was aboard the filly for the first time on Texas Day. "When I picked her up and asked her to go, she answered pretty good. In the last eighth of a mile she exploded and gave me everything I wanted her to."

On going wide in the stretch, Guidry said: "I kind of wanted to save a little ground, but they (Closer She Moves, Joanie's Lace and Dans Miss) were three abreast. If I was going to wait there I'd have waited all day long. I had the horse and I had the momentum, so I just went on around them."

Second-place money of \$5,480 went to Robert Arnett, owner/breeder of Dans Miss, who was top-weighted at 117 pounds and is trained by Ralph Rampellini. Third was Closer She Moves, whose owner/breeder Gary Smith collected \$3,014 for the filly conditioned by Steve Fontenot. The remaining horses (in order of finish) were Joanie's Lace, Rope Dancer, Fur's To That, Texas Squaw and Keechi Girl.

The winning time of 1:40.4 was fast enough to satisfy local trainer Monte Couch, who has handled Jovial Wings since her maiden outing. Couch saddled the filly for last year's Trinity Oaks victory and four other wins in a 23-start career that also includes three seconds and two thirds.

"We went into this pretty confident, because we knew what an outstanding rider Mark is," Couch said.



Jovial Wings enters the winner's circle under winning rider Mark Guidry. Guidry is currently the leading rider at Chicago's Arlington International Racecourse, and was making his first appearance at Trinity Meadows.



A graduate of the TTBA Yearling Sale, Jovial Wings hits the finish line in front of Dan's Miss (#2), with Closer She Moves (#5) coming in third in the Governor Ann Richards Stakes.

"Also, we felt the track was in good shape."

Couch added that he was pleased with the apparent success of Texas Day. "This just shows everybody

what good racing's going to do for the state," he stated.

Governor Richards wholeheartedly agreed. And asked what she thought of a stakes race being named

for her, she replied: "I think it was so sweet of them to do it. It's an honor for me to participate in any capacity of horse racing. I'm fascinated by the entire process."

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GOVERNOR ANN RICHARDS

When state treasurer Ann Richards pledged during the 1990 gubernatorial campaign to actively support lowering the state's pari-mutuel tax in order to initiate the development of Class I racetracks, Texas horsemen listened.



When the newly-elected governor made good on her promise by helping to push through a substantial takeout reduction during the 1991 legislature, Texas horsemen cheered. The 59-year-old from Waco had captured their respect and gratitude.

Devised and promoted by a team of representatives from all facets of the Texas racing and breeding industry, the modified legislation reduced the state's share of the handle from five percent to one percent, on a sliding scale format.

The measure meant an immediate boost to the handful of small and mid-size tracks that had been struggling along since Texas' first modern-day pari-mutuel track opened in 1989. Its primary purpose, however, was to allow the major tracks a chance to get up and running, and to accelerate all of the state tracks' progress toward financial independence.

Licenses were subsequently granted for

three large-scale Texas racetracks, all of which are slated to open within the next two years. It's a safe bet that Richards will be guaranteed the choicest seat at any one of the tracks, any time.

Following six years as a county commissioner and eight years as state treasurer, in 1991 Richards became Texas' first female governor since Miriam "Ma" Ferguson served two terms in the 1920's and '30s.

Like Richards, Ferguson was a staunch supporter of horse racing. Both women recognized racing's profit potential as a major step toward reviving an ailing Texas economy, and both envisioned the vast spectrum of jobs to be spawned by the new industry.

But the outcome of Richards' involvement in Texas racing is likely to be different from Ferguson's. While Ferguson eventually fought a losing battle against conservative forces intent on abolishing state-sponsored gambling, Richards' proven capacity for wise leadership—enhanced by her genuine enthusiasm for the sport—will cast a powerful influence on the longevity of Texas horse racing in these modern times.

Breaking the conservative mold that preceded her, Richards began her term in office by appointing more minorities and women to state posts than any previous Texas governor. She has managed to streamline the state government system, and has launched training programs for the thousands of state agencies and commissions.

Richards has been praised for making great strides in the areas of economic development, criminal justice, education, technology, the environment, and health and human services. Whispered rumors of an expanded political career that could land her in a key Washington post have grown to audible predictions heard throughout America, as her accomplishments and national recognition factor continue to mount.

That Richards has never entirely discounted the possibility of a future run for a federal office only adds to her aura of unlimited potential. And, given the governor's sterling track record and indomitable propensity for endurance, it is only fitting that the fillies and mares scheduled for today's event named in her honor will run farther than any other distaffers on the Texas Day card.

Like Ann Richards, they will prove their ability to go the distance.

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