

TEXAS PROFILE

Randy Galloway

By ANNE LANG

He might best be described as the Jeff Foxworthy of the sports media world. Or perhaps the Dr. Red Duke of racing. Plenty of folks flat-out hate him; others would gladly support him in a run for U.S. president. But no matter which side of his sports politics you may ride on—particularly with regard to Texas horse racing—there's no arguing that longtime Dallas newspaper columnist and radio talk-show host Randy Galloway has a way of grabbing your attention. And heaven help you if you're a wimp.

IT was a chilly February afternoon at Trinity Meadows Raceway near Fort Worth. Up in the stands, 53-year-old Randy Galloway held his breath as the starting gates sprang open in the chute across the infield. Squinting through binoculars, he tried to locate his jockey's black-and-red colors among the thundering pack of Thoroughbreds. No sign. Puzzled, he continued to search in vain as the horses rounded the turn for home in the 6-furlong race.

Suddenly, a wild cheer went up from crowd as the #10 horse surged to the lead in the stretch, widening the margin by a decisive full length as he crossed under the wire amid the fans' sustained hollering. As co-owner of #10, Galloway should have been cheering, too; instead, he and his partners simply stood frozen in disbelief.

Number 10 was riderless.

"There he was, runnin' like crazy, with nobody aboard," Galloway glumly recalls.



Randy Galloway (right) and TTBA columnist Allen Bogan discuss the Lone Star Jockey at Grand Prairie at a recent media function at the track site.

"Evidently he'd stumbled right at the start and lost our jockey, Terry Stanton. The funny part was, most horses in those circumstances will veer way outside and fade, but not ours, no sir! He went straight to the rail, disrupting the whole pack. Honestly, I'm relieved that no one got hurt. He went on and ran a normal race, stalked the front-runners and ran 'em down in the stretch. Then as soon as he crossed the finish, he pulled up and started jogging, turned around and came back with the others. Made the outrider's job easy!"

The unofficial hero of Trinity that afternoon was 8-year-old Broken River, a veteran claimer owned by Galloway's Wimp Free Racing Stables. Formed in the summer of 1995, the 6-person partnership is named after Galloway's evening radio show, "Wimp-Free Sports Talk" on WBAP-AM 820.

"It's just a fun kind of thing," Galloway explains about the partnership. "With Grand Prairie [Lone Star Jockey Club] about to become

what I think will be among the country's best tracks, several of us decided we needed to get some horses. One day at Trinity last summer, we just did it. I kicked in \$800 for my share of a horse with a little back-class named Voden, who was running for a \$2,500 tag. We got our trainer friend Phillip Walker to claim him.

"Now we had a racing stable, so we figured we'd better pick a name," he continues. "At first, I resisted calling it Wimp Free, because it was already used for my radio show—but my partners won me over. I'm glad we did it, now, because it sure gets a lot of attention." Galloway's wife of 32 years, Janeen, designed a logo for the silks that displays the word "Wimp" inside a large circle, with a diagonal slash through it.

"Terry (Stanton) is our regular rider, and he wants to make sure everybody notices that there's a slash through the word 'wimp.' I know he'd prefer it if that slash was a whole lot bigger!" Galloway chuckles. Wimp Free's partners include trainer Walker; former minor-league baseball player Joe Macko; Irving investment counselor Mike Perlmeter; Galloway's longtime friend Don Walker (no relation to Phillip); and Don's mother, Mildred.

Since being claimed by the group for \$6,250 last July, Broken River, a son of Hula Blaze, has won nearly \$20,000 in purse money and Texas-bred awards (from lifetime earnings of more than \$96,000). The good horse Voden—Wimp Free's first acquisition—was not so fortunate. He ran one time for the partnership, finishing seventh. Shortly thereafter, he contracted a lung

infection. The group ended up selling him for \$200.

After Voden came Broken River, who was soon followed by a California-bred named Awesome Aly. "I'm not sure if there's any Alydar anywhere in his pedigree," Galloway wryly admits. "If there is, it's pretty far-removed. He sure didn't run like an Alydar." Indeed, after being claimed for \$6,250, Awesome Aly bowed at Houston in his first outing for Wimp Free. Sold, for \$600.

"We decided we didn't want any more Cal-breds after that one," Galloway declares. "But Broken River's been a great horse. Phillip has done a wonderful job with him; so has Al Pike, who saddles him at Sam Houston. My number-one rule is that I never second-guess my trainer, which causes a lot of people to say: 'Galloway, you chop [Dallas Cowboys head coach] Barry Switzer's head off every chance you get in your column, and yet you say you'll never second-guess your trainer!' And I just answer: 'Well, I guess that proves I've got my priorities straight!'"

There are other racing-related priorities as well. Galloway says that the partnership plans to add a few more Thoroughbreds to their current one-horse stable. On the subject of that horse, he announces: "Broken River will stay in Houston this summer; we might take him to Louisiana Downs, and we might return to Trinity. Wherever we go, he always tries. He's got the guts of Troy Aikman."

Coincidentally, it's a phone call from Aikman that interrupts the *Texas Thoroughbred* interview just minutes later. Following a brief chat with the Cowboys' star quarterback, Galloway explains: "He and Switzer are still feuding, and I wanted to give Troy's side of it in my column. Of course, Troy's is the only version I want, because I just don't deal with Barry Switzer!"

No fence-riding allowed in the Galloway camp.

A Determined Start

There were lots of fences, though, in Galloway's birthplace of Mayfield in western Kentucky—not exactly at the heart of prime Thoroughbred country, but able to boast its fair share of horseflesh. At

age 10, Galloway moved with his family to Odessa. The following year, his father was transferred to Grand Prairie, where Galloway has remained ever since. But his penchant for racing was fostered early on.

"I remember going to Ellis Park when I was about six, and I think I fell in love with the sport right then," says Galloway, who lists football, baseball, basketball and hockey as "tied for a distant second" among his favorite sports. After moving to Texas (which lacked pari-mutuel tracks), "it was tough to remain a racing fan throughout the 1950's, 60's and 70's, but I managed. Even when I was just in high school, there was a group of us that would catch the special train to Oaklawn out of Dallas every Saturday."

Five years after their 1964 wedding, Galloway and Janeen became the parents of Gina, who's now 27, married and living in a Dallas suburb. Second daughter Jennifer, 22, is a senior at Stephen F. Austin. During the girls' childhood years, the Galloways "never missed a summer at Ruidoso. Then we started going to Louisiana Downs after it opened, and later on, Remington Park."

But long before then, Galloway had figured out a way to parlay his fondness for racing—and professional sports in general—into viable employment. First attending Sam Houston State, then majoring in journalism at North Texas State (where he was a sportswriter for the college newspaper), Galloway eventually dropped out to take a job opportunity as a part-time sports reporter for the *Dallas Morning News*. That position soon evolved into fulltime work covering high schools—with eventual advancement to college sports, then pro ball.

In 1981, he was given his own column, which appears on Sunday, Monday, Thursday and Saturday. This year marks Galloway's 31st anniversary with the newspaper. It's also his 16th year with WBAP, where he launched a weekly show in 1980; now he's on the air 4-5 nights a week. The two-hour format offers a mixture of Galloway's commentary, remarks from callers, and conversation with guests who

are prominent in various sports. The tone often gets emotional, to say the least.

"The other night, he was chewing out some auto-racing guy, calling him a 'gear-head,'" laughs Galloway's friend Harry Stern, a former turfwriter for the *Dallas Morning News*. "I tried to think of what Randy would use as a similar insult for someone who doesn't share his opinion on a horse racing topic."

But Galloway's opinions on the various aspects of the Sport of Kings, according to those who know him, are heartfelt. "He deeply loves horse racing," Stern observes, "and he views the sport the same way a fan would, because he is a fan. And now he's a horse owner, as well. His only problem is, he's a horrendous handicapper! We used to tell him it's a shame he loves racing so much, because he's so bad at picking winners."

Another former *Morning News* turfwriter is Randy Moss, who's known Galloway since the early 1980's. Of his friend's writing and broadcasting style, Moss says: "Randy's a Texas guy, laid-back, casual, humorous—yet at the same time, very informative. He's always clued in to what's going on behind the scenes in professional sports, and he's a smart enough guy that not only does he cultivate sources who keep him informed, but who also help him understand what it all means. A lot of people can dig up information, but Randy's got the knack to process information in order to reach a reasonable conclusion."

Some of Galloway's targets might take issue with the term "reasonable." For instance: there was a feud that evolved during Trinity Meadows' inaugural season, when Galloway took what Moss describes as "a very harsh and entirely justified stance" toward one of the track's owners, Jack Lenavitt.

"In fact, Randy was probably more caustic in print toward Lenavitt than he used to be toward the owner of the Texas Rangers, whom he couldn't stand," Moss recounts. "After one particularly 'hot' column appeared, word came to the Trinity pressbox that Lenavitt wanted to talk with Randy. Soon we could see the two

of them down below on the apron, walking and talking. Suddenly, Lenavitt drops to his knees and starts pounding the pavement with his fist. Then he jumps up, and there's much finger-jabbing in each others' faces.

"When Randy got back to the pressbox, we asked him what had happened. He said that Lenavitt had fallen to his knees when Randy had questioned Lenavitt's dedication to Texas racing. Lenavitt's response was to pound the asphalt and say: 'This IS Texas racing! I am Texas racing!'" Moss pauses, then grudgingly adds: "Well, at that time, I guess he was."



Galloway on the air at WBAP Radio in Fort Worth.

He concludes: "Randy wears the outrage he sometimes stirs up like a badge of courage. But the difference between him and (a journalist who takes an adversarial stance for the sole purpose of arousing public ire) is that he reaches an opinion honestly, based on what he truly believes and assesses the situation to be. He doesn't hesitate to stick to his guns on that opinion, and if it creates a tidal wave of negative sentiment, then so be it. His readers and listeners recognize his sincerity, and that's a big part of what makes him so entertaining."

Galloway cheerfully acknowledges that a large portion of the letters he receives is "mad mail," a trend that even dates back to his early days as a sportswriter.

"When I first started at the *Morning News*, we didn't have a turfwriter per se," he says, "so I became sort of the de facto turfwriter, because I liked racing so much. I'll bet I did at least 40 stories alone on the subject of 'Why Don't We Have Racing in Texas?' Allen Bogan (*Texas Thoroughbred* columnist) still laughs, reminding me that even before I had an offi-

cial column, I used to write my racing stories in an opinionated way. I guess I did sorta take a hacksaw to certain religious groups who were blocking pari-mutuel wagering back then.

"The angry mail used to pile up on the desk, and I took great pride in that. The madder I made 'em, the more the mail poured in. But I knew I was right, so it didn't make any difference!"

Has he received any threats to his life over the years? "No; I still get a lot of nasty mail, but no death threats so far. There's undoubtedly some people who'd love to punch me out, though!" Galloway laughs with glee, then adds: "Seriously, I don't think you can beat what I do for a living. I must like it, because I've been doing it for 30 years, and it's never felt like work. I sure wouldn't want to be doing anything else."

Straight-Talking Man

Not surprisingly, Galloway is more than willing to share his emphatic viewpoints on the general state of major-league Texas racing—past, present and future.

On the past: "I think San Antonio and Houston had trouble because neither place has the racing background, the racing blueprint, that Dallas-Fort Worth has. San Antonio has a demographic problem. They don't have the middle-class money there; it's more of a low end and a high end, with not much in between. And the high end just wasn't significant enough to carry the handle. In Houston, they totally misjudged the market, offering those huge purses right off the bat. It's just too bad they had to go through all that Chapter 11 trouble, because they lost some good barns when they couldn't put up the purse money."

On the present: "Retama remains a problem, I'll admit. But Sam Houston's got a great team in place now, and they're steadily rebuilding. As for Lone Star, the money they're bound to rake in through pre-opening simulcasting (ongoing now) will be phenomenal." What about the current conflict between Quarter Horse and Thoroughbred horsemen's groups? "If you've got separate entities out there and everybody's negotiating for them-

selves, you end up losing in the long run. Oklahoma's a prime example of that. I'd like to see the Texas HBPA back the way it was: everybody under one umbrella, and just trying to get along."

On the future: "I think Lone Star will hit a home run immediately. This is horse racing territory up here, and it's been proven for a lot of years—by the numbers of North Texans who flock to out-of-state tracks, and by the success of Trinity Meadows, despite the type of facility that it is. And Lone Star will be totally first-class. Frankly, I don't see a viable circuit between the three big Texas cities. By that, I mean that you won't have the same calibre of horses running at Houston and San Antonio that you'll have at Lone Star, because Lone Star's purses will be bigger. Horsemen will proceed from Lone Star to tracks with comparable purses. I think the real circuit will end up being Lone Star, Oaklawn and Fair Grounds. Houston will fit in, too, if they work around Lone Star's dates—working cooperatively, instead of in direct competition."

Certainly, Lone Star vice-president and general manager Corey Johnsen is hoping for the same thing. Having known Galloway since 1982, Johnsen has nothing but the highest praise for his friend.

"I don't know if a lot of people realize this," Johnsen reveals, "but a big reason why we have this opportunity for a major North Texas track is because of Randy Galloway. He wrote supportive columns, and even helped man the telephones when Grand Prairie had the sales tax election (which subsequently allocated a substantial sum to Lone Star's development). Without that sales tax contribution, I truly believe that a world-class track being erected in Grand Prairie just might not have happened."

While Lone Star developers struggled over numerous start-up obstacles during the early 1990's, Galloway remained optimistic, Johnsen says. "Even in the bleakest of times for us, or no matter how badly things were going for Sam Houston or Retama, Randy's attitude was always: 'This is going to be different. We're gonna make it

here.' I think the whole horse industry owes him a debt of thanks for believing in this project from day one. And he's given me a lot of excellent advice along the way; I really respect his opinion."

As for Galloway's typical broadcast and printed delivery, Johnsen describes him as "the voice of the common man. He relates to everybody, but he writes exactly what he thinks, and in a very commonsensical way. Because of his talent and his longevity in the market—and also the fact that he's got a very popular radio show—he's transcended the realm of the average newspaper columnist. He's definitely a media personality."

A case in point, Johnsen says, was when Johnsen attended a Rangers baseball game five years ago. On a break from the pressbox, Galloway came down to visit Johnsen at his seat, which immediately caused an excited stir in the surrounding crowd. Fans pressed in to banter with Galloway, calling out greetings. "It was amazing," Johnsen recalls. "I swear, if I'd


been with someone even as well-known as the mayor of Dallas, fewer people would have taken notice. Randy is that popular; a real celebrity."

At The Heart of Things

But for all his public recognition; for all the satisfaction of making a significant, far-reaching impact on countless readers and listeners through the decades, evidently what Thoroughbred racing truly boils down to for Randy Galloway is his immeasurable pride and joy as an owner. Johnsen says he's amused by the fact that Galloway has gone "totally berserk over owning a race horse. His partnership group is a perfect example, in my opinion, of the bright future horse racing can have if we just break in new owners with honest advice, a good trainer, and a horse that can actually run—with maybe a win or two thrown in."

To Galloway, though, winning is just icing on the cake. "To me, it's the greatest excitement in the world to be at the racetrack and

have a horse running," he declares almost reverently. "I've covered all the biggest sporting events in this country, and elsewhere in the world. I've been there when the Cowboys have won five Super Bowls and all, but I've never come close to being as pumped up as when our horse is about to run in a \$10,000 claiming race at Trinity Meadows.

"There's no finer feeling on Earth." 

Anne Lang is a freelance writer and a former editor of The Texas Thoroughbred. She currently is a contributing writer for Spur magazine, an Austin stringer for People magazine and a columnist for Daily Racing Form. She is also a national writing award winner for articles she wrote for Horse & Rider and Western Styles magazines. She has also been published in The Blood-Horse, Thoroughbred Times, Equus, Horsemen's Journal, Racing Times and The Backstretch magazines.