

On a Day History Was Made: Melbourne Cup Reflections 2005

The making of sporting history constitutes no ready equation. The media had spared neither journalist nor ink covering the lead-up, a curator had found the watering switch and the Flemington track came up dead despite the breeze and 30 degree heat. Above it all a sky writer emblazoned 'Diva' against a dazzling arc of blue. Surprisingly, the VRC merchandising arm was either on leave or had adopted the "glass half full" approach to risk as apart from a few caps and badges the Makybe Diva colours were more prominent on the dancer who swirled his partner in an enthusiastic tango prior to the great mare entering the birdcage than they were on the fans.

The first Tuesday in November has always been an institution (indeed, my birthday falls on the day every other year). I grew up with the much anticipated phone call from my father, his voice suitably warmed by a luncheon wine menu to tell me whether the carefully folded twist of newspaper that contained the name of the horse he had chosen for me in the sweep had won.

Now an adult, and I had traveled halfway across the globe to watch the race live. Images of gleaming thoroughbred hindquarters and the deafening roar of a capacity crowd interplayed with a sparkled reflection of a smile as I acknowledged the sleek concoction that the stylist had twisted my hair into earlier in the day. Cut to a glimpse of the tissue wrapped dress that had been delivered from Paris some months earlier and all the trimmings I had indulged myself with since. Pause at the feel of a manicured lawn beneath a well heeled shoe; touch your fingers to the dewy glass of champagne; and feel the weight of sunshine on bared shoulders.

The countdown to 3pm commenced. Oversized puppets clad in jockey silks pranced and waved along the straight, ballroom dancers sashayed with fixed smiles and the occasional pointed glance at the pair in front who weren't swooping at exactly the synchronised pace they should have been. Above it all the National Anthem stung the eyes of the expatriates who longed, momentarily, for a country they no longer called home.

The parade of past champions revealed a legend from my university days - Might and Power. In my desire to capture him on film I suddenly found myself in the calm grasp of the Flemington rose thorns; an able distraction from other greats such as Subzero, Brew, Saintly, and Doriemus.

Amongst a thickening crowd Makybe Diva strode quietly into the mounting yard - her strapper more agitated than she as cameras whizzed above our heads on complex trapeze lines as Channel 7 angled for the best images to beam to the billion plus watching around the globe. The same people would no doubt have wondered what it was like to "actually be there".

Hot.

A bloodstock agent appeared behind me, acknowledged my hello with a polite nod and looked momentarily lost as to who on earth I was.

Hat feathers fluttered, chiffon rippled in the lightest of breezes and morning suit tails defined the elegance of generations past as the dulcet tones of the commentary

team continued to explore the race form. Half close your eyes. Dissolve into the sea of colour.

History will state that on Tuesday 1 November 2005 Makybe Diva became the first horse to win three Melbourne Cups. More than 106 000 people would stand as one to cheer her home, and in the moment when she lowered her head on the line the crown passed from the chestnut with the mighty heart who had ruled the same course 75 years earlier.

Another century, another champion. Fate - in the form of a bouquet of blood red roses laid at the base of his life size bronze - appear to have signaled the changing of the guard; new memories to weave themselves into the tapestry of time.

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