

Racing for America: The Horse Race of the Century and the Redemption of a Sport

James C. Nicholson

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James C. Nicholson's *Racing for America* exposes the historical roles of politics, money, and corruption in horse racing.

The book profiles the key players, history, and hype surrounding the 1923 "Race of the Century" and its impact on horse racing. The contest pitted Americans against British racers, and helped revive a sport whose prospects for survival in the United States were uncertain. In alternating sections, Nicholson profiles the rags-to-riches story of corrupt oil tycoon and horse owner Harry F. Sinclair, cantankerous trainer Sam Hildreth, top young jockey Earl Sande, and the winning horse, Zev.

The book follows the struggles and successes that brought this cast together, forging them into a team against the backdrop of a sport plagued by corruption and the brewing Teapot Dome deal that scandalized President Harding's administration. It includes an instructive look at the political, cultural, and economic conditions that facilitated American horse racing's return from the brink of extinction, giving it a place of national prominence, even as the United States trended toward oligarchy and commercial mass spectacles.

Though its focus is on one race and its particular players, the book covers a period from 1895 to 1930 and beyond, its clear, concise reporting capturing atmospheres, eras, and the hope that Americans placed in a race. Nicholson's storytelling is layered, presenting events with enough historical details and texture to reveal the players' motivations. He conveys the minute-by-minute tension of horse races and their stakes, and captures American horse racing, and the gambling and doping scandals that almost wrought its demise, showing the complex role that shady politics played in saving the sport. Photographs and detailed information are present to support the story.

Racing for America is a contextual work of sports reporting whose compelling personal stories help to capture a 1923 horse race.

WENDY HINMAN (March / April 2021)

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