

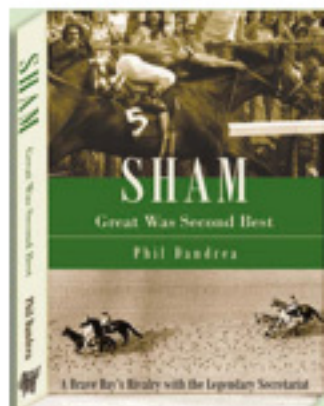


TDN Book Review

Sham: Great Was Second Best by Phil Dandrea

Review by Ian Clayton

Phil Dandrea's [Sham: Great Was Second Best](#) is an impeccably researched insight into the underrated Sham, a horse who courageously battled the legendary Secretariat through the 1973 Triple Crown. While movies and books have been written about Secretariat and his amazing feats on the racetrack, little has been said about the horse some would argue pushed him to greatness. Dandrea uses a combination of intensive research and personal accounts to make that argument.



The book hits its stride in the days leading up to the Kentucky Derby, with rival trainers Pancho Martin and Lucien Laurin trading verbal barbs and the media fanning

the flames of Martin's temper. Dandrea does a great job of making you feel like you're right there, hearing from both sides as they mutter under their respective breaths and aloud to the media.

The races unfold vividly as well. In the Derby, Sham strikes the front in the stretch while missing the two teeth he knocked out hitting the gate at the start, only to be caught by Secretariat in record-breaking time. The frustration builds heading into the Preakness, when Secretariat's owner Penny Tweedy visits Sham and his trainer at their barn before the two square off at Pimlico. It's there you can get a sense of Sham's demeanor, as he willingly greets his rival's owner with a brush of his nose. In the Preakness, Sham gets rolling on the lead early, only to have Secretariat make a huge move on the first turn to join him on the front down the backstretch. Sham could only chase from there, unable to close the gap as the two run away from the others.

There was no avoiding the media frenzy over Secretariat in the days leading up to the final leg of the Triple Crown at Belmont Park. It was as if the race had already been run, Secretariat the winner, an unstoppable force. For it was Secretariat staring back at Sham's trainer, Pancho Martin, from the cover of *Time* magazine. Steve Cady is quoted in the book from the pages of the *New York Times*, "If ever a horse deserved to have a nervous breakdown, it's Sham." Asked to recall Sham's situation years later, jockey Heliodoro Gustines felt Sham might have been a bit down-hearted for the Belmont S. Even the once boastful Pancho Martin is quoted in the book telling *Newsday*, "If he beats me in the Belmont Stakes on Saturday, then I'll call him a super horse."

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As Dandrea describes, the gates spring open for the Belmont, in what would be the duo's final meeting, I felt myself rooting for Sham as he dueled with his rival through those suicidal opening six furlongs. As Secretariat began to pull away from Sham down the backstretch of the Belmont, I could feel the disappointment both the horse and his team must have felt. In knowing not only Sham but the players and events that lead to that final duel, you really get the sense that he was truly a great horse, in the wrong place at the wrong time.

It's later revealed that, following Secretariat's death in 1989 and Sham's in 1993, Dr. Thomas Swerczek from the University of Kentucky performed a necropsy on both horses. Dr. Swerczek noted, Secretariat's heart was the largest he had ever seen, more than twice the normal size for a horse. Ironically, according to Swerczek, Sham's heart was the second-largest he'd ever seen.

Dandrea does an amazing job throughout the book of portraying the emotions of the moment. His extensive research and first-hand accounts of this incredible rivalry allow the story to play out as if it happened yesterday. I recommend even a casual fan of the sport read this book—the story is not only one of two rivals who were the best of their generation, but one of devotion, determination and ambition. Included in the 415 pages is 16 pages of photos as well as an expansive bibliography and endnotes section—definitely worth a read for \$17.95.