

Allaire ambushes Six Speed in last stride

A RECORD crowd. Just over 14,000 through the turnstiles. An all time high stakes on offer. A raging favourite beaten in the shadow of the post amid surfeit of drama. Whether science agrees or not with age old belief that an eclipse causes celestial aberrations with disastrous consequences for mankind, on the day of the Lunar eclipse there were racing upheavals aplenty.

The unclaimed Jackpot Pool of Rs. 9 lakhs stands testimony! This year's edition of the Kingfisher Derby, Bangalore had all the trappings of a spellbinder. There was Six Speed, unbeaten in five starts and an overwhelming choice for the Derby, the richest ever at this centre and the total stake money of just under Rs. 60 lakhs second best to the Poonawalla Breeders Million but ahead of both the Indian Derby and the Indian Turf Invitation Cup. But for that one speck of

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doubt over her ability to get the trip the community's popular pick as the one to beat. Then there was Allaire. Notably Aslam Kader's pick till the day he fell from Analogy. Summons to Srinath who is in the midst of a lucrative spell in Macau where his 27 wins in a short stint is getting raving mention. That celebratory wave of the whip as Srinath nailed Shroff on Six Speed said it all. Allaire had got her resolute head past Six Speed coming from a long way back in that dash to the line and that relief after-triumph normally triggers overwhelmed the Darius Byramji camp. This game filly had her share of career threatening problems

and she had just three weeks of uninterrupted training into the big race. Now there is little doubt that Allaire's best is yet to come. As Ameetha Mehra, daughter of Maj. P. K. Mehra who part owns Allaire with Mr. Deepak Khaitan, said, Allaire had never looked better than she did on Sunday.

In a way Allaire's gut-wrenching victory brought the cheer back to Mr. Deepak Khaitan whose Averoff and Acrobat had gone down in a humdinger of a finish last year to Smart Chieftan. For Darius getting the Razeen-Fly For Baby chestnut to race at such an optimum level of fitness against the backcloth of her known physical demands must have been professionally highly satisfying.

"I must be thankful that I got a good horse to ride", was Srinath's reaction moments after the triumph. He is back in Macau to complete his contractual obligations which may keep him there for another month or two. But he knows that he has turned a corner and in the wake of his biggest ever success on the track back home his own riding profile may have been upped several notches.

Will she stay? This was one nagging question Six Speed had to deal with as the hype built around her in the run up to the Derby. The Bookmakers refused to show Six Speed the kind of generosity they showered on others including Allaire, who as a reasonably priced second favourite drifted out to eights! Much of what happened in the back stretch was of no consequence except that Shroff seemed hell bent on conserving Six Speed's energy as much as possible. In a way the scariest part of the race was when Altimara let herself to the front to take a lead that possibly altered track

balances and sounded a general alert that it would be unwise to let her go like that. Shroff's reaction was swift. He had no difficulty getting past Altimara midway up the straight and when Six Speed surged ahead to a collective roar, the race seemed to be in her safe keeping. But Allaire and Srinath had grander ideas. Allaire ambushed Six Speed in the last possible stride and the Judge had to merely confirm what Srinath had already told the world at large through his exuberant wave. Six Speed had been so gallant in her defeat. Pundits though may have scored a propaganda point by saying that this year's Derby was all about Six Speed getting the trip rather than others getting at her.

In those climactic moments not many spared a thought to what was happening behind this pair. The totally neglected Hello Brother was the hero of a side show when he came up with a sustained stretch run to get past a tiring Altimara. Both Allocated and Axe failed to survive the final furlong crunch while Andreyev's was a curiously bad run and he never could quite come into play from a disadvantageous position he found himself in right from the go.

The length of the card made the day that much longer. Eleven races on a Big Day like this is too huge a burden on wallets and spirits. For those who were there purely for the joy of the Derby as a social compulsion, it was thoroughly enjoyable. But for the hardcore punting community the story was different. Followers of money got a sound thrashing and the abject failure of the highly thought of Ammeter in the opener set the fiery trend.

Ammeter lost all her chances at the gate. Yet another example of how hazardous it is with untested three-year-olds, however well bred. Syndicate Ownership has made its bow alright. But it is not as popular as it is meant to be. Just Do It may have given this form of ownership a tremendous boost. Ryan Marshall did an exquisite job on this long shot to tick the first leg of Darius Byramji's double which Allaire later completed. Despite Rajendra's presence, Nickleodeon was a pass over. This gelding is sure to go one better next time.

Prime Target was given a vigorous ride by B.Prakash. That is what tilted the scales in the Karan Singh-trained gelding's favour when Squeeze essayed a strong challenge. Shekhawat's was a half-hearted attempt on Chandan Ka Palana.

Mumbai schooler Mansoor Shah had a sweet Derby day double, the first leg of which was Absolute Hit who proved too speedy. Prince Shazaan returned a comfortable winner to ensure Shah's brace. Eyes of Truth's finishing effort suggests that he would welcome a step up in distance.

Days of Glory made Star Pursuit work for her victory. The runner-up is bound to perk up after this run.

Veteran Shafiq took another step towards his 1,000th winner when he steered the friendless Al Habib to a resounding victory. The Mahmood Khan



Mr. Marilingaiah, Chairman and Senior Steward, Bangalore Turf Club, giving away the BTC Anniversary Cup to Ms. Ameetha Mehra.