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# Crown Treasure completes a Guineas double

**C**ROWN TREASURE sauntered in, untroubled, unchallenged. Yet her bloodless victory in the second leg of the Guineas — the Kingfisher 2000 — was squeezed out of prominence by a chain of incredulous events, stretching from the judge's box to the starting gate.

Pesi Shroff gave the Mujtahid-Vision Of India filly one of his brandmark rides, enough time and space to get into her rhythmic best. This scintillating run of Crown Treasure's was further proof, if at all proof is needed, that she is an upper crust filly with an extra dose of grit. With every passing milestone she seems to get sturdier and better composed. Rashid Byramji had every reason to sport a smile of triumph once Crown Treasure surged ahead of Amazing Grey so much on her own unbridled enthusiasm.

Crown Treasure is bound to firm up as the brightest Derby prospect. Even Sateesh Narredu conceded that the filly was decidedly travelling much sweeter

## MYSORE

than he had bargained for yet, he says Amazing Grey had done well enough, considering that this was only his third run. "He gave me a good feeling and a hint that he might do well over the extra two furlongs in the Derby," said Sateesh. He is visualising a much stiffer contest the next time the two cross paths, in all probability on October 6.

The Guineas itself was a race between two sets of colours. Mr. Vijay Mallya's Crown Treasure and Mr. M.A.M. Ramaswamy's three runners. Brave Highlander cut the wind for his more illustrious companions. The early pace wasn't much. It reflected in Amazing Grey's visibly unsettled look for best part of two furlongs. Neither Crown Treasure nor Shroff showed any urgency until the race was to take a decisive turn. And that came about at the top of the straight.

Narredu decided to quicken the tempo when the field was sighted at 400m. It swiftly evoked a striking response from Crown Treasure. For a brief while the strides matched, then the Mujtahid filly stretched like an elastic. Amazing Grey held on to second from Alriffa, who clearly could do no more. Brave Highlander was an inevitable doormat.

On either side of the Guineas, though, racing was of a different hue, of the controversial kind. It is amazing that this sport can breed stranger-than-fiction sequences from totally innocuous races and create situations which few can conjure even in their wildest dreams.

It was a Friday of funny footnotes. A judges box fiasco provided an exquisite prelude. There were two objections strong enough to kick up dust storms. There was this well-supported Tropical Park going asunder. A trainer was in the dock a few hours after he had saddled a winner.

But the craziest of happenings was reserved for the last race. A ferocious Amass, not the easiest of horses to get aboard, threw up her head in such murderous rage at the drop of the starters flag that jockey Warren Singh was sent spinning to the ground, back first. He had a providential escape. The chestnut filly, a confirmed madcap, lay grotesquely on her hind legs, the fore high up in the air and the head bobbed in teething fury for a considerable length of time. Those few seconds seemed eternal. She untangled herself to begin a second round. This time crashing through the inner-rails, mercifully onto an area that was much safer. If she had turned her ire on the hapless handlers who were desperately trying to pin her down, there would have been a catastrophe. One official shuddered at the prospect of Amass going helter skelter the other way on the track. Oblivious of this peril, the field was merrily racing by then. Needless to say, the authorities have barred her entry until she mends her ways. For the record, the oddson Bold Spartan won this race with a measure of comfort from Dara on whom Zia Akhtar rode a race that didn't go well with the stipes. Stargate's third was suggestive.

"Mark you, Mysore is the sternest test for a judge's resolution. You can't act on impulses. You take your eye off for a moment you are finished. The angle is so deceptive", a man of abundant racing experience who had judged races for years at this centre had once remarked in a totally different context. Those words of wisdom almost sounded prophetic on Friday when the judge was caught napping in the first race.

There was nothing spectacular about the cluster finish, except that one among the fighting five,

Worth of Diamond, had drifted under pressure to the sand. From the look of it, it wasn't a finish the naked eye could have resolved, at least not with conviction, because of Mysore's notoriously deceitful angle.

So it came as a surprise, when the judge announced a few contemplating moments later, Roaring Desire as the winner and asked for a print to decide the minor placings among three more, including Worth of Diamond.

The print was a shock of sorts. Worth of Diamond was missing. Where is it wondered the flummoxed judge. He knew something was amiss and to reconfirm, sought the negatives. To his horror, he found Worth of Diamond's flared nostril ahead of Roaring Desire. The scene now shifted to the Stewards room. The conscientious judge confessed that he had completely left out Worth of Diamond and had taken Roaring Desire to have gone clear. The stewards revised the order. The print left no doubt in any mind.

A stitch in time saves nine. If the judge had summoned a photo, more as a precaution, things would have been absolutely normal. History has a nasty habit of repeating itself in the cruelest of forms. Nearly eight years ago the then judge had awarded the race to Flower Art (Shafiq) ahead of Crown Princess. Robin Corner couldn't help scratching his head in dismay: "Hey how did I lose this finish". He in fact hadn't. The error was discovered on time and sanity restored.

As a jockey club official in England succinctly put it "a photo finish print is a picture of reassurance that all is fair and square."

The furore over Nasty Baby-Jazz finish in Bangalore last winter and now this latest fracas are two compelling reasons for judges to "play safe."

The academic aspect of racing, winners, losers, performers, non performers, has to be cast aside this week because issues and incidents clearly worked them out of the headlines.

Trainer M. P. Mahesh broke through a rather lean trot. But within hours of his Diamond Lad pulverising the opposition, he was handed out a Rs. 5,00,000 fine and a suspension till the end of the season for his ward's "improved performance" compared to his previous run when the four-year-old gelding had run down the field about three weeks ago.

No trainer has ever been punished to this extent

for an "infringement" of this nature. That in itself makes it a unique case wherein material or circumstantial evidence before the Stipes had to be weighed against the trainer's defence within the ambit of lawful interpretation.

As for material evidence, the horse had run down the field and in a sharp reversal of that advertised form had come through to win by a widening margin. The circumstances corroborating the stipes assertion that Diamond Lad's previous run had not been "sanguine" is in the fact that this time around it attracted curiously inspired betting support suggesting that it was a well-laid gamble. The trainer countered this argument by saying that the horse had indeed improved, as evidenced by a couple of workouts in the run up to this race, in those intervening days.

This brings into question the vexed issue of how far to lean on "facts on the table". Professionals in one voice say that the punishment is rather harsh, the stipes don't agree with that line of thinking, they read a deceptive element to this "in and out" performance. That brings the arguments to the narrower end of meting out natural justice. The best way forward would be to frame a comprehensive set of rules and guidelines, or dust the existing ones and stick to them without fear or favour. Decision making should never conform to opinions and surmises of those who sit in judgment.

Same is the case with objections. One objection a day is handful, but imagine three in two days. Like most objections at least two of them were covered by a fog of intense debate, the differing verdicts adding to its intensity.

Riviere Rouge got the race in the Stewards Room, on Thursday. Ministerial kept it and a few races later, Bold Aristocrat lost out to Castilla.

The Stewards took as much time to adjust a tie or fix a cuffling to see that Krishnan on Bold Aristocrat had been rather clumsy in going bang over to Castilla at a very critical stage of the race. So Castilla got through. Bold Aristocrat had come into the straight on the "wrong leg" and as an upshot had leaned heavily over Castilla who had discernibly closed in.

But the other two were no straightjackets. Ferak Dil put up such a stout hearted show that the fashionably bred Riviere Rouge was made to stretch ev-



Crown Treasure (Shroff) winning the Kingfisher Mysore 2000 Guineas from Amazing Grey (S. Narredu) and Alriffa (Gallagher).

ery sinew. Then came that twist. When Raja Rao progressively lost control and allowed his mount to drift out, hampering in the bargain, a clear path for Narredu. Was it serious enough to take the race away? Amidst a dissenting voice or town the stewards thought it was. The placing were reversed. It was a disappointment of sorts that a horse that had won his first outing so well should have been struggling to shake off a lesser mortal in Ferak Dil has no relevance to the drama on the track.

The three-year-old Ministerial was well within himself in the run in but when Haute Couture began to put an assertive challenge, Ministerial was seemingly under pressure. He went over, dangerously close to his challenger but then held on.

Now while the deliberations were on in the Stewards room, animated conversations used Riviere Rouge as the yardstick. If the same principle were to be applied, argued one group, then Haute Couture should get the race. It didn't. The Stewards thought otherwise.

That again brings into sharp focus, the methodology involved in decision-making. Are opinions taking precedence over merits, technicalities? As long as authorities do not ensure that sauce for goose better be sauce for gander, there are bound to be many more such lucid examples of inconsistency.

"The answer lies in adhering to a strict set of rules governing all objections without preferences or prej-

udices. The bottom line, in the opinion of the stewards, should be tossed out of the window", noted an official who wished to remain anonymous.

Rose Bowl reversed a trend and made her dislike for dead weight known when springing a surprise. The win was decidedly off tangent compared to her previous form. But then this is a filly who does what she thinks best be it in morning work or on the track. That's where she gets away. Thunder Flash was another one who made a U turn of a poor form while beating the well backed Speed Merchant to it at the post.

Westlem Whisper, her lungs well filled after the previous run, showed remarkable progress. Shroff gave the four-year-old, Flying Speed a confident ride to contain MarkofDistinction's relatively mild challenge. It nevertheless was an improved showing by the moody seven-year-old gelding.

Tropical Dancer's long lead stood her in good stead when Omphalos charged home. Big Mac posted his second win, staving off a determined rails run by Ace Ruler. Mrs. Silva Storai had a race snatched from her on Steelee in the last stride by Tzigane, who came through a troubled passage like an express train. Squall and Eagle Sprint cut each other's throat to leave Splendent with the cake. Ebony Gold was an eye-catching second here. Persian House got better assistance this time. It showed on the track.