



4-1-2011

Remembering Barbaro

Sally Silverman
University of Pennsylvania



Jesse Owens. Eric Liddell. Barbaro.

Athletes have long been inspirational icons for society, and Barbaro ranks with the best of them.

In 2006, the majestic, well-muscled Thoroughbred bay colt became one of only six horses ever to go into the Kentucky Derby undefeated and finish in the roses. At three years of age, he wowed the crowds with the largest winning margin seen at the Derby in more than half a century. He had the heart of a champion, pressing on to the finish line of his own will, carried by strength and determination without any urging from his jockey. That quality made him a favorite for the coveted Triple Crown, out of reach by any horse since 1978.

A devastating injury at the Preakness Stakes, the second race in the crown, shattered his right hind leg and all hopes of the highest honor in the world of racing. The injury brought him into the international limelight, allowing him to show the world that his heart was even bigger than could have been imagined. Barbaro spent the next eight months at New Bolton Center where he endured multiple surgeries to fix three bones shattered into more than 20 fragments. Miraculously, the fractures healed and Barbaro was able to walk again, until he developed laminitis. The devastating condition would prove to be the only competitor that Barbaro could not best.

“In my mind he was a very exceptional horse,” Dr. Dean Richardson, chief, Large Animal Surgery, said in an interview on CBS News in 2007. “He just kept such an amazingly positive attitude. So that would make him unforgettable even if he didn’t have any other characteristics that were memorable.”

The number of people who have come forward and continue to keep the memory of Barbaro alive is astounding and many show their admiration for this fine colt by joining the fight to find a treatment for his deadly opponent – laminitis – through gifts to Penn Vet’s Laminitis Research Fund.

And thanks to that support, Barbaro leaves much more than just a legacy of inspiration – he leaves a legacy that means a better life for horses that follow.

— Sally Silverman

This page, starting from top: image by Joan Fairman Kanes/courtesy of Mrs. Gretchen Jackson; image courtesy of Alex Brown (whose stunning *Greatness and Goodness: Barbaro and His Legacy* has just been released. The substantial volume tells the story of Barbaro’s life and his legacy, based on dozens of interviews, including Michael Matz, Dr. Dean Richardson and the New Bolton Center team, media members and racetrack workers. The book is enriched with 164 photographs. For more information, go to <http://alexbrown.com>); image by Sabina Pierce; image by Sabina Pierce. Opposite page: image by Barbara Livingston/courtesy of Mrs. Gretchen Jackson.

