

Mississippi Turns Ugly

by Melissa Stevens

JACKSON, Miss. - The Mississippi State Charity Horse Show was transformed into a boxing match Saturday night after accusations of crowding on the rail during the Three-Year-Old Stake. Joe Cotten won this stake and the qualifier with Ted Williams both by unanimous vote. Dr. Cash, owned by Bill Barnett, Jr., of Windsong Farms, took reserve with Jackie McConnell riding. Words were exchanged between the riders in the class and individuals on the rail. Observers say the accusations of crowding turned into allegations that the competition was fixed.

After the class, a fight broke out in the warm up area between Bill Barnett, Jr., and Wink Groover. Rusty Hyneman and Mike Walden joined the scuffle shortly after it began. At the end of the altercation, Barnett was left with a torn shirt.

Another skirmish occurred shortly after between Bill Barnett, Jr., and Joe Cotten while Cotten was trying to warm up Main Power. A reliable source reports that Barnett stood in front of Cotten and Main Power again making accusations that the competition had been fixed. Cotten apparently leapt from his horse, but observers jumped between the two before any blows were exchanged.

Lonnie Messick and Judy Martin of the National Horse Show Commission, both of whom were present at the show, have spoken with the individuals involved, but have not yet concluded their investigation. Messick told The Report that no formal complaints have been filed by any one thus far.

Bill Barnett, Jr., contacted The Report and stated that while he was struck by both Wink Groover and Joe Cotten, he never hit or swung at anyone during the episode at the Jackson, Mississippi Horse Show and that allegations that he accused anyone of "fixing" the class or show are absolutely untrue. The Report offered Barnett the opportunity to issue a formal statement for publication, but he declined.

The individuals involved in the various confrontations at the Mississippi show have now all apparently apologized to one another and are trying to put the whole incident behind them.

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Lonnie Messick with the National Horse Show Commission is currently investigating the matter. We will follow with more details as soon as they are learned.