

Preface

One of the best things about working for a newspaper is that tomorrow always brings another edition. That can also be one of the worst things about it.

The story or column that you felt so good about today is old news by tomorrow. As much as you may want to sit back and admire your work, the world quickly moves on. Yesterday's masterpiece is in the trash, buried in coffee grounds and wrapped around a smelly piece of leftover trout. What do you have for us *today*?

The energy produced by that daily churn of new stories and events has a lot to do with why newspaper reporters, editors, and columnists love the business the way we do. But it also hurts a little when we stumble across one of those long-ago stories or columns we loved and realize that its shelf life was about 24 hours.

It explains why I've had a book such as this one in my mind for a while. After writing probably 6,000 or 7,000 columns for the *Columbus Dispatch* over the course of about 25 years on a wide variety of topics, I thought it might be fun to go back and visit some of the people and events that made that particular 24-hour news cycle, whenever it was, special to me. And I thought maybe some readers will realize that story or event was also special to them.

But how to determine which ones would make the cut? Math was never one of my best subjects, but it didn't take long to figure out that many of the columns I wanted to include would never appear here. This isn't *War and Peace* or *Remembrance Rock*. Given the costs of publishing, promoting, and distributing a book such as this, there had to be limits to what we could include, which meant that fascinating column about the Ohio State–Florida A&M football game probably wasn't going to appear. Ultimately, that limited

the selection to about 135 columns, which meant that No. 140 out of 7,000 wasn't going to make it, either. But the frustration those cuts caused me was not simply a product of space limitations. If the book were 100 pages longer, I'm sure the final cuts would have been every bit as hard.

Picking out some of the winners was easy. An Ohio State fan interested in a trip down memory lane would be shocked if columns from the Buckeyes' two recent national championships in football weren't included here, and they are. But every significant event I wrote about couldn't be included because there are just too many, and events and games themselves don't always make for the best reads.

Choosing which profiles to include wasn't easy, either. One player might be more accomplished than another, but which player or coach has the better *story* and how do you weigh those two elements when a choice has to be made? Years after the columns appeared, which one would the reader enjoy the most? Which one is the most significant? Which one was *my* favorite? This is clearly an inexact science.

There's a chunk of Ohio sports history here, both during the time I covered it live and in interviews with those who were part of history decades before I arrived. I think a lengthy piece on the struggles black athletes encountered in Columbus in the early and not-so-early days will surprise many readers. To my mind, a column about Phil Moseley, senior manager for the 1950 Ohio State football team, who delivered the news to OSU coach Wes Fesler that the historic Snow Bowl game was going to be played despite the abysmal weather, also had to be included. So did one about the Columbus Panhandles, who were succeeding at professional football before Columbus became a college football town, and one about Columbus mayor Buck Rinehart, who had major league aspirations for the city when many of us thought he was crazy. After making the initial cuts, I happened across a story of mine about how a couple of former 1919 Cincinnati Reds players thought some of their teammates might have also tried to lose the World Series that became famous for the Black Sox scandal. That was also included for its historic value, even though I had written it in 1981, well before the other pieces in this volume.

By contrast, I cut a nearly 2,000-word piece I wrote about OSU football pioneer Chic Harley in 2000 because I wrote an entire book about him in 2008 and full chapters about him in books I wrote in 2012 and 2017. Chic is still represented here in a much shorter piece about a fan's quest to have a statue of him erected outside Ohio Stadium. With space at a premium and

lots of new subjects to choose from, I thought that would be better than going back over the same ground.

I tried to strike a balance between the teams and the sports, but balance wasn't always possible. A reader might count the columns in an attempt to determine some perceived bias—comparing Browns to Bengals, Reds to Indians, Crew to Blue Jackets, and so on—but believe me when I say that nothing is proved by that exercise. I wrote hundreds of columns about each team over the decades, but this is a book limited to a number of subjects I found to be most interesting and most readable, not an expression of fondness for one team over another.

I wanted to make this fun for the reader interested in engaging in a little nostalgia and also for the one who is hearing about these people and events for the first time. There was a discussion about putting the columns in some kind of order—by date, by sport, by team, for instance—until one of my editors told me she really enjoyed the random succession of different columns, perfect for someone who has only five or ten minutes and can open the book to any page and find a quick read.

Each story is a lot like opening a time capsule. When you do, I hope you enjoy what you find inside.

Dreamfair Kogel's Sudden Death Cruel Finish to Jug

FRIDAY, SEPTEMBER 23, 2005

DELAWARE, OHIO—On the backstretch at the Delaware County Fair, where a veterinarian and his assistants were furiously trying to bring Dreamfair Kogel back to life, the track announcer's voice sounded like a booming echo from hell.

You have to feel that this is the greatest race . . .

Back there, 30 feet from the entrance to the paddock in the middle of the track, the rest of the sentence was quickly lost among the whispers and sobs.

It was hard not to feel the unintended cruelty. On one side of the track, P-Forty-Seven was being celebrated as the new champion of the Little Brown Jug, one of the jewels of pacing's Triple Crown. On the other side, one of the horse's rivals was lying dead on the track, the victim of an apparent heart attack.

After qualifying for the final with a second-place finish in the first heat, Dreamfair Kogel fell behind and eventually ended a distant last. As he slowly neared the paddock, driver Richard Zeron tried to guide him off the track. Dreamfair Kogel started to rear up, took two staggering steps, and then his legs buckled and he slumped to the ground.

There was an audible chorus of gasps from the paddock. Nearby horsemen ran out and tried to pull the bike away from his body. When it was finally freed and he lay flat on the track, medical personnel worked on him for several minutes, giving him shots of adrenaline. They finally tried to restart his heart with hard blows to the body, with the happy ceremony from the winner's circle serving as an eerie backdrop.

. . . it was just outstanding, what a great day, it couldn't have happened at a better place . . .

Lindsey Van Gundy, assistant to Circleville veterinarian Tom Ebenhack, was one of the first ones on the track and helped Ebenhack try to revive him.

"It was just a complete shock," Van Gundy said. "The poor groom and the owner, I can only imagine how they felt. It was like, 'Put some more [adrenaline] in, put some more in . . .'"

A tractor backed a trailer up to the body while owners John and Mary Lamers of Ingersoll, Ontario, and trainer Wayne Preszcator stood by in stunned silence.

This had been the Lamers' first Jug horse. It had been such a great day. Such a great, great day.

"A week ago Tuesday, he won at Mohawk in 1:50.4 and that's when I made up my mind to put him in the Jug," John Lamers said. "I thought we had a legitimate chance. He finished second in the first heat, and we certainly thought we had a shot in the final, never dreaming something like this would happen."

How could he? Ebenhack, who was there to oversee blood and urine collection and testing, said he could remember only two horses dying that way in 26 years as track veterinarian at Scioto Downs and never at the Jug. Whatever the autopsy shows, it won't make it any easier for those who raised and worked with Dreamfair Kogel.

"He was just an absolute perfect horse to work around," Lamers said. "He'd never get excited. He was always relaxed in the stalls. When you were grooming him, he'd just be standing there like an old broodmare. He was just that sort of personality. He was never wound up. He never got excited. He just wanted to race."

It seems obscenely cruel that Dreamfair Kogel won't get a chance to do that again.

"I knew something was wrong at the quarter pole when the lines were slack," Preszicator said. "I thought something was wrong when he was going right past here. He wasn't keeping up."

If you saw it, you can't help but ask yourself why. Should Zeron, who left without speaking to reporters, have pulled him up early at the first sign of trouble? Could the fact that winners have to run more than one heat have been a factor? There has been talk about running qualifying heats Saturday and the final Thursday.

"I would think it probably increases the odds," Ebenhack said. "But I grew up in this business. I'm 54, and I can remember seeing horses do three heats. I raced two-year-olds of my own that I did two heats on."

In other words, we're probably going to be left with admiration for the courage Dreamfair Kogel demonstrated in completing the entire mile in distress—and with painful questions that probably will never be answered.

"As much as it sounds cold, the answer is, 'It's bad luck,'" Ebenhack said. "I think that leaves a lot of emotion out, but it's probably the simple truth. My comment to many people is that God just wanted him more than we did."