

# CAL CUP II: THEN & NOW

by DEBRA GINSBURG

## Letthebighossroll

### California Cup Sprint 1991

When Letthebighossroll was first fitted with racing plates, the Thoroughbred world had not yet heard of a silver-maned trainer named Bob Baffert. Furthermore, George Bush Sr. was in the White House, Cal Ripkin was nowhere near Lou Gehrig's record and even Baffert was still five years away from saddling his first Kentucky Derby starter.

Yet, this steely gray and feisty son of Flying Paster was the animal destined to make Baffert well-known to California racing fans. The trainer purchased him at the 1990 Barretts May 2-year-old sale for Mike Pegram and Bob Roth, longtime clients of Baffert's since his days as a Quarter Horse trainer. Fans grew to love the horse's catchy name and the colorful entourage that followed him around.

Unraced at two, Letthebighossroll won his first four starts at three, including a trio of stakes. Sent to New York, though, he wound up tenth after tackling In Excess (Ire) in the Metropolitan Handicap, and then ran fifth behind champion Fly So Free in the Riva Ridge Stakes. He captured the El Cajon Stakes back on home soil, but ran third twice to older runners and bled in a workout leading up to the 1991 Cal Cup. The gelding was going into the Sprint with a lot of questions that needed answering.

Despite his earlier successes at Santa Anita, 'Bighoss' went postward as second choice to Answer Do, the third place finisher in the 1990 Sprint. When he broke last from his outside post, his connections believed their worst fears had just materialized.

As Letthebighossroll trailed through the backstretch, 1990 winner Valiant Pete had the early lead and was joined at the top of the stretch by Answer Do. By this time, Eddie Delahoussaye had 'Bighoss' in high gear and he roared up

on the outside. Valiant Pete fell back, but Answer Do and Letthebighossroll carried their furious battle to the wire. The Flying Paster gelding prevailed by a head in a photo and earned the vote as California's champion sprinter as a result of this gutsy victory. It was a title he would wrestle back five years later.

In 1996, at the age of eight, 'Bighoss' won or placed in six of eight starts for earnings of \$273,425. It was his best campaign since his 3-year-old season. He captured his first graded stakes win when he annexed the grade III Triple Bend Handicap at Hollywood Park and also defeated 1995 Santa Anita Derby champ Larry the Legend in the Crazy Kid Handicap at Del Mar.

The popular gelding closed out his racing career by running second to Red in 1997 Cal Cup Sprint and pushing his career earnings to \$1,014,377. He is now owned by Southern California turfwriter Stephanie Diaz.

"Shortly after he retired, I went by Baffert's barn to find out what he was planning to do with the horse," Stephanie said. "Considering Bighoss' nasty disposition, I was half-hoping he would say I couldn't have him, but then Bob was probably grateful that someone wanted to give the horse a good home."

Diaz knew of a trainer in the Hemet area that worked wonders with problem horses. Neal Arave came highly recommended by Farrell Jones, who called him the best 'horse whisperer' he has seen in the business. Stephanie did nothing with 'Bighoss' for eight months while Arave worked his magic. The gelding came to her perfectly sound after eight tough campaigns, a tribute to Baffert's training job.

"He's really mellowed out," she said of the 13-year-old gelding. "We work cows together and go on long rides in the hills—nothing very stressful. He's just enjoying life right now."



Nov. 9, 1991—Cal Cup Sprint—Letthebighossroll 1st (left)