

DOWN THE STRETCH: Memories of San Lazaro Hippodrome

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The San Lazaro Hippodrome was set on a property of about 25 hectares in the heart of old Manila, and, like a living organism, it grew and expanded over the decades until every available inch of space was used for stables, grandstands, and all the other structures that support a working community.

I came upon the racing scene in 1991, intending to write feature articles for the “Sporting Life” supplement of the now-defunct Manila Chronicle. Fresh out of college, I thought that one way to make my mark as a writer was to write about the sport from the inside, to penetrate that world and fashion autoethnographic narratives. Much later, I read about Hunter Thompson and his gonzo journalism, and thought, yes, that’s what I did.

I decided that instead of interviewing student jockeys, I would become one myself. That is how I ended up as the sport’s first female apprentice jockey, and at the time it didn’t feel special. I was just one of a group of young horse-mad teenagers, and a particularly inept one at that.

My becoming part of the racing world at that time felt like entering a theater in the middle of a movie and leaving before the end: you will never know the whole story, only the part that you were there for.

After all, the Manila Jockey Club, which owned and operated the Hippodrome, was founded a century and a half ago. Many generations have come and gone in its service and patronage. As a jockey apprentice, and later as a jockey’s wife, racing writer, and manager, I was in a privileged position to not only watch but participate at that point in its existence, and the old Hippodrome had many stories to tell.

1. Karerahan

The racetrack and its facilities—clubhouse, stables, jockeys' quarters, saddling paddock, and more.

The Founding Years

The story of the Manila Jockey Club opens in 1867. It was the year La Reina Isabel Dos decreed that the Colegio de Santa Isabel be established in Naga, the year the Royal and Pontifical University of Santo Tomas was made the center of instruction, the year the Jesuits established the Manila Observatory.

Amid the flurry of educational expansion by the clergy, a group of sportsmen decided that summer to form a club to indulge their love for horses and racing. The Governor General of the Philippines, Jose de la Gandara y Navarro, and about a hundred members of prominent and affluent Spanish, Filipino, and English families agreed. The names of some of these *socio fundadores* still resound in Philippine business and society today – Ayala, Zobel, Tuason, Elizalde, Nieto, Prieto. Eduardo Boustead, the father of Nelly, Jose Rizal's love interest, was a founding member.

MJC was initially formed as a social club, and membership was highly exclusive, granted only after strict and rigorous screening by the Board of Directors. One dissenting vote was enough to bar an applicant.

Because the Club was organized purely for recreation, there was no betting at first. For a decade in the late 1860s to 1870s, members held what we would call 'fun runs,' racing Philippine ponies on a quarter-mile (400 meters) straight course from San Sebastian Church to Quiapo Church.

The races were held once a year, in April or May, with tokens such as gold and silver medals, watches, or other ornaments as the prizes. Only members of the Club – the gentlemen riders – could compete in the *carreras oficiales*.

The Move to the Sta. Mesa Oval

By 1880, Quiapo had become a stronghold of commerce, its streets crammed with the shops and homes of business tycoons. The Club moved its races to rural Sta. Mesa beside the Pasig River, to a rice field rented from the Tuason family. A new oval racetrack with a bamboo and *nipa* grandstand that

could accommodate 800 people was built there. It is likely that the facility gave the street its name—Calle Hippodromo

The Santa Mesa Hippodrome was located about a mile upstream from the Manila Club, founded by the British and stood on the oldest private membership club in the country. The histories of the two institutions were intertwined, with the British in the Philippines being among the regular attendees at the races.

Angus Campbell writes in “The Manila Club” (1993) about a day at the races during that era:

It was a gala country-style affair, where friends met to spend the day with the horses; the racing fans came in carriages drawn by spirited steeds. The ladies wore long skirts and pleated dresses with matching parasols. The men, young and old, sported light pants, four-buttoned coats, and black Ascot ties, lending an atmosphere of color to the hippodrome. After the races the ladies and their escorts repaired to the clubhouse [the Manila Club] where they danced to the tune of the Spanish quadrille and waltzes.

Beginning in 1881, race meetings were held twice a year for three successive days. The business community would declare a holiday, with the list of race *aficionados* headed by no less than the Governor-General and the Archbishop of Manila. Professional jockeys were now allowed to ride in two of the average eight races of the day.

Races were then run clockwise, as in Europe and Japan today; in the Philippines today, as in the United States, Australia, and Dubai UAE, races are run counter-clockwise.

2. Pista

The racetrack itself, the oval upon which races are run.

The Transfer to San Lazaro Hippodrome

In 1899, a few months after the occupation of Manila by American forces, races were resumed at the Santa Mesa Hippodrome. A year later, the Club leased a 16-hectare site in Sta. Cruz, Tayuman, Manila, from the Sisters of the Monasterio de Santa Clara.

The land on which the facility stood was part of the 400-hectare Hacienda de Mayhaligue, a former friar estate. It was home to the Hospital de San Lazaro, administered by the Franciscan order since 1785. In 1912, MJC bought the property from the nuns and built a new grandstand and six-furlong (1,200 meter) track.

Social life became more democratic under the American civil government. Horseracing, once exclusive to the rich, became open to anyone interested. In 1903, legalized betting was introduced, increasing the sport's mass appeal.

Under the commercial stimulus provided by betting, two competitors opened shop, one in Cebu and the other in Pasay, known as the Pasay Country Club, with its track bounded by Harrison and Vito Cruz Streets. Both were short-lived.

MJC continued to reign as the only racing club in the country until 1937, when the Philippine Racing Club in Makati was founded by a group of Filipino and American investors. It remains a worthy competitor of MJC to this day, joined by the Metro Manila Turf Club in 2013.

In March 1937, MJC abandoned its outdated social club format and was formally incorporated as a business entity under the name Manila Jockey Club, Inc.

In the early 1940s, MJC president Don Rafael Roces introduced the "daily double" and "Ilave" bets which spurred racing's popularity among sports fans and raised the volume of betting. The "DD" is still a beloved option on today's betting menu and is distinctly Filipino, offered nowhere else in the world.

More improvements to the facility were undertaken, the most noteworthy of which was the demolition of the old wooden grandstand to make way for a magnificent concrete clubhouse in the Art Deco style, for decades thereafter a beautiful example of that graceful style of architecture.

Its architect was the celebrated Juan Nakpil, who also designed the University of the Philippines-Diliman's Quezon Hall, in front of which stands the Oblation statue, as well as UP's carillon tower and university library, among other famous structures. He was later to be named a National Artist.

Given the dearth of historical documents related to the building's construction, I guess it was sometime in the 1930s that it was erected; first, because of the style of architecture, and second, because it was in 1930 that

Nakpil founded his architectural firm, according to Guillermo Mendoza in “Pioneer in Philippine Architecture,” included in a 1973 book on national artists.

The Second World War

In 1941, at the onset of the World War II, MJC shut its doors. In 1943, Japanese troops occupied the Club and used its buildings as barracks. Americans took over after Liberation in 1945 and turned it into a garrison.

According to history buff John Tewell, from information he found on an aerial photograph of the Hippodrome taken on June 4, 1945, the 49th General Hospital was also located there, with the racetrack’s main building housing “wards, operating rooms, offices, and clinics. [The building and grounds also had] two large mess halls, nurses’ quarters, enlisted men’s quarters, and a theater,” with “two large baseball diamonds available also.”

When MJC members regained possession of the track in March 1946, everything was in a sorry, dilapidated state. Reconstruction began immediately; new equipment was purchased and installed; and after just two months, MJC was back in business.

A Distinguished Destination

The 1945 aerial photo John Tewell found shows the Hippodrome’s large oval track, in front of which was a long, three-story building capped at either end with perpendicular rectangular structures. The center of the building curves out gracefully in a bow, with side half-towers with steel-mullioned windows. It was one of the most elegant structures in Manila, constructed in the geometric Art Deco style. Balls and important events were held in its halls.

The Club was a destination of note before and after the war and as an institution was actively engaged in the social and civic life of the day. Dr. George Estrada confides in his memoir *As Flip as I Want to Be: Ruminations on the Filipino-American Experience*, that his mother, Milagros Moya, a charmer from Samar, won the 1940 Miss Luzon title and “rode proudly atop a float in a beauty pageant sponsored by the Manila Jockey Club.”

In 1951, it was where the Nacionalista Party Convention was held, and the mayoral candidate for Manila chosen. On August 5 that year, writes

Amador F. Brioso Jr. in his book *Arsenio H. Lacson of Manila*, a biography of the colorful and exuberant mayor,

The place, Manila Jockey Club, was made to look like a town fiesta. The hall was festooned with colorful buntings, large posters, and with multi-colored balloons to boot. Loud music courtesy of bands made the event all the more festive... Then the much-awaited counting [of ballots] began... By evening it was clear that Lacson was winning the race... Ecstatic over his surprising triumph [over Engracio Clemeña and Nicasio Osmeña], Lacson lost no time in proceeding back to the Manila Jockey Club where his rapturous supporters eagerly awaited him.

By the time I came along to become part of the MJC story, the ‘hipodromo’ at Felix Huertas and Tayuman Streets was a famous Manila landmark in more ways than one.

Until it was later obscured by high-rise residential and commercial buildings, its imposing clubhouse was a familiar sight that could be seen from afar, helping to spatially orient travelers who were journeying to it and nearby places—the University of Santo Tomas, the San Lazaro compound which houses the Hospital de San Lazaro, the Manila Chinese Cemetery, and the Archdiocesan Shrine of Espiritu Santo.

Not only was the racetrack a beloved landmark and location for important races, it was also an important work of Philippine architecture. Its Art Deco angles and curves were simple yet pleasing to the eye, no matter how many layers of paint covered its original surface through the decades. Although the rooms had lost their original proportions over multiple interior do-overs and remodeling, one could still appreciate the magnificent bare bones of the building.

In 1990, the building was painted white with navy blue trim, the Club’s logo colors. The layers of paint on the interior walls, applied over decades, had peeled in some places, and were as thick and pliable as the skin of a mango. I confess to vandalism, having peeled off several hands-widths of the paint at some spot or another.

Even back then the building and facilities showed their age; like a beautiful woman in her fading years, the clubhouse’s decrepitude was obvious and coats of paint, like makeup, were powerless to restore it to its past glory.

3. Patakbo

To run a race, 'patakbohin ang karera'; to enter a horse in a race, 'itakbo siya sa karera'; an entry in a race, 'May panakbo ka ba riyan?'

Karerang San Lazaro

The *karerahan ng San Lazaro* was also a venue for the most exciting sporting events in the country. As one of only two venues for horseracing during its lifespan, it played host to countless stakes races and racing festivals.

In the 1970s, MJC ran 18 races a day three times a week starting from 10:00 a.m. In later years, the number of races in a day became fewer, while more racing days were added to the week.

Before there were off-track betting stations and automated tickets, the place was always packed to the rafters every race day. Tellers sold tickets inside enclosures called *takilya*. With tickets in hand, racing fans would look for seats in the grandstands, built bleacher-style. It got hot there particularly in the summer.

Hungry bettors could grab Jamaican beef pies for one peso; inflation later drove the price up to P2.50 but they still always sold out. Habitues could also grab Ma Mon Luk-style siopaos from Mang Jun, or balut from vendors under the rickety wooden grandstands.

I'd sit up there with my fellow-apprentices watching the races from behind a cage of cyclone wire, put up to prevent fans from approaching too close and disrupting the races. My friends would crack and peel eggs, I'd sip soda with a straw from a bottle or plastic bag, and we would pore over the *programa* (racing schedule) looking for the names of famous jockeys and horses. If a favorite lost, angry spectators hurled insults and more substantial items at the loser jockeys walking back to quarters – balled-up racing programs, softdrink bottles, coins.

Before live television coverage and TV monitors, MJC employees wrote the official results of each race in chalk on a wide board placed on a tall metal stand. Fans would cluster around, tickets in hand, and either give a leap of joy or a disgruntled toss of their tickets; by the end of day, that spot would be littered with dozens of crumpled pieces of paper.

Before the racetrack moved out of Manila, when ninety percent of bets were still placed at the *karerahan*, I'd walk through those same drifts

of paper that formed around the *takilyas*, kicking the tossed tickets aside as I went from the grandstand to the parking lot or the ladies' comfort room.

Horse-owners did not watch at the grandstand. They had their own boxes in the main building overlooking the track. The Cojuangcos—Jose (“Peping”), Pedro, and Enrique (“Henry”)—had private rooms, as did Aristeo Puyat of Paris Match Stable fame and Andrew Sanchez, owner of Triple Crown, champion Time Master and later twice chairman of the Philippine Racing Commission.

Some horse-owners who had stables beside the track wall built viewing boxes higher than the wall. The Cojuangco brothers had theirs at the 1,400 and 1,500-meter marker on the track while Puyat had his at the quarter-mile. They had a good view of the races from there, as did folks whose homes abutted that wall.

“Juan’s Evolution” commented online that he “lived three blocks away from that area, from the main front entrance [on the] right side of Felix Huertas Street...In my teens, I [had] friends living at the back of the perimeter walls of the racetrack where we enjoyed actual viewing of the races for free.”

Many fans remember being brought to the track when they were young. Some of them recorded their memories on the internet. I recall exchanging pleasantries online with blogger “Señor Enrique,” who wrote:

On late Sunday afternoons...my father would sometimes take me with him to the San Lazaro racetrack, which was walking distance from where we lived. We only stayed for a couple of races and then went home in time for supper. While my father shared racing tips with his friends, I would usually indulge in either hotdogs or hamburgers and vanilla ice cream. By the time we got home, I was too full to eat anything else. It was always a fun experience whether my father won or not.

My daughter, writer Alex Alcasid, whose father is former jockey Antonio “Oyet” Alcasid Jr., now racing manager of Santa Ana Park, recalls spending much time in the Hippodrome infield parking lot when she was a child of five or six. If it wasn’t I who took her, she went with her grandparents to wait for her father to finish his races for the day.

“While they watched the races, I would play on a big sand mound there. It had little seashells in it,” she said. “It wasn’t until I was older that I realized that the sand was to replenish the track. There was also a patch of cattails and I would pick them and wave them around like a fuzzy wand while the thud-thud-thud of horses ran past, wishing them to run faster and win the race.”

How to Cheat at a Horse Race

Before Clay Puett invented the starting gate in 1939, races were started by use of a rope. Jockeys would get their horses as close to it as they could, and when it was dropped, away they went. Before track lighting came good enough, there was no night racing. And before there were photo-finish cameras, jockeys tried to get away with every trick in the cheat book.

Old riders tell stories that seem impossible and hilarious now: about the substitution of horses in the middle of the race; jockeys pushing and pulling at each other, or hitting each other or the other horses with their whips; blatantly sawing at the reins to halt or slow the horse; or deliberately falling off their mounts.

A former jockey now in his early 70s, who rode in the 1960s to the 1980s, told me that jockeys back in his day were more skillful than the ones now because they knew how to handle horses so well that they could lose on purpose.

“All that pulling of mounts, I used to do that,” The Elder One confessed. “You’d try to push another jockey off his horse, or you’d pull on his reins. Or his horse’s tail. Or you’d hit the jockey or his horse with your riding crop. Then there was deliberately falling off, *nagpapatihulog*. There was trying to halt your horse and doing it so hard you were practically standing in the stirrups.”

“The stories you’ve heard about changing horses?” he went on. “Those are all true. This was how we’d do it - the substitute horse would be waiting under a tree beside the track. Of course he had a jockey on top of him, *gaga*. When we passed, the groom would pull in my horse and set the other one off. There was a lot of stuff like this going on back then.”

This story is hard to believe; for one, I’ve never seen a tree growing beside a track, let alone one big enough to hide a horse and rider. But then, who was I to argue? “You were still a child then,” The Elder One said. “How

would you know?” That quite put me in my place, and reminded me he has been part of the story for far longer than I have.

The Big Three

There were certain names breathed in respectful tones: Elias. Camba. Hipolito. Jockeys all, this was during the time when they were known only by their last names or a moniker: Jikiri, Poldo, Pol, Bebet. Nowadays, they are listed on the racing program by last name and first and middle name initials.

One of the most famous riders of all time made San Lazaro his demesne. This was Jesus ‘Bong’ Guce, whose prowess on a horse was such that he earned the nickname “El Maestro.” He had an uncanny rapport with horses that is still spoken of to this day. He also developed the ability to time laps in his head, a great advantage in training and racing because it allowed him to pace his mount as he needed.

His most famous rival, who shone just as bright in the racing firmament, was Eduardo C. Domingo Jr. ‘Boboc’ was regarded as a “gentleman jockey” because he had begun a master’s degree at De La Salle University and was from a prominent Negros family on his mother’s side, the Coscollueles. Where Guce was by turns serious and jocular, Domingo was unfailingly charming and amiable. Albeit rivals on the track, the two became close friends and married two sisters.

Rounding out the Big Three riders in racing then was Elpidio “Bobot” Aguila. “Eagle”, as he was often called, was a workmanlike rider, careful and dependable, but capable of flashes of genius strategy. Not as flamboyant as the other two, his was a calming presence.

This triumvirate was often accosted by fans after their rides at San Lazaro, as they made their way from the jockeys’ quarters to the parking lot. Some fans took pictures with them or had them autograph their *programas*. This was during a time when horseracing news was given more space in newspapers and there was a pressroom at each of the racetracks.

Boboc even became so famous as to be included in a television commercial for San Miguel Beer, “Isang Platitong Mani” with comedian Bert “Tawa” Marcelo, billiards champ Amang Parica, boxing great Gabriel “Flash” Elorde, and singer Rico J. Puno. The ad became so popular that it inspired a spin-off movie of the same title that Domingo was also cast in.

My fellow apprentices and I sometimes waited by the Tayuman MJC gate for one or the other of the Big Three to appear, slick and dapper, after their races. There must be a group photo of us somewhere; I'd give anything to have a copy of it.

Jockeys, like boxers, have to make weight for each race. Bong took diuretic pills to lose water weight. As a consequence, he developed a speech impediment over the years and I could barely understand him when he spoke. I would nod just to be safe, and later wonder what I had acquiesced to. He was acknowledged as one of the toughest jockeys, getting back up in the saddle after each fall, but years of hard riding took their toll and he is now wheelchair-bound.

Eagle was the serious type, or so I always thought. His friends remember him as being humorous and engaging. In 2008, he died after spending a year bedridden after a bad fall during a race.

I was closest to Boboc. We were both panelists on the live racing coverage of the rival track, Santa Ana Park, sometimes in the early to mid-2000s, and spent hours talking about racing and personalities. He told me a little bit about his life and the important races he'd figured in and the horses he rode, among the most famous being Toshio Abe's Sun Dancer. She won all legs of the Triple Crown in 1989, the Presidential Gold Cup in 1989 and 1990, and many other stakes races, retiring undefeated in the early '90s.

Despite Boboc's fame, after his retirement he was as humble and gracious as ever, even when he was appointed by several presidents to serve on the Philippine Racing Commission as a commissioner. Everyone got along with him. Everybody liked him. We called each other *'ga*, short for *palangga*, or beloved, because our mothers were both from Bacolod City and we both spoke Hiligaynon.

In 2011 or 2012, Boboc suffered a heart attack. I was working with the Philippine Charity Sweepstakes Office then, and I got a message on my phone. "Ga," he said, "I'm at the hospital. Please help." With Joey Macaraig, another former jockey who was working with me at PCSO, we rushed to his bedside. Boboc had bypass surgery, but suffered another stroke while still in the ICU. His speech was slurred, and he had difficulty walking. The last I heard, he had moved to Cavite.

4. Karera

A race; the term also refers to the industry as a whole.

The Golden Age

For many aficionados, the 1970s and 1980s were the golden age of racing in the Philippines. Back then, MJC's tagline was "San Lazaro Hippodrome—Where Racing is at its Best."

It was in the 1970s that night racing was instituted upon the advancement of track lighting technology, and the disqualification rule was developed, along with many other rules and regulations that guide the sport today.

The '80s saw the institutionalization of the use of thoroughbreds, and the breeding of *nativo* horses for racing was slowly phased out. That decade also saw the dominance of the Thoroughbred Fair and Square (Belgrade Square x Fair Sea). Owned by the Mamon family and trained by Dr. Antonio C. Alcasid Sr., he set a record for 2,000 meters at San Lazaro with a time of 2:10.6 in the Philippine Charity Sweepstakes Office Presidential Gold Cup of 1981. He lost just once in his career and went on to sire other great track champions.

The '90s saw the emergence of Strong Material, Real Top, Crown Colony, and the magnificent mare Sun Dancer (Fair and Square x Katie's Dancer), who was undefeated her entire career. Sun Dancer's regular rider was Boboc Domingo, and the pair always attracted a huge crowd at the Hippodrome whenever they were entered in a race.

The Gran Copa

When you ask old-timers about the grandest race held at San Lazaro, they always say, "The Gran Copa de Manila," although the original race was never held!

It was 1898, and prominent members of MJC decided to hold a grand race as part of the celebrations for the 1897 signing of the Pact of Biak-na-Bato, which ended the conflict between Filipino revolutionaries and the Spanish military.

An ornate silver cup was commissioned from a jeweler in Hong Kong. The special race was set for May 1 at MJC's Santa Mesa racetrack.

Imagine the horse-owners, jockeys, trainers, and grooms making their arduous preparations over several months, all of them wanting to take home the spectacular cup. But they were to be denied their chance at glory when on the eve of the event, into Manila Bay hove Commodore George Dewey's fleet, the vaunted Asiatic Squadron of the U.S. Navy. The Spanish-American War had begun. The race was cancelled, and MJC closed for the duration.

The magnificent *copa* that was never awarded was sent for safekeeping to the Hong Kong and Shanghai Bank, where it stayed in a vault until after World War II. In 1946, MJC took the cup back and displayed it at their clubhouse in Tayuman, only for it to be destroyed by fire in 1971.

A replica was later made, and it is this that is on display at the second floor of the MJC's Turf Club at its San Lazaro Leisure Park racecourse in Carmona, Cavite, where it moved to in 2003. I've seen it, and passed it several times a day, when I worked there for a couple of years, as head of the broadcast department, and later as assistant racing manager.

The Gran Copa is a dull gray rather than shiny silver, and chased all around with figures from Western art. It looks old-fashioned, like something a museum, or your great-grandmother, would have owned, and she would have filled it with flowers to enliven it. I've always thought it a forlorn artifact, bereft of deeper meaning than that of time and circumstance.

But the cup still evokes the romance of the 19th century, of Rizal's Manila, of women dressed in *traje de mestiza* carrying silk parasols or an *abanico* to playfully tap lovers with. It brings to mind a glorious 'what could have been' and so strong was this sentiment associated with the cup that an attempt was made decades later to hold the race that never was.

It was 1980 and Manila Mayor Ramon D. Bagatsing, a noted horse-owner, had the idea to stage a grand race he would name 'Gran Copa' to drum up public enthusiasm for racing. With the support of Philippine Racing Commission chairman and Makati Mayor Nemesio Yabut, he approached MJC officials, who enthusiastically agreed to revive the event.

On Araw ng Maynila – June 24 – that year, the Gran Copa de Manila Racing Festival was held, and it was the largest, grandest, highest-grossing event in the sport until MJC shut down the Tayuman Hippodrome. San Miguel Beer was the festival's first longtime corporate sponsor, and later on, Carlsberg Beer.

Luminary won the first Gran Copa race. The event continued to be held at the Hippodrome until 2002, when Herminio S. Esguerra's champion Wind Blown won the Gran Copa Division I Classic. The race was resumed at the new San Lazaro Leisure Park in 2005, but it did not regain its former popularity.

In June 1998, I was heavily pregnant and due to go into labor at any moment. My then-husband told me, half-seriously, "Try not to give birth on Araw ng Maynila. We're busy then!" It was that important an occasion. We both thought it would be the funniest thing if I did give birth then. But I had our second daughter, Erika Rosemary, on June 23. To this day, we reminisce about how she was almost born on Gran Copa day.

The PCSO Presidential Gold Cup

Another race that had its beginning with MJC was the PCSO Presidential Gold Cup. It was conceived in the early '70s by the Board of Directors, headed by chairman and general manager Nereo C. Andolong. The motivation for instituting the race was that it was in line with PCSO's mandate to support the racing industry.

The race and its hefty purses provide incentives for local horse-owners and thoroughbred breeders to produce more horses and attain excellence in the sport. Today it is the sport's most prestigious and richest race, offering four million pesos in prize money.

The first Gold Cup was held on Oct. 7, 1973, at the San Lazaro Hippodrome. The winner was Pedro Cojuangco's Sun God, trained by Bernardo Lahoz, and ridden by another legendary jockey, Elias Ordiales, who booted home many champions at that track. Sun God won virtually unopposed, capping an impressive career.

Another unforgettable Gold Cup was the one in 1994 won by Crown Colony. He was owned by the biggest horse-owner at the time, Rolando "Rolly" Rojas.

Crown Colony was ridden by my former husband, Oyet Alcasid, and when the gates sprang back they were left 20 lengths behind the leader. In terms of time, that translates into four seconds, an eon in horse racing.

Rojas, whose horse was the favorite to win, had already descended from his box to the grandstand in preparation for the awarding ceremony. He was dismayed to see how far behind Crown Colony was: dead last.

Oyet, loath to disappoint Rojas and the horse's other connections, and wanting a taste of Gold Cup glory himself, somehow scrubbed and maneuvered and whipped his way to the wire ahead of the pack, borne on a tide of resounding shouts from the grandstand. He and—a triumphant Rojas—received their trophies from the guest of honor, President Fidel V. Ramos himself.

Crown Colony (Regent Street x Irresistible) clocked 2:15 over 2,000 meters—no way close to breaking a record, but coming from 20 lengths behind and dead last was a feat worthy to land him in the racing annals.

5. Winner Take All

Where the player chooses the winners of seven consecutive races; it is the betting option that has the biggest potential payoff.

MJC Moves to a New Home

The decades of hard wear took their toll on the once-graceful building and grounds of the Hippodrome. Also, the racing industry had greatly expanded and there was no longer room for more stables and other needed facilities. MJC management, led by lawyer Alfonso R. Reyno Jr., decided that it was time to repurpose the land upon which the racetrack stood; and move the racing operation to a 77-hectare property, shaped uncannily like a horse's head, in Carmona, Cavite.

The racing folk at the time were unused to change, particularly the massive sort encompassed by Reyno's vision. An entire community of racing workers—jockeys, trainers, grooms among them—had sprung up around the Hippodrome's environs. They, and their counterpart at Santa Ana Park, had developed their own culture and even their own language (*salitang karera*).

Over 98 years, generations were born and lived and died beside the *karerahan*. To be uprooted and move to a new place—and so far away—was unthinkable. Many balked. Stakeholders worried that racing sales would decline with the racetrack so far from their fan base in Manila. Horse-owners muttered about the cost of outfitting new stables, and whether the air of Carmona was salubrious enough for their horses' health. Employees were aghast at having to travel from Manila to Carmona on race days.

But change was inevitable, and at last it had come to racing.

As the grandstand and other common facilities were rising, horse-owners visited the new racetrack and chose the sites for their stables. Depending on the number of horses they intended to keep, and the grooms and helpers (and their families) who would live there, they built accordingly in close coordination with MJC.

Next, equipment, furniture, and other gear were slowly transferred over the months and weeks leading to the opening of the new facility. The final move came right after the last day of racing at the Hippodrome. Trailers traveled back and forth from Tayuman to Carmona over several days ferrying the horses, while the racing folk loaded their belongings in trucks and cars and said goodbye to the neighborhood that, for many of them, was the only one they had lived in all their lives.

Many wept and hugged their neighbors as they boarded their vehicles. With them went their *Dividendazos* and *divizas*, the *martingalas* and *martilyos*, and the huge statues of Santiago de Galicia, the community's patron saint, astride his horse with vanquished Moors lying under the flying hooves.

After a week or so at the new San Lazaro Leisure Park, folks found the wider spaces, fresher air, and greenery better for their and the horses' wellbeing than the cramped and congested conditions at the hipodromo.

Grooms and jockeys resumed their former routines—waking at four o'clock in the morning, or earlier, to exercise horses on the twin tracks, hotwalking and bathing, feeding and raking the sawdust that covered the floors of the stalls. This occupied them until ten o'clock or so, with the rest of the day filled with visits by veterinarians to check the horses' health and give treatments, farriers to do shoeing and hoof trimming, and horse-owners treating themselves to an hour or so of enjoying the company of their horses, and inspecting their stables.

If there was downtime, it was spent looking over the previous race day's *programa* or the week's *copia* (list of horse groupings), as everyone prepared for the historic first race day at the new track.

Back at the Tayuman Hippodrome, with the last of the horses and humans gone, the place settled into a dusty, silent waiting, later woken by the clamor of sledgehammers and bulldozers as the old gave way to the new. Today an SM mall sits on the site, along with condominiums and a hotel.

The Future of Racing

As I write this, racing as a sport and a gaming activity is in decline. Sales have plummeted because of the TRAIN tax law. Millennials aren't interested. The sport's niche market is shrinking. And, in this digital age, countless other amusements abound. MJC has sold its Carmona property to Ayala Land, Inc. and plans to move its racetrack further south, perhaps to Batangas or Quezon province.

Will I see the end of the story in my lifetime? Or will the narrative of MJC spin on for decades more?

Though the old racetrack was demolished to make room for other developments, the achievements of horses and riders will always shine in racing history and in the memories of racing fans.

And even when I am old, and even if I will not know how the story ends, I will remember cracking balut against the grandstand, cheering Crown Colony on to victory as he churned dust with his speedy hooves, and raising my eyes to the blue and white turrets of the grandest lady of racing, the San Lazaro Hippodrome.