

A View from the Hoof

War Admiral v/s Seabiscuit, *herding holdup revealed...*

By

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Ever since I was a child, I can remember people who were friends of my grandfather, Pop Thomas, talking every so often about this peculiar horse from “*way back*”, who knocked the socks off the competition so many times and captivated a nation in need of a shining sign of hope. When I am asked by my friends what made me start Thomas Herding Technique, my thoughts always go back to the story of Seabiscuit for very many reasons and to me he was the poster child for the advancement of the natural herd dynamics within the artificial human environment. In my opinion, Tom Smith was a genius because he was able to recognize in Seabiscuit a horse that was already a natural herd leader, and he allowed the “biscuit” the opportunity to be the horse he was inside. What Seabiscuit showed the world, was that a mentally sound horse could dominate the field of super athletes, because of sheer will.

On the heels of the previous essay dealing with potential withholds where we discussed the concept of *Herding Holdup*, I wanted to offer this analogy from the THT point of view as an example of HH in motion. In the match race between War Admiral and Seabiscuit, the reasons the “biscuit” won are not nearly as complicated as the reasons the Admiral lost, yet each are directly related, indeed, are founded upon, the natural herd dynamics. If the two horses were wild mustangs in Montana, and Seabiscuit was challenging War Admiral for his family, Seabiscuit would have beaten him then as well. When two or more horses not within the same family group are placed into a head to head *competition* such as a race, many factors enter into the scenario and they all stem from how the horse has been nurtured to envision his or her rightful place in a band environment. This balance of mind and body is a form of *natural selection*, ensuring that not only the most physical horse but also the most capable, has leadership. (This is extremely relevant in the nurturing processes of mares.) Perhaps it was that War Admiral knew how to run, but he didn’t know how to lead? Seabiscuit never should have been able to run like he did; by all accounts he was quite the opposite in many instances of what a great race horse like War Admiral brought to bear. Yet physical power was indeed no *match* for the mental toughness of Seabiscuit, a horse that would have done quite well in the wild leading and protecting the mares

and family of his choice. This has more to do with the natural herd dynamic than it does with anything else. In fact, Thoroughbred racing may well look like an *event* on the oval, but what you are seeing are the inherent intricacies of the herd dynamics playing themselves out for each individual horse. War Admiral, an incredible physical specimen in superb athlete, may well have been a victim of the enigma of Herding Holdup; an incredible horse, who never knew his place in the crowd.

If you have six horses of equal physical standing in the gate, it is the one who has the most sound mentality and confidence balanced with the physical that will win on a consistent basis. Building this confidence and avoiding HH meltdowns at the finish line begins long before the horse is unloaded at the training stable. In the natural herd order the horse is nurtured along the way and based upon his or her natural inclinations will find their place and the confidence needed to survive within the band/social environment. For the horse living in the artificial human environment, the process of environmental enrichment and the ability to find ones place in the social dynamic is fraught with many obstacles, making this *nurturing* process vitally important to the emotional stability of the horse. The mental needs of the social horse must be groomed with as much care and attention as are the physical, and if you are hoping to breed the best to the best and get *incredible*, a lack of attention to the social dynamic will more often than not be the cause of much grief. If this were not the case, if this mental nurturing were not vitally important, then simply paying for the breeding of A to A to get A+ would be as simple as that. You would have a monopoly of winners. Yet because of the added nuisance of Individual Horse Personality, (IHP), not only does social enrichment and confidence nurturing mandate a lifelong commitment if you want the best horse you can get, the very methods to achieve this end must also be streamlined to fit within the personality they are expected to help. Imprinting the foal at birth while still in the company of the mare standardizes for the foal a relationship of acceptance of his/her human counterparts, but should not circumvent the position of the mare. At the time of weaning from the mare, which is in my opinion done far too soon in many cases, the imprinting process must become more proactive, this is the time when Assimilated Imprinting of the yearling is of most importance. The best way to avoid your car engine from seizing up at the end of a long journey is to be sure you had the right amount of oil in it before your journey began. This is an analogy that holds true for the horse as well. At THT we believe in the importance of imprinting in its various forms from *Foal to Future*, as being the best way to avoid HH. Social enrichment, allowing the mind of the horse to be free, is of equal importance as is allowing him to run free in the field. Herding Holdup may end up costing you a race like it may well have done did with War Admiral, which was merely the natural result of a horse living in an unnatural world. Your horse may be hot blooded and raucous and you may feel you have a bad ass engine of power on your hands, when the opposite is most often true. Enriched with and taught quiet, self assured confidence along the journey of life, there is afforded no need to *protect yourself* with an unnecessary show of force. If you have a horse that is touchy and skittish, quick to react with fright and wound as tight as a bugs butt stretched over a bucket, your horse is suffering and

could well be living in world of emotional uncertainty. In other words, you have an athlete with untapped potential, and the best you will ever get from him, is inconsistency.

Among the many contributors to HH are ever changing environments. The horse that is moved from track to track, training facility to training facility, is presented with a new set of environmental aspects at every turn. For a confident horse environmental changes do not have as much influence as they do with a horse that is not self assured because they are quite adapt at interpreting environmental stimuli. War Admiral did not travel to the west coast to meet Seabiscuit for many reasons of course, and it is possible one may have been that he did not react well to environmental changes because of the way HH affected him? Of course that is purely speculative but it is a thought nonetheless because this phenomenon is one that can be seen today. Seabiscuit traveled a lot and traveled well, a sign of his self assured aloof nature because any environment a King enters into is already assumed to be his own. Any HH issues secreted within the horse will show themselves by the subsequent reactions they cause. Working Herding Holdup out of the horse will never be done by trying to force the issue. One of the biggest mistakes that can be made is trying to *train it out* by repetition or even force, or presenting a situation to the horse that *makes* him submit such as hobbling. Any act of constriction mentally or physically is an act that can become counterproductive to finding the solution for it goes against what is naturally accepted. Anytime you take away a physical ability, you add a layer of mental uncertainty, reinforcing what the horse *thought was true* in the first place by way of secondary associated triggers. The more you do this to *get your point across*, the more the opposite will be true. What will happen is you may well create a myriad of associated memories that can be triggered in any like instance. This is the basis for inconsistencies in your horse. In order to build a balanced and sound athlete every aspect of the social animal must be addressed and paid attention to both in and out of the presence of humans. The ways in which this is done are case sensitive and are also, *sex* sensitive. Because of the ways stallions and mares are fitted into the natural herd dynamic, because of their respective roles in the continued preservation of their species, the techniques both designed to handle existing HH, and the techniques designed to avert it, must be fitted to the natural inclinations within the herd that each sex has as their basic instinct dynamic. They then must be streamlined to again fit the IHP of the horse in question.

Inconsistent, knee-jerk reacting horses are screaming for help, finding and addressing the missing pieces of their equine puzzle of life has to be the first investigative step. The match race between War Admiral and Seabiscuit is a classic revelation of the influence of mental prowess over physical strength. Because the outcome *shouldn't* have been what it was, all these years later the truth within that moment of time is yet loud and clear and plays itself out on race tracks every day, all over the world. It is one of the reasons why I embarked on a journey that would be the development of Thomas Herding Technique, a company that is itself in constant forward motion for the creation of services based on the natural herd dynamic; that all powerful underlying reality of the horse. THT addresses the social and mental needs of *horse issues* that are the cause of so much stress and worry; the very evil within all Potential Withholds. THT was

developed as a specialized service to investigate and provide case specific developmental therapies that serve to enrich the mental equine, opening the door to a higher potential by showing them a way to fit in and nurturing their confidence in ways that are naturally accepted. The etiology of the *problem horse* can very often be traced to variable causes relative to the environment which is why all THT services are designed to further the natural herd dynamic for the horse living in an artificial human world.