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Obituaries

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Miss Boudrot was 'truly a groundbreaking figure in the trenches competing head-to-head with men.'

CHIP TUTTLE, Chief operating officer at Suffolk Downs

Denise Boudrot, at 57; led the way for women jockeys on track

By Marvin Pave

GLOBE CONTRIBUTOR

Burlington native Denise Boudrot drew national attention while winning races after race as an apprentice jockey in fall 1974 at Suffolk Downs on her way to becoming the first female jockey to lead all riders in victories at a major thoroughbred track.

Sports Illustrated described her as the symbol of "the start of a second generation of female riders," while People Magazine noted that "she stays at a firm 100 pounds with gymnastics and releases by drawing and painting to the fit of rock and country music."

Her induction July 20 as the first female jockey in the New England Turf Writers Association Hall of Fame was announced earlier this year.

Miss Boudrot, who had been married to horse owner and publisher Rutland Hopkins since 1966, died at their farm in Crafton, Vt., May 19 after a long battle with brain cancer. She was 57.

She won more than 1,000 races, including the breakthrough 94 victories in 92 days at Suffolk Downs in East Boston in 1974, earning praise as the Longshot Lady and Johnny Longdon in skirts from one handicapper.

Miss Boudrot, whose late brother, David, gave her the gift of her first pony, named Sachem, when she was 12 years of age, competed for 13 years on the New England circuit, retiring as a jockey in 1980.

"My career started when Denise's ended, and I always felt that she was a pioneer for female riders like myself in New England," said Toniomi Piermarini, who won Suffolk's riding title in 2007 and is the track's current leading jockey. "There were very few female riders in a male-dominated sport when she started, and through her perseverance and talent she convinced owners and trainers she could do it. And she was caring, giving, and smooth, always ready to help others."

Chip Tuttle, chief operating officer at Suffolk Downs, said Miss Boudrot was "truly a groundbreaking figure in the trenches competing head-to-head with men, at a time when consciousness for women's rights was not where it is today."

Linda Anderson, a retired jockey who competed against Miss Boudrot, cherishes a photo taken of Miss Boudrot pouring baby powder over her head after Anderson's first victory.

"It was like an initiation," said



As an apprentice jockey in 1974, Miss Boudrot posted 94 victories in 92 days at Suffolk Downs.

Anderson, "but Denise also had a way of toning us down if we got too impressed with ourselves. She'd take us over to a corner and remind us we had a long way to go and that ours is a daily-day career. We respected her and valued her opinion."

A 1970 graduate of Burlington High School who enjoyed hosting 4-H Club activities and show riding in her youth, Miss Boudrot worked as a supermarket cashier, at a snack bar, and on an assembly line, before she got a job at Lincoln Downs in Rhode Island, working out horses and riding lead ponies.

That led to her introduction to veteran trainer and owner Junie Brennan, who asked her to work at his winter quarters in South Carolina and subsequently gave Miss Boudrot her first professional mounts and a contract at Suffolk.

It was not easy at first for the 4-foot-11 jockey who used days and nights at both Lincoln and Suffolk as a bag, the nickname given to apprentice riders.

In a 1982 Globe story, Miss

Boudrot, whose five wins on Nov. 12, 1974, has never been equaled by a female jockey at Suffolk, put the gender question into perspective. "All jockeys have to master the same skills to make a horse win," she said. "If a 1,500-pound racehorse wants to run off with a 100-pound rider, it doesn't really matter whether you're a man or a woman."

What did matter to many Suffolk patrons was Miss Boudrot's ability to put money in their wallets.

"We may just be the best rider at the track right now," a veteran horse player told the Associated Press in 1974. "She can go wire to wire and come from behind. She does it all."

Miss Boudrot, in that same article, explained her strategy.

"The shortest and quickest way home," she said, "is at the inside rail, that is, of course, if you have the horse."

Miss Boudrot met her husband when he hired her to ride a longshot, Mostly Jeeting, in 1982 at Suffolk. Her victory paid \$124 for a \$2 bet, the first of her more

than 50 wins.

"That was my introduction to her, and as I got into the business, I used her name," said Hopkins. "I never told her to retire, but we were living in Duxbury at the time, and it was a long commute to Suffolk for her; she went out like Ted Williams, winning her final race."

The couple moved to Vermont in 1994, holding Miss Boudrot's dream of owning her own horse farm.

Russell Derderian, stakes coordinator at Suffolk and a former owner-trainer who used Hopkins as a rider in the early 1980s, was eyewitness to several Boudrot wins.

"I knew her agent, Fred Nash, and I had several women riders in the past," recalled Derderian. "My horse, Oh Daddy, could make up a lot of ground on the turf course, and Denise made the most of that final turn, getting him through on the rail."

"She also won four times in a row on another of my horses, Oktasha. All the owners were fond of Denise. She was very per-



sonable and fun to be around."

With her earnings, Miss Boudrot — who suffered several injuries on the track, including a broken leg — bought a 15-acre farm for her late parents in Ellersie, S.C., which they named the Longshot Lady Farm.

"Denise handled her success very well," said childhood friend Maureen Sullivan, now a mutual clerk at Suffolk who was invited by Miss Boudrot to work with her at Brennan's farm in the early 1970s. "She worked very hard, and she was proud of her accomplishments. But she was also very humble. Denise is proof that if you love something that much and you work hard, nothing can stand in your way."

Miss Boudrot's love for horses, and indeed for all animals, con-

tinued after her retirement as a jockey.

She returned to the horse show circuit, winning numerous ribbons, and then, with the help of performer and trainer Carole Fletcher, they trained. Miss Boudrot's former show quarter horse to be a trick horse, named "Clew Kufeldtchopper." Their act, called "The Reluctant Racehorse," was seen at fairs, race tracks (including Suffolk), and other venues along the East Coast.

In addition to her husband, Miss Boudrot leaves four stepchildren and six grandchildren. A memorial service was held last Monday in the 1-acre garden she created on her Vermont farm. Her ashes were spread beneath a nearby apple tree.