

# MassCap renaissance

## Historic race returns

By ED GRAY

The Massachusetts Handicap has been graced with the presence of so many immortals, both equine and human. It's as though Seabiscuit, Whirlaway, Johnny Longden, Eddie Arcaro and scores of other thoroughbred legends just won't let it die.

New England's most prestigious horse race, which endured a couple of extended absences from the Suffolk Downs' stakes schedule, will be resurrected once again tomorrow with hopes that it will recapture its past glory.

"It's important to Suffolk Downs for the MassCap to be a part of the sports fabric of Boston once again," said Chip Tuttle, the East Boston track's chief operating officer. "It's very important to bring back the MassCap. We want to give the fans and the city a big day when the circus comes to town, when they can watch the best horses, best trainers and best jockeys in the country."

The 65th running of the MassCap may not measure up to those of yesteryear, when horses like Seabiscuit and Whirlaway and Hall of Fame jockeys like Longden and Arcaro came to town, but the first running of Suffolk's marquee race in three years is viewed as the first step toward re-establishing it nationally as well as locally.

Cancelled in 2005 and '06 due to the track's faltering business, the MassCap has become a priority for Suffolk Downs' new ownership.

"When Richard Fields made his investment in the track earlier this year," Tuttle said, "one of the first things on his agenda was to bring back the MassCap to show that the new ownership is making a commitment to thoroughbred racing."

Fields, a New York real estate developer hired by the Seminoles to build the tribe's Hard Rock casinos in Florida, will bring back the MassCap with confidence bolstered more by the race's recent history than its storied past.

### Give him a Cigar

When the late James B. Moseley acquired and reopened Suffolk Downs in 1992, the prominent Hamilton thoroughbred owner and breeder was intent on bringing back the MassCap, which hadn't been run since 1989, six months before former owner Buddy Leroux abruptly closed the track with grandiose plans to develop the real estate.

"When I got to New England in September 1991, from the very beginning, I heard so much about the MassCap,

mostly from Jim Moseley," recalled former Suffolk Downs vice president Lou Raffetto. "Coming from New Jersey, the MassCap didn't mean anything to me at that time, but all Jim Moseley talked about was the MassCap, the MassCap, the MassCap. Frankly, I used to humor him."

After Suffolk Downs reestablished itself under Moseley's watch, Raffetto came around to the idea of bringing back the MassCap. The current chief operating officer of the Maryland Jockey Club was instrumental in elevating the historic handicap to national prominence in its very first year back on the stakes schedule. Having devised a bonus system linked to a trio of Grade 1 stakes races, Raffetto succeeded in attracting emerging superstar Cigar for the 1995 MassCap.

"To this day, I'd have to say that it's been my biggest accomplishment from a racing perspective," Raffetto said.

Cigar went on to capture the MassCap and its bonus-laded \$650,000 winner's share of the purse, only to return in 1996 to win his 15th straight race on his way to equaling Citation's record of 16 in a row in his subsequent start at Arlington Park.

Back on the map, the MassCap became one of the nation's most important races in the national handicap divi-



HERALD FILE PHOTO

**SMOKIN' HOT: Cigar runs to a big victory in the 1995 Massachusetts Handicap at Suffolk Downs, one of his two MassCap wins.**

sion until the former manager deemed it necessary to cancel the Grade 2 stakes. For the next three years, the MassCap was history.

### Back in the day

Two years after Top Row upset Discovery in the inaugural running of the MassCap in 1935, Seabiscuit captured his seventh straight race as the even-money favorite of an estimated 40,000 attendees. The legendary race-

horse set a track record under 130 pounds, including jockey Red Pollard, completing 1 1/8 miles in 1:49 to earn \$51,780.

An estimated record crowd of 60,000 convened at Suffolk Downs the following year to witness the highly anticipated MassCap showdown between Seabiscuit and 1937 Triple Crown champion War Admiral. Unfortunately, Seabiscuit was scratched less than an hour before post time due to a reported leg injury as

fans came close to rioting. To make matters worse, War Admiral, favored at 2-5, was upset by longshot Menow and finished fourth over the muddy track, which may have been the real reason Seabiscuit was scratched.

Whirlaway, the 1941 Triple Crown champion, was far more successful in his MassCap appearance, scoring by more than two lengths in 1942 while lowering the track record to 1:48 1/5. The winner's purse of \$43,850 propelled Whirlaway past Seabiscuit as the leading money-winning horse of all-time.

Assault, another Triple Crown champ (1946), finished fourth in the 1949 MassCap in a field of five.

Riva Ridge was a Preakness short of a Triple Crown sweep in 1972, but the Kentucky Derby and Belmont Stakes winner exacted a measure of revenge in the 1973 MassCap. The heavily favored 4-year-old easily defeated 1972 Preakness upset victor Bee Bee while equalling Whirlaway's track record with a 3/4-length triumph.

Suffolk Downs basked in the national spotlight that day when owner Penny Chenery, trainer Lucien Lauren and jockey Ron Turcotte graced the winner's circle a week after they joined their 1973 Triple Crown champion Secretariat in the Belmont Park winner's circle. Then, the MassCap fell on hard times for the next decade.

### Hometown hero

The Massachusetts Handicap's rich tradition was not lost on a future Hall of Fame jockey.

"When I was a hotwalker at Suffolk Downs before I started riding, they'd put up

### ALL-TIME WINNERS

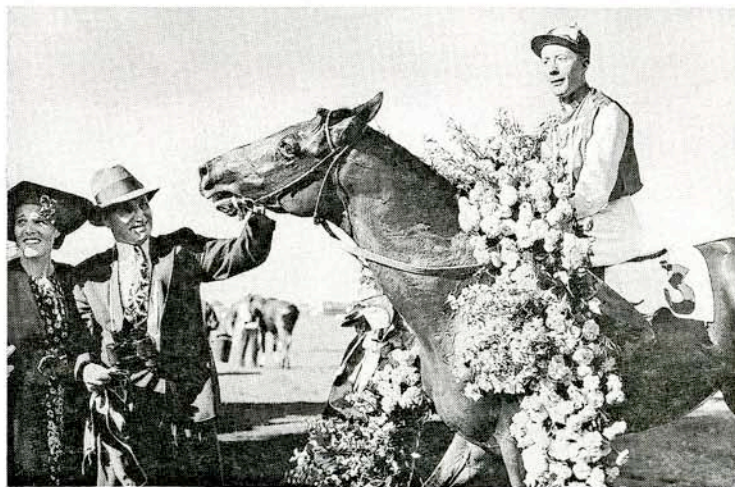
2005-06	— No race
2004	— Offlee Wild
2003	— No race
2002	— Macho Uno
2001	— Include
2000	— Running Stag
1999	— Behrens
1998	— Skip Away*
1997	— Skip Away
1996	— Cigar
1995	— Cigar
1989-94	— No race
1988	— Lost Code
1987	— Waquit
1986	— Skip Trial
1985	— Bounding Basque
1984	— Dixieland Band
1983	— Let Burn
1982	— Silver Supreme
1981	— Soldier Boy
1980	— Ring Of Light
1979	— Island Sultan
1978	— Big John Taylor
1977	— Swimming Hal
1976	— Dancing Champ
1975	— Stonewalk
1974	— Billy Come Lately
1973	— Riva Ridge
1972	— Droll Role
1971	— Chomption
1970	— Semilant
1969	— Beau Marker
1968	— Out Of The Way
1967	— Good Knight
1966	— Fast Count
1965	— Smart
1964	— Smart
1962	— Crimpson Satan
1961	— Air Pilot
1960	— Polyad
1959	— Talent Show
1958	— Air Pilot
1957	— Promised Land
1956	— Greek Spy
1955	— Midafternoon
1954	— Helioscope
1953	— Wise Margin
1952	— Royal Vale
1951	— To Market
1950	— One Hitter
1949	— Cochise
1948	— First Nighter
1947	— Beauchet
1946	— Stymie
1945	— Pavot
1944	— First Fiddle
1943	— Market Wise
1942	— Whirlaway
1941	— War Relic
1940	— Eight Thirty
1939	— Fighting Fox
1938	— Menow
1937	— Seabiscuit
1936	— Time Supply
1935	— Top Row

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**SUFFOLK DOWNS' CHIP TUTTLE ON THE RACE'S REBIRTH**

### MASSCAP POST POSITION, ODDS

(Distance: 1 1/8 Miles)		
PP, Horse	Jockey	Odds
1. Dr. Pleasure	Cornelio Velasquez	6-1
2. Palladio	Richard Dos Ramos	12-1
3. Who What Win	Shaun Bridgmohan	15-1
4. Fairbanks	Richard Migliore	7-5
5. Shuffling Maddnes	Raul Rojas	12-1
6. Fire Striker	Kevin Krigger	30-1
7. Evening Attire	Jose Espinoza	5-1
8. Brass Hat	Willie Martinez	5-2



HERALD FILE PHOTO

**HISTORY IN THE MAKING: Seabiscuit is shown in the winner's circle after his victory in the MassCap in 1937, the third year the race was run.**

signs in the infield with the names of the past winners," said Chris McCarron, a Dorchester native who would work his way up from mucking stalls and walking hots to the very pinnacle of the thoroughbred world. "I remember seeing names like Stymie Drole Role, Whirlaway. There were some awfully good horses that won the MassCap."

"Of course, by the time I won the MassCap in 1976, the prestige of the race had waned a bit," said McCarron, who scored aboard Bud Delp-trained Dancing Champ. "But it still was the first race of any prestige that I had won up to that point. Going back to win the big race like that in front of family and friends was a blast."

The MassCap would experience somewhat of a renaissance during the mid-1980s, and McCarron would return to Suffolk Downs in 1987 to record a far more significant victory aboard the locally owned and trained Waquoit, who fought back to nip heavily favored Broad Brush at the wire.

Waquoit's victory was one of the most thrilling in MassCap history, the likes of which the new Suffolk ownership is hoping will be produced in the near future.