

The Claiming Race

By Justice Kocher

To all outward appearances the old man sitting in the dining car on the train was very calm, but inside he was a furnace of worry and doubt. To all outward appearances the jockey in the livestock car was cool and confident, but why was he sweating and slapping a lead rope across his leg? The only calm member of the trio was the horse, the object of the worry. The cause of the worry was that Captain, the horse, was to be entered in a claiming race on the morrow—a race in which a horse that has been claimed can be bought cheaply by the claimer, and the owner does not know until after the race if their horse has been claimed.

On the following morning the jockey could be seen exercising Captain on the track; feeling the rhythmic, powerful stride gave him confidence. The old man could be seen watching his stallion prick his ears and fight the bit in his eagerness to really run, he smiled and all the tenseness washed away. The stallion himself had no worry leave him as he had never had any in the first place. He only wondered why he was being kept from galloping.

The race that afternoon was a beautiful sight. When Captain and Pickett (Captain's opponent) left the starting gate, Pickett immediately took the lead. At the quarter Captain was gaining. At the half Captain and Pickett were neck-to-neck; at the 3/4 Captain had the lead, but coming into the final stretch he stepped in a divet, and fell to his knees. With a desperate lunge he got to his feet and passed the post only seven lengths behind. How the crowd roared!

Only two people there never cheered. Only two people there cried tears of sadness. Captain had been claimed. To all outward appearances there lives today an old man, sore because his horse lost, so sore that he lost his love for horses. Behind his back his old friends jeer at him. They say, "He's only skin deep" or "He never was a horse lover" or "Why won't he watch the races anymore?" To all outward appearances there is a jockey that chickened out and left his business. Proving Captain's superiority feels very unimportant.