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Sold out



Open Court

NICK PREVENAS

Finally, professional football has arrived in Arizona.

Allegedly, the St. Louis Cardinals franchise relocated to Arizona in 1988, but its status as the most inept franchise in the National Football League has done little to endear the Cardinals to the community.

Three weeks ago, I chronicled the culture of failure surrounding the Arizona Cardinals and how this off-season has provided a rare glimmer of hope.

Since last week's NFL draft, that glimmer has turned into a full-blown solar flare.

Friday's edition of the Arizona Republic triumphantly announced that, for the first time in franchise history, the Cardinals have sold all of their available season tickets. This means that the NFL will no longer black out their games on the local television affiliates.

Not only that, the Cardinals have announced that they are taking deposits on future season ticket purchases.

What is to account for this sudden spike in popularity? The stupidity of the teams drafting ahead of the Cardinals.

For reasons unknown to rational football fans, USC quarterback Matt Leinart slipped all the way to Arizona's position in the draft at No. 10. Had Leinart declared for the draft after his Heisman-winning, National Championship junior season, he would have been the consensus No. 1 prospect.

Why did Leinart sneak past teams like the Titans, Jets, Raiders and Lions, all of which desperately need a top-notch signal caller? Because today's general manager puts more stock in things like 40-yard-dash times and standing broad jumps than on-field performance.

So what if Leinart compiled a 37-2 record during his USC tenure? Apparently, Leinart lacks "upside," a nebulous term general managers use to talk themselves out of sure-fire prospects in favor of raw talent.

With Leinart falling into Arizona's laps, the franchise has a true identity, something it has lacked since Jake Plummer was slinging interceptions in the late-90s.

For the past two years, Leinart has been the most popular athlete in Los Angeles (including Kobe Bryant). There's no doubt regarding his ability to handle the pressure of the NFL, because for Leinart, playing for the Cardinals is two steps down from the Trojans on the visibility scale.

When Leinart is ready to take the snaps as the starter, he will benefit from the outstanding talent head coach Dennis Green has assembled at the skill positions. Former Colt Edgerrin James is the first legitimate tailback Arizona has had since, well, ever.

In addition, no NFL team boasts a better pair of young wide receivers in Larry Fitzgerald and Anquan Boldin. Rookie tight end Leonard Pope should give the Cardinals another outstanding option in the passing game.

Now that the Cardinals have a marketable superstar, a brand-new stadium and an identity, pro football might start to matter in Arizona. Heck, the Cardinals might even make a Super Bowl run when Phoenix hosts the event in 2008.

Well, maybe not. But you never know.

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Sonoita Horse Races provide Kentucky Derby atmosphere



RICK MCCALLUM | GREEN VALLEY NEWS

TUCSON THOROUGHBRED Answer Cats Line, ridden by Daniel Gutierrez, sprints toward the finish line to win the opening race at the Sonoita Horse Races on Saturday.

By Nick Prevenas
Green Valley News

Yesterday, Sonoita welcomed a dash of Kentucky spirit to the Santa Cruz County Fairgrounds.

"Every year, we simulcast the Kentucky Derby in conjunction with the races we do here, and everybody loves it," said racing committee co-Chairman Charlie Hadden.

Last weekend, more than 2,000 Southern Arizona horse racing enthusiasts ventured to the fairgrounds for the start of the 91st Annual Santa Cruz County Horse Races.

The event carried over to this weekend, with the Kentucky Derby acting as the main topic of conversation.

"People get dressed up and we serve mint juleps. We all have a lot of fun with it," said event coordinator Tina Letarte.

"My wife Lola and I have lived in Tucson for 33 years,

and we just found out about Sonoita's event last year," said racing fan Tony Vito. "We've gone to Churchill Downs to watch the Derby dozens of times, and Sonoita makes a much tastier mint julep."

Hours before the Derby began, hundreds of people waited in line to place their bets on their favorite horses.

"A few years ago, this was the only place people could bet on the Derby," said John Ward. "Before the dog tracks opened up the betting, this place would draw absolutely enormous crowds."

Ward, a former world champion Quarter Horse jockey and member of the American Quarter Horse Association, has attended the Sonoita Horse Races for the past 10 years.

"Today is all about the Thoroughbreds, though," Ward said. "Thoroughbreds run longer distances while the Quarter Horses run the sprints. It's like comparing

stock cars to dragsters."

Ward said he was rooting for any of the three horses famed horse trainer and Nogales native Bob Baffert entered in the Derby. Point Determined, Bob and John and Sinister Minister.

At 1 p.m., there were over 3,500 people in attendance to catch the opening race. Three races were held prior to the start of the Derby.

As I'm Seeing Spots crossed the finish line in the third live race, people began to filter through the fairgrounds, either to place a last-minute wager, or to stake out a spot in front of one of the fairgrounds' two-dozen television sets.

With over \$30 million wagered on this race from around the world and thousands of dollars wagered at the Sonoita fairgrounds, the tension was palpable as people huddled around the televisions in anticipation.

At 3:04 p.m., the Run for the

Roses was finally under way.

As Keyed Entry and Sinister Minister jumped out to an early lead, people frantically shouted the numbers to their respective horses.

Those who wagered on No. 8 began to shout even louder, as Barbaro began his furious charge at the half-mile mark.

Unfortunately, the television signal was interrupted every 30 seconds, causing the crowd to groan until the signal returned.

As the Thoroughbreds raced toward the finish line, the signal was lost yet again, but upon its return, those who wagered on Barbaro were ecstatic to see their horse finish six lengths ahead of Bluegrass Cat to take home the Kentucky Derby crown.

Barbaro, a 4-1 shot to win at the start of the day, finished the race in 2:01.36 and remains undefeated in his racing career.

After the race, people either angrily tore their betting

slips in half, or triumphantly walked toward the betting desk to collect their winnings.

"You can't beat the atmosphere and excitement you find here," Vito said. "This is what horse racing is all about."

Six more live Thoroughbred races followed the Derby, giving people an opportunity to either make up their losses or continue their Derby winning streak.

Today's events feature nine Quarter Horse races.

"Next week, we're holding a Quarter Horse show here at the fairgrounds," Letarte said. "It's one of the oldest horse shows around, and there are a lot of contestants."

Barbaro will continue his quest for racing's Triple Crown on May 20, when he will take part in the Preakness Stakes.

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Green Valley area awarded gold rating for cycling safety

By Nick Prevenas
Green Valley News

The League of American Bicyclists has given the Southern Arizona region a gold rating for its friendly and safe atmosphere for the region's cycling enthusiasts.

"We are proud of this recognition of our bicycling paradise and of our efforts to make further improvements," said Santa Cruz Valley Bicycle Advocate Committee Co-chairman Bill Adamson.

The awards ceremony will take place on June 2 at 9:30 a.m. at the Snake Bridge in Tucson.

In 2004, Tucson was awarded the silver rating, a terrific honor, Adamson said, but with plenty of room to improve.

"We went to Tucson's bike committee, the Town Council and the Board of Supervisors and said that the silver rating was nice, but that's not good enough," Adamson said. "We've got to get to that platinum level."

Currently, Davis, Calif. is the only city in the United States to reach platinum status.

Green Valley resident Bill Katzel spearheaded an initiative to make sure the League of American Bicyclists recognized not just Tucson, but also the entire region.

"We have been working

with Matt Zoll from the Pima County Department of Transportation and Dick Roberts, the President of Green Valley Community Coordinating Council, to make sure that this is, and always will be, a great place for the cycling community," Adamson said.

When determining a region's cycling rating, the LAB looks at cycling facilities, bike lanes and routes, law enforcement and education.

"They don't just look to see if it's a pretty place to bike," Adamson said. "They have certain standards, and they want every community to work at achieving higher standards. It's great that we have that gold rating, but we have to keep improving."

Adamson, along with fellow co-chairman Jim Jordan, formed their committee in 2003 when they felt the cycling conditions were beginning to deteriorate.

"Because of the sharp population increase, the new developments created gaps in the bike lanes, especially on the north end of Camino del Sol," Adamson said.

After a grassroots letter-writing campaign to bring this issue to the attention of GVCCC, almost 50 cyclists and golf cart drivers gathered to address the issue.

"The county officials admitted that they wanted to improve the bike lanes, but they didn't have the time or the money to do so," Adamson

said. "So we formed a committee and met with county engineers to get the wheels in motion. A month later, they found the money and we worked together to complete this project."

The bike lanes along Camino del Sol were completed in April. Adamson said the plan was excellent because it had room to expand as the population continued to grow.

"There are about 15 people in our committee, which is pretty much our riding group," Adamson said. "We have had a lot of discussions on improving bike routes not just in Green Valley, but in Sahuarita, Tubac and South Tucson, as well."

The committee's latest project is their "Master Plan for Multi-Use Lanes and Trails," which was finalized in April 2005.

"On the north end of Continental Road, the shoulder wasn't paved until last year," Adamson said. "About a month ago, we were awarded two grants valued at over \$1 million to create bike lanes from La Posada to Continental School."

In addition to the bike lanes, Adamson said they plan to create a multi-use path from the school to the non-age-restricted area in Madera Vista, so the younger children have a safer route to school.

"Ultimately, we want to have multi-use lanes and trails for walkers, golf cart

drivers, hikers and bikers," Adamson said.

Adamson said the group doesn't plan to rest on its laurels after these projects are completed.

"We're not only developing what we need now, but also what we will need over the next 10 or 15 years as the pop-

ulation increases," Adamson said. "Our committee is continually working with the county to get the next new thing established. We're not going to rest until we achieve that platinum rating."

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PHOTO SUBMITTED

MARYLEE ADAMSON (LEFT), and Bob Gullett ride along the new shoulder on Camino del Sol, a project the Santa Cruz Valley Bicycle Advocate Committee finished in April.