

L'AFFAIRE DE JAVA RAJAH

A true story, by Robin Dawson



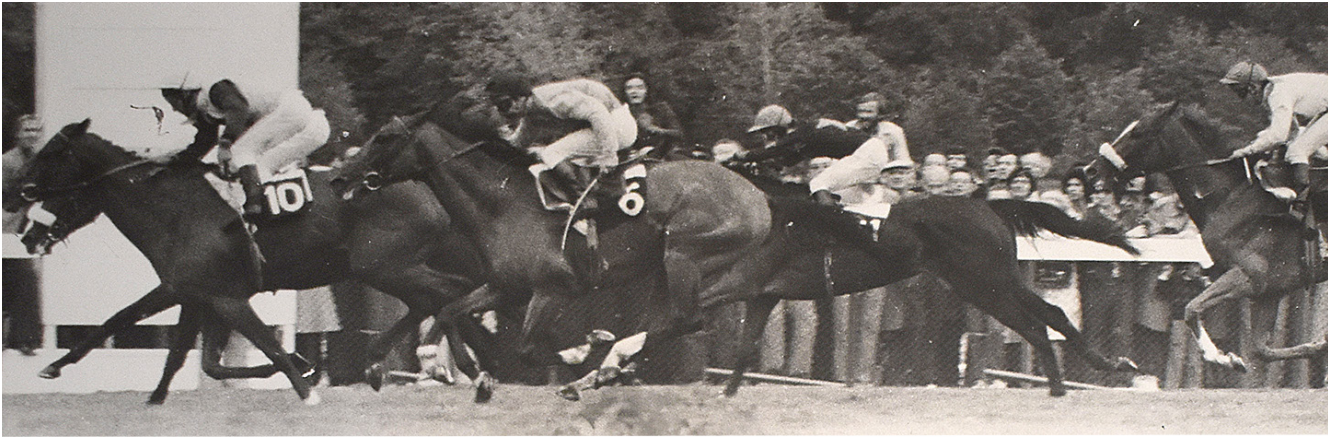
Sometimes life's trajectory can be determined by inches or seconds. Such was the case for me in mid-September of 1976.

A late developing 3-year-old colt, Java Rajah, won the Prix Omnium at Longchamp racecourse in Paris, France by the shortest of noses. It was a good win for the stable, as all races at Longchamp are.

But, had he been beaten that day, by the slenderest of margins, instead, the turmoil that this victory precipitated might never have arisen. I might be still living in France...maybe even a leading trainer. Certainly, I would never have moved to Canada and everything that has happened in the intervening forty-four years would have been different.

As it was, several weeks later, on the Monday after that year's Prix de l'Arc de Triomphe, October 4th. (in which Java Rajah ran very well to be 5th. behind Ivanjica) while having lunch with Jonathan Pease (Assistant trainer to Francois Mathet, at that time), I received an urgent call from my employer, Scobie Breasley, to return to the yard, on Chemin des Aigles.. immediately! And, there, I learnt that, according to the Societe D'Encouragement (French racing's ruling body), the prelevement (dope test) on Java Rajah in the Prix Omnium had come back positive, for Caffeine Citrate.

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Such news was a shock, but not nearly as shocking as what would unveil over the following weeks, as the maliciousness of the French racing authorities and the influence of certain leading French owners became apparent and a stable of eighty horses disintegrated.

1976 had been a bad year for the supposed Entente Cordiale between England and France, in the world of horse racing, with the sensational double disqualification of the French 4-year-old colt Trepan from back-to-back Group 1 victories in the Prince of Wales Stakes at Royal Ascot and Eclipse Stakes at Sandown (for the same drug) and now the smarting French were exacting retribution against one of the most powerful foreign-backed (ostensibly British, but Indian owned and Australian driven) stables in France.

As one of the only Anglo-French speaking members of team Tikkoo, I accompanied Scobie Breasley to the enquiry where it was patently obvious that protocol was being abused (test results were supposed to be revealed within 7 days. Not weeks after, after the subject had run again and NOT been tested for comparison) and this was a blatant pay-back. Scobie protested that he did not even know what Caffeine Citrate was. But the decision was final. No appeal. The tumbrels were waiting. And, realizing that this was a deliberate act by French racing authorities to balance-out the 'unfair' (in French eyes') treatment of Francois Boutin and Trepan's connections' earlier in the Summer, Ravi Tikkoo withdrew completely from France, moving all his horses to New York.

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From having had a tremendous first year on the elite Paris circuit, with 43 winners, of whom 11 were of the listed or Group variety, including the Group 1 Coronation Stakes at Royal Ascot (Kesar Queen) our lives were turned upside down, with 99% of staff made redundant.

Of all the disappointing things that have happened in my life, this is right up there with the most galling. Please forgive the pun!

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JAVA RAJAH (Y. Saint - Martin)
Prix de L'omnium Longchamps
September 12 1976