

# The Memories Behind the Memorabilia, at Hollywood Park's Auction



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By Channing Sargent

"It's a weird combination - feeling sentimental about this place, and wanting to buy things from it," Sharron Evans says as she wanders the auction showroom at the recently closed Hollywood Park racetrack this past Saturday. Within the Player's Club - what was less than a month ago a wagering room for the serious horseplayer - stand rows and stacks of memorabilia from the track's rich, 75-year history.

Fans and collectors peruse framed photographs of famous jockeys, painted portraits of equally famous horses, plus racing silks, commemorative plates, iconic lawn jockeys and historic jockey equipment like scales and lockers. Evans, an equestrian artist herself, has driven here with her husband from their ranch in Utah. They made a last-minute decision the night before the auction began to make the 10 hour trek, for the sake of seeing the park one last time. She remembers coming here as a child, and as an adult, when she was splitting her time between California and Utah, she came for all of the races won by the legendary horse Zenyatta. Evans has her eye on a few portraits, but doesn't yet know what she wants to bid on.

While she and other fans browse the showroom, Mark Weitz of sale manager GA Global Partners preps for the long day ahead within the now empty, and largely gutted grandstand. Wagering boxes and concession stands have been stripped of supplies and the equipment that remains is marked with bright pink auction tags.

Mark expects about 1,000 bidders between the online and on-site auction - about the same as the day before, which was devoted to the industrial equipment within the park, like table saws, generators and refrigerators. But it also included some historic pieces, like the 5th floor Director's Room bar, with its wood paneled race horses and brass foot railing, where celebrities like Michael Jackson and Elizabeth Taylor ordered their drinks.

Back in the showroom, Kip Hannan, Hollywood Park curator, points out the most sentimentally valuable items of this second day of the auction. "Here's the winning circle jockey scale," he says, pointing out the large, 300 pound Toledo Scale that had been weighing winning jockeys for decades. "That'll go for a lot."

He follows the rows of photographs and paintings, naming the horses depicted. "This is Seabiscuit and his sons," he says of lot number 1230. "And here's Citation, the number three greatest horse of all time."

As the Park's curator, he has taken it upon himself to archive the park's history. "Seven or eight years ago, I saw the writing on the wall," he says of the racetrack's eventual demise.

Hannan lowers his voice to just above a whisper as his dark brown eyes trail over a wood paneled display of Kentucky Derby winner portraits. "Nobody was doing anything [before I got here] with this massive amount of stuff, to preserve it or restore it. I mean, this ought to go to a museum, the Kentucky Derby museum, or something," he says, pointing out that some of the portraits in the wood paneling - the ones that were hand-drawn - date back to the 1800's.

"Isn't he wonderful?" a woman with big, fiery red hair says of Hannan as she wanders past. "This man is the heart of Hollywood Park." She grabs Hannan's arm. "He cares so much about preserving its history," she continues. Hannan bows his head, humbled. "Thanks, Roberta," he says.

Photo by Channing Sargent Kip Hannan and Roberta Weiser Her eyes, shadowed with shimmery green makeup and black liner, well with tears. She wears a black Hollywood Park t-shirt under a black leather jacket with a jeweled brooch of race horses on the lapel. Her name is Roberta Weiser, and she has worked at Hollywood Park in mutuels (receiving wagers and completing payouts) for 35 years. She doesn't know if she will bid on anything today. Mostly, she says, she's here because she couldn't stay away.

By now, out at the grandstand, the auction has begun. "Eleven hundred is bid now twelve, eleven hundred now twelve thirteen hundred now bid fourteen hundred where," Mark Weitz calls out in sing-song style, tracking bids on the Toledo Scale. Auctioneers watching the audience let out shouts of "Hyup!" whenever a bidder holds up their paddle. The scale goes for \$4750 to an online bidder.

Within an hour the auction has moved through over a hundred items. Item number 1109 is a set of metal street sign of race horse names that hung at the stables. The bidding quickly skyrockets to over three thousand, as a small silver-haired woman in the audience competes with an online bidder in New York City. The woman finally wins, and the audience erupts in cheers, like they've just watched a historic race.

The winner, Chris Alpin, walks to the item holding area to see the signs up close. "I started galloping here in 1977," she says. "I couldn't see these signs go to New York - the thought of it made me want to cry. I thought maybe they'd go for a third of what they did. I wasn't prepared to go so high, but I just had to."

The wood paneled portraits of the Kentucky Derby winners are lot number 1253. The bidding starts slow; the panels, in a state of disrepair, aren't a hot item. Hannan moves toward the front of the audience, keeping a keen eye on the panels. "They've been stored in a warehouse since 1972, completely forgotten," he says under his breath as he watches the bidding crawl up.

Weiser, seated in the front row, bids a few rounds until she bows out. The bidding continues between someone online and another person in the audience, until the winning bid is announced. Sharron Evans from Utah holds up her paddle for the auctioneers to note her bidder number. "I'm going to have to restore them," she said. "Need to talk to someone who knows how." Hannan, standing nearby, introduces himself. "Hi, I'm Kip. I'm the park archivist," he says. "I found those in a warehouse, brought them out to the daylight."

Hannan and Evans walk to the back of the audience and sit down together as he explains how she ought to restore the portraits she's just won - which show every Kentucky Derby winner from 1875 to 1972.