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The David Allan Column

The Inspiration of a Loser



Haru Urara: Japan's National Heroine 'Trier'



IN 2003, Japan was in the economic doldrums. The "Economic Miracle" of the 70s and 80s, throughout which this writer lived there, had gone followed by "the lost decade". Lifetime employment for nearly all the working population was a thing of the past. The malaise was clearly felt at the small Kochi Racetrack on Shimizu, Japan's fourth island offshore from Hiroshima.

Kochi was about to close. The PR manager urgently needed to stimulate more interest so he wrote the story of HARU URARA (means "Glorious Spring"), a seven-year-old racemare who had failed to win in 70 races. One of Japan's major newspapers Mainichi Shimbun (means "Every Day Newspaper") picked it up and, in a short time, the story went nationwide.

As HARU URARA's run of losses continued, so she came to symbolise the concept of "Ganbare" (means Keep Trying), something that the beleaguered population had to do every day.

Prime Minister Koizumi cited her as a great example of not giving up. In fact, "NEVER GIVE UP" was one of the legends on Haru Urara T-shirts, stuffed toys and water bottles that sprang up as a mini-industry in the Kawaii culture.

"Kawaii" (= cute or pretty) has extended to being a widespread part of social culture in modern Japan. It helped that HARU URARA's trainer had sewn Hello Kitty images onto the mare's hood.

Like Mickey Mouse or Snoopy, Hello Kitty – an anthropomorphic white cat - is a very kawaii brand on everything from school equipment to cafes from USA to UK to Australia, from Iceland to Turkey, and in South Africa - check out veteran rapper Tumi Molekane's "Hello Hello Kitty", not to mention Avril Lavigne's 'Hello Kitty You're So Pretty' counterpoint to her often raunchy lyrics.

Hello Kitty is everywhere just like Pokemon, the revival of which has people all over the world walking into lamp-posts or in front of traffic while desperately trying to catch a character on the Pokemon Go game.

Only a few weeks ago, 4,000 Pokemon "hunters" gathered at Sea Point in Cape Town as the newest game took hold.

The most popular Pokemon species is Pikachu. There is a Caesour broodmare in the Cape cleverly named Pikachu (from a female line of Kitty names). A Jay Peg full sister to her two winners will sell in the CTS Inanda Ready To Run.

HARU URARA in her Hello Kitty hood was being followed by millions. "Makegumi nohoshi" (The Star for all Losers). She continued to race enthusiastically but with no success. When her losses had totalled 90 plus, international superstar jockey Take Yutaka came to ride her.

JRA (mainstream) racing attracts six figure crowds to the Tenno Sho, ArimaKinen and the Japan Cup. The average daily attendance is in excess of 20,000. But Kochi is an NAR course (generally serving smaller towns). Something like the Paris tracks v. French provisional, or a South African equivalent of today's courses v. (imaginary) tracks in Langebaan or Ladysmith.

So when 13,000 people crammed into Kochi Racecourse to see Take riding HARU URARA, the atmosphere was fantastic. Was that day going to be her day? Ganbare!

The pouring rain that made the track sloppy was replaced by bright sunshine when she walked out. The crowd cheered GLORIOUS SPRING - commenting with amusement on her power to change the weather. The equivalent of a million dollars was bet on her on course. Thus she saved Kochi's existence.

She finished last. Nevertheless she gave a "Victory Lap", smothered in sloppy dirt, to unanimous applause. Cheered to the rafters, not least by the employees at the course.

HARU URARA continued to race – once causing national glee when 3rd – until she had failed 113 times. Her owner and trainer popped her into a horse box and that was that. She vanished as a public figure in 2004. The "HARU URARA BOOM" was over, although the legend was and is instantly recognisable as an example of continuous effort.

A Happy Ending? Certainly. Ten years later in 2014 the public found her again when a small, impecunious farm in Chiba Prefecture outside Tokyo appealed for help in looking after her. The farm was deluged with money. HARU URARA had been gifted to them years beforehand to look after and they had done exactly that.

The loser of 113 races. The national heroine. The Hello Kitty filly. Munching grass in Chiba and in great shape.

HARU URARA 1996 by NiippoTeio (by Lypheor by Lyphard) out of a mare by Lucky Sovereign (Nijinsky). Maybe not the best mating. **-tt**



Millard's Super Korean raid

FORMER South African Tony Millard enjoyed a stellar Korean raid when his charge, the 8yo NZ-bred Super Jockey (Sandtrap-Pennies In Heaven) won the 1200m US\$700,000 Gr1 Korea Sprint on Sunday at Let's Run Park in Seoul.

Although Millard expressed concerns about the depth of the sand on Friday, his charge made light work of the heavy track. Jumping from the no 2 gate, Karis Teetan rode a beautifully executed race, keeping his mount handy throughout, before producing a final kick for home to win by 4 lengths.



Before departing Sha Tin, Super Jockey completed a sensational barrier trial that had many observers of the opinion that the gelding was on top form and Millard, who achieved a milestone 500 Hong Kong winners back in April commented "He is a relatively unburnt horse, I have always been conservative with him. I don't have an abundance of good horses, so I have protected him. I haven't raced him a great deal and I think it has kept him young."

The connections have played future plans close to their chest, but a Dubai campaign looks a likely target. - tt.

O'Brien dynasty grows

INTRICATELY took a thrilling renewal of the Moyglare Stud Stakes at the Curragh on Sunday to give Joseph O'Brien his first Group One success as a trainer. The winner was bred by his mother, Anne-Marie and ridden by his brother Donnacha. Their father, Aidan, saddled four of the other six runners in the 1400m contest including second-placed Hydrangea, who attempted to make all under Pdraig Beggy.

Aiden O'Brien, the Ballydoyle master, said: "I can't believe that Joseph at 23 is able to train a Group 1 winner. Where Joseph trains is exactly where we trained before and we never won anything like a Group 1. Also for Donnacha to win a Group 1 at just 18 years of age on a homebred mare, everyone at home is just delighted," he said. - tt

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Purple Tractor, promising three-year-old

The 'Tractors' keep winning for syndicate

THE Purple Tractor Syndicate's three-year-old, Purple Tractor, skated away to a convincing win for trainer Brett Crawford and jockey Corne Offer in Race 9 over 1000m at Durbanville on Saturday afternoon.

A R250,000 buy from the CTS Ready To Run Sale, Purple Tractor boasts two wins from five starts and has almost recovered his purchase price for the members of the syndicate.



Crawford, who saddled four winners on the day, commented: "Purple Tractor is the sixth runner with a Tractor' name we've raced in a syndicate originally formed by Grant Knowles and Klawervlei Stud for fun and to give smaller owners a chance to race in partnership.

"The first was Green Tractor, followed by Red, Pink, Black and Orange. The only one who didn't manage to win was Pink Tractor, she'd gone in the wind. I like Purple Tractor, he's not going to stop here, and there's another one coming called [Emperor's Tractor](#). He's a two-year-old, being broken in at the moment.

"I think the various partners started naming the syndicate's horses after drinks, like Vodka and Cream Soda would be a Green Tractor, and so on. The name 'Tractor' stuck. It's been fun for everyone."

Purple Tractor could turn out best of the bunch so far. He is by champion freshman sire Gimmethegreenlight from a mare by Fort Wood and having such good pace is a good sign.

"I like him a lot," said Crawford. - tt