

How far did the horse  
jockey wantha bangs  
davis go?



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The horse industries have always been a blooming business for a few rich people especially to some African-American horse enthusiast. Although some claim it for just a hobby, owning a horse to be used for racing is a blueprint of being a part of a higher social status. But, to what extent and effort did the African- American people do before being tagged as one of the greatest equine racing practitioners.

Tracing back to history, evident marker of American wealth is their ability to own an imported thoroughbred horse coming from England. From these first batches of horse, they started to breed their own line of thoroughbred horses on to their own large farms. For practicality matters, slaves were assigned in taking care of the horses and were responsible for the training for the racing events.

Horse racing was then enjoyed and a lucrative American pastime. The owners did soon discover that the horse riders were very important too. The work of slaves caught the attention of the owners, so they were then assigned not just trainers but also riders of the race horse because they are really acquainted with the temperament and ability of the horse.

Through the ambition to become winners as much as possible in very horse racing, the African-American sportsmen entitled as jockeys and trainers came into existence.

Back at year 1800, the south part of America has generated almost all black jockeys to be competing at major horse race events. And from year 1823 up to the start of the American Civil War at year 1861 to 1864, horse racing is

the main favorite sports making the African- American jockeys as the key player of all times.

So, " Monkey" Simon who was a rider at year 1806 was then first African American jockey known at Clover Bottom Race in Tennessee (Registry). Soon, at 1851, it was succeeded by Abe Hawkins in the race track of Metarie, Louisiana (Registry).

Then on Jan. 1, 1861 to February 12, 1896, Isaac Murphy became the major African American jockey in the Kentucky Derby jockey winning three times for the year 1890 and 1891. He is a whip rider that many oppose his attitude just to win the race without considering the animal's condition.

The famous trainer quoted Isaac Murphy saying, "" I have seen all the great jockeys in England and this country for years back, but, all in all, Isaac Murphy is the greatest of them all", (Registry). But later, the title was grabbed by Eddie Arcaroto to which he made a record that last up to year 1948.

After the footsteps of Isaac Murphy came a roll of famous horse racers starting from the World War I. These include the great, Monk Overton of the year July 10, 1891 who captured six winning races at Washington Park in Illinois. Also, Willie Simms gained the fame after finishing six victorious races at Sheepshead Bay on New York in June 23, 1893, and winning the Kentucky Derby in 1896 to 1898.

James " Soup" Perkins made the fame at the age of 13, and was known in 1893 as " the boy jockey" . Jimmy Lee and Jimmy Winkfield of the early 90's

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ruled too. And for the modern day, it was Marlon St. Julien that took last May 6, 2000. The jockey who's title was named as the foremost black jockey for seventy-nine years to catch fame at Kentucky Derby (Registry).

Unfortunately, due to the American Civil War (1861-1865) the sports of horse racing have discontinued temporary. It is stopped for the mean time since the horses are needed as vehicle for the war. A lot of the racing horse miserably died to this incident.

Nevertheless, by the year 1875 after the war, the horse racing once again took its role. Oliver Lewis won the first Kentucky Derby on May 17, 1875 (Registry).

To be off great jockey, an excellent trainer was also needed by the African-American jockey. Without them, there path to fame would be impossible. Although many African American jockeys first started as trainers, still many would resist being a jockey.

The famous trainers as well as jockey were Edward " Brown Dick" Brown and Alex Perry . Both had the experience of winning a Kentucky Derby and were the trainers of the renowned horses Baden-Baden and Joe Cotton (Registry).

Prominent male African-American jockeys then followed the stardom of best horse racer, but not until 1930 to 1950's when Wantha Bangs, a girl jockey claimed reputation into the race track (Aging).

Through this field, she managed to win a lot of races that she rode as well as in a match races. Strong minded and very talented, she was a person who truly connotes an example of a true Western America.

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The press were so amazed to her that newspaper writers of that time were overwhelmed at her riding skills as well as to her bearing and poise attracting much of the fans. A lot of articles about her story were published and four newsreels were featured to acknowledge her. Sports pages around the world main headlines are all on her. Her winning smiles made a novelty in photos too.

Wantha Bangs's petite and brown figure became a famous figure from Tijuana to Vancouver racetracks (" Girl Jockey: Wantha Davis").

Reviewing the reports and comments on her, a reporter mentioned that she is " a beautiful girl with a sunshine personality, who insists that she is an old fashioned girl who doesn't drink, smoke, care for cosmetics, goes to Church, likes the comfort of trousers verses dresses, is happy and contented—a splendid specimen of an out-door girl", (" Girl Jockey: Wantha Davis"). Her life was the spotlight story of the year.

Also, she was admired by the famous racing columnist, Oscar Otis. His description to Wantha was that, " she was not only the best girl rider in America but among the 10 noble riders in the nation such as Eddie Arcaro and Johnny Longden", (" Girl Jockey: Wantha Davis").

As a consequence of her popularity, in 1949 she was able to defeat three Hall of Fame horse jockeys. A lot of spectators were intrigue about her, so many fans travelled from San Diego to Agua Caliente, Mexico to witness her race with Johnny Longden.

She defeated him for just a gap of a length and three-quarters in an agreed race of six furlong(Aging). Johnny Longden who is a three-time champion was so angry that he pulled off his bearing and went stubborn, refusing for weighing. And for Glen Lasswell, he was defeated at Agua Caliente, likewise at Nebraska to Basil James(Aging).

After the loss of Johnny Longden, sports columnist Nelson Fisher stated in the San Diego Union that, “ By now even the most calloused skeptics over the idea of a girl competing against a boy are acknowledging that she has what it takes” (“ Girl Jockey: Wantha Davis”).

And again in 1953, Fisher published an article commenting that,” Wantha rode horses like most male jockeys would like to” (“ Girl Jockey: Wantha Davis”).

Her skill in horsemanship was well appreciated in the world of sports but the focus of the media on Wantha was her gender as female jockey. The issue gave negative comments on her like, “ Wonderful Wantha Faces Male Riders”, “ Feminine Jockey, Hit with Crowd” and “ Comely Saddle Marvel Facing Double Trouble”(Aging).

As an influence of top horse tycoons, Wantha had the opportunity to be of equal level to race with the best male jockeys of their time. She had competed and defeated the top rank men rider and was among the first women athlete to this sports (Encyclopedia).

To name some of the Americas known horse breeder and owner that works with Wantha, these are Walter Merrick, Rex Ellsworth and Marion van Berg(Encyclopedia).

She was a very brave jockey. Wantha mentioned that, “ When you’re on a horse, you don’t have time to think about your nerves.” Her style in handling the horse is that she persuades it by her hand rather than whipping it, and she yells with the use of right words so it would go first place in the track. She also claims that all the horses she rode, each has specific yells to say (“ Girl Jockey: Wantha Davis”).

Wantha rode the best horses during her peak of fame that made her in demand among horse owners. She took trips to places such as in Kentucky, where it is the hometown of thoroughbred horses, and in Louisville to take a chance for a big time race to a big time arena. She then also worked at Churchill Downs.

But as a problem to her gender, she was not permitted to race to these areas. Her application to have a license was reitately rejected always(Aging). It was only after twenty years after Wantha’s retirement under the Civil Rights Act of 1964 that a license was issued to a woman jockey (“ National Cowgirl Museum & Hall of Fame”).

To race without a license is a tough job for Wantha. She went into some strange bush tracks that are dirty and dangerous places. Wantha came across into some an authorized pari-mutuel tracks too. She said,” I rode in places so wild and woolly, there were steers and bucking horses in the

infield; anything was liable to run across the racetrack”, (“ Girl Jockey: Wantha Davis”).

Although there is no ladies dressing room facility in a race track, this was never a problem for Wartha. Her dressing room was her horse trailer. The trailer was turned into a convenient dressing room (“ Girl Jockey: Wantha Davis”).

Recalling Wanthas life, her maiden name is Wantha Lorena Bangs. Since her home is just a mile away in a racetrack at Kansas, it was always natural for kids like her during that time to ride into a horse. Merrylegs, a Shetland pony, was her first horse given by her grandfather as a gift to her fourth year birthday.

When she was at age fifteen and old enough to run and the stirrups can be reached, a neighbor introduced a black mare named Baby Jo to her. Through her ride with Baby Jo, it gave way in starting her career as female jockey.