The New York Times at Belmont Park

We try not to go over this at too much length, but coverage of the spring-summer 2006 meeting at Belmont Park disappeared from the New York Times. (The meet ran for 12 weeks from Wednesday May 3 to Saturday July 22.) Apart from the Belmont Stakes which was covered at length, there was no coverage of any other stakes race at Belmont Park by the New York Times.

It wasn’t that horse racing went totally uncovered. There obviously was massive Times coverage of Barbaro’s health. For the two month period after Barbaro’s injury in the Preakness on Saturday May 20, there were 66 articles in the Times (including notes, AP stories, and letters) that mentioned Barbaro. There were 34 articles from the New York Times primarily concerning Barbaro’s condition after the horse’s appalling breakdown in the Preakness There were Barbaro columns by Richard Sandomir, George Vecsey and William Rhoden. There was an editorial (May 23, “A Broken Horse”) and two op-eds. (Jane Schwartz, May 22 “We Care. But Why Do We Care So Much?,” Linda Greenhouse May 28, “Our Creation, Our Concern”). Belmont Park was mentioned in nine of the articles that specifically concerned Barbaro’s wellbeing.

The closest things that the Times printed to coverage of a live Belmont race were a) a short 265 word AP story entitled “Victory for Prado Before Visit to Barbaro,” describing Edgar Prado’s win in the Metropolitan Handicap and his plans to visit Barbaro the next day and b) a May 25 column by William Rhoden entitled “An Unknown Filly Dies, And the Crowd Just Shrugs,” about the breakdown of a horse at Belmont during the seventh race on Wednesday May 24.

There were eight articles in the Times principally devoted to covering the Belmont Stakes. Barbaro was mentioned in all these articles. Other than that, the 12 week Belmont meet went uncovered. NYRA ran 38 stakes races during the Belmont meet. Counting the Belmont Stakes, NYRA ran eight Grade I events at Belmont. Other than the Belmont Stakes, not one of these stakes events received a mention in the Times.

There were four other articles (which were not predominately dealing with Barbaro’s condition) that mentioned Belmont Park as a part of a general overview of health and safety issues at the track. For example, on May 26, the Times published “Thoroughbred of Ambulances Cares for Injured,” a 908 word article on the horse ambulance used at the track. On June 4, the Times ran a story entitled “At Belmont, Health Care Is No Longer Just for the Horses,” on health care for backstretch workers. Belmont was mentioned in passing in both June 10th’s “Barbaro’s Injury Converts Owner into Voice for Change,” and in May 23’rds “Injured Horses Benefit From Medical Advancements.”

Finally, Belmont Park was mentioned in one article on the NYRA franchise battle on June 5, in one article on judging barbecue contests on July 5, and as part of a small note from the AP on June 2 on the return from injury of jockey John Velazquez.
If it weren’t for Barbaro and the Belmont Stakes, the spring-summer 2006 race meeting at Belmont Park would not have been covered at all by the Times.