



DOUG BURGE

CTBA PRESIDENT

Remembering Russell Baze's Outstanding Career

As depicted on the cover of this edition of *California Thoroughbred*, the CTBA would like to honor Russell Baze as he recently announced his retirement from the jockey colony in California after finishing second in the 10th race at Golden Gate Fields June 12. Baze retires as the winningest jockey in history, with 12,842 wins.

Originally elected a member of the National Racing Hall of Fame in 1999, he was inducted into the California

Thoroughbred Breeders Association Hall of Fame in 2008. The longtime king of Northern California, Baze rode many California-breds over his 40-year career. Quoted in January 2008 in this publication, Baze stated: "I rode a lot of Cal-breds. You could say my first big break in Northern California came from riding Cal-breds."

Baze was the early rider on such California-bred stars as eventual Kentucky Derby runner-up Cavonnier, as well as Eclipse Award winner Brown Bess. He pi-

loted many Cal-bred stakes winners over the years and would typically venture to Southern California to participate on the California Cup card at Santa Anita. In fact, at the 18th California Cup renewal in 2007, he had two stakes winners, with Bold Chieftain in the Classic and Sierra Sunset in the Juvenile.

In tribute to the leading rider in nearly every meet over the past two decades at Golden Gate Fields and the now-closed Bay Meadows, several CTBA directors/members have added the following reflections:

"Russell was a good person and a consistently top rider. He had the same wife and the same agent most of the time I knew him. Not many jocks can claim that attribute. If I had a horse in a stakes up north, I made it a habit to call Ray Harris, his agent, to see if he was open. Oftentimes he was not, but then I knew the stakes might come up tough as the best horses' connections would usually try to get Russell. He could ride any type of horse, speed or come-from-behind, turf or dirt, short or long, and he put a 100% effort into every mount regardless of the class level of the race. Coming down the stretch, if his horse had a shot, he had an innate ability to get up at the wire."

—**John Harris**

"During my tenures as the manager of Northern California's two major tracks, I was lucky to have someone of Russell's stature, experience, and integrity heading the jockey colony. His steady hand was of importance in the functioning of the tracks. Just as important was the role Russell played as a goodwill ambassador for racing. In my 15 years as a manager in Northern California, Russell was called upon repeatedly to make appearances to promote racing, and not once did he decline such a request. The positive impact of his longtime agent, Ray Harris, should be also recognized. Both of them will be missed."

—**Jack Liebau**

"Russell Baze, the true professional. As an owner, when your trainer secured the services of Russell, you knew you had to be there because you were live and had a shot. We were fortunate to give a leg up on Soviet Problem to win many stakes—Oakland Handicap, Bay Meadows Budweiser Breeders' Cup, Sacramento Handicap, First Advance Hand-

icap, among others—but also with lesser stock, as with Russell, no matter what level, you always got his professional ride. His warmth, his smile, and his attitude radiated; Russell was the true professional. My sincere thanks for your exemplary attitude in your successful career, and now bait the hook well as you relax in the new phase of your life."

—**Don Valpredo**

"We trusted Russell with our best horses, and he rode them well. But the amazing thing about him is he would ride a low-end claimer just as hard as he did a stakes horse like Sierra Sweetie. I think he rode her in every race, north and south, and won on her all the time. But the one I like to tease him about was when he took Bold Chieftain over Sierra Sunset in the Alamedan and picked the wrong one."

—**George Schmitt**

"Russell was the consummate professional. He rode our best and our worst, always striving for victory. It warms my heart to know he won a grade I on Smiling Tiger."

—**Phil Lebhertz**

"I watched Russell Baze ride early on in his career. He rode each horse with the same determination and finesse, regardless of whether it was in a \$2,500 claimer or the Lost in the Fog Stakes. Thank you, Russell, for the many wonderful memories; you have always been humble, gracious, caring, and just one heck of an outstanding rider. You leave a large hole in the jockey community up north. Congratulations on a healthy retirement."

—**Sue Greene**