



Ruffian: A Racetrack Romance

William Nack

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On July 6, 1975, a 3-year-old filly named Ruffian was loaded into the starting gate at Belmont Park for a televised match race against Kentucky Derby winner colt Foolish Pleasure. Since winning her first race a little more than a year earlier, the unbeaten, unflappable Ruffian had literally raced her way into the hearts of a nation. One of those hearts belonged to *Newsday* turf reporter William Nack.

As a boy in Illinois, Nack had carried in his pocket a trading card of his hero, Swaps, the winner of the 1955 Kentucky Derby. As a young soldier in Vietnam, Nack tuned out the midnight bomb blasts by listening to racetrack broadcasts from Santa Anita. Now, fresh off the publication of his astonishing biography of Secretariat -- described by *Seabiscuit* author Laura Hillenbrand as "the gold standard of horse books" -- he found himself smitten once again.

But tragedy struck that summer's day at Belmont Park. After charging from the gate, Ruffian stumbled and shattered her right foreleg. She had to be put down. Nack's heartbreaking run with thoroughbred racing's most famous filly will soon be immortalized in a made-for-TV movie to be broadcast on ESPN and ABC. In this moving, lyrical memoir, he relives the afternoon that forever changed his love affair with the track.

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