

A 'Not So Blue' Day at the Races

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When we brought in the New Year, as a recently married woman and an even more recently turned 34 year old, I made a conscious note to self that this is in fact the beginning of a new book; a pure white canvas on which to mark, outline, scribble and smudge. As the all clear was given that January 2020 has officially started, this new decade particularly presented itself as a blank race card, one in which we now get to choose our own winning combinations of 'Each Ways', 'Trifectas', 'Swingers' and 'Doubles'.

Since my husband, Mario, is an avid horse-racing fan and player, while choosing our wedding location shoot photos for our wedding day on 23 September 2019, our initial idea in fact was to have our photos taken at Kenilworth racecourse. Green, lush and with the mountain in the background, this location was simply showcasing a piece of us and what we have encountered throughout our dating relationship; horse-racing. After contacting the offices, however, we were told we cannot take photos there, as an event was already scheduled at the racecourse for that the day. Leaving the front runner behind, we opted for our second place option, Claremont Gardens.

Having dated for more than 10 years, our love story began when we met at work, and that followed with years of cooking adventures, music events and of course, horseracing. Daily chats about horses, trainers, Betting World, Hollywood Bets, Sporting Post, Formgrids, races cancellations, scratched horses, very close pick six winnings, many trips to Marshalls, pop-ins at Kenilworth and Durbanville Racecourses, a trip to the Durban July and countless hours of DSTV's channel 239, Tellytrack coupled with every Saturday morning's racing talk show – horseracing has been with us all the way.

While thinking of a birthday gift for Mario, I opted to surprise him with tickets L'Ormarins Queen's Plate Racing Festival. In all these years, for some reason, we were never able to attend; and what a spectacularly, perfect pre-birthday gift this was.

The Race Day has Arrived

Having both purchased our blue and white outfits, we were up early on the day. We were dropped at the racecourse at about 12:30 and entry at the gates went relatively smoothly; this was already an indication of a well-organized event. We waited in line for about 10 minutes, but already caught glimpses of some beautiful outfits from glitter to ball gowns to heels to hats. We got our passes and were in.

Having studied the race card on the days leading up to 11 January, we immediately went to the bookies to play our main race. Mario played an array of bets from the place accumulator, wins and places, while I on the other hand just opted to play my main race winner, Justin Snaith's Crown Towers.

We often have conversations about how to choose winners for races, and while Mario has his own strategy, I have mine too. I usually only look at the respective horses' last 3 runs and

the lengths he / she came behind the winner, that is, if they did not win. I always seem to go with my first instinct.

We then found our way to the Style Lounge. Since we have only ever been to the J&B Met, now Sun Met, we did not really know what to expect. At first, we could not see the Style Lounge anywhere, and all I was hoping for was a beer and some shade. We asked one of the ushers dressed in blue and white, and he easily directed us to where we needed to be. After running into some people we knew, we finally found the Style Lounge Village, and thank goodness, the area was cool, shaded and in close proximity to toilet facilities.

Upon entering, we were very pleasantly surprised. We could only really compare it to the past J&B / Sun Met events we have attended, and already, the atmosphere felt somewhat different.

Comfortable white seating, cool air, flowing décor, a fully stocked bar, friendly staff, reasonably priced drinks, DJ set up and tote facilities. We easily found a relaxed spot to sit, while listening to music, enjoying a beer and watching the races on the big TV screens provided.

And so our race day started.

Justin Snaith had just picked up his first win for the day.

I played Race 3, Number 4, King of the Moment, unfortunately Namaqualand won, which we actually spoke about prior to playing the bet, but did not play it.

I heard many people mention Hawwaam to be the clear winner, but still stayed away from placing that bet.

I played R10 wins on all races in the main race, since Vardy unexpectedly won the 1600m beating Rainbow Bridge, I lost, and only paid out R66. I played a R100 win on the Crown Towers, knowing in my risky heart that he would win, he did not. Although he was many lengths in front at the beginning, they caught up with him.

Mario had been backing Double Mint, and won. He also told others who came to sit at our table about Double Mint, they played it as well, and could not believe they won.

We met some horse trainers who spoke to us about their horse in an upcoming race.

We met a German guy who told us about wine bottles and corks; and also told us he has been living in Cape Town for 10 years, but still has a German accent.

We added some pictures on Instagram and tagged @LQPCT.

We played Mr Cobbs as a win, but he came second.

Wondered if the smoke coming from a nearby field fire would halt the main race.

We drank Heineken.

Bought some cigarettes and received a promotional gift of the most comfortable sandals which was very welcomed.

Cheered with the crowd.

Listened to Roastin' Records play on vinyls.

Overall Experience

All in all, the day was plated with many firsts.

Our first time at the races as a married couple. Our first time at the L'Ormarins Queen's Plate Racing Festival. The first time Adam Marcus trained a winning Queen's Plate horse, and the first time Craig Zackey won at the Queen's Plate. It was our second time though seeing Ian Smith sing and play his trumpet.

As the clock struck 11pm, the ball ended for us and our chariot arrived; I did not lose my shoe though.

We had not won big at the races and some would call that a 'bad day'. On the contrary, in fact, we had a 'very good' day. We felt like winners just being there together, dressed up in the elegantly themed blue and white, listening to Roastin' Records roast his records, meeting trainers, screaming at the TV with the rest of the crowd, and just living in the moment.

As we have been following horse-racing throughout our years of being together, we do hope to experience more of these types of events. We may not win big in cash, but just having to experience that, is our kind of 'favourite'.

We left the L'Ormarins Queen's Plate Racing Festival knowing that this is a New Year with only many more new life experiences to be made – even if our barrier draws are far apart on some days, we will always finish over the same line.