

The Temple News

In Barbaro, Philly finds a true hero

Philadelphia is desperate for a hero. This city had the chance to be the home of the Super Bowl champions, the World Series champions and almost every other sort of champion there is.

In Smarty Jones, the city had a chance to be the home of a Triple Crown winner in the Kentucky Derby. The city had that chance again the next year with Barbaro, an American thoroughbred horse.

While Barbaro did not bring back the Triple Crown title, he ended up being one of the greatest and most noble heroes the city has ever seen.

On May 20 last year in Baltimore, Barbaro was touted to win the Preakness, the second race in the Triple Crown.

He had already won the Kentucky Derby. He had a misstep down the track and everyone could see instantly that he was badly hurt.

He was sent to the University of Pennsylvania's New Bolton Center, a top equine hospital, in Kennett Square, Pa. There Barbaro received surgery and treatment for the multiple fractures in his rear hind leg.

Barbaro was in surgery for five hours the next day, and for the next few months, the only news was that his future was uncertain. Meanwhile, the two white gates at the main entrance were plastered with signs saying, "Get Well Barbaro" and other well wishes.

The New Bolton Center was receiving donations of apples and carrots by the

pound for the horse. The outside of his stall was decorated with cards from all over the country.

People who had never cared for horse racing or much for horses suddenly cared about Barbaro.

Why? Because this horse, a Kentuckian by birth, fought like a true Philadelphian.

Like Rocky after round 10, like the Eagles after McNabb's injured ligament, Barbaro was thought to be a goner, but he kept coming.

He kept fighting without losing the passion or the spirit his owners loved him for. He was alert, playful and practically trotting out of surgeries.

Surrounding Barbaro were equally inspirational people. His owners, the Jacksons, did not abandon him to go raise another champion racehorse.

Cost of treatment was never an issue, only whether or not he was in pain. His trainer, Michael Matz, was a three-time Olympian who carried the flag at his final games.

During the summer, Barbaro developed laminitis or an inflammation in his left hind hoof.

This writer was in a newsroom in Washington, D.C., when the sports editor said it looked like Barbaro would die.

Like many from Philadelphia who had grown to believe in the horse, her response was, "Just watch. He'll get through it."

He got through that. It was not until he

developed laminitis in his front two legs that his surgeon and his owners finally decided that the pain was too much and that he had fought long enough.

Last Monday, Barbaro was euthanized in his stall, quietly, with his owners and his surgeon present.

The Barbaro Fund has raised more than \$1.2 million for new equipment for other patients at the New Bolton Center. This money will give other equine hospitals the same state-of-the-art equipment the New Bolton Center offers.

Barbaro's fight has raised interest in equine studies and the treatment of horses on and off the racetrack. The level of love Barbaro received is unusual in horseracing.

There is a bigger fight to make the amount of care and love he received the norm and not the exception.

He was an incredible horse, surrounded by incredible people. While he did not win the Triple Crown, his struggle and his victories are what make him great. The fact that he never stopped fighting and that his owners never gave up on him make him a greater hero than any title ever could.

In a city desperate for a hero, Philadelphia found one in a 3-year-old thoroughbred that wouldn't stop fighting, no matter how bad the situation was.

Carloyn Steeves can be reached at csteeves@temple.edu.