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Surf & Turf...It's Fan-tastic!

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What's better than the beach under a warm September sun, steak sandwiches, homemade peach pie, a mid-afternoon massage, and an invigorating dive into the cool Atlantic? Well, few things I'd say. But try telling that to any one of the 17,000 that converged upon Monmouth Park this past Saturday for the inaugural running of half-million dollar Monmouth Stakes. If anyone thinks this game lacks heroes or fans then they better get their head out of the sand, for they were both in attendance - it's no wonder the beaches were empty.

I claimed my spot on the paddock rail in advance of the feature, and was glad I did. Was it Lindsay or Britney with lead-line in hand? There were so many snapping cameras you would have thought it was Oscar night. They clapped and cheered, and even hooted and hollered as a true star of the game made his grand entrance. Yes, Big Brown was in town and both young and old joined the ranks of the paparazzi just to get a peek. Another wave of cheers rolled in during the post parade as BB's name was announced. Young girls in the grandstand gave away baked brownies, and not a word was uttered about his prior fall from grace (see Belmont Stakes), or his all-out effort to run down a frisky and determined Coal Play in the Haskell.

And Brownie did not disappoint. Facing older and certainly accomplished horses in Silver Tree, Proudinsky and Bernard Baruch winner Shakis, I thought BB a bit vulnerable. Kent's instructions must have been, "Send him - straight from the gate," as Brownie was powered to the lead exiting the chute. With mild pressure from Pablo Fragoso and Get Serious, BB set the early pace, recording a half in :46 & 4. It was a leap of faith to imagine him holding on at this pace but Get Serious was done quickly. BB just skirted away but was again tested on the far turn, this time by Bobby Frankel's Proudinsky. But Desormeaux had a grand finish planned and Brownie dug in, keeping Ramon Dominguez and his charge a half-length at bay. It was a good win for Brownie, and his connections can now look confidently toward Santa Anita in October.



As Kent brought the son of Boundary back to the winner's circle, yet another tide of applause rose up and over the track. It was wonderful to see those in attendance show such appreciation. They may have had a few bucks on him but the real thrill came from seeing a great horse do what a great horse does.

The Jets may have Favre, but racing's got Big Brown! And the fans at the shore made the difference on this day - and Brownie? Well baby, he was born to run....

