

# Running the Race: 'Smarty Jones' and the Defeat at the Belmont Stakes

by Art Katz

---

*Believers must run the race with patience and endurance, trusting in God's control rather than their own strength, and conserving their resources to achieve victory.*

**Scripture:** Hebrews 12:1

**Topics:** "Endurance", "Spiritual Race"

---

## Description

Art Katz draws a parallel between the race of life and Smarty Jones' near victory at the Belmont Stakes, emphasizing the importance of endurance and character over mere speed and talent. He reflects on how Smarty, despite his impressive lineage and training, lost due to a lack of stamina and control, which serves as a metaphor for believers running their spiritual race. Katz encourages Christians to maintain patience and reserve, avoiding premature exertion that could lead to spiritual defeat. He reminds the congregation to keep their focus on Jesus, who guides them through the race of life, and to be aware of unseen challenges that may arise. Ultimately, the sermon calls for a deeper understanding of the race set before us, urging believers to run with purpose and perseverance.

---

## Transcript

"Art Katz encouraged the duplicating of his audio messages, and there are no copyright claims for those who desire to share them with others. However, Art's books and writings (including articles on this website) do still carry a copyright, and permission needs to be sought if quoting from those is required."

-----

June 5, 2004 (Ecclesiastes 9:11 The race is not to the swift...)

Like millions of others, I was among those who held their breath waiting for Smarty's success at Belmont for the elusive Triple Crown that no horse had won in 26 years. Never having attended a horse race in an entire lifetime, knowing nothing about horses, breeding or training, I found myself caught up in the excitement, rooting with school children and millions of others for this undersized plebian Philadelphia mount. Except for its outstanding lineage, it lacked the Kentucky farms aristocracy from which the better horses ordinarily come. A victory today, expected by everyone, and reflected in the slight betting odds assessed by the experts, would have heightened by many millions the value of such a sire whose single

couplings were already estimated at \$50,000.

Alack and alas, like the great Casey at bat, Smarty struck out. Having led virtually through out the entire race, our wonder horse (having won its previous race by 11 lengths!), peaked and was overtaken at the finish line by a single length, by a 36-1 mount Birdstone who had not even been considered a contender! From out of nowhere, out of sight and not in the pack of front runners, coming up unseen on the outside, it suddenly came abreast of our tiring front-place hero and moved ahead easily just at the finish line, in less than a second to pass him by a length! A stunned silence fell over the record- breaking crowd of 120,000, and a wave of inexplicable disappointment, a near grief, fell upon my own heart as it did the entire nation. "It was as if all the air had suddenly been sucked out of Belmont Park. A colleague called the loss a 'tragedy.' He said that Saturday was one of the saddest days of his life." [This and all quotations are out of the NY Times sport pages, Monday, June 7, 2004] Even the winning jockey and the horse's owner genuinely apologized for their victory and were booed by some at the winner's circle.

What is the significance for us who believe who are running an infinitely more significant race? What can we learn that we not lose out at the finish line, just when we were assured of victory to be beaten irretrievably by one whom we had not considered to be a serious contender? Already the pundits are submitting their critiques from which we can draw valuable lessons. The Belmont is the longest of the three principal races (The Kentucky Derby and the Preakness), a mile, and a half a sixteenth or a quarter mile over the length of the others. Had this race been at that length, Smarty would easily have been the victor as he had in all eight of his previous races. His time for the first quarter broke existing records for its speed. But it was this extra bit for which he lacked the overcoming stamina, having raced to take the lead from the first despite his wise jockey's attempt to restrain him. In a calculated strategy to exhaust him early, two of the other jockeys succeeded in prodding Smarty to race their mounts for the lead prematurely. His jockey, Stewart Elliott, later admitted "He was taking me there, whether I wanted him to or not...What do you do choke him and drag him back? I had as much hold as I dare take on him." His trainer noted from the grandstand, "The colt was wasting vital energy fighting Elliott. Smarty Jones was dragging his jockey to the lead at a steep price." Evidently, what was feared took place. A horse which had never run this distance could easily dissipate its strength, that 'extra bit' of overcoming stamina, possessed by the controlled horse that bested him by a length. The final quarter mile was run at a declining speed of 27.29 seconds as compared to an earlier quarter at 22.81 while the horse that overtook him completed that final quarter at 26.08.

Smarty's trainer, John Servis, had entertained some apprehension in noting that his steed lacked the calm that had characterized him before the start of the other races which he had run. His colt was "*too sharp*" which is horse-racing parlance for being too pumped up to turn in a measured performance in the face of acute stress" [all emphases in italics mine]. He was out of sorts with his jockey, running his own race!

All who are knowledgeable compliment the perfection of his training regimen, his exercise, diet and rest, right up to the race. Even his movement from the stable in Philadelphia to Belmont in Long Island was a carefully calculated and timed even accompanied by motorcycled police and overhead helicopters in a procession considered for kings! No detail was overlooked; no expense spared. Yet he lost. The intangible factor that distinguishes a champion, that of character, a moral quality, beyond every physical endowment was lacking and made the all the difference.

So dear saints, "Let us run the race that is set before us" in all patience and endurance, having something in reserve, not prematurely expending our necessary resources, keeping a wary eye out for the

unforeseen and unsuspecting on our blind side, considering the entire distance always longer than we had at first thought, however a fraction physically, much more, infinitely longer when spent! Let us not be drawn into competitive bursts to assure our primacy, considering Him whose 'mount' we are in whose nail-pierced hands our reins are held. Let Him fully control our head and mouth, sensitive to His restraint, however light His touch. The race is His not ours. Putting aside the sin that so easily besets us, let us run so as to win.

---

Source: <https://sermonindex.net/speakers/art-katz/running-the-race-smarty-jones-and-the-defeat-at-the-belmont-stakes/>

# *Grow in Your Walk with Christ*

---

Listen and read messages that will stir your heart for Christ and point you to deeper repentance and devotion.

- 50,000+ Sermons from speakers past and present
- 3,900+ Classic Christian Books freely readable online
- 1,200+ Bible Translations and Commentaries
- Over 450k forum posts — Join our vibrant online Christian forum

**[www.sermonindex.net](http://www.sermonindex.net)**