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His new trainer, Tom Smith, understood the horse, and his unorthodox training methods gradually brought Seabiscuit out of his lethargy. Smith paired the horse with Canadian jockey Red Pollard (1909-1981), who had experience racing in the west and in Mexico, but was down on his luck. On August 22, 1936 Seabiscuit raced for the first time for his new jockey and trainer, in Detroit, without impressing anyone. But improvements came quickly and in their remaining eight races in the East, Seabiscuit and Pollard won several times, including Detroit's Governor's Handicap (worth \$5,600) and the Scarsdale Handicap (\$7,300) at Empire City Race Track in Yonkers, New York.

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In early November 1936, Howard and Smith shipped the horse to California in a rail car. His last two races of the year were at Bay Meadows racetrack in San Mateo, California (just south of San Francisco), and gave some clue as to what was to come. The first was the \$2,700 Bay Bridge Handicap, run over one mile (1.6 km). Seabiscuit started badly, but, despite carrying the top weight of 116 lb (53 kg), ran through the field before easing up to win by five lengths, in a time only two fifths of a second off the world record. This form was carried over to the World's Fair Handicap (Bay Meadows' most prestigious stakes race) with Seabiscuit leading throughout.

For 1937, Howard and Smith turned their attention to February's Santa Anita Handicap. California's most prestigious race was worth over \$125,000 (over \$1.5 million in 2006 dollars) to the winner and was known colloquially as "The Hundred Grandeur". In their first warm up race at Santa Anita Park, they again won easily. In his second race of 1937, the San Antonio Handicap, Seabiscuit suffered a setback. Bumped at the start and then pushed wide, the horse trailed in fifth, with the win going to the highly-fancied Rosemont.

The two would be rematched in the Hundred Grandeur just a week later. After half a mile (800 m), front runner Special Agent was clearly tired and Seabiscuit seemed perfectly placed to capitalize, before inexplicably slowing on the final straight. The fast closing Rosemont edged out Seabiscuit by a nose. The defeat was devastating to Smith and Howard, and widely attributed in the press to a riding error. Pollard, who had seemingly not seen Rosemont over his shoulder until too late, had lost the sight in one eye in an accident during a training ride (not during a boxing match as implied in the 2003 film), a fact he hid throughout his career. Regardless, the horse was rapidly becoming a favorite among California racing fans, and his fame spread as he won his next three races, before Howard chose to again relocate the horse, this time for the more prestigious Eastern racing circuit.

Once there, Seabiscuit's run of victories continued unabated. Between June 26 and August 7, he ran five times, each time a stakes race, and each time he won, despite steadily increasing imposts of up to 130 lb (59 kg). The seven consecutive stakes victories tied the record. On September 11, Smith accepted an impost of 132 lb (60 kg) for the Narragansett Special. On race day, the ground was slow and heavy, and entirely unsuited to "the Biscuit", even without the heaviest burden of his career. Smith wished to scratch, but Howard overruled him. Seabiscuit was never in the running, and trudged home in third, four lengths behind Calumet Dick, who was carrying only 115 lb (52 kg). The streak was snapped, but the season was not over. Seabiscuit won his next three races (one a dead heat) before finishing the year with a valiant second place at Pimlico.

In 1937, Seabiscuit won eleven of his fifteen races and was the leading money winner in the United States that year. On the west coast, he had become a celebrity. His races were followed fanatically on the radio and newsreel and filled hundreds of column inches in the newspapers. Howard, with his business acumen, was ready to cash in, marketing a full range of merchandise to the fans. The Eastern racing establishment was considerably less impressed. The great three-year-old, War Admiral, had won the Triple Crown that season and was voted the most prestigious honor, the Eclipse Award for Horse of the Year.

[edit?](#) The best horse in America In 1938, as a five-year-old, Seabiscuit's success continued. On February 19, Pollard suffered a terrible fall while racing on Fair Knightess, another Howard horse. With Pollard's chest crushed by the weight of the fallen horse, and his ribs and arm broken, Howard tried three jockeys, before settling on George Woolf, a great rider and old friend of Pollard, to ride Seabiscuit.

Woolf's first race was the Santa Anita Handicap, the "hundred grandeur" that Seabiscuit had narrowly lost the previous year. Seabiscuit was drawn on the outside, and from the start, was impeded by another horse, Count Atlas, angling out. The two were locked together for the first straight and by the time Woolf had his horse disentangled, they were six lengths from the pace. The pair battled hard, but were beaten by the fast finishing Santa Anita Derby winner, Stagehand, which had been assigned 30 pounds (13.6 kg) fewer than Seabiscuit. However, not all was lost for the Howard family as Stagehand was owned by Charles' son Maxwell Howard.

Throughout 1937 and 1938, the media speculated about a match race with the seemingly invincible War Admiral (also sired by Man o'War, Seabiscuit's grandsire). The two horses were scheduled to meet in three stakes races, but one or the other was scratched, usually due to Seabiscuit's dislike of heavy ground. After extensive negotiation, a match race was organized for May 1938 at Belmont, but again Seabiscuit scratched. By June, however, Pollard had made a recovery and on June 23 agreed to work a young colt named Modern Youth. Spooked by something on the track, the horse broke rapidly through the stables and threw Pollard, shattering his leg, and seemingly ending his career.

A match race was held, but not against War Admiral. Instead, it was against Ligaroti, a highly regarded horse owned by the Hollywood entertainer Bing Crosby in an event organized to promote Crosby's resort and Del Mar Racetrack in Del Mar, California. With Woolf aboard, Seabiscuit won that race, despite persistent fouling from Ligaroti's jockey. After three more outings, with only one win, he would finally go head to head with War Admiral in the Pimlico Special in Baltimore, Maryland.

[edit?](#) Match of the century On November 1, 1938, Seabiscuit met War Admiral in what was dubbed the "Match of the Century". The event itself, run over 1 and 3/16 miles (1.91 km), was one of the most anticipated sporting events in U.S. history. The Pimlico Race Course, from the grandstands to the infield, was jammed solid with fans. Trains were run from all over the country to bring fans to the race, and the estimated 40,000 at the track were joined by some 40 million listening on the radio. War Admiral was the prohibitive favorite (1-4 with most bookmakers) and a near unanimous selection of the writers and tipsters, excluding the California faithful.

Head-to-head races favor fast starters, and War Admiral's speed from the gate was the stuff of legend. Seabiscuit, on the other hand, was a pace stalker, skilled at holding with the pack before destroying the field with late acceleration. From the scheduled walk up start, few gave him a chance to head War Admiral into the first turn. Smith knew these things, and had been secretly training the Biscuit to run against type, using a starting bell and a whip to give the horse a Pavlovian burst of speed from the start.

When the bell rang, Seabiscuit ran away from the Triple Crown champion. Despite being drawn on outside, Woolf led by over a length after just 20 seconds. Halfway down the backstretch, War Admiral started to cut into the lead, gradually pulling level with Seabiscuit, and then slightly ahead. Following advice he had received from Pollard, Woolf had eased up on Seabiscuit, allowing his horse to see his rival, and then asked for more effort. Two hundred yards from the wire, Seabiscuit pulled away again and continued to extend his lead over the closing stretch, finally winning by four clear lengths.

As a result of his races that year and the victory over War Admiral, Seabiscuit was named "Horse of the Year" for 1938. The only prize that eluded him was the Hundred Grander.

[edit?](#) Injury and return While being ridden in a race, Seabiscuit faltered. The jockey, Woolf, said that he only thought the horse stumbled and continued the race. Afterwards, Howard and Smith ran to the horse with Smith yelling. The injury was not life threatening, although many predicted he would never race again. The diagnosis was a ruptured suspensory ligament in the front left leg. With Seabiscuit out of action, Smith and Howard concentrated on another of their horses, an Argentine stallion named Kayak II. Pollard and Seabiscuit recovered together at Charles Howard's ranch, with Pollard's new wife Agnes, who had nursed him through his initial recovery. Slowly, both horse and rider learned to walk again (Pollard joked that they "had four good legs between" them), although poverty had brought Pollard to the edge of alcoholism. A local doctor broke and reset Pollard's leg to aid his recovery, and slowly Red regained the confidence to sit on a horse. Wearing a brace to stiffen his atrophied leg, he began to ride Seabiscuit again, first at a walk and later at a trot and canter. Howard was delighted at their improvement, as he longed for Seabiscuit to race again, but was extremely worried about Pollard's involvement, as his leg was still fragile.

Over the fall and winter of 1939;40, Seabiscuit's fitness seemed to improve by the day. By the end of 1939, Smith was ready to confound veterinary opinion by returning the horse to race training, with a collection of stable jockeys in the saddle. By the time of his comeback race, however, Pollard had cajoled Howard into allowing him the ride. After again scratching from a race due to the soft going, the pair finally lined up at the start of the La Jolla Handicap at Santa Anita, on February 9, 1940. Compared to what had gone before, it was an unremarkable performance (Seabiscuit was third, bested by two lengths) but it was nevertheless an amazing comeback for both. By their third comeback race, Seabiscuit was back to his winning ways, running away from the field in the San Antonio Handicap to beat his erstwhile training partner, Kayak II, by two and a half lengths. Burdened by only 124 pounds, 56 kilos, Seabiscuit equalled the track record for a mile and 1/16.

There was only one race left. A week after the San Antonio, Seabiscuit and Kayak II both took the gate for the Santa Anita Handicap, and its \$121,000 prize. 78,000 paying spectators crammed the racetrack, most backing the people's champion to complete his amazing return to racing. The start was inauspicious, as a tentative Pollard found his horse blocked almost from start. Picking his way through the field, Seabiscuit briefly led. As they thundered down the back

straight, Seabiscuit became trapped in third place, behind leader Whichcee and Wedding Call on the outside. Trusting in his horse's acceleration, Pollard steered a dangerous line between the leaders and burst into the lead, taking the firm ground just off the rail. As Seabiscuit showed his old surge, Wedding Call and Whichcee faltered, and Pollard drove his horse on, taking the Hundred Grander by a length and a half from the fast closing Kayak II.

Pandemonium engulfed the course. Neither horse nor rider, nor trainer nor owner could get through the sea of well-wishers to the winner's enclosure for some time.

On April 10, Seabiscuit's retirement from racing was officially announced. When he was retired to the Ridgewood Ranch near Willits, California, Seabiscuit, the horse nobody wanted, was horse racing's all-time leading money winner. Put out to stud, Seabiscuit sired 108 foals, including two moderately successful racehorses, Sea Swallow and Sea Sovereign. Over 5,000 visitors made the trek to Ridgewood Ranch to see Seabiscuit in the seven years he spent there before his death. His burial site is to this day a secret, known only to the immediate Howard family.

On June 23rd 2007, a statue of Seabiscuit was unveiled at Seabiscuit's home and final resting place, Ridgewood Ranch.

Seabiscuit in popular culture In 1940, right after his spectacular Santa Anita win and at the moment of his retirement, track writer B. K. Beckwith wrote *Seabiscuit: The Saga of a Great Champion*, complete with a short foreword by Grantland Rice, that summed up the impact of this horse on America at the time.

In 1949, a fictionalized account was made into the motion picture *The Story of Seabiscuit*, starring Shirley Temple. Sea Sovereign played the title role. An otherwise undistinguished film, arguably its one virtue was the inclusion of the actual match race footage of War Admiral.

In 1963, author Ralph Moody wrote *Come On Seabiscuit* (ISBN 0-803-28287-7), recently brought back into print by the University of Nebraska Press. It served as an inspiration for Laura Hillenbrand. On the radio show *Fresh Air* with Terry Gross on July 29, 2003, Hillenbrand said of Moody's book:

When I was about seven years old. . . . I found a children's book called *Come on Seabiscuit!* which was just wonderful! I read it so many times I broke the spine and all the pages fell out. I still have it; it has to be wrapped in rubber bands because the pages will go everywhere. But that book in just vivid prose told the story of the horse.

In 2001, Laura Hillenbrand wrote *Seabiscuit: An American Legend* (ISBN 0-449-00561-5). The book became a bestseller, and on July 25, 2003, Universal Studios released a motion picture titled *Seabiscuit*, which was nominated for seven Academy Awards, including Best Picture. The 2003 film has been tweaked by some critics on the grounds that the match race restaging, the centerpiece of the film, lacked the drama one would have expected from it.

At Santa Anita Park, a life-sized bronze statue of "the Biscuit" is on display. In 1958, he was voted into the National Museum of Racing and Hall of Fame. In the *Blood-Horse* magazine ranking of the top 100 U.S. thoroughbred champions of the 20th Century, Seabiscuit was ranked twenty-fifth. His grandsire, Man o' War, was first.

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