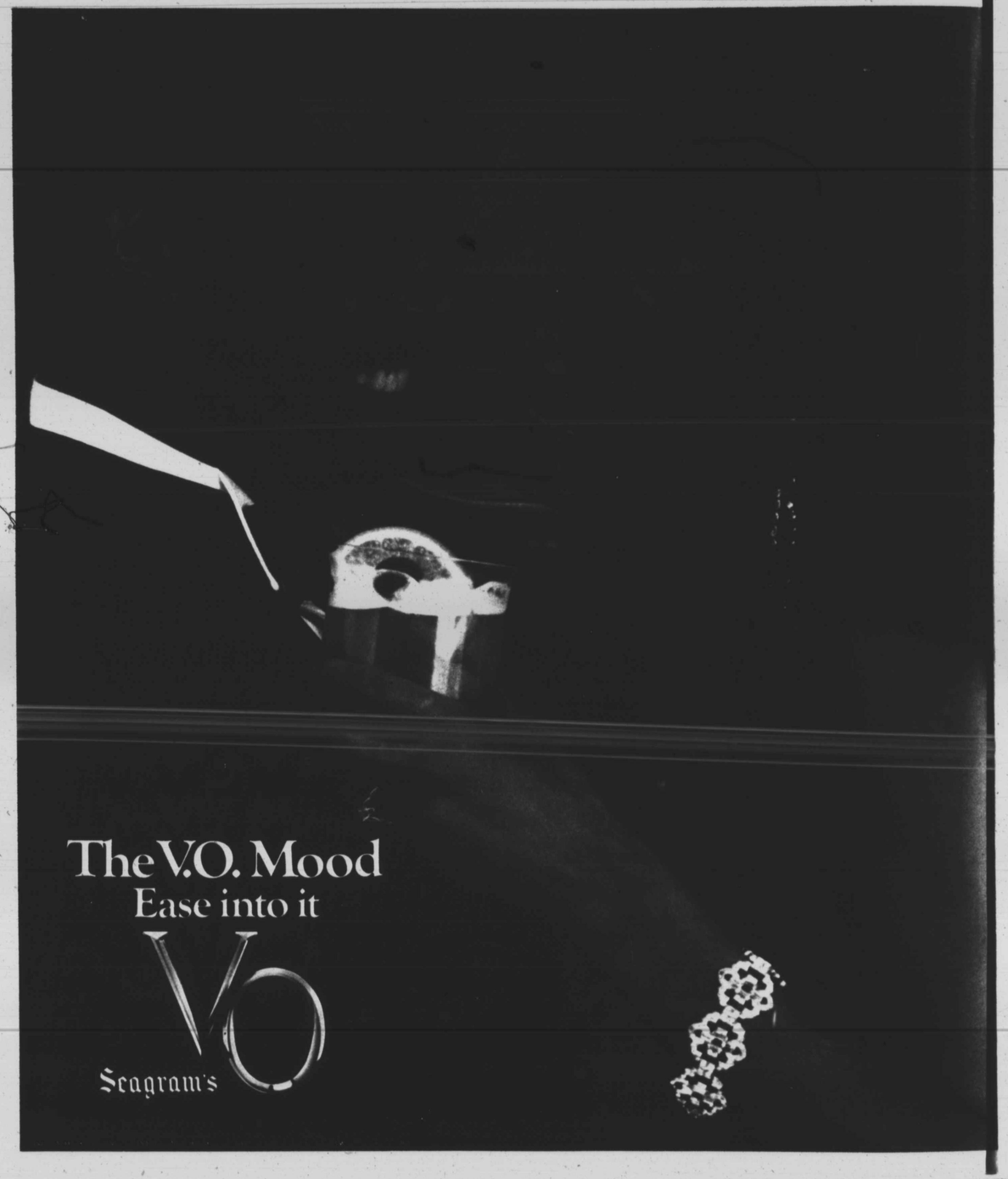

DAWN SPORTS FEATURE

Black Horse Trainers

(Part I of a series)

By Sam Lacy

Hundreds of times every day throughout the country, horses break the barrier in front of their competition.

They are given a pat on the rump, their riders are applauded, their owners receive sizeable checks and ticket-holders rush to the windows to claim their winnings.

But few people know, or care, who trained those thoroughbreds for their winning effort.

In almost any company, one can find scores of racing fans who are able to relate the wondrous deeds of Isaac Murphy, who was the first jockey in history to ride three Kentucky Derby winners and later became the only black enshrined in the Maryland Jockey Club Hall of Fame (although he never rode at Pimlico).

And there'll be many who are familiar with the fact that black riders were the general order of the day around the turn of the century. Also that black jockeys were aboard 18 of the first 25 winners of the famed Run for the Roses.

But ask how many black trainers were on the scene in those days, and the answers will be in the form of blank stares. In fact, very little is known of black trainers and their work even today.

It isn't hard to understand the trainer's anonymity. Unless he has a stable which grosses over $3 million annually — like Charlie Whittingham, Ron McAnaly or Bobby Frankel — or is a character like Johnny Campo whose TV act outdid his horse, Pleasant Colony, last year, the guys who prepare the horses for racing are rarely known.

A race horse trainer is like the pulling guard on a football team. Little or no recognition goes to the guy who clears the way for a running back like Earl Campbell, Billy Sims or George Rogers. In much the same way, the fellow who spends his before-dawn hours readying a horse to win, is generally ignored.

For instance, all those people who know that Murphy and Willie Simms and Alonzo Clayton and Erskine Henderson and Pike Barnes, etc., dominated the riding colony in racing's early years are not aware of this fact:

Trainer Fred E. Fox, who trains for Virginia - based Gordonsdale Farm, confers with apprentice jockey Jack Jewell prior to saddling King's Dominion in the seventh race at Laurel.

The first three winners of the Kentucky Derby were horses trained by black men. When Aristides won the inaugural in 1875 with Oliver Lewis aboard, he was saddled by Andy Anderson for millionaire owner H. P. McGrath. The 1876 event was won by Vagrant, sent to the post by trainer James Williams for John Jacob Astor. And Baden-Baden, the 1877, winner was prepared for the race by Ed "Brown Dick" Brown who lifted 12-year-old Willie Walker into the stirrups for the victorious ride.

Raleigh Colston, who had ridden Searcher to a fifth place behind Lewis and Aristides in 1875, switched to training six years later and in 1883 saddled Leonatus, that year's Derby champion.

When one reads the history of the Kentucky Derby and Preakness and other famous races, one rarely gets past the name of the horse which won, the jockey who rode and the price it paid.

It is seldom indeed that the man — or woman — who takes care of the animal and prepares it for the race receives the attention that is his or her due.

This is especially true in the case of the black race trainers. And there are many.

It wasn't, actually, until this feature was in its formative stage that the realization came: it will be impossible to cover them in one installment, or in two, or three.

And, even then, the writer will be forced to admit he has merely scratched the surface.

To start, we'll look at some of the more active conditioners operating on the eastern circuit, particularly those in Maryland, New York, New Jersey, Pennsylvania and West Virginia.

As earlier stated, there are no powerful names among them. But, that may be because they have not had the good fortune to find a Spectacular Bid, Affirmed, Seattle Slew or John Henry in their stables.

These are among the great thoroughbreds of history, and it can be argued whether their

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Active at Bowie This Year

Because of the nature of the business — horses being claimed and changing stables almost every day — it is impractical to attempt to put animals and trainers together. However, here is a list of blacks who raced thoroughbreds at the Bowie winter meeting:

Hank Allen, W. S. Awkward, Robert Braxton, William C. Berry, William S. Berry, Paul Banjoman, George Clay, Raymond Clay Jr., William Cook and Lewis Craig.

Also Fred E. Fox, Ernest Gill, Thomas Gardner, Ernest Green, R. G. Harris, George Hayes, Donald W. O. Hughes, Celestine Johnson, Harrison Johnson, Norman Johnson, J. Maurice Key.

Also Vincent Lewis, Chester Moore Sr., William D. O'Neill Jr., Bernard H. Palmer Jr., Daniel C. Palmer, Leon Parker Jr., Horace Parker, Louis E. Scott;

Arthur J. Smith, J. M. Snowden, Radcliff C. Tapscott, Bernard Thomas, Charles W. Whims Sr. and Oscar Williams.