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sotto voce — Long Live the Sport of Kings

by **Bob Schatz** (Manager of North American Sales, Everett's)
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I'll credit my daughter Julia with much of my knowledge of horses. I don't ride, but she does, and because of her persistence as a younger girl, I now am the proud owner of a thoroughbred on her behalf. Together, she and Gildur, her steed, have learned the art of dressage and are a pleasure to watch ride.

My exposure to horses, did not begin there, though. Before Julia was born, I attended horse races on a regular basis. I've long appreciated the grace and beauty of these fine animals, especially in competition. The excitement of a good horse race is contagious. Even the sounds of a race are noteworthy, from the pounding of hooves on bare earth to the crowd's encouraging screams.

From a bettor's standpoint, there's much to be said for horse racing; there are so many different ways to win. Money is returned on the first three individual finishers of a race, as well as the one-two finishers in quinella races, and the two consecutive winners in daily double races. For both the bold and timid alike, there are ways for horse races to pay benefits beyond the beauty and excitement of just being there.

Contrast that, if you will, with another of my favorite sports, boxing. Yes, I said boxing, which I know is an illogical sport for an old CO from the Vietnam era to enjoy. While I abhor street violence, for me there is no getting away from the intensity of athletic effort that goes into a good boxing match. When well-matched fighters engage in boxing, the result can be quite moving, sometimes in spite of the brutality, sometimes because of it. In that matching of brute strength, there is something emotionally powerful that boxers convey to those witnessing the fight. In spite of my own desires for a peaceful existence on this earth, it is a power hard to ignore.

Unlike a horse race, though, boxing has no room for "supporting players."

When two heavyweights enter the ring, only one will walk out a winner, unless, of course, the fight takes place in Madison Square Garden. By its definition, boxing thinks only in terms of survival and elimination; no other combinations of winning are possible. Where in horse racing, the nag losing by a nose still provides a payoff to bettors, in boxing the guy thumped hardest on the nose takes his exit, leaving only his opponent to collect the spoils.

In the library supply business, there seems to be an unfortunate evolution suggesting that the plethora of competing companies providing an array of service combinations from which libraries can "place their bets" is giving way to a boxing-model where competition is being reduced to a battle of two titans. If this is so, we're in for some rough times. Inevitably, when heavyweights

square off against each other, there is a predictable outcome: whether through elimination or merger, there is a high degree of likelihood that, eventually, from those two heavyweights comes one champion who gets to rule the market.

How do librarians feel about such a prospect? Can one or two large companies provide enough diversity to meet your needs? And what happens to the obligations you have to faculty and patrons if one of the giants of library supply should go down for the count? I wonder, and worry, that soon it may be too

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late for libraries to support the kind of competition that recognizes and rewards more than one participant, that encourages a race rather than a fight.

I applaud the skill of any professional champion, yet let us not forget that the effort of second and third place finishers in a race provides some of the impetus for first place horses to run their fastest. They also provide seed stock from which future champions have been known to come. Without diversity and challenge, sports, species, and markets devolve into something less than an ideal state. To keep this from happening, libraries have to make it known, to vendors and publishers alike, that too much concentration of power in too few hands is not what is wanted. Where you place your orders today, gives voice to the kind of supply environment available to libraries tomorrow.

The end of a boxing match can be quite exciting. If libraries sit and watch the number of their suppliers dwindle away, though, the count heard from the world of library supply will be as much for the spectators as for the fighters in the ring. Something to think about.