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Famous “Metworst” races in Boxmeer since 1740

History of the “Metworst” races

The “Metworst” races are century old horse races which are organised every year on Carnival Monday in Boxmeer. Some think that the tradition would even originate from the Old Germanic fertility ritual. In former times, young single horsemen tried to obtain fertility of the fields from the Gods for the coming year by means of riding through the fields. These fertility rides took place at the beginning of Lent (Carnival). That is how the “Metworst” got affinity with Carnival.

The oldest regulations known date from the year 1740. Therefore, historians regard that year as the year of foundation of the association “De Metworst”. The aim of the association is clearly stated in the 1st article of the regulations:

“The aim of the Association is to maintain and continue an ancient tradition in our municipality, which was installed by a charming lady, and which consists of racing for a sausage (“Metworst”), the annual reward for a generous aid given by young men from Boxmeer to the lady referred to above.”

According to the legend there has been a charming lady in the 15th Century called “Honourable Miss Aleida” whose coach veered off the road on her weekly ride. Helpful “fertility riders” from Boxmeer helped her to get back on the road again. To express her thanks, she burdened one of the farmsteads she possessed (the “Burdened Farmstead”) with an annual gift: 7 Dutch ells of sausage (“Metworst”), 2 loafs of bread, 2 barrels of beer and half a pig’s head. As from that moment every year a horse race has to take place to decide who may receive these goods. Not surprisingly the credo of the association is:

“We maintain the rights of our fathers”.

Only single young men from Boxmeer who are a member of “De Metworst” association can participate in the “Metworst” races. “Single young men” means: born, raised and living in the parish of Boxmeer and not being married. In a knockout race it is decided who can bear the title of “King of the Metworst” for the period of one year. This is the highest honour that can be bestowed in Boxmeer. It is even more special when someone wins during 3 consecutive years. In that case the title of “Emperor of the Metworst” will be obtained, however this has not happened anymore since the year 1900.

Programme of “Metworst” Monday

The annual races must be held on Monday prior to Shrove Tuesday. The races take place at the “Field of Vortum”, a provincial tarmac road situated between the two villages Sambeek and Vortum-Mullem. After being awoken by horn blowers starting at 4am, thousands of people walk from Boxmeer to the “Field of Vortum” to watch the races and to see who “will become King that year”.

The “Metworst” races usually consist of 13 knock out races spread over 3 heats. The distance of the track is about 800 meters. The first race starts around 09.30h. The winner of the so called “King’s race” goes to the “Burdened Farmstead” in Vortum-Mullem to receive the goods from the patroness of the “Metworst”. She also hangs the silver King’s shield on the winner. After this homage the “King of the Metworst”, accompanied by the other jockeys and the “fool’s barrow”, go back to Boxmeer to the “Wilhelmina tree” right in the centre of Boxmeer. There the “King of the Metworst” is crowned by the patroness, after which the “wine of honour” is served.

Next everyone moves on to the crowded festival room at “Hotel Riche” where a great “King’s party” (“Kunningsbal”) begins and the King is cheered on vociferously. At 6pm, the reception of the King begins in his “clubhouse” (a pub in Boxmeer) followed by big parties well into the night in all the pubs of Boxmeer.

Visit our website for more information about the “Metworst”: www.metworst.nl

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