Triple Crown winner's jockey wore China silks

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By William Hennelly in New York |   
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When Justify headed down the home stretch at the Belmont Stakes to win horse racing's Triple Crown on Saturday, the chestnut colt's jockey Mike Smith saddled up in red silks with yellow stars.  
The colors of the Chinese flag represented the China Horse Club, a 25 percent owner of the 3-year-old thoroughbred.  
After winning both the Kentucky Derby and Preakness Stakes in the silks of Justify's majority owner WinStar Farm, Smith donned the China-themed finery at Belmont Park in New York before a crowd of more than 90,000.  
The change was agreed to by the owners of the 13th Triple Crown-winner.  
WinStar Farm President Elliot Walden told TV station WDRB in Lexington, Kentucky last week that the silk switch initially drew some skepticism at WinStar, but said the China Horse Club branding would garner more international interest, particularly in China. On its website contact form, the club lists a Shanghai address.  
"Justify is going to wear China Horse Club silks," Walden said on Thursday. "That is exciting on one hand. It's not really important what silks he wears. It's important how things work out. If the horse wins the Triple Crown, we should be grateful."  
Undefeated in his six outings, Justify last wore the China silks after his second victory at Santa Anita Park in California, according to WDRB. The horse has an impressive pedigree - he is descended from previous Triple Crown-winners Seattle Slew (1977) and Secretariat (1973).  
Walden bantered with China Horse Club President Teo Ah Khing about whether he was sure he wanted to change the silks before the Triple Crown's last leg.  
"I did joke with Teo after the Preakness, asking, 'Are you sure you want to take on this weight of running for the Triple Crown with your silks?'" Walden said. "I was kidding him, because I knew that's exactly what he's looking for," WDRB reported.  
"One of the things he's passionate about is bringing horse racing to China and China to mainstream horse racing. So he knows the silks are a branding opportunity for him. It couldn't have worked out any better. It's just a rotation that just happened."  
China Horse Club has about 200 members, each of whom paid a required $1 million entry fee, The New York Times reported last month.  
Teo, who attended Harvard University, is an architect from Malaysia who is building a thoroughbred facility in St. Lucia. He was introduced to thoroughbred racing when he designed the Meydan Racecourse in Dubai, United Arab Emirates, for Sheikh Mohammed bin Rashid Al Maktoum, the Times' feature said.  
Walden said Justify's illustrious trainer Bob Baffert, who is normally superstitious, didn't comment on the change in silks, according to WDRB.  
Walden said he was "excited to see him run in the China Horse Club silks. I think China is going to be watching, and if China is watching, who knows what could happen for horse racing?"

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