



Rafael Bejarano

Born: June 23, 1982 in Arequipa, Peru.
Resident: Louisville, Ky.
Family: Single.

Rafael Bejarano's record at Keeneland

Total wins: 135
Stakes Wins (13)

- Ranked fourth by earnings in 2005 with \$14.4 million and 10th by victories with 263.
- Scored his first Breeders' Cup victory in 2005 with Intercontinental (GB) in the Filly & Mare Turf.
- Won the 1,000th race of his career on Oct. 14, 2005, at Keeneland aboard Northern Vacation.
- Won 2006 riding title at Keeneland's spring meet (in a tie) and the 2005 Keeneland fall and Churchill spring and fall meets.
- Led the nation by wins in 2004 with 455; ranked eighth by earnings with \$12.2 million.
- Eclipse Award finalist for leading jockey in 2004.
- Won riding titles at all five Kentucky tracks in '04—Keeneland (fall), Churchill Downs (spring), Ellis Park for the second consecutive year, Kentucky Downs and Turfway (winter-spring and fall meets).
- Also leading rider at Turfway's 2003 fall and holiday meets.
- Won his first Grade 1 race—the Stephen Foster—with Colonial Colony at Churchill in June 2004.
- Won six stakes at Keeneland in fall of 2004, including the Lane's End Breeders' Futurity and the Darley Alcibiades.
- Honored by the Kentucky Thoroughbred Media as leading jockey in Kentucky in 2003 and 2004.

Rafael Bejarano wrapped up 2006 with 275 victories and a 10th-place ranking by earnings with \$12,369,078. He escorted more than 20 horses into the winner's circle after stakes victories, including the Gulfstream Park Handicap (G1) with Einstein (Brz) and Grade 2 wins with Oonah Maccool (Ire), Mister Fotis, Silent Name (Jpn), Sunriver and Precious Kitten. He tied with Julien Lejaroux for leading rider at Keeneland's spring meet.

Bejarano, who turns 25 this June, is following in the footsteps of fellow Peruvian riders Jorge Chavez and Edgar Prado. The former won the Eclipse Award for top jockey in 1999 and Prado has been a finalist for the award the last five years.

After reigning as the nation's leading rider in 2004, with 455 victories, and being a finalist for the Eclipse Award for leading rider, Bejarano's mounts earned \$14.4 million in 2005 to rank fourth and won 263 races to rank 10th. He won his first Breeders' Cup race on Intercontinental, had his first Kentucky Derby mount (Andromeda's Hero), won his 1,000th race and added three more riding crowns.

"Wow! It's come up so quickly," Bejarano said of his 1,000th win. "I still remember riding my first winner not too long ago. I hope I can ride for another 40 years and maybe be able to catch Laffit (Pincay, the former record holder with 9,531 victories who has since been passed by Russell Baze). I am really happy."

He also won Grade 1 races with Forest Danger (Carter), Host (Chi) (Shadwell Turf Mile) and Sweet Talker (Queen Elizabeth II Challenge Cup). Other graded victories came at Aqueduct, Calder, Churchill, Delaware

Park, Kentucky Downs, Philadelphia Park, Pimlico, Santa Anita and Turfway.

In 2004, he finished in the Top 10 in earnings with \$12,210,087 and won titles at Keeneland, Churchill, and the other three Kentucky racetracks. He won 30 stakes races at 10 tracks for 15 different trainers, including the first Grade 1 races of his career—the Stephen Foster Handicap on Colonial Colony and the Breeders' Futurity with Consolidator. He won five other stakes at Keeneland, including the Alcibiades (G2) with Runway Model and the Phoenix Breeders' Cup (G3) with Champali.

When he was 17, he traveled with his father from Arequipa to Lima in search of work. From an encounter with someone his size who was a jockey, he concluded that he might be able to ride, too. To earn the money he needed to enlist in the jockey school and to buy boots and a safety vest, he started grooming horses. So he enrolled in the Jockey School of Peru's two-year program and graduated as the top apprentice. It was the same school from which Edgar Prado had gotten his start.

He began winning races immediately and was soon encouraged by Dante Zanelli, Sr., a leading trainer in Peru, to come to the United States. He started out with Zanelli's son, Dante, Jr., who had set up a stable at The Thoroughbred Center in Lexington. Bejarano won his first race in the U.S. on July 10, 2002, at River Downs aboard John Bobby.

"I was so impressed with him early on," said River Downs publicity director John Engelhardt, "that I got him to autograph the program when he broke his maiden here."

Fellow apprentice John McKee was busy breaking Steve Cauthen's record for victories

during a single season at River Downs, but Bejarano also attracted attention by winning eight races from 40 mounts.

Zanelli's grandfather trained numerous Peruvian champions and four Triple Crown winners and is credited with helping Jorge Chavez early in his career. His father continued the tradition and helped Edgar Prado get started.

Before the end of the year, Bejarano had won 65 races and his mounts had earned more than \$720,000.

Bejarano was on a roll in Kentucky beginning in the summer of 2003, taking the Ellis Park riding crown with a 33-win margin.

"I would like to be as good as my hero, Edgar Prado," Bejarano said during the Ellis meet that summer. "I ride them all with the same effort, whether they are 50-1 or even money. I have to win as many races as possible to get into Edgar's position and be thought of by horsemen and fans like he is.

"It's a lot tougher here than last year at Hoosier Park and River Downs when I was an apprentice. But you have to keep moving to keep improving. You learn every day. I practice doing different things with horses and bettering my English every day. But mostly my riding. That counts with people the most. Winning is the most important thing."

Bejarano won 11 stakes races for nine different trainers. He also won Turfway's fall and holiday crowns, setting a record during the latter meet with 46 wins from 137 mounts for a win percentage of 33 and an in-the-money percent of 67. His first graded stakes victory came in the Kentucky Cup Juvenile Stakes (G3) at Turfway aboard Mr. Jester. The win came via the disqualification of Pomeroy.

For the year, his mounts triumphed in 260 races and earned \$4,912,559. He won one more race that year than Prado.

Bejarano's former agent, Steve Elzey, said in the fall of 2003: "I believe he'll be a Top 10 rider in the country next year, no doubt. He's an outstanding person. He's the whole package. He's built a home with a pool and bought a new car for his family back home. They were living in a one-room house before that.

"He's about the most talented young rider I've ever seen."

Though Elzey was replaced as agent by Joaquin "Joe" Ferrer in the fall of 2004, Bejarano made Elzey a prophet.

"He's a great kid to work with," Ferrer said. "He's very talented and very ambitious. He's an agent's dream. He wants to work in the mornings. All the trainers and all the owners like him. He rides a very aggressive race and a very smart race. He wins over all the trainers with his talent and his personality. I want to try to do what's best for him and try to keep him on top."

