



Carl Nafzger

Born: Aug. 29, 1941 in Plainview, Texas

Resident: Olton, Texas

Family: Wanda (wife).

Carl Nafzger's record at Keeneland

Total wins: 154

Stakes Wins (19)

- Won the 1990 Eclipse Award as the country's leading trainer.
- Trainer of three Eclipse Award winners—1990 champion 3-year-old colt Unbridled, 1998 champion 3-year-old filly Banshee Breeze and 2006 champion 2-year-old colt Street Sense.
- Won the 1990 Kentucky Derby and Breeders' Cup Classic with Unbridled.
- Won his second Breeders' Cup race last year with Street Sense in the Juvenile.
- Tied for leading trainer at Keeneland at the 1994 fall meeting.
- Won the Three Chimneys Spinster (G1) in 1998 with Banshee Breeze.
- Won Queen Elizabeth II Challenge Cup (G2) in 1989 with Coolawin.
- Won the Coolmore Lexington Stakes (G2) with Unshaded in 2000 and Home At Last in 1990.
- Won the 2002 Walmac Int'l Alcibiades Stakes (G2) with Westerly Breeze
- Finished 1-2 in two Grade 1 stakes in 1990—the Secretariat Stakes with Super Abound and Unbridled and the Super Derby with Home At Last and Unbridled.
- Tied with Woody Stephens and Neil Howard for fourth by stakes wins at Keeneland with 19 and ranks sixth in wins with 154.

Carl Nafzger, who has developed Eclipse Award winners Unbridled, Banshee Breeze and Street Sense, recalls his first visit to Keeneland in 1966 while traveling on the rodeo circuit from Raleigh, N.C., to San Francisco. "I said, 'Someday I'll race here,' and at that time the comment was made to me, 'They won't even let you in the grandstand, Nafzger.' In 1976, exactly 10 years later, we raced there, and I haven't missed a meet since I started."

Nafzger is tied for fourth at Keeneland for stakes victories with 19. Fairway Phantom provided him with his first in the 1980 Breeders' Futurity. Since then, they have included the Spinster with Banshee Breeze and the Queen Elizabeth II Challenge Cup with Coolawin.

Nafzger announced in late November of 2005 that he was turning over the day-to-day operation of his stable to assistant Ian Wilkes while he concentrates on the business aspects.

He told *Daily Racing Form's* Marty McGee that it "basically is the way we've operated the last 18 months or so anyway." He added that he was "not retiring from the business by any means—only changing titles. Ian deserves to be recognized for what he does."

The transfer to Wilkes' name took effect Jan. 1, 2006, though Nafzger retained a few horses, including Eclipse winner Street Sense and Lady Joanne, to train for long-time clients. Wilkes, 41, was born in Australia and was Unbridled's exercise rider. (Wilkes won the Amsterdam [G2] with Court Folly last year.)

Nafzger grew up on a farm near Olton, Texas, and from an early age was fascinated by the bulls his father raised. It led him to the rodeo and he went to the national rodeo finals three times (1963, 1964 and 1965). In 1963, he was ranked third in the world in bull riding.

"I had quite a bit of success on the tour during the late 60s," he said. "It was quite a grind. I traveled about 80,000 miles a year and

worked about 10 months a year, day and night. I loved the rodeo, but it just gets to a point where you can't do it anymore. Just like a jockey can only ride so long before he must stop. I grew up around livestock, so it was a natural instinct to be around horses. When I left rodeo riding, I wanted my next career to continue to be an asset as I grew older, not something I would have to stop doing because of age."

He obtained his first Thoroughbred trainer's license in 1968, the same year that he and his wife Wanda were married in Cheyenne, Wyoming. Wanda grew up on a sheep ranch in South Dakota and was a special education teacher when she met Nafzger as he came through South Dakota rodeoing.

When he first started with Thoroughbreds, he and Wanda "did all our own work," Nafzger recalled. "We groomed our own and I exercised and shod my own racehorses. We bought our first Thoroughbreds at Keeneland's 1970 September Sale. We pooled all of our money—Wanda and I, my Dad and my brothers. Wanda had a teacher savings account—we drew it out, we put our money together, we spent it all at Keeneland—\$8,000. Bought two head—one for \$5,000 and one for \$3,000. We did good with them. In some capacity or other, we've purchased yearlings at Keeneland since 1970."

Equine.com credits him with the first of his 71 stakes winners in 1978, when Nalees Miss won the Myrtlewood Stakes at Louisiana Downs.

Nafzger credits former Tartan Stable president and trainer John Nerud for giving him a big boost. "John Nerud did three great things for me," he said. "He put good horses in my barn, he gave me confidence to stick to my own theories and he kept owners off my back until I could prove that I could train horses."

He also said that Nerud "taught me right off the bat, to keep my horses fat and happy and then work them a half-mile and they'll win races for you. And to keep the horses in the best company possible."

He is best-known for his handling of champion Unbridled. Who can forget his touching commentary to the late Frances Genter during Unbridled's victorious charge down the stretch in the 1990 Kentucky Derby?

Unbridled also won the Breeders' Cup Classic that year en route to an Eclipse Award as champion 3-year-old, and Nafzger earned his own Eclipse that year for outstanding trainer.

In 1998, a daughter of Unbridled, Banshee Breeze, became his second champion. After winning the Coaching Club American Oaks and Alabama Stakes, she won the Spinster.

Other top horses he's trained over the years include Unshaded, Vicar, Solvig, Coolawin, Smile, Til Forbid, Jeano, Star Choice, Binalong, Alannan, My Boston Gal and Belterra.

Nafzger won three graded races at Churchill Downs in 2003, including the Churchill Downs Distaff (G2) and Falls City handicaps (G2), both with Lead Story. In the Falls City, Nafzger also saddled runner-up Mayo On the Side, and his charges combined for a \$219,200 exacta.

In 2004, he won the Humana Distaff Handicap (G1) with Mayo On the Side, the Louisville Breeders' Cup Handicap (G2) with Lead Story and the Bonnie Miss (G2) with Last Song. He also won the Politely Stakes at Pimlico with Two Punch Gal. The following year, Eurosilver won the Skip Away Handicap (G3) and the stable won 42 other races for earnings of \$2,244,281.

Last season, his trainees won 16 of 101 starts for earnings of \$1,811,880. In addition Street Sense's win in the Breeders' Cup, he also saddled Lady Joanne to win the Golden Rod (G2).

Between 1976 and Jan. 9, 2007, Nafzger was credited with 1,037 wins and earnings of \$45,787,852.

Nafzger, who wrote "Traits of a Winner: The Formula for Developing Thoroughbred Racehorses," told *Daily Racing Form*: "Wanda's as much a part of this stable as I am. This has always been a Carl and Wanda operation, and it's teamwork."

He said the stable's goal "is to do the best you can do, and God will do the rest."

"My biggest achievement is collecting good people around me—great owners, great grooms, great assistants. Everybody knows I'm lazy, so you've got to get good people around you. Our organization is close. We've been together for years, the grooms five, six, seven years. At the 1990 Eclipse Awards Dinner, I said, 'Wanda and I enjoy watching people and horses develop to their fullest.' And by that I mean owners and everybody who are still developing and achieving."

