



## Harvey L. Vanier

**Born:** April 21, 1924 in Diller, Neb.

**Resident:** Waterloo, Ill.

**Family:** Nancy (wife), Lyda Williamson and Jennifer Allen (daughters).

**Harvey Vanier's record at Keeneland**

**Total wins: 143**

**Stakes Wins (7)**

- Two-time winner of the Blue Grass Stakes—in 1983 with Play Fellow and 1989 with Western Playboy.
- Leading trainer at the 1987 Keeneland spring meet.
- Leading trainer at Arlington 1987, 1989, and 1993-1997.
- Tied for third in the Hawthorne 2002 spring standings.
- Finished fourth in the Arlington 2000 standings while his wife, Nancy, finished seventh in the owners' standings.
- Trainer of Architect, who won 10 straight races in 1979.
- Tied for eighth in career wins at Keeneland with 143.

"The horses are the players and without the players there is no team," veteran trainer Harvey Vanier told Neil Milbert in 1994 after winning his fourth Arlington Park training title. "Good horses are what you need to win races. I've been fortunate in that I've had nice horses for nice clients."

Over the years, his "nice horses" have included Play Fellow, Western Playboy, Safe Play, Blue Buckaroo, Architect, Admiral's Shield, Storm on the Loose, Kodiack, Bungalow, Lt. Pinkerton, Southern Playgirl and Iron Courage. In 2000, his stakes winners included Wade for Me, winner of the Modesty Handicap (G3) at Arlington. In 2004, he had promising 2-year-old Straight Line, who won the Iroquois Stakes (G3) and the Honest Pleasure Stakes, in his barn.

The colt, a \$15,000 yearling purchase at the 2003 Keeneland September Sale, was owned jointly by Harvey's wife, Nancy, and Cartwright Thoroughbreds.

"We're very excited about him," Vanier's daughter, Jennifer Allen, who serves as assistant trainer on the road, said early in 2005. "We know he likes the Churchill Downs racing surface. Jockey Brice Blanc, who's ridden him, is very positive about him and thinks he's the real thing. We're holding our breath right now."

In 2005, Straight Line did win the Ack Ack Handicap (G3) at Churchill Downs and last year he won the Holiday Cheer Stakes on Dec. 30.

After Gulfstream, the stable moves to Keeneland and then on to Arlington. Brian Williamson, married to Vanier's other daughter, Lyda, also keeps a string of horses at Hawthorne racing under his name. In 2004, Win Me Over won the Jim Edgar Illinois Futurity at Hawthorne in mid-December. Bred by the Vaniers, the colt raced in Nancy's name and was trained by Williamson. Homebred Tally Up won two stakes for Williamson last year.

Harvey Vanier initially thought about becoming a jockey. "At 12 years old, I was riding horses at those little Fourth of July

events and fair meetings," he said. "At 15, I rode at recognized tracks, pari-mutuel betting and all. That was Beatrice, Nebraska, and Lincoln, Nebraska. At 15 and 16, I could do 102 or 103 pounds with my tack. I rode with some good riders. Dave Erb and I had the bug together. At 17, I graduated from high school, and I didn't realize that over the winter I was up to 125. And I never could get it down, really. I was a bad reducer. My family moved from Fairbury, Nebraska, to Hopkins, Missouri, in 1942. I rode around the fairs in northwest Missouri and Iowa then. I couldn't do less than 30 then. There were no weight scales around those places. I rode with some wild riders, then, old ruled-off riders. It was rough riding."

His father, Lawrence Vanier, had a few horses in those days. "He was a horse buyer and trader and dealer. He trained, just for a couple of years around the Nebraska circuit there a little bit. And he loved it, but he was a farmer and we had farming to do. He came to realize he just couldn't do both—be into traveling and training racehorses and handle the farm, too. He sorta gave it up, especially when I got a little older. I'm the one that went on away to the track with the horses."

He recalls that he had his first license in 1942 at the now-defunct Ak-Sar-Ben in Nebraska. After a three-year stint in the infantry during World War II, Vanier returned to horse training with a couple of hard-knocking full brothers—Ten Forty and Rapid Jim. Both were bred and raced by Vanier's parents. They combined to earn \$67,875.

He refers to Play Fellow as both the best and most challenging horse he's trained. The son of On the Sly won nine of 22 starts and earned \$711,253. His six stakes victories included the 1983 Blue Grass Stakes (G1), Travers (G1), Arlington Classic (G1) and American Derby (G1).

Up until then, Architect had been the best horse Vanier had trained. Vanier and his wife of more than 45 years, Nancy, bred the winner of 13 of 24 career starts.

"He was a classy horse and a good race-horse," Vanier said. "He had a little stifle problem most of his racing career that hindered his best racing form sometimes."

His stakes victories included the 1979 Fayette and 1980 Ben Ali handicaps, both Grade 3 races.

Play Fellow's son Western Playboy was another top horse for Vanier. Winner of the 1989 Blue Grass (G1), he also won the Jim Beam Stakes (G2) and the Pennsylvania Derby (G2).

His first Derby starter was Admiral's Shield with whom he won the 1970 Derby Trial. "He could make up a lot of ground," Vanier said of him.

His first Grade 1 victory came in 1982 with Safe Play when she captured the La Canada Stakes at Santa Anita.

The highlights of his training career have been winning the Travers at Saratoga with Play Fellow and winning the Blue Grass twice "because it's in Kentucky and everybody that we know that's horsey is here," Nancy Vanier said. Harvey added that his training titles at Arlington are also something of which he's quite proud.

The Vaniers met in the late 1950s at a Keeneland summer sale. They were married on the second Saturday in May in 1960. "We couldn't have it Derby weekend," laughed Nancy Vanier.

Nancy comes to the track every day, she said, though a bit later than Harvey. Their daughter Lyda gallops horses in the summers and also keeps the books.

"We'd better be a team," Harvey Vanier said. "We're married."

Asked what keeps them going, Harvey quipped: "Arguing between each other."

They bought Fairberry Farm near Waterloo, Ill., the year they were married and added Rightaway Farm near Versailles, Ky., in the fall of 1982. Their broodmares produce about 25 foals a year, most of which are born in Illinois though a few are foaled in Kentucky. The mares are bred in Kentucky.

"We bring the mares here (to Rightaway) after they foal in Illinois," Nancy Vanier explained. Harvey added: "Sometimes we leave a couple here to foal so they'll be Kentucky-breds." The foals they don't sell they keep to race in Nancy's name.

Western Playboy has been pensioned but four other stallions currently stand at stud at Fairberry Farm.

Vanier firmly believes in giving young horses plenty of time. "I used to see Ben Jones give those young horses so much time," he said. "Ben was my friend and he was also my idol. Ben was just great. I've been around many good horsemen, but he was one of the best."

Through 2006, Vanier had won 1,987 races and his horses had earned \$39,992,838. Through Jan. 9, 2007, Equine-line.com had Vanier with 63 stakes winners.

