



John Velazquez

Born: Nov. 24, 1971 in Carolina, Puerto Rico.

Resident: West Hempstead, N.Y.

Family: Leona (wife), Lerina (daughter) and Michael Patrick (son).

John Velazquez's record at Keeneland:

Total Wins: 61

Stakes Wins: (13)

- Two-time Eclipse Award-winning jockey (2004-2005) and leading money-winning rider (2004-2005).
- Has six Breeders' Cup victories—most recently the Distaff with Ashado and the Sprint on Speightstown, both in 2004.
- Leading rider during Keeneland's 2005 spring meet.
- Won the 2005 Dubai World Cup (G1) on Roses in May.
- Leading rider at Gulfstream Park in 2006.
- Won 2005 Toyota Blue Grass (G1) on Bandini.
- Leading rider at Saratoga in 2003 and 2004.
- Won the 3,000th race of his career at Saratoga on July 29, 2004, aboard Runingforpresident, coinciding with John Velazquez Bobblehead Doll Day at the track.
- Leading rider in New York 2001-2004 (finished second in 2005).
- Set Saratoga record on Sept. 3, 2001, when he won six races, including the Diana aboard Starine (Fr).
- Elected chairman of the Jockeys' Guild last year.

Two-time Eclipse Award-winning rider John Velazquez was sidelined for about six weeks in 2006 from injuries sustained in a scary accident at Keeneland during the spring meet. He won his first race back, on June 2 at Belmont, but he was relegated to fourth place in the national standings with \$15,562,754 with a winning percentage of 23.

He still won nine Grade 1 races, aboard English Channel (United Nations Handicap and Joe Hirsch Turf Classic), Bluegrass Cat (Haskell Invitational), Henny Hughes (King's Bishop and Vosburgh), Pomeroy (Forego), Pool Land (Ruffian), Honey Ryder (Flower Bowl Invitational) and Scat Daddy (Champagne). He also won more than 15 other graded races, the majority of which were for Todd Pletcher's powerful stable. They included the Futurity (G2) on King of the Roxy, the Delaware Oaks (G2) with Adieu, the Gulfstream Park Handicap (G2) on Harlington, the Meadowlands Breeders' Cup (G2) with Master Command and the Kentucky Jockey Club Stakes (G2) on Tiz Wonderful. Pletcher trained all but Tiz Wonderful, who was saddled by Scott Blasi.

He was the leading rider at Gulfstream Park during the year and was elected chairman of the Jockeys' Guild.

Velazquez hit the top in 2004, winning his first Eclipse Award and ranking as North America's leading money-winning rider, feats he repeated in 2005. In 2004, his mounts earned \$22.2 million and nearly \$20.8 million in 2005. The 250 races he won in '05 enabled him to rank 11th while posting a winning percentage of 22. He was the only rider with mounts in all eight '05 Breeders' Cup races.

Velazquez won 44 graded stakes during 2005, 30 with Pletcher-trained horses. He won nine Grade 1 races in North America,

including the Blue Grass on Bandini and the Travers on Flower Alley.

(His victory aboard Roses in May in the Dubai World Cup with its winner's purse of \$3.6 million is included in the Equibase list that includes selected international races.)

"I think Johnny's improving each year, because the older you get the better you get as a rider," said his agent, Hall of Fame rider Angel Cordero, Jr. in *The Blood-Horse*. "The last two or three years, he's been very fortunate to be able to ride the caliber of horses he has."

After accepting his first Eclipse Award, Velazquez said of Cordero: "He's been everything to me since I came to this country."

His other Grade 1 wins in 2005 were: the Ballerina with Happy Ticket; the Go For Wand, Ogden Phipps and Beldame on Ashado; the Diana with Sand Springs; the Frizette aboard Adieu; and the Garden City Breeders' Cup on Luas Line (Ire).

Velazquez won stakes on 46 different horses (excluding Roses in May), who combined to win 65 stakes races including two of Canada's best—the Atto Mile with Leroidesanimaux (Brz) and the E.P. Taylor on Honey Ryder.

Now 35, Velazquez attended the jockey school in Puerto Rico in June of 1988. He began his riding career shortly thereafter, scoring his first victory at El Comandante in 1990 aboard Rodas. He relocated to New York in March of 1990 under Cordero's guidance. Cordero has been his agent since 1998.

He won the first two Grade 1 races of his career in 1995—the Turf Classic aboard Turk Passer on Oct. 7 and the Queen Elizabeth II Challenge Cup on Perfect Arc on Oct. 21.

The following spring, he won his first riding title, at Aqueduct, and was the regular rider of Yanks Music, champion 3-year-old

filly of 1996, who was trained by his father-in-law Leo O'Brien.

Velazquez scored his first Breeders' Cup victory in the 1998 Mile aboard Da Hoss and also won the Futurity aboard Lemon Drop Kid that year.

Da Hoss, who had won the 1996 Mile, had missed all of 1997 and had only had one prep race prior to the 1998 running at Churchill Downs. Sent off at 11.60-1, Velazquez reserved him in sixth for a half-mile and the pair "surged to the front in mid-stretch, dug in when headed a sixteenth out and prevailed in a stiff drive," according to the race chart, to win by a head.

He added his second Breeders' Cup victory in the Juvenile Fillies aboard 47-1 shot Caressing in 2000.

At Saratoga the following summer, he won a record six races on Sept. 3, including the Diana Handicap with Starine, and won five races on Aug. 5. At Aqueduct on Nov. 24, Velazquez won four races, including the Cigar Mile with Left Bank, the Remsen with Saarland and the Demoiselle with Smok'n Frolic.

In 2002, he added two more Breeders' Cup victories—another Juvenile Fillies, with odds-on favorite Storm Flag Flying, and the Filly & Mare Turf with Starine, who was 13.20-1.

In 2004, Velazquez again won two Breeders' Cup races—the Distaff with Ashado and the Sprint aboard Speightstown. As a result, he was voted the Bill Shoemaker Award for top performance by a jockey on Breeders' Cup Day.

By year-end, he had amassed 335 victories for a winning percentage of 25 and his mounts had earned \$22,250,261. He had won 40 graded stakes during the year, 23 of which were on Pletcher trainees, including the Kentucky Oaks with Ashado. In addition to Ashado and Speightstown, he also won Grade 1 races aboard Kitten's Joy, Storm Flag Flying, Sightseek and Commercante.

He reached the 3,000-victory milestone on July 29, 2004, at Saratoga aboard Runingforpresident. He also won all four New York track titles in 2003 and 2004 and was the leading rider in New York for four straight years, through 2004. He has finished among the top 10 riders on the New York Racing Association circuit every year since 1991.

Velazquez, who also has topped the riders' standings at Gulfstream Park, three times at Saratoga and numerous times at Aqueduct and Belmont, was the leading rider at Keeneland for the first time in the spring of 2005 as Pletcher was the leading trainer. He won the first of his 13 Keeneland stakes in 1994 and had won two earlier Grade 1 events prior to the 2005 Blue Grass—the 1995 QEII on Perfect Arc and the 2001 Ashland with Fleet Renee.

Though his resume still lacks a Triple Crown victory, accomplishing that doesn't figure to be too far off as long as he and Pletcher continue clicking.