



Hal Wiggins

Born: Nov. 30, 1942 in Port Arthur, Texas.

Resident: Louisville, Ky.

Family: Renee (wife), Lon and Whitney (sons).

Hal Wiggins' record at Keeneland

Total Wins: 28

Stakes Wins: (3)

- Leading trainer at Keeneland in the fall of 1998.
- Tied for leading trainer at the 2000 Kentucky Downs meet.
- Won the Indiana Derby (G2) in a deadheat in 2006 with Cielo Gold.
- Finished in a tie for fifth during the 2002 Keeneland fall meeting.

After graduating from high school, Hal Wiggins promised his parents he would enroll at Texas A&M University and earn a degree. He was forestalling the inevitable.

He had first learned about racehorses from his father, Don, and his grandfather, both of whom owned horses that competed in match races at bush tracks throughout Texas and Louisiana.

Then, when he was 14, he went to live with and work for trainer W.A. "Ab" Simpson in New Mexico. Simpson was the leading trainer at Ruidoso in 1957 and 1958. The track conducted racing for Quarter Horses and Thoroughbreds.

"I got the chance to go out there and stay with he and his wife and work for them at the track," Wiggins recalled. "It was a mixed meet and I got to work around all kinds of horses. It was a great experience. I learned a lot and I was with the leading trainer. I knew early on that this is what I really wanted to do. My mother wasn't so convinced, but I was.

"My mom held me to that promise," he said. "I'd go to the library and read the race results in the New York Times and the New Orleans paper. But it was a good experience, getting a degree. No one can take it away."

While working as a tax accountant, he would van horses to Delta Downs to run at night. By the mid-1970s, he left his "day job" and pursued his dream—training racehorses. "I knew it was what I wanted to do. I knew it was what was going to make me happy."

He started at Delta Downs and Evangeline Downs in Louisiana with Thoroughbreds and Quarter Horses and made the transition to Thoroughbreds only by 1980.

For about 20 years, Wiggins banged around the Southwest. He had horses in Louisiana and Arkansas and when racing was expanded to Texas and Oklahoma, he traveled there as well.

On occasion, he would make a trip to Kentucky, but it was only to visit and buy horses.

"From Louisiana every September, I'd come to the Keeneland September sale," he said. "I'd always think 'Everyone in the business needs to be in Kentucky.' I'd kind of be isolated in Louisiana. You couldn't really haul your horses around.

"I'd buy some horses for clients and we would take them home to run in Louisiana and Arkansas. Every time we went back home, my wife (Renee) and I would talk about Kentucky."

They decided to move to Kentucky in 1993. "We wanted to move up," Wiggins explained. "I just decided that if I was ever going to make a run at it, it was time to move to where the action is.

"I'd been in Louisiana, Oklahoma, Arkansas for a long time and I left a lot of good clients down there. But I really didn't have any choice. I had a couple of very good friends that were some of my best clients and they wanted to race in Kentucky. The purses had gotten so good up here."

One of them was Dolph Morrison, on whose behalf Wiggins purchased Morris Code for \$23,000 at the 1993 September Sale. "She went on to win over \$700,000 and we had a lot of fun together," he said. "And there was Thomas Mueller from Ft. Smith, Arkansas. I had horses for him for a long time, but he wanted to keep his horses up here. He told me that if I would move up to Churchill and get stalls to give him a call.

"These guys had been so good to me; I knew I had to give it a shot."

It takes a good horse to get a trainer noticed. Yukon Robbery was another one, winning three consecutive runnings of the Fair Grounds Breeders' Cup Handicap, beginning in 1993, and other stakes.

"Those two horses—Yukon Robbery and Morris Code—did a lot for me. I think people took notice and some knew that we could train a good horse. They were special horses that loved to run. I've been very fortunate to have the good fortune to be around good owners who have had some good horses. They make you look awfully good."

He considers Morris Code and Chorwon to be the best horses he's trained to date and his favorites. Multiple stakes winner Chorwon was bred and raced by Mueller.

Another horse he had a lot of success with was Leo's Gypsy Dancer, a \$20,000 purchase for Purse Strings Farm, a syndicate of 17 women.

"They are a really good group of ladies, and they are having a whole lot of fun," he said while the filly was still racing. "The winner's circle is complete chaos. They've learned a lot. Most of them had never been in the business. I think that's good for racing." Leo's Gypsy Dancer earned more than \$400,000 and was then sold for \$280,000 at Keeneland.

The syndicate was assembled by Ginger Ray, a real estate agent who helped Wiggins and his wife find their house in Louisville.

His wife, Renee, is "a computer whiz," he said. She and Hal's sister, Sandy Wiggins, run the office. One of his two sons, Lon, formerly was his assistant before going out on his own. Lon's wife, Robin, helps him in the barn and served as his assistant at Oaklawn Park.

"I probably would have chosen a different profession for Lon," he said. "I can't gripe, though. The training profession has been very good to us. We've met really nice people. It is very hard work, demanding and time-consuming, but it has its rewards."

Wiggins keeps an average of about 25 horses in training for clients such as Dolph Morrison and Janelle Grum.

Winning the Keeneland title "was nice recognition," Wiggins said. "It really helped the stable."

In 2002, he won the Hopemont Stakes with Rapid Proof and the Kentucky Cup Mile Stakes at Kentucky Downs with Jake the Flake. In 2003, he saddled Brown Eyed Beauty to win the Spring Fever Stakes at Oaklawn and Kyler's Midge to win the Gardenia Stakes at Delta Downs. During 2004, he saddled Lotta Kim to win the Tiffany Lass Stakes at Fair Grounds. "She was injured and retired," he said. "She was really a nice filly."

He won 2005 stakes with Rapid Proof, who captured both the Mervin Muniz Jr. Memorial Handicap (G2) and the John B. Connally Breeders' Cup Turf Handicap; Singit won the Excitable Lady Handicap, Brassie Prince the Razorback Futurity and Diboll Dilly the Instant Racing Breeders' Cup Stakes. Last year, Dash of Humor won three stakes, Cielo Gold won the Indiana Derby and Swingit won the JPMorgan Chase Jessamine Stakes at Keeneland.

Equineline.com had him with 27 stakes winners, 817 wins and earnings of \$17,893,952 from 1976 through Jan. 9, 2007.

Like most trainers, he'd like to have a big horse that would take him to the Triple Crown races and the Breeders' Cup. "We'd like to do that," he said.

Part of his wish has come true with Breeders' Cup starters Morris Code (1994 Juvenile Fillies) and Chorwon (2001 Turf).