



Nicholas P. Zito

Born: Feb. 6, 1948 in New York, N.Y.

Resident: Elmont, N.Y.

Family: Kim (wife), Alexander (son), Sara (daughter).

Nick Zito's record at Keeneland

Total wins: 124

Stakes Wins (16)

- Inducted into the Racing Hall of Fame in 2005.
- Two-time winner of the Kentucky Derby—in 1991 with Strike the Gold and in 1994 with Go for Gin.
- Developed champion 3-year-old filly Bird Town in 2003 and 2-year-old filly Storm Song, who won the 1996 Breeders' Cup Juvenile Fillies.
- Won the 2004 Belmont Stakes with Birdstone.
- Three-time winner of the Toyota Blue Grass Stakes—1991, Strike the Gold; 1998, Halory Hunter; and 2004, The Cliff's Edge.
- Captured the American Championship Racing Series in 1992 with Strike the Gold.
- Leading trainer at Keeneland four times—spring of 1997, and fall of 2003, 2004 (in a tie) and 2005; ranks ninth by stakes wins with 16.
- Snapped D. Wayne Lukas' streak of six straight Triple Crown victories when he saddled Louis Quatorze to win the 1996 Preakness Stakes.
- Voted the Mr. Fitz Award by the National Turf Writers last year.
- Subject of a bobblehead doll giveaway at Churchill Downs (fall of 2002).

For all of his accomplishments, trainer Nick Zito was inducted into the National Museum of Racing's Hall of Fame last August. During the ceremony, he referred to himself as "the luckiest fan alive."

Last year, his stable won 71 races and earned \$4,298,811 to rank 20th. Highlights were provided by Wanderin Boy, winner of the Brooklyn Breeders' Cup (G2) and Ben Ali (G3); Sun King, who won the Commonwealth Breeders' Cup (G2); Hesanoldsalt, winner of the Fred W. Hooper (G3); and Commentator, who won the Mugate Stakes at Belmont. He now ranks ninth in all-time stakes victories at Keeneland with 16.

The year before, his stable earned nearly \$8.2 million with Grade 1 victories provided by High Fly (Florida Derby), Bellamy Road (Wood Memorial), Commentator (Whitney) and In the Gold (Gazelle). Other graded stakes were won by Andromeda's Hero, Sun King, Burnish, Sir Shackleton and Wanderin Boy. Zito also won his third straight fall meet title at Keeneland, giving him a total of four, saddled a record five Kentucky Derby starters and was voted the Mr. Fitz Award by the National Turf Writers.

A year earlier, Zito and Birdstone spoiled the Triple Crown bid of Smarty Jones by winning the Belmont. Birdstone later won the Travers Stakes (G1). With The Cliff's Edge, Zito won his third Blue Grass. And with Sir Shackleton, he won the Derby Trial (G3) and West Virginia Derby (G3). His stable earned \$6,967,792 to rank 10th. He also won stakes with Pies Prospect, Gulch Approval, Glorious Miss, Royal Assault, She's a Mugs, Up Like Thunder, Commentator and Broadway View.

Zito first went to the racetrack at age 9 with his father, who once exercised horses for well-known trainer Max Hirsch. When he was 12, he would sneak into the track, and

by 15 he had a job as a hotwalker. After obtaining some experience, he started grooming horses for trainer Buddy Jacobson. After working for Robert P. Lake, he was an assistant trainer for Johnny Campo for four years and then an assistant for LeRoy Jolley before going out on his own.

He won his first race in 1972 with Palais at Liberty Bell.

The horse that helped establish Zito's reputation was Thirty Six Red. He met B. Giles Brophy in the late 1980s, and they bought Thirty Six Red for \$92,000 at the 1988 Keeneland September sale. Zito later said he looked at 400 horses, whittled that number down to 40 and then compiled his top 10. The top horse on that list was Thirty Six Red, who won the 1990 Gotham and Wood Memorial, and ran second in the Belmont and third in the Breeders' Cup Classic.

"Thirty Six Red gave me a lot of confidence, and proved to a lot of people that I had a good eye for horses and could develop them," he told *Daily Racing Form*. "Mr. Brophy then got a couple of partners, William Condren and Joseph Cornacchia, and their partnership gave me Strike the Gold, my first Derby winner.

"I've got what I want, which is to be respected as a trainer who can develop 2-year-olds for the Triple Crown. To me, the Triple Crown is what racing is all about, and the Kentucky Derby is the race in this sport."

Three years later, Zito won the Kentucky Derby again—this time with Go for Gin—and in the process became only the 15th trainer to win the Derby twice.

Zito, who won the Blue Grass Stakes again in 1998 with Halory Hunter, also saddled three horses to second-place finishes—Suave Prospect (1985), Lewis Quatorze (1996) and Acceptable (1997).

Zito had one of the best handicap horses of 2001 in Albert the Great, who won the Suburban (G2), Brooklyn (G2) and Widener (G3) handicaps. The previous year, Albert the Great had been one of the best 3-year-olds, and A P Valentine had been one of the year's best juveniles. Their respective victories in the Jockey Club Gold Cup (G1) and Champagne, both on Oct. 14, made that an exceptionally lucrative day for him.

He was greeted with thunderous applause following the two victories. "This is New York," he told *The Blood-Horse*. "When you're a New Yorker you're always a New Yorker."

It was Zito's third consecutive win in the Champagne, following The Groom Is Red in 1998 and Greenwood Lake in 1999.

The victories removed some of the sting of losing Stephen Got Even and Greenwood Lake to injuries that year. Stephen Got Even won the Donn Handicap (G1) at Gulfstream but injured his ankle, and Greenwood Lake, thought to be Zito's best shot at the Triple Crown, was injured and retired.

A year later, Zito reached a new level in racing as the subject of a bobblehead giveaway at Churchill Downs to the first 10,000 patrons. He was depicted in a navy jacket, khaki slacks and a navy cap bearing the familiar "FDNY" logo, displaying his solidarity with his native New York.

In 2003, he won the Champagne (G1) with Birdstone, the Lane's End Breeders' Futurity (G2) with Eurosilver, the Kentucky Jockey Club (G2) with The Cliff's Edge, and the Kentucky Oaks (G1) and Acorn (G1) with champion Bird Town. He finished 13th in the national standings with \$5,344,914 in earnings.

Zito has been a regular at Keeneland since Strike the Gold won the Blue Grass in 1991. And he speaks often of his fondness for Kentucky. "This is a special place; there's no doubt about it," he says. "You just feel good when you are in Kentucky. It's horse country, for sure. But it's more than that. I'm just fortunate to get the chance to come here and experience it. When I was growing up, I used to dream about it. I guess you can say I'm living out my dreams now."

He once told *Daily Racing Form*: "I am proof that in America, if you choose to elevate yourself, you can do it. In this game, as in every other part of life, there is prejudice, nepotism and even racism. I came from a home with two hard-working parents, and they taught me that if you are willing to apply yourself to what you want, you can get it. But I'm a street kid. And I'm charming. I was able to get lucky and get people to give me a chance. Thank God, we were able to deliver."

He has delivered by developing such other good horses as Morning Bob, Ride Sally, Mr. Greeley, Star Standard and Suave Prospect.

From 1976 through Jan. 9, 2007, he was credited by Equineline.com with 1,508 wins, earnings of \$77,739,734 and 77 stakes winners.

