

# Racing

Seventy-five years ago, Keeneland's founders set the course for what was to become one of Thoroughbred racing's richest traditions. Their vision was to create two festival-like race meetings each year in the heart of Thoroughbred country — Kentucky's Bluegrass region. The goal, as outlined in the original prospectus, was "to create a model racetrack to perpetuate and improve the sport and to provide a course that is intended to serve as a symbol of the fine traditions of Thoroughbred racing."

Since that first meeting in October 1936, Keeneland's racing program has continued to strive for excellence, ranking among the nation's best in terms of purse distribution (approximately \$600,000 per day), number of starters per race and quality of racing.

Keeneland's stakes schedule is anchored in the spring by the \$750,000 Toyota Blue Grass (G1) and the \$400,000 Central Bank Ashland (G1), and in the fall by the \$600,000 Shadwell Turf Mile (G1) and five other Grade 1 races — the Darley Alcibiades, Juddmonte Spinster, First Lady, Dixiana Breeders' Futurity and Queen Elizabeth II Challenge Cup. Racing at Keeneland affords horsemen outstanding opportunities to showcase two-year-olds, veteran turf stars or contenders for racing's classic events. Over the years, numerous champions have graced Keeneland, and its spring and fall race meetings have served as a springboard to success for many Triple Crown and Breeders' Cup contenders.

Keeneland not only attracts the best horses, but the finest jockeys in the business. Its jockey colony is one of the deepest in the sport, counting such Eclipse Award winners as Julien Leparoux, Garrett Gomez, John Velazquez and Kent Desormeaux among its members. Many legendary jockeys, including Eddie Arcaro, Bill Shoemaker, Angel Cordero Jr., Pat Day, Don Brumfield, Gary Stevens and Jerry Bailey, have ridden at Keeneland.

That Keeneland is such a special place is no accident. It took the grand thinking of Jack Keene, coupled with the shared aspirations of a group of prominent horsemen, most notably Hal Price Headley and Major Louie Beard, and the careful stewardship of subsequent management to fully realize their vision.

With the demise of the Kentucky Association track in 1933, area horsemen faced a dilemma — for the first time in more than 100 years Lexington was without a racetrack. Concerned citizens began meeting in 1934 after determining it wasn't feasible to reopen the shuttered track. From among 20 locations, they selected Jack Keene's property. It was selected first and foremost because Keene was willing to part with the property for much less than its fair market value. Plus, it included a mile and a furlong



## Ben Huffman, Racing Secretary

Ben Huffman brings a wealth of racing experience to his position as Keeneland's Racing Secretary, which he has held since 2002.

A native of Louisville, Huffman attended Western Kentucky University and the University of Louisville. He began working for his father, trainer William G. (Blackie) Huffman, as a teenager and for three years was his assistant. His first job in a racing office was at Ellis Park in 1990 when he worked as the claims clerk. His first job at Keeneland was also as a claims clerk.

Huffman worked as a paddock judge, patrol judge, stakes coordinator and placing judge before becoming co-assistant racing secretary at Saratoga in 1996 and 1997. He became the late Howard Battle's assistant racing secretary at Keeneland in 1994. At 30, Huffman was named racing secretary at Ellis Park. He also has served as assistant racing secretary at Turfway Park. Huffman was stakes coordinator at the Fair Grounds from 2002-2003, and Racing Secretary and Director of Racing from 2003-2006. He was named Racing Secretary and Director of Racing at Churchill Downs in the fall of 2006.

"I had great teachers in Howard Battle, Jerry Botts and Rick Leigh," he said.

private track, combination stone castle and barn, a 100,000-gallon water tank, a roadway and land for future stables and parking.

The facility, while a good start, still required much work to welcome racing's finest. Headley, Beard and others worked feverishly around the clock, and a mere 15 months later, Keeneland opened its gates. It was managed by the Keeneland Association, which consisted of a team of volunteers under the direction of Beard and Headley, Keeneland's first president.

On opening day, more than 8,000 fans came to the races — ranging from locals who simply wanted to see racing in their hometown for the first time in years to titans of business who brought some of their best

bloodstock to compete. By the end of the nine-day meet, Keeneland had scraped by, losing just \$3.47 in its first year. Lexington, a town of 46,000, had supported racing's comeback as the meet posted attendance of 25,337. And even with 15 million Americans out of work, those fans had taken a gamble or two, wagering more than \$500,000.

As Headley said, "We want a place where those who love horses can come and picnic with us and thrill to the sport of the Bluegrass. We are not running a race plant to hear the click of the mutuel machines. We want them to come out here to enjoy God's sunshine, fresh air and to watch horses race."

The late Howard Battle, Keeneland's longtime racing secretary, described the



Keeneland/Coyne

track's appeal this way: "Keeneland should be the national park of racing. The beauty of spring with the clean, clear air and the blooms of the pears, crab apples and dogwoods are excelled only in October by the yellows, golds, ambers, oranges and reds of the same flora. Besides the aesthetic atmosphere and multitudinous contradictions to most racing establishments—tree-lined parking, one-mile-and-a-sixteenth course, two finish lines, facing the sun and being near the horses in their natural setting—we are still the best road to the Kentucky Derby and Oaks and now the Breeders' Cup in the fall."

Early symptoms of Kentucky Derby fever are apparent at Keeneland each spring, as contenders from across the nation compete in the track's signature prep, the Toyota Blue Grass Stakes. Since 1936, 19 horses have used the Blue Grass as a steppingstone to victory in the Derby, most recently Unbridled (1990), Strike the Gold (1991), Sea Hero (1993), Thunder Gulch (1995) and Street Sense (2007).

The Central Bank Ashland Stakes is a premier prep for fillies with Kentucky Oaks (G1) aspirations. Thirty-one fillies have won the Oaks off the Ashland, including such standouts as Silverbulletday, Summerly, Princess Rooney, Blush With Pride, Optimistic Gal and Real Delight. In 2008, Proud Spell rebounded to win the Oaks following a third-place finish in the Ashland, while Ashland winner, Little Belle, ran second. In 2010, Ashland winner Evening Jewel narrowly missed the garland of lilies, losing the Oaks by only a nose to eventual champion Blind Luck.

The fall meeting's stakes have produced 29 Breeders' Cup World Championship winners. Last year, two Breeders' Cup winners prepped at Keeneland in the fall - Dubai Majesty followed her win in the Thoroughbred Club of America (G2) with a victory in the



Keeneland/Coady

Sentient Jet Breeders' Cup Filly & Mare Sprint (G1), while Chamberlain Bridge and Central City, first and second, respectively, in the Breeders' Cup Turf Sprint (G2), last raced in Keeneland's Woodford (G3).

Keeneland counts among other recent fall stakes/Breeders' Cup winners She Be Wild (second in the Darley Alcibiades, won the Breeders' Cup Juvenile Fillies [G1]) and Informed Decision (won the Thoroughbred Club of America [G2] and Breeders' Cup Filly & Mare Sprint [G1]). Forever Together won the First Lady and Breeders' Cup Filly & Mare Turf (G1), following in the footsteps

of Intercontinental (GB) (2005) and Perfect Sting (2000). Street Sense rebounded from a third-place effort in the 2006 Breeders' Cup Futurity (G1) to capture the Breeders' Cup Juvenile (G1) and two-year-old colt honors. Four other colts also have used the Breeders' Futurity as a steppingstone to victory in the Breeders' Cup Juvenile—Tasso (1985), Boston Harbor (1996), Favorite Trick (1997) and Answer Lively (1998).

During this 75th anniversary year, Keeneland's founders would be proud of the continuing tradition of top-class racing they had envisioned.



## Keeneland Rated #1 By Horseplayers Association of North America for Third Year in a Row

For the third straight year, the Horseplayers Association of North America (HANA) has ranked Keeneland first among 67 of the continent's top racetracks in its Track Rating System.

HANA is a grassroots group of horseplayers comprised of more than 2,000 members from nearly every state and Canadian province. The association currently represents more than \$75 million in combined annual handle.

"We are so honored for Keeneland to earn a third consecutive ranking as HANA's top racetrack, especially since we are celebrating our 75th anniversary this year," Keeneland President & CEO Nick Nicholson said. "Our great team at Keeneland strives every day to go the extra mile in delivering quality service to our fans, and I believe that is what sets us apart. I sincerely thank all the wonderful

Keeneland employees for their efforts in achieving this milestone."

"Keeneland delivered horseplayers no takeout rate over 19% on any bet, a field size of over nine horses per race, and an average pool size of over \$700,000 per race. When we added it up, they came out on top once again," said HANA President Jeff Platt.

The HANA Track Ratings are based on an algorithm designed by HANA board member Bill Weaver, a retired engineer. Using studies and empirical data which are directly correlated to horseplayer value and handle growth, namely takeout rate, field size, wager variety, pool size and signal distribution, a composite score is tabulated, and tracks are ranked. The rankings are posted on HANA's web page, [www.horseplayersassociation.org](http://www.horseplayersassociation.org), which allows horseplayers and potential

customers to sort data on the various categories, as a resource.

Keeneland is a leader in deploying technology to enhance the fan experience. Recently, the track introduced a Smartphone-friendly version of its website to provide a variety of helpful information to visitors, bettors and horsemen. Also new for race fans is a self-guided QR Code tour of Keeneland which offers discounts and prizes during the race meetings.

Keeneland's website continues to feature Trakus race video and its popular PolyCapping database, which provides handicappers with detailed information on every horse that has won a race at Keeneland since October 2006. Additionally, Keeneland maintains an active social media presence, engaging fans through Facebook, YouTube, Twitter and Foursquare.