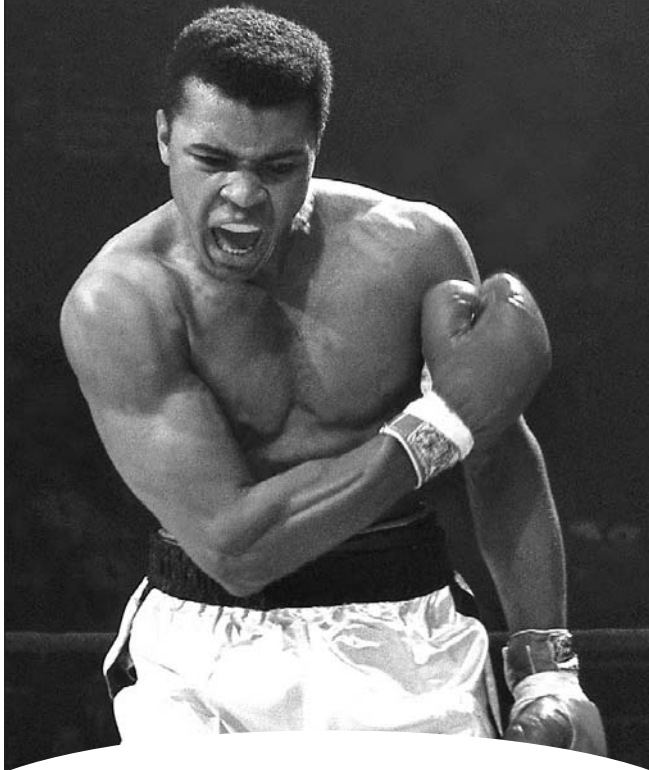


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A place in the big show

Susie Gensing represents Keeneland
in a national handicapping contest

By K.T. Donovan

Susie Gensing's third-place finish in the eighth *Daily Racing Form*/NTRA Handicapping Championship in January might have surprised some people, but Gensing, an airline customer service agent at Lexington's Blue Grass Airport, has been developing her handicapping skills for much of her life.

Gensing's love of racing was nurtured as a child when her father, whose Navy position moved the family around the country, began taking her to nearby race-tracks. Gensing came to Kentucky to stay in 1987 and began handicapping races from area tracks. In 1999, she entered her first handicapping tournament, at Turfway Park, in the second year of the DRF/NTRA National Handicapping Championship. Apparently a quick study, she qualified for the 2001 national tournament.

"I went to Turfway with my fiancé and his brother, and we always play together," said Gensing, 35. "They were so happy for me. I play the tournament better than I do just gambling on the races. I think you can only do one or the other well, at least for me. After that, I played River Downs, Keeneland and Turfway. It's taken me five years to get back there."


With her fiancé, Gensing visits Keeneland nearly every day during the race meets, and she attends simulcast racing at Keeneland four or five times a week during the rest of the year. To make her picks, she studies past performance and breeding information in *Daily Racing Form* and reviews the horses during the post parade.

More than 100,000 people attempted to qualify to the DRF/NTRA Handicapping Championship by participating in tournaments at race-tracks, off-track betting locations, casinos and online. Last July, Gensing qualified by finishing second at Keeneland's contest.

"At the tournament, there are other women handicappers, but what I find is that I have a hard time getting credit for what I pick," Gensing said. "People assume I'm not picking my own, that someone else is telling me what to do. They can't believe that I can do it just as good as anyone else."

Facing 253 other handicappers at the championship event on January 26-27 at Bally's, Las Vegas, Gensing finished second in the opening round and earned \$7,500. After falling to 16th place early on the second day, she rallied to finish third overall and earn another \$75,000. The winner, Stanley Bavlish of Virginia, earned \$400,000.

"My biggest goal was to qualify for Keeneland; that was my dream," said Gensing. "So I didn't care about getting second in the qualifier or in the first round; I was excited that I did it for Keeneland."

Gensing enthusiastically recalls the support from Keeneland's staff and fans and the reception she received upon her return from Las Vegas. "When I got back, everyone congratulated me, and I want to thank Keeneland for making it such a great experience," she said. "I'm going to keep trying to qualify each year. I hope to be the second woman to win the national tournament." 



Keith Chamblin (left) of NTRA and Steven Crist of *Daily Racing Form* recognize Susie Gensing for her handicapping talents.

K.T. Donovan is a freelance writer based in Lexington.