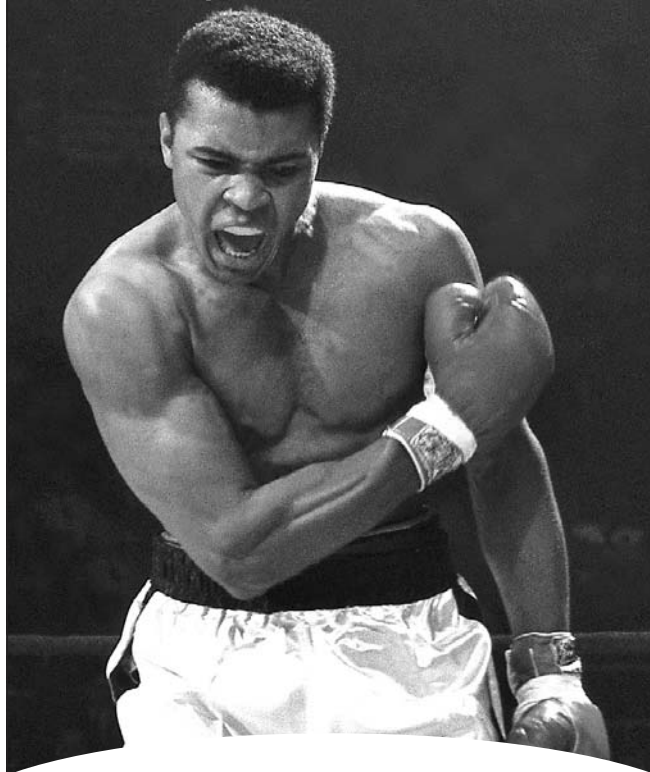


We're always
in your corner.



Whether you're the greatest boxer or the greatest mom, a better tomorrow can be yours when you have the right name in your corner. Fifth Third Bank can show you how all your hard work today can mean more for your tomorrow.

Call 1-859-455-5300 or walk in any of our 20 Central Kentucky Banking Center locations today.



FIFTH THIRD BANK

www.53.com

Fifth Third and Fifth Third Bank are registered service marks of Fifth Third Bancorp. Member FDIC.



Photo by Z

The first four finishers in last year's Lane's End Breeders' Futurity at Keeneland were Great Hunter (black blinkers), Street Sense (inside), Circular Quay (white bridle) and Birdbirdistheword (pink silks).

To prep or not to prep

Keeneland's Polytrack is influencing Derby

By Steve Bailey

After Kentucky Derby Presented by Yum! Brands (G1) hopeful Great Hunter won the Robert B. Lewis Memorial Stakes (G2) on March 3, trainer Doug O'Neill announced where the talented three-year-old Aptitude colt would make his next start.

"From here, we'll probably head to Keeneland because Mr. (owner J. Paul) Reddam really likes that synthetic surface," O'Neill said.

This is the first year that the \$750,000 Toyota Blue Grass Stakes (G1), one of the final stops on the road to the Derby, will be run on Polytrack. And O'Neill is not the only trainer looking forward to prepping his Derby contender on the surface.

Trainer Ken McPeck said he would consider returning Delta Jackpot Stakes winner Birdbirdistheword to Keeneland for the Blue Grass. Last October, the colt finished fourth in the Lane's End Breeders' Futurity (G1) behind winner Great Hunter, eventual champion Street Sense and Circular Quay. Street Sense next won the Breeders' Cup Juvenile (G1) at Churchill Downs over Circular Quay and Great Hunter.

"Polytrack is a great surface to prep and to race over," McPeck said. "To tell you the truth, we actually felt pretty good about (the Lane's End Breeders' Futurity) even though he finished fourth. He was only four lengths back and scoped for a lung infection after the race."

Trainer Rick Violette, who campaigns Whirlaway Stakes winner Summer Doldrums, said the increasing number of tracks converting to artificial surfaces will change the way some trainers choose to prep their horses for the Derby.

"It's going to upset the apple cart for some, no doubt," said Violette. "I mean, how do you evaluate your horse if he does not run well on the Polytrack? Or what if he does run well, how will that transfer back to the dirt?"

"Some horses are going to run off the screen on the Polytrack and not run well in the Derby. It's going to make the evaluation process more difficult."

Difficult or not, more tracks are planning to switch to synthetic surfaces, which could make prepping on dirt more unlikely in the future.

"In five to 10 years, it's not going to be who's going to handle the Polytrack en route to the Derby," Kentucky oddsmaker Mike Battaglia said. "It's going to be who's going to be able to handle the dirt at Churchill Downs when they come off the Polytrack."

Steve Bailey is deputy news editor of *Thoroughbred Times*.