

THE *Exclusive*

2026 COMPLETE
OWNER'S GUIDE



OCTOBER 30–31
LEXINGTON, KENTUCKY

INVESTING IN THE PRESENT TO RAISE THE FUTURE.

Brown Advisory is proud to partner with The Breeders' Cup to present the Brown Advisory Breeders' Cup Juvenile Turf, and to support the global equestrian community and its beneficiaries.



Discover Our Expertise
www.brownadvisory.com



Mischief Magic wins the 2022 running of the Breeders' Cup Juvenile Turf Sprint.

WELCOME TO THE 2026 BREEDERS' CUP WORLD CHAMPIONSHIPS

*A*s the finest Thoroughbreds and their connections from around the globe gather in Kentucky, we are honored to partner with the outstanding team at Keeneland Race Course to host you and your guests for our 43rd running.

At the Breeders' Cup, we recognize the dedication, resilience, and ambition that define our great sport. The journey to compete on this stage represents an extraordinary achievement, and every participant plays a vital role in elevating the World Championships to the highest standard. In recognition of that elite status, our team remains committed to delivering an exceptional experience from the moment you arrive in the heart of horse country through the conclusion of a spectacular week—ideally after celebrating your success in the winner's circle.

The World Championships continue to set the benchmark for international racing, building upon the momentum of recent years with strong global participation and continued growth across multiple benchmarks. Our 2025 edition delivered a record \$210 million in global wagering and an economic impact of \$125 million. In 2026, Keeneland provides an iconic setting known for its rich heritage, impeccable hospitality, and idyllic surroundings in the heart of horse country. We look forward to presenting the World Championships there for a fourth time, and, for the first time, highlighting the seamless elegance of the new Paddock Building and accompanying

renovations that exemplify Keeneland's commitment to the future of racing.

Since its inaugural running in 1984, Breeders' Cup Limited has distributed more than \$1 billion in purses and awards while crowning hundreds of champions. We remain committed to excellence, stewardship, and the continued advancement of Thoroughbred racing. Through Breeders' Cup Charities and other key initiatives, we are focused on supporting the people, horses, and communities that sustain our great sport. Your participation is fundamental to our success and the positive impact the World Championships make on the industry overall.

On behalf of our board of directors, members, and nominators worldwide, thank you for your continued commitment to excellence, and congratulations on arriving at the pinnacle of racing. Should you require assistance during your visit, our Concierge Team stands ready to support you with the personalized service that defines the Breeders' Cup. We wish you the very best of luck and hope you thoroughly enjoy the prestigious 2026 World Championships.



DREW FLEMING
President and CEO
Breeders' Cup Limited

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- John Keitt**
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Executive Vice President, Chief Marketing Officer
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Cover: A Breeders' Cup flower blanket; Keeneland dirt track.

EXCELLENCE

— ACROSS THE BOARD —



KENDALL-JACKSON

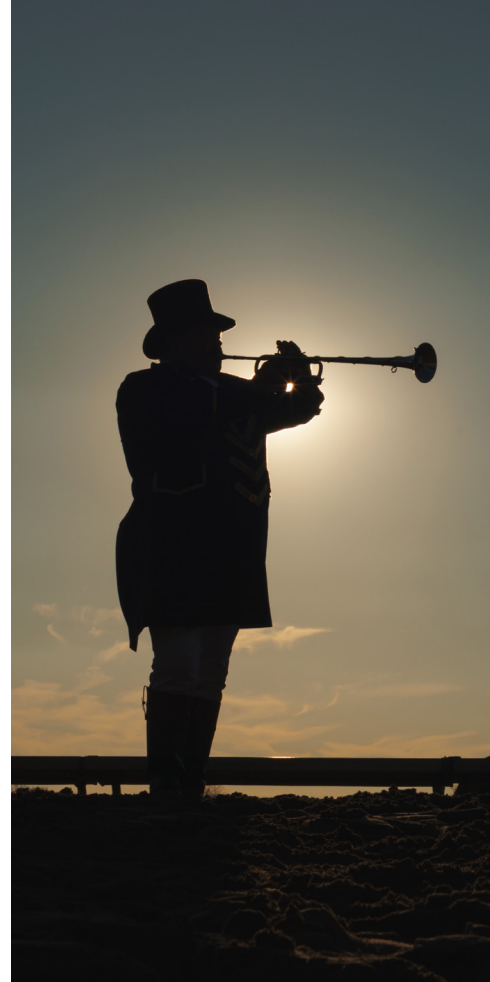
Cambria
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Champagne
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YOUR BREEDERS' CUP JOURNEY BEGINS

Luxury, Convenience,
and Expert Support

At the Breeders' Cup World Championships, our focus is on creating an experience that reflects the prestige of participation for you and your horses. Your dedication and the exceptional talent you bring are what make the Championships a world-class event.

From premium seating arrangements to luxury accommodations and thoughtfully coordinated travel, our Participant Concierge team is here to ensure every detail is handled with care. After pre-entry on Monday, Oct. 19, participants will receive a digital Welcome Packet with essential event information and prompts to customize ticketing, transportation, and activities.

If you have any questions regarding your confirmed or prospective plans to attend the Breeders' Cup, our team is always available by phone or email. We look forward to welcoming you and wish you the very best of luck on race day.

*From top: Keeneland's Call to Post;
the Breeders' Cup trophy.*



PARTICIPANT CONCIERGE TEAM

Concierge@BreedersCup.com
+1 (859) 422-2697

The Breeders' Cup Participant Ticketing and Concierge Office, located in the Entertainment Center at Keeneland, will open on Monday, Oct. 19. Please enter via Gate 1 and take the first right turn, following signage for the Hill and further direction to the Breeders' Cup designated offices and parking.

PARTICIPANT EVENT SCHEDULE

Step into a World of Unforgettable Hospitality
and Exceptional Entertainment

MONDAY, OCTOBER 26

6:00–11:00AM

BREAKFAST AT THE BREEDERS' CUP

Presented by WinStar Farm and Keeneland

Invitation only

The Clubhouse, Keeneland

4:00–8:00PM

ROOD & RIDDLE BREEDERS' CUP POST POSITION DRAW & RECEPTION

Invitation only

4:00PM: Doors | Sales Pavilion, Keeneland

5:00PM: Draw, Reception to follow | 1936 Room

TUESDAY, OCTOBER 27

6:00–11:00AM

BREAKFAST AT THE BREEDERS' CUP

Presented by WinStar Farm and Keeneland

Invitation only

The Clubhouse, Keeneland

5:00–10:00PM

THE BREEDERS' CUP OFFICIAL HOSPITALITY EXPERIENCE AT THE APIARY

Invitation only

The Apiary, Lexington

WEDNESDAY, OCTOBER 28

6:00–11:00AM

BREAKFAST AT THE BREEDERS' CUP

Presented by WinStar Farm and Keeneland

Invitation only

The Clubhouse, Keeneland

7:00AM–5:30PM

PARTICIPANT TICKET COLLECTION

By prior appointment only

Participant Ticketing & Concierge Office,
Entertainment Center, Keeneland

12:00–5:00PM

OFFICIAL HOSPITALITY LOUNGES

Participant ticketing available upon request at hotels

The Manchester, Marriott Lexington City

Center, Marriott Lexington Griffin Gate

Golf Resort & Spa

5:00–9:30PM

KEENELAND CHAMPIONSHIP SALE

Invitation only, 21+

Scan the QR code for location updates.

5:00–10:00PM

THE BREEDERS' CUP OFFICIAL HOSPITALITY EXPERIENCE AT THE APIARY

Invitation only

The Apiary, Lexington

THURSDAY, OCTOBER 29

5:00AM–8:00PM

OFFICIAL HOSPITALITY LOUNGES

Participant ticketing available upon request at hotels

The Manchester, Marriott Lexington City

Center, Marriott Lexington Griffin Gate

Golf Resort & Spa

6:00–11:00AM

BREAKFAST AT THE BREEDERS' CUP

Presented by WinStar Farm and Keeneland

Invitation only

The Clubhouse, Keeneland

7:00AM–5:30PM

PARTICIPANT TICKET COLLECTION

By prior appointment only

Participant Ticketing & Concierge Office,
Entertainment Center, Keeneland

7:30–10:30PM

A CALL TO POST, THE OFFICIAL WELCOME RECEPTION

Invitation only, 21+

Central Bank Center, Lexington



2026 BREEDERS' CUP WORLD CHAMPIONSHIPS

RACE-DAY INFORMATION

Official race order and final post times for the 2026 Breeders' Cup World Championships will be released on Oct. 21.

For the most up-to-date race-day information, including race times, please scan the QR code.

FRIDAY, OCTOBER 30

Future Stars Friday

5:00AM–12:00PM

OFFICIAL HOSPITALITY LOUNGES

*Participant ticketing available
upon request at hotels*

The Manchester, Marriott Lexington

City Center, Marriott Lexington

Griffin Gate Golf Resort & Spa

7:00–10:00PM

THE BREEDERS' CUP OFFICIAL HOSPITALITY EXPERIENCE AT THE APIARY

Invitation only

The Apiary, Lexington

SATURDAY, OCTOBER 31

Championships Saturday

5:00AM–12:00PM

OFFICIAL HOSPITALITY LOUNGES

*Participant ticketing available
upon request at hotels*

The Manchester, Marriott Lexington

City Center, Marriott Lexington

Griffin Gate Golf Resort & Spa

7:00–10:00PM

THE BREEDERS' CUP OFFICIAL HOSPITALITY EXPERIENCE AT THE APIARY

Invitation only

The Apiary, Lexington

Goodnight Olive wins the 2022 Breeders' Cup Filly & Mare Sprint at Keeneland.



EVENT INFORMATION

Your Guide to Official Breeders' Cup Events

BREAKFAST AT THE BREEDERS' CUP
Presented by WinStar Farm and Keeneland

ROOD & RIDDLE BREEDERS' CUP POST POSITION DRAW

A CALL TO POST
The official 2026 Breeders' Cup World Championships kickoff

Monday, Oct. 26–
Thursday, Oct. 29

Monday, Oct. 26

Thursday, Oct. 29

Begin each morning at this exclusive breakfast experience, set within the storied grounds of iconic Keeneland. Michelin-starred chef Curtis Stone returns to unveil an elevated culinary experience, crafted in partnership with Keeneland Hospitality.

Indulge in a bespoke morning menu while the world's finest Thoroughbreds take to the track for their final preparations.

Suggested Attire:
Elevated everyday style with light layering and relaxed footwear for crisp mornings.

*Invitation only.
Entry with digital ticket.*

Step into the energy and anticipation of the World Championships with an invitation to the official Post Position Draw, an electrifying, globally broadcast moment. Set within the iconic Keeneland Sales Pavilion, a celebrated landmark of Thoroughbred heritage, this exclusive gathering places participants and their guests at the center of the action, as the draw unfolds and the path to championship competition is revealed.

Suggested Attire:
Effortless smart casual.

*Invitation only.
Entry with digital ticket.*

A Call to Post sets the tone of the weekend with an evening defined by elegance and shared celebration. Guests are treated to live performances, signature cocktails, and indulgent post-dinner offerings. At the heart of the occasion are the sport's key participants. Owners with Championship entries receive six invitations, and participating trainers, jockeys, and breeders are each invited to attend with a guest at the Central Bank Center in Lexington.

Suggested Attire:
Cocktail chic.

Invitation only. Entry with digital ticket. Strictly 21+.



SHUTTLE SERVICE

A shuttle bus service is available between hotels, official events, and Keeneland. Complimentary parking on track is also available.

For up-to-date information, including times for the complimentary shuttle buses, please scan the QR code.

KEYS TO COMFORT

Luxury Lodging and Thoughtfully
Designed Benefits for Every Participant



A guest suite at The Manchester Hotel. Right: Marriott City Center Lobby Bar. Below: The exterior of the Marriott Lexington Griffin Gate Golf Resort & Spa.

HOSPITALITY LOUNGES

An invitation to unwind awaits at the official Breeders' Cup Hospitality Lounges, set within The Manchester, Marriott Lexington City Center, and Marriott Lexington Griffin Gate Golf Resort & Spa, Oct. 28 through Nov. 1.

For those staying downtown, we invite you to experience The Apiary—an elegant venue in the heart of Lexington, open Tuesday, Oct. 27–Saturday, Oct. 31. Enjoy nightly receptions featuring complimentary light fare and cocktails exclusively for Breeders' Cup guests. The-Apiary.com.

Exclusively for participants and their guests, these refined environments are shaped by anticipatory service and thoughtful, tailored touches. The Breeders' Cup Participant Concierge team will be on hand to coordinate ticket collection, curate itineraries, and fulfill bespoke requests.



OFFICIAL HOTELS

To help deliver an exceptional experience throughout Breeders' Cup week, we have secured a selection of premium hotel rooms in close proximity to Keeneland. Each ownership group (including partners and syndicates, which are considered a single ownership entity) will receive a \$1,500 credit toward accommodations at one of the preferred hotels listed here.



The Manchester
941 Manchester Street
Lexington, KY 40508
TheManchesterKY.com

Marriott Lexington City Center
121 W. Vine Street
Lexington, KY 40507
Marriott.com

Marriott Lexington Griffin Gate Golf Resort & Spa
1800 Newtown Pike
Lexington, KY 40511
Marriott.com

21C Museum Hotel Lexington
167 W. Main Street
Lexington, KY 40507
21CMuseumHotels.com

Reservations will be processed and confirmed on a first come, first served basis. Please note that all listed hotels require a minimum three-night stay between Thursday, Oct. 29, and Sunday, Nov. 1.



FOR PARTICIPANT HOTEL INQUIRIES

To reserve your stay, please contact Erin McLaughlin via Hotels@BreedersCup.com or +1 (859) 422-2675.

Scan the QR code to submit your reservation online. All bookings must be made through the Breeders' Cup Racing Office.



EVERY RACE. EVERY MOMENT. ONE APP.



Experience every moment of the World Championships—wherever you are.

Stream all 14 Championship races live, stay current with breaking news and results, and take part in exclusive contests. Follow the Breeders' Cup calendar with ease, tailor your notifications to what matters most, and make race day even smoother with direct access to your Account Manager—all in one powerful app.

ELEVATE YOUR ENTRY

Navigate Race Day with Ease and Exclusive Perks

DIGITAL TICKETING FOR PARTICIPANTS

All ticketing for the Breeders' Cup World Championships, including official events, will be delivered digitally through our official partner, SeatGeek.

Domestic participants may download the SeatGeek app and create an account in just a few simple steps. International participants may access their SeatGeek account, once registered, through the official Breeders' Cup app.

Create your SeatGeek account by visiting seatgeek.com/#register and following the quick registration process. Our Participant Concierge team is here to assist you every step of the way should you have any questions.

OWNER SEATING & HOSPITALITY OPTIONS

Owners of horses entered in the Breeders' Cup World Championships will receive up to six (6) complimentary dining or box seats, along with one (1) complimentary parking pass, on the day their horse runs. Additional seats may be purchased, subject to availability.

Owners may choose a premium dining experience, which includes a gourmet luncheon curated by Michelin-starred celebrity chef Curtis Stone. For those who prefer open-air seating, complimentary shaded options will be available in either the Grandstand Box Seats or the Grandstand Loge Box Seats. Guests in these locations will enjoy in-seat food and beverage service, with access to nearby premium concessions.

While seating cannot be guaranteed, every effort will be made to accommodate individual preferences.

Owners will be asked to complete the digital Welcome Packet sent following pre-entry on Monday, Oct. 19, in order to request seats.

WHAT TO EXPECT WHEN YOU COLLECT

Beginning on Wednesday, Oct. 28, you may collect your participant packs from your hotel or on track at the Breeders' Cup Participant Ticketing and Concierge Office, located in the Entertainment Center at Keeneland.

- 1 Digital Tickets**
All digital tickets will be issued to participants on Wednesday, Oct. 28, through SeatGeek.
- 2 Parking Passes**
If requested, parking passes remain physical and will be provided within your participant pack. There is a useful map on the back of each pass to show you the best route to take.
- 3 Participant Pin**
This enameled pin will provide you access to the hotel hospitality lounges and specific areas at Keeneland (access information included when collected).
- 4 Paddock Passes**
*There will be the same number of Paddock Passes to complement your seat tickets, up to a maximum of 10 passes per owner.**
- 5 Gifting Lounge Voucher**
Each owner will be provided with a Gifting Lounge Voucher to use in collecting merchandise. Royalties from all Breeders' Cup merchandise are donated to Breeders' Cup Charities, giving back to worthy nonprofits across a variety of causes.
- 6 Participant Baseball Cap**
We provide 12 complimentary baseball caps, personalized with your horse's name, for each owner. Appreciating that these items are always popular, we will provide you with an order form in your digital Welcome Packet should you wish to secure more.*

*Please note, a partnership, co-ownership, or syndicate is considered one owner.

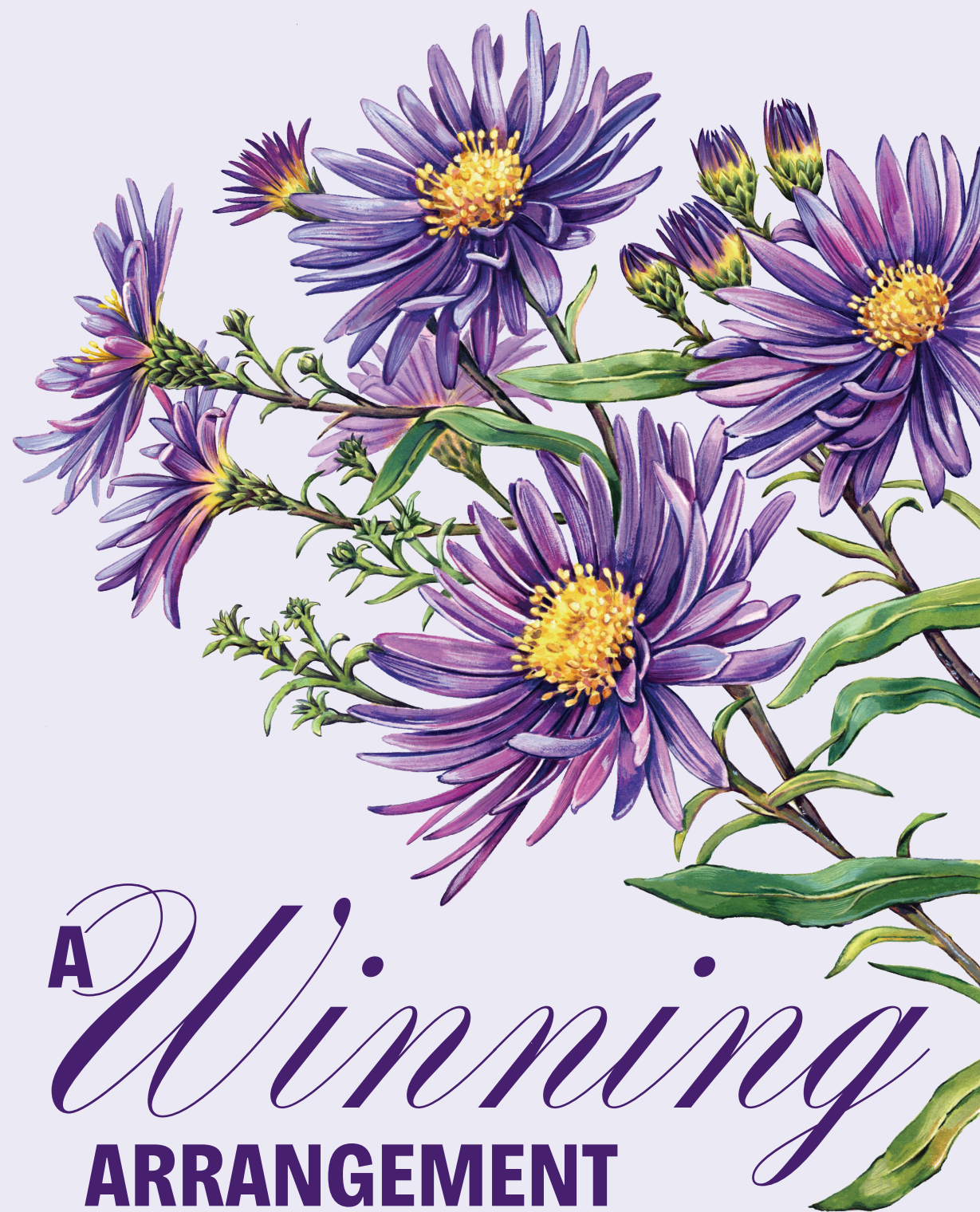
HORSES AND HORSEPOWER



The All New 2026 Lexus LX 700h



OFFICIAL PARTNER OF
THE BREEDERS' CUP



A *Winning* ARRANGEMENT

The Breeders' Cup garlands are more than beautiful—
they're woven into racing's most emotional moments

LIKE A GENERAL SURVEYING HER ARMY, Angie Harp, Kroger's floral merchandising lead, starts by scrutinizing 40,000 flowers with meticulous care. Custard-yellow cremons and rich purple asters are each examined for their size and shape. Only the flawless make the cut—they're destined for the winner's circle, after all.

For nearly four decades, the flower blankets of the Breeders' Cup have served as more than a winner's decoration. Draped across the backs of champions moments after victory, the purple-and-gold garlands have become one of the sport's most recognizable symbols—floral masterpieces as much as engineering feats entirely steeped in tradition.

"This is our Augusta green jacket," says Dora Delgado, executive vice president and chief racing officer for the Breeders' Cup. "It's our symbol."

Delgado has watched that symbol evolve from the very beginning. She joined the organization shortly after the Breeders' Cup launched in the early 1980s and has spent more than 40 years helping shape the championship event. Along the

way, she has overseen nearly every equine-related aspect of the competition—from horse recruitment and international logistics to veterinary safety programs and race-day pageantry.

"We knew that we wanted that visual symbol of victory," she says. "Something that crowned these champions in the same way victors in ancient Greece were honored with laurel wreaths."

FROM GROCERY STORE TO WINNER'S CIRCLE

The first Breeders' Cup flower blankets appeared in 1986, though Delgado laughs now at how different they looked from the polished creations fans recognize today.

"I've got photos of those original blankets, and they do not represent what we switched over to in 1988," she says. "One was an X shaped, another looked like a teardrop. They didn't even have the race name on them."

That changed when the Breeders' Cup partnered with Kroger, whose Louisville floral team was already crafting the iconic rose blanket for the Kentucky Derby.

"What appealed to us was their craftsmanship," Delgado says. "Every flower was selected for perfection. We wanted the blankets to have weight and detail and elegance." That ensures the bespoke look of each blanket.

"They actually contracted with flower producers just for us," Delgado says. "There were years where frost wiped out crops and they were scrambling to find replacements. The amount of effort behind these blankets is incredible."

It is Harp's job to maintain that level of execution. She works with a team of 14 master florists, and race day begins promptly at 8 a.m. Unlike the Derby, which requires a single blanket of roses, the Breeders' Cup needs 14 elaborate creations each championship weekend, plus two extra for display.

"We put them all together on the first day of the race," Harp says. The team begins work in the Kroger store in Versailles, Kentucky, allowing shoppers to watch the entire process unfold in real time.



ENGINEERING ELEGANCE

Each garland contains 108 cremons and 265 asters, with the crown accented in 6 cattleya orchids along with solidago, italian ruscus, oregonia, and leatherleaf. The flowers are carefully glued into satin-backed panels designed not only to look beautiful but to safely drape across a Thoroughbred's body, a safety concern Delgado says is always at the forefront.

"Horses are instinctively protective of their backs," she says. "The blankets have to break at the withers correctly. Nothing can poke through, nothing can feel abrasive. Every detail matters."

That attention extends all the way to the winner's circle, where Harp and her team act as essentially the Breeders' Cup answer to SEAL Team 6, what Delgado jokingly calls "flower blanket security."

"They are literally standing guard," Delgado says with a laugh. "People want to touch them, brush against them, take pictures. Angie's team is constantly grooming the blankets, replacing flowers, making sure they stay pristine."

It sounds funny, but Harp says it's really no joke. "We want to give winners the best quality possible. What they do with them after is up to them," she says. Harp's team take their roles as flower blanket secret service so seriously that when the Breeders' Cup takes place outside of Kentucky, the florists come too. "We have a great



relationship with UPS, so we make the blankets and ship them ahead on a plane," she says. When the plane lands, Harp and her team are ready to escort the blankets to the track, minding and mending any wayward petals along the way.

PETALS IN THE AIR

Of course, pristine only lasts so long.

One of the iconic victory photos from Breeders' Cup after Breeders' Cup captures jockeys tossing handfuls of flower petals into the air after a win.

"It's beautiful," Delgado says. "But I can also imagine Angie standing there horrified."

It's true, Harp says. "I was shocked the first year I saw it happen."

All those hours spent gluing and tweaking, destroyed in seconds. That said, in her years working with the Breeders' Cup, she's come around to the tradition. "They love the garlands, and it is a beautiful picture, those petals flying in the air," Harp says.

After the celebrations, many owners preserve the blankets as treasured keepsakes. Some are freeze-dried, while others are recreated with silk replicas and displayed in trophy rooms and barns around the world.

"When the Japanese horses won at Del Mar in 2021, they had multiple blankets draped across their barn area," Delgado recalls. "That's the ultimate bragging right."

The blankets themselves rarely change.

Aside from occasional updates to embroidered logos or lettering, Delgado says the design remains intentionally timeless.

"The purple and yellow, the orchids, the pillows—it's symbolic now," Delgado says. "I don't think we'd ever change the actual design."

MORE THAN A TROPHY

For Harp, the importance of the flower blankets will transcend simply celebrating a horse. That truth came into reality for Harp when she met Cody Dorman.

In 2018, Cody Dorman—a Make-A-Wish recipient living with Wolf-Hirschhorn syndrome—visited Godolphin's Gainsborough Farm in Versailles, Kentucky, where an extraordinary connection began. During the visit, a young colt approached Cody and gently rested his head in the boy's lap, a quiet moment that those present would later describe as almost fated.

The colt was eventually named Cody's Wish, and over time the relationship between horse and boy grew into something far deeper than symbolism. When Cody reunited with the horse in 2020 during a difficult period marked by depression, the encounter brought him renewed joy and purpose.

Meanwhile, Cody's Wish emerged as a racing star, winning the Breeders' Cup Dirt Mile in both 2022 and 2023. Remarkably, the horse never lost when Cody was there to watch him race.

Harp still remembers the emotion surrounding those victories. "I was there out in the winner's circle, and everyone was crying," she says.

For Harp, moments like that are what make the flower blankets matter. Beneath the spectacle and tradition, the garlands become part of racing's most emotional scenes—draped across champions in moments of triumph, joy, and memory.

By the time the flowers reach the winner's circle, they are no longer just asters and cremons carefully glued into place. They become symbols: of victory earned, of bonds forged, and sometimes, as in the story of Cody's Wish, of something far larger than sport itself.

And though the blooms eventually wilt, the moments they frame endure long after the petals fall. **EC**

“
**AND THOUGH
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MOMENTS THEY
FRAME ENDURE
LONG AFTER THE
PETALS FALL**
”

THE TASTE OF *Victory*

Big races call for memorable meals. This Breeders' Cup-worthy menu from Keeneland Hospitality and Curtis Stone brings together a dinner fit for the winner's circle





PAN SEARED SILVER PERCH

Yield: 1 serving

INGREDIENTS

2 tbsp. apple cider vinegar
¾ cup bourbon
¼ cup dark brown sugar
2 tbsp. Worcestershire sauce
1½ tbsp. whole-grain mustard
2 tbsp. honey
1 tbsp. Dijon mustard
1 tsp. pink sea salt
1 garlic clove minced
Pinch red chili flake
1 tbsp. minced fresh ginger
6 oz. silver perch
3 tbsp. extra-virgin olive oil
1 rosemary twig
1 garlic clove, hand crushed

PREPARATION

Preheat oven to 350°F. Place first 11 ingredients into a small cast-iron pan over medium heat. Bring to a boil, then adjust to a simmer, whisk till all ingredients are incorporated and dissolved.

Leave over a medium flame until the sauce is reduced by half. Set sauce aside when consistency is thick and reduced by half.

In a separate cast iron skillet, heat extra virgin olive oil, rosemary, garlic clove, over medium heat. Pat down fish to ensure it's dry. Place fish skinside down and cook for 5 minutes till skin releases from the cast iron on its own. Pour the sauce on the fish and cook in the oven for 9 minutes until internal temperature of the fish reaches 135°F.

KENTUCKY BLACKBERRY SMASH

Yield: 1 cocktail

INGREDIENTS

1 dash saline solution
¾ oz. fresh lemon juice
¾ oz. blackberry + mint syrup (recipe follows)
2 oz. Maker's Mark
Blackberries and mint sprig, for garnish

PREPARATION

Combine ingredients in a shaker with ice. Fine-mesh strain into a rocks glass over ice. Garnish with blackberry and mint sprig.

For the Blackberry and Mint Syrup

Yield: 36 ounces

INGREDIENTS

2 cartons (6 oz.) blackberries, approximately 325g
454 g water
1 oz. mint leaves (by weight)
750 g white sugar
1 gomme syrup (recipe follows)

PREPARATION

Combine blackberries and water in a saucepan. Bring to a boil, then immediately lower heat, add mint, cover, and simmer for 10 minutes. Remove from heat.

Using a large mesh strainer, strain out the "juice," pressing the fruit to extract as much liquid as possible. Run this "juice" through a coffee filter. Measure the weight of the juice.

Combine 1.5 parts sugar to juice. The yield on the juice should be approximately between 450-550g. Multiply this number by 1.5 to calculate the weight of the sugar.

After determining its weight, combine the sugar with juice in the saucepan and heat slowly to 180 degrees. Do not allow it to boil.

Once the sugar is incorporated, fold in the gum-arabic mixture. Stir. Heat through, then remove from heat and allow to cool.

For the Gomme Syrup

Yield: 2 ounces

INGREDIENTS

2 oz. water (by weight)
2 oz. gum arabic (by weight)

PREPARATION

In a small plastic container, combine Syrup and water. Stir with a stick, rolling around the liquid, and allow the mixture to rest for 48 hours. The Syrup will dissolve into the solution.

HANDS THAT RAISED CHAMPIONS

Long before the garlands and grandstands, Breeders' Cup champions got their start with horsemen and horsewomen who know their brilliance—and quirks—by heart

As the 2026 Breeders' Cup World Championships are set to return to Keeneland Race Course, the festival of racing serves as more than just a pinnacle of the sport; it is a homecoming to the horse country. While the stage is set for an international cast of equine athletes from around the globe, many of their stories began just a few miles from Keeneland amid the rolling hills of the Bluegrass State.

To honor these roots, the Breeders' Cup has partnered with *Thoroughbred Daily News* (TDN) to launch **Hands On History**. This multimedia series offers an intimate look at past Breeders' Cup champions, visiting the nurseries where they were foaled and the paddocks where they now reside in retirement. The project highlights the unsung heroes behind these champions—the people who have had their “hands on history.”

For these horsemen and horsewomen who have guided hundreds of Thoroughbreds throughout decades of commitment to the sport, the Breeders' Cup champions remain uniquely etched in their memories. They recount the early chapters of these legends, from leggy stages as foals to feisty turns as yearlings, and offer a glimpse into their lives today as elite broodmares and stallions.



In the first edition of **Hands On History**, the Breeders' Cup and TDN visited historic Claiborne Farm, home to 2010 Breeders' Cup Classic winner Blame. The champion who famously defeated Hall of Famer Zenyatta under the lights at Churchill Downs turned 20 this year.

Charlie Oliver, the horseman who first laid eyes on the Claiborne Farm and Adele Dilschneider homebred, estimated that he has foaled between 700 and 800 Thoroughbreds in his 35 years of working at Claiborne, but he remembers Blame's arrival with perfect clarity.

“It was on a Tuesday,” he recalls. “Scott Jones and I brought him into the world. He was a bit of a jerk when he was a baby. He had his little quirks about him, but he grew out of them and got to where he was easy to handle.”

Walker Hancock, president of Claiborne, worked with Blame as a yearling when the young man was just a teenager. He was at Churchill Downs when the Albert Stall trainee pulled off an unforgettable win over the previously undefeated Zenyatta.

“It was as loud as a sporting venue could possibly be,” Hancock says. “I think everyone in that whole place was screaming for Zenyatta and we were screaming for Blame. People were booing Blame and they're looking at us like, ‘How could you possibly be cheering right now?’”

Kevin Lay was also on hand for the victory. A third-generation employee at Claiborne Farm, Lay had been working there since he was 17 and already knew that after the Classic, Blame would retire to Claiborne's storied stud barn under his care.

Over the past 16 years, Lay and Blame have become inseparable, their bond deepening through the stallion's long second career at the farm.

“A lot of people say he's the horse that broke America's heart,” Lay says. “But, I guess for me, it didn't break my heart, because I was in love with him.”

The second edition of **Hands On History** features 2017 Classic winner Gun Runner. The piece highlights Three Chimneys Farm stallion manager Veronica Reed, who has overseen Gun Runner's ascension as a leading sire, and broodmare manager Jeff Danford, who has foaled dozens of Gun Runner's progeny including this year's Longines Kentucky Oaks (G1) winner, Always a Runner.

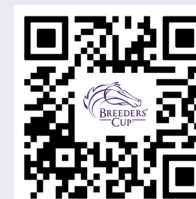
In the months leading up to the 2026 Breeders' Cup World Championships, **Hands on History** will continue to shine a light on the farms where the journeys began for past champions, including Coolmore, Lane's End, and WinStar Farm. **BC**

From left: Blame at Claiborne Farm with Charlie Oliver, Kevin Lay, and Walker Hancock; Blame (inside) and Zenyatta; (right) Gun Runner.



Three series in partnership with *Thoroughbred Daily News* highlight the remarkable stories that surround Breeders' Cup contenders. Follow Breeders' Cup Breakthrough, showcasing the thrill of first-time victory at the World Championships; **Hands On History**, and Breeders' Cup Connections, which this year focuses on the breeders of potential runners.

For more, scan the QR code or visit BreedersCup.com/Video





FAST HORSES, FEARLESS PAINTINGS

British painter Katie O'Sullivan brings an insider's understanding of racing to her role as official Breeders' Cup artist

Katie O'Sullivan has been known to scrap a painting just days before it's due. Last year, the contemporary British fine artist—whose work hangs in the collections of the late Prince Philip, Sheikh Mohammed bin Rashid Al Maktoum, and a small army of aristocrats too long to list—abandoned a canvas four months in the making only days before it was set to ship to a buyer.

"I thought, I hate this. It looks dead," O'Sullivan recalls. "So I started over."

Ten days later, she finished the replacement. "And I was so pleased," she says.

In less than a week and a half, O'Sullivan had created a stronger, more vital work, and sent it confidently on its way. The instinct to destroy and begin again is part of what has made her one of equestrian art's most revered painters.

"I never want anything to feel too precious," O'Sullivan says. "Just kill it. Start over."

That high-standard approach makes sense for an artist immersed in the rhythms of racing. O'Sullivan, the official artist of the 2026 Breeders' Cup World Championships, is surrounded by the sport: Her studio sits in Lambourn—amid England's famed "Valley of the Racehorse"—in-

side a working barn filled with six dogs and Thoroughbreds stabled on either side. It is here, in the peaceful presence of horses and the daily churn of the yard, that O'Sullivan paints.

And oh does she paint.

"I usually have ten paintings going at once," she says, standing in the middle of a studio crowded with works in various states of becoming. Behind her looms a monumental portrait of Journalism, winner of the 150th Preakness Stakes (G1), rendered with such velocity it seems nearly in motion. Flanking it are two distinctly untraditional studies inspired by Edgar Degas—one awash in electric blues, the other in saturated reds.

Which is to say: O'Sullivan is not in the business of producing polite equine portraits for country house stairwells.

As best-selling author Jilly Cooper wrote in the foreword to one of O'Sullivan's exhibition catalogues, her "endless experiments with different textures are enhanced by her understanding of and huge love for her subjects," adding that the artist seems to tell each subject, "I will both cherish and immortalize you."

Rather than confine herself to traditional canvas, O'Sullivan constantly experiments with

texture and surface. She was one of the first equestrian artists to start gilding. Journalism was painted on silver leaf, giving the champion colt an almost cinematic luminosity.

"I showed Mike McCarthy, the trainer of Journalism, the Journalism on silver leaf, and he went, 'My God, that's amazing,'" she says.

She has also worked with gold leaf, a notoriously difficult medium she describes as feeling "like painting on glass."

The work demands extraordinary precision. As a young apprentice, for hours, she sat painstakingly restoring the painted flourishes on blue-and-white china, an intimate internship that sparked a lifelong fascination with fine porcelain and decorative arts. That sensibility still echoes through her work today. Whether rendering birds flitting across delicate dishes, the frosted fur of a winter hare, or the sinewy stretch of a Thoroughbred driving toward the finish line, O'Sullivan creates richly layered compositions that hover somewhere between the classical and the almost mischievously alive.

That same intentionality can be seen in O'Sullivan's works for Breeders' Cup—two paintings, one featuring the new three-story Paddock Building at Keeneland and the other a powerful depiction of horses in the midst of competition.

"What I want to capture in that painting is that I understand that when the stalls open, it's about a dream coming true," O'Sullivan says.

It's a perspective perhaps more visceral for O'Sullivan than for any recent Breeders' Cup artist. A mother of four, she is not only an observant painter of racing's triumphs and tensions, but an emotionally invested spectator, too. Her daughter, Saffie, has rapidly emerged as one of the sport's brightest young talents, giving O'Sullivan a front-row seat to the exhilaration—and volatility—of modern racing.

Saffie's 2026 season has already been marked by a string of headline-making performances, including victories aboard Heart of Honor at Wolverhampton and Brotherly

Love on Dubai's Road to the Kentucky Derby trail. Earlier this year, she also secured her first career win in Saudi Arabia and finished third in the Saudi Cup International Jockeys Challenge, continuing a steady ascent that has made her one of British racing's most closely watched jockeys.

When the 2026 Breeders' Cup World Championships arrive, O'Sullivan's paintings will do more than commemorate the event. They will capture the emotional architecture behind it—the dreams, risks, and relentless pursuit of perfection that define racing itself. **BC**



From far right: Katie O'Sullivan with her dogs; Flightline; a portrait of Journalism and Flightline; O'Sullivan at work in her studio.

SALES RING TO Stardom

The road to Breeders' Cup glory often begins at Keeneland

AT KEENELAND, THE SALES RING has long functioned as both marketplace and oracle. Beneath the pavilion lights, impeccably bred horses circle the walking ring while consignors smooth coats, buyers scrutinize bloodlines, and auctioneers summon fortunes with the rise and fall of their voices. Some horses enter the ring carrying the burden of seven-figure expectations; others arrive with modest pedigrees and little fanfare. Yet every season the same tantalizing possibility hangs in the air: that somewhere in the catalogue stands a future champion waiting to reveal itself.

Time and again, graduates of Keeneland's sales have gone on to define the sport's grandest stages, nowhere more so than at the Breeders'

Cup. Champions once paraded through those Lexington barns as uncertain prospects have returned to racing immortality in the Breeders' Cup winner's circle, transforming auction notes into lore. Some justified every extravagant bid placed upon them. Others emerged from obscurity. At the Breeders' Cup, where the finest horses in the world gather each fall, Keeneland's imprint is nearly impossible to escape.

That connection between auction house and winner's circle remains one of Thoroughbred racing's most seductive narratives. Here, three individuals whose lives have been shaped by champions reflect on the Keeneland scene, and the unmistakable echo of the gavel that first set their destiny in motion.



THE ONE WE'RE LOOKING FOR

Bloodstock agent David Ingordo

David Ingordo calls Keeneland his office. For the bloodstock agent whose Keeneland purchases have included Breeders' Cup winners Zenyatta, Accelerate, More Than Looks, and Super Corredora, the experience begins before a single horse steps out of the barn.

"When you pull in off Versailles Road, it doesn't matter which entrance you come in," he says. "You think you're in some kind of national park, or somebody's beautifully manicured home and garden." From the old trees and stone buildings to the wood-paneled facilities and immaculate grounds, Ingordo says the place has a way of elevating the work itself. "The physical plant of Keeneland is such a beautiful place to go every day, no matter what season," he says. "It puts you in a good mood."

That beauty, though, is matched by function. During the September Sale, Ingordo and his team arrive days before bidding begins, then spend hours and hours moving

through the barns, inspecting horses from morning until late afternoon. The barns are designed, he says, so horses and humans can do their jobs well, and the consignors bring the same attention to detail. "Their staff are beautifully dressed, the horses are beautifully presented, and everybody is putting their best foot forward," Ingordo says. Still, the thrill is in the unknown. "You never know what's going to come out," he says. "When you pull hip number 703 out, and that horse is Zenyatta, you're saying, 'This is the one we're looking for.'" For Ingordo, buying horses is a tactile, deeply human process: seeing a horse in the flesh, reading its presence, studying the shine of its coat, and talking with sellers who are "great characters" by nature. "When you add up the backdrop, the personalities, and the beauty of the horse itself," he says, "it's a magical experience."



Ingordo has spent nearly his entire life inside that world. Raised in Arcadia, California, near Santa Anita Park, he was just 14 when Sunday Silence won the Kentucky Derby while his father worked as the colt's jockey agent—crystallizing his future. By 15, he had a special permit to work, and he has been in the business ever since.

"It's not a job, it's a lifestyle," he says. That lifestyle is now shared by his family, including his wife, Kentucky Derby winning trainer Cherie DeVaux, and their daughter, Reagan. Though Ingordo grew up in California and says winning at Santa Anita or Del Mar will always matter, Kentucky has become home. Keeneland, in many ways, is the center of it. "Without Keeneland, I don't know that my success and Cherie's success, both at the sales and in training, would be what it is," he says.

With the Breeders' Cup returning to Keeneland, a win there would carry special weight for Ingordo. "Winning a Breeders' Cup anywhere is meaningful," he says. "But winning one at Keeneland would be massively, massively meaningful to us."



THE COMPLETE PACKAGE

General manager Jonathan Smyth

Jonathan Smyth remembers the 2019 Keeneland September Yearling Sale as he remembers every Keeneland auction: long days spent studying as many horses as possible, searching for the rare individual who separates himself from an already elite field. That year, one filly immediately rose above the noise.

Malathaat possessed what Smyth, then-assistant manager of the Lexington farm that was the base of the American branch of Shadwell Stable, describes as “the complete package.” By champion sire Curlin and out of Grade 1-winning mare Dreaming of Julia, she carried the pedigree buyers covet at Keeneland. But pedigree alone is never enough in a sales ring packed with the sport’s best-bred prospects. Smyth was equally struck by her physical presence: a tall, balanced filly with a powerful hind end, fluid movement, and unmistakable class. Raised by Stonestreet Farm, she embodied the kind of horse buyers hoped to uncover at Keeneland, a rare combination of athleticism, breeding, and composure.

At the time of her purchase, Shadwell Stable’s exclusive trainer in the United States was Kieran McLaughlin, and the filly initially appeared headed in that direction. But during the spring of her 2-year-old season, McLaughlin announced his retirement, creating an unexpected turning point. Soon afterward, the Shadwell team met with Todd Pletcher to discuss the future of the operation. During those meetings, Pletcher repeatedly asked about one horse in particular: Malathaat.

The reason soon became clear. Pletcher had been the underbidder on the filly at Keeneland and already knew the family intimately, having trained her dam, Dreaming of Julia.

Three years after being purchased as a yearling at Keeneland, Malathaat returned to conclude her career with a championship performance on racing’s grandest stage. The 2022 Longines Breeders’ Cup Distaff (G1) was widely regarded as one of the most



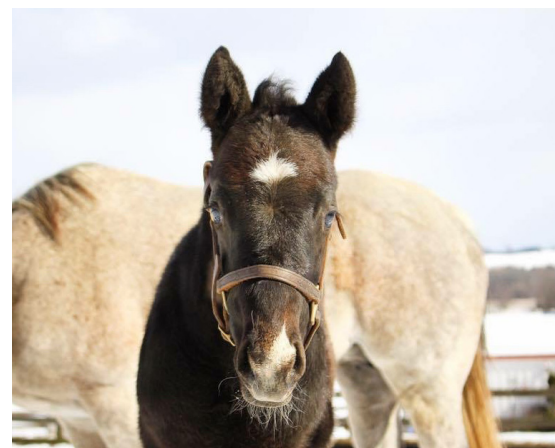
competitive fields in the division, featuring accomplished Grade 1 winners including Clairiere, Nest, and Secret Oath. What followed was a breathtaking three-way photo finish that instantly became part

of Breeders’ Cup mythology.

For Smyth and the Shadwell team, the symmetry was almost cinematic: a filly identified amid the frenzy of the Keeneland September sale returning years later to capture a world championship. In a sport built on vision and instinct, Smyth says Malathaat’s journey affirmed why Keeneland matters so deeply—and why the Breeders’ Cup remains the ultimate destination for contenders and connections alike.

SETTING THEM UP FOR SUCCESS

Breeder Sabrina Moore



Sabrina Moore was barely out of high school when she decided to forgo college and build a life with horses instead. “I was the only person in my graduating class that didn’t pick a college or do my SATs,” she says. “I just knew horses were all I wanted to do.”

In Maryland, Moore carved out a path of her own, launching a small breeding and boarding operation in her twenties with the support of trusted veterinarians, bloodstock agents, and her family. Little did she know that her youthful confidence would breed the horse who would define her career: Knicks Go.

Moore claimed the colt’s dam fresh off the track. When Knicks Go arrived, he immediately stood out. An early foal, he quickly looked older and more physically developed than many of his peers.

“He was just a very mature, forward weanling,” Moore recalls. “He had substance, nice bones, and was super athletic.”

Those qualities convinced Moore to send him to the Keeneland November Breeding Stock Sale, where she hoped exposure to the industry’s top buyers would not only maximize his value but also place him in the right hands. “You want them at a market like Keeneland because the best horsemen are there,” she says. “You’re trying to set them up for success after they leave your farm.”

When Knicks Go sold at Keeneland and later changed hands again for nearly double the amount originally received, Moore watched his ascent with a mix of pride and disbelief. She followed every race closely, developing connections with people around the colt—from shipping staff to social media managers at the barn—gathering behind-the-scenes updates wherever she could. As hype surrounding Knicks Go intensified, so did scrutiny from racing fans online.

“People were dogging him on Twitter,” Moore says, like a proud mom defending her child. “I felt like I was his number one supporter.” Through the highs and lows

of his career, she never stopped watching. His eventual emergence as a two-time winner at the Breeders’ Cup World Championships, including the 2021 Longines Breeders’ Cup Classic (G1), felt “surreal,” she says, not only because of his success, but because breeders so rarely receive recognition in the sport. Moore credits the Breeders’ Cup for going out of its way to celebrate breeders alongside owners and trainers. “On most race days, breeders don’t get much love,” she says. “The Breeders’ Cup really values every connection to the horse.”



STAY AND PLAY THE *Lexington* WAY

Lexington hits full stride during Breeders' Cup weekend, pairing world-class racing with bourbon pours, standout dining, and horse country glamour. But the best way to experience it all is to arrive early—or linger a little longer—and discover everything waiting beyond the track

PRESENTED BY



EAT

The bourbon and horses may get top billing, but Lexington's culinary scene—recently recognized as the No. 6 Food City in the U.S. by Condé Nast Traveler—is equally worthy of applause

COLES 735 ON MAIN

As any owner knows, the lead-up to the Breeders' Cup is a whirl of preparation. When it's time to unwind with a good meal, Coles 735 on Main serves up elevated Southern comfort food in a relaxed setting with handcrafted cocktails, daily fresh-baked bread, just picked vegetables, and in-house cured meats. Coles735Main.com

DUDLEY'S ON SHORT

A longtime Lexington institution, Dudley's on Short has been a favorite gathering place for racing insiders since 1981—especially during the race meet. Set in the heart of downtown, the restaurant pairs polished Bluegrass hospitality with seasonal American fare, an elegant dining room, and a cozy rooftop patio perfect for lingering over bourbon, lunch, or celebratory post-race dinners. DudleysOnShort.com

OMAKASE SUSHI & SAKE BAR

This contemporary Japanese restaurant reflects a cosmopolitan energy, serving impeccably crafted sushi, premium nigiri, and both traditional and inventive dishes rooted in Japanese culinary technique. An evolving sake program rounds out the experience. OmakaseLex.com

MILETA

Four words: Parmesan Reggiano soft serve. At Mileta, chef Alex Green transforms Parmesan rinds into an unexpectedly craveable dessert, blending them with balsamic vinegar of Modena before topping the savory-sweet swirl with house-made meringue sprinkles, flaky sea salt, and a glossy drizzle of olive oil. That's just one of the creative temptations—think a private pasta room and exclusive rose room—at this fine-dining restaurant.

MiletaRestaurant.com



Above: Mileta

JEFF RUBY'S STEAKHOUSE

Like the perfect marriage between a glamorous supper club and an elegant steakhouse, this downtown Lexington institution serves impeccably aged USDA Prime steaks, fresh seafood, and an award-winning wine list. Whether you're celebrating a Keeneland victory in the Breeders' Room or toasting a special occasion, the fine dining atmosphere, infused with racing heritage, makes it one of the city's most coveted reservations. JeffRuby.com/Lexington

DRINK

Welcome to Bourbonland, where the same Bluegrass landscape that produces legendary Thoroughbreds also gives Kentucky bourbon its character

LOST PALM

Lost Palm channels 1960s South Florida racing with pineapple-scented air, flamboyant tiki cocktails, and Latin-inspired share plates. Located inside The Manchester across from Gatton Park, the rooftop bar draws locals and visitors alike for inventive cocktails, zero-proof drinks, and late-night revelry with a tropical twist just minutes from the lively Distillery District.

LostPalmKY.com

WEST SIXTH BREWING

Kentucky may be bourbon's spiritual home, but beer gets equal billing. Try the local drafts at West Sixth, located in a 100-year-old building called the Bread Box due to its previous iteration as the Rainbo Bread Factory. Guests can simply sip or join a guided tour which affords them six samples and a special glass to take home.

WestSixth.com



Clockwise from bottom right: A bourbon tasting experience at Fresh Bourbon Distillery; Lost Palm at the Manchester rooftop; Spendthrift Farm, open for tours.

BITES OF THE BLUEGRASS

More than a food tour, this experience offers a taste of Kentucky's history. As you stroll through Lexington, you'll discover how the state's farms, bourbon industry, and cultural influences have shaped its distinctive foodways, with thoughtfully curated tastings along the way.

BitesoftheBluegrass.com

BOURBONLAND

The Kentucky Bourbon Trail has an impressive 68 official destinations to visit. Of those, Lexington is home to eight local distilleries and 11 more within an hour's drive, not to mention, countless bourbon bars. Explore the innovation taking place at local distilleries such as RD1 Spirits, James E. Pepper Distillery, Bespoke Spirits and Fresh Bourbon. Or venture just outside downtown to experience Castle & Key, Four Roses and Woodford Reserve.

VisitLEX.com/Bourbonland

HARVEY'S BAR & BEER GARDEN

Sip, socialize, and soak up the warm atmosphere of Harvey's Bar. This downtown Lexington favorite pairs handcrafted cocktails with an exceptional wine list, and an inviting neighborhood atmosphere. Just beyond the bar, enjoy The Grove courtyard patio for cocktails and light bites.

TheGroveLex.com



TRIFECTA: GLASS - ART - LOUNGE

This dynamic glass art studio and fine art gallery reimagines the glassmaking experience through immersive workshops and sensory-driven exhibits that invite visitors to engage with the medium firsthand. After trying your hand at a design, slip into the venue's speakeasy-style lounge. Tucked behind the studio, the intimate bar pairs cocktails with a moody atmosphere, making it the perfect place to unwind after admiring the artistry.

TrifectaDesignStudio.com

VISIT HORSE COUNTRY

Surrounded by more than 450 horse farms, it's no wonder that Lexington is known as the Horse Capital of the World. Book a tour through Visit Horse Country, or contact the farms directly. Tour providers are also available to help accommodate groups offering behind-the-scenes tours to some of the region's most remarkable horse farms, a must-do for anyone interested in Kentucky's equestrian and Thoroughbred racing heritage.

VisitHorseCountry.com

LEXINGTON NEIGHBORHOODS

From historic, tree-lined streets to the revitalized Distillery District, Lexington's neighborhoods and districts invite visitors to explore the city's distinctive character through locally owned shops, acclaimed restaurants, creative spaces, and gathering places that reflect its timeless charm, historic identity, and modern spirit, where every district offers its own stories, flavors, traditions, and an unmistakable sense of place.

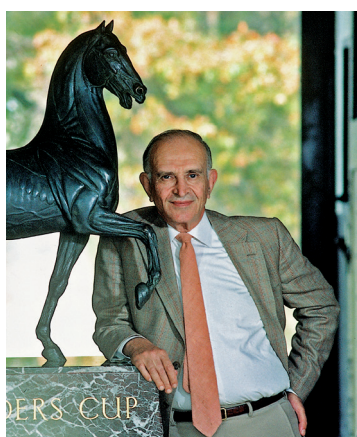
VisitLEX.com

PLAY

On or off the track, there's always something happening in Lexington. Here's where to spend your time exploring



John Gaines (center) with the winning connections of the inaugural Breeders' Cup Classic at Hollywood Park in 1984; Gaines next to a statue of the bronze écorché trophy.



GAINES-ING MOMENTUM

Four decades after its debut, the Breeders' Cup remains a testament to John Gaines's sweeping vision for the sport

Before the first horse ever thundered down the stretch at the Breeders' Cup, before NBC cameras arrived at Hollywood Park, before Jimmy Stewart and Cary Grant mingled beneath the Southern California sun on racing's biggest new day, the event existed only as an idea inside the mind of a Kentucky horseman many considered brilliant, stubborn, and perhaps a little impossible.

John Gaines preferred impossible ideas.

"If he had an idea that he thought needed to happen," his son Thomas Gaines says, "he would go to great lengths to ensure it became real."

That's what happened April 23, 1982, when John, who died in 2005, addressed the Kentucky Derby Festival's "They're Off" luncheon. Speaking to a crowd of journalists, John made an announcement he'd kept secret from everyone, including his wife. His idea? A championship day of racing unlike anything the sport had ever seen before.

OFF TO THE RACES

It's hard to imagine today. The Breeders' Cup is so embedded in the rhythm of Thoroughbred racing that it feels inevitable: two champion-

ship days, millions upon millions in purses and awards, international attention, definitive coronations for the sport's best horses. But in the early 1980s, horse racing had no true championship event. Sprinters, turf horses, juveniles, dirt routers—each division operated in its own orbit. Eclipse Awards were handed out months later, based as much on opinion and campaigning as direct competition.

John saw a glaring absence. Racing needed its Super Bowl.

Not simply a lucrative event, but a season-ending climax that could create narrative and spectacle for casual fans and insiders alike.

"It created storyline narratives and definition," Thomas says.

The idea itself was bold enough. Getting the racing industry to agree to it was another matter entirely. Thomas laughs remembering the sheer audacity of the undertaking.

"The Breeders' Cup was such an enormous political challenge when he unearthed the idea within a hugely competitive, tightly controlled industry," he says.

The resistance wasn't because people thought

it was a bad concept. Quite the opposite. The problem was that everyone had opinions about how it should work, who should benefit, who should pay, and who would ultimately control it.

That's where John's genius emerged.

THINK LIKE A CHAMPION

Born into a family already accustomed to reinvention, John understood business from an early age. His father founded Gaines Dog Food during the 1930s, transforming what had once been feed for kennels into one of America's first nationally packaged dog food brands. The family's roots ran through harness racing, but John Gaines brought a broader ambition to the Thoroughbred world.

He attended military school at Culver, studied at University of Notre Dame, and later served at the Pentagon in the Air Force. Thomas says that discipline defined his dad's determination, from his directness to his refusal to back away from difficult fights.

He was also a collector—not merely of horses, but of art, Japanese prints, and Old Master drawings. Once interested in something, he pursued it intensely. The Breeders' Cup became perhaps his greatest collection of all: a gathering of the sport's best into one definitive championship.

Its funding mechanism was revolutionary.

At the time, elite stallions bred relatively small books of mares. John's idea was to syndicate one additional breeding season for elite stallions and use the proceeds to help fund the purses for a year-end championship event. It was elegant because it aligned the entire industry behind the idea. Breeders funded the event that would ultimately elevate breeding itself.

But even with the financing concept in place, John still needed the industry to commit. So he made a move that now sounds almost absurdly savvy. He secured television first.

Long before all the racing factions fully agreed, John convinced NBC Sports—reportedly with the support of legendary executive Dick Ebersol—to commit to televising the event with four hours of coverage. In the early 1980s, when only a handful of networks dominated American television, that kind of commitment carried enormous weight.

"Once television was behind it," Thomas says, "it made it awfully tough for people to criticize it or try to quash it."

The strategy worked.

PHOTO FINISH

By the time the inaugural Breeders' Cup arrived at Hollywood Park in 1984, the event already felt monumental. Celebrities crowded the stands. Cameras rolled. Racing suddenly had a championship stage worthy of its grandeur.

"There was a great character, a lady that owned Hollywood Park named Marge Everett," Thomas recalls. "She was friends with all the Hollywood royalty. Jimmy Stewart and Cary Grant and all these people were there."

More importantly, the event succeeded immediately. "It was clear that this was every bit the success anybody could have hoped or dreamed," Thomas says.

For Thomas, watching the Breeders' Cup evolve was inseparable from growing up inside the racing world itself. His childhood unfolded on a Lexington horse farm where family life and business life blurred together.

"You grow up in the midst of all of it," he says.

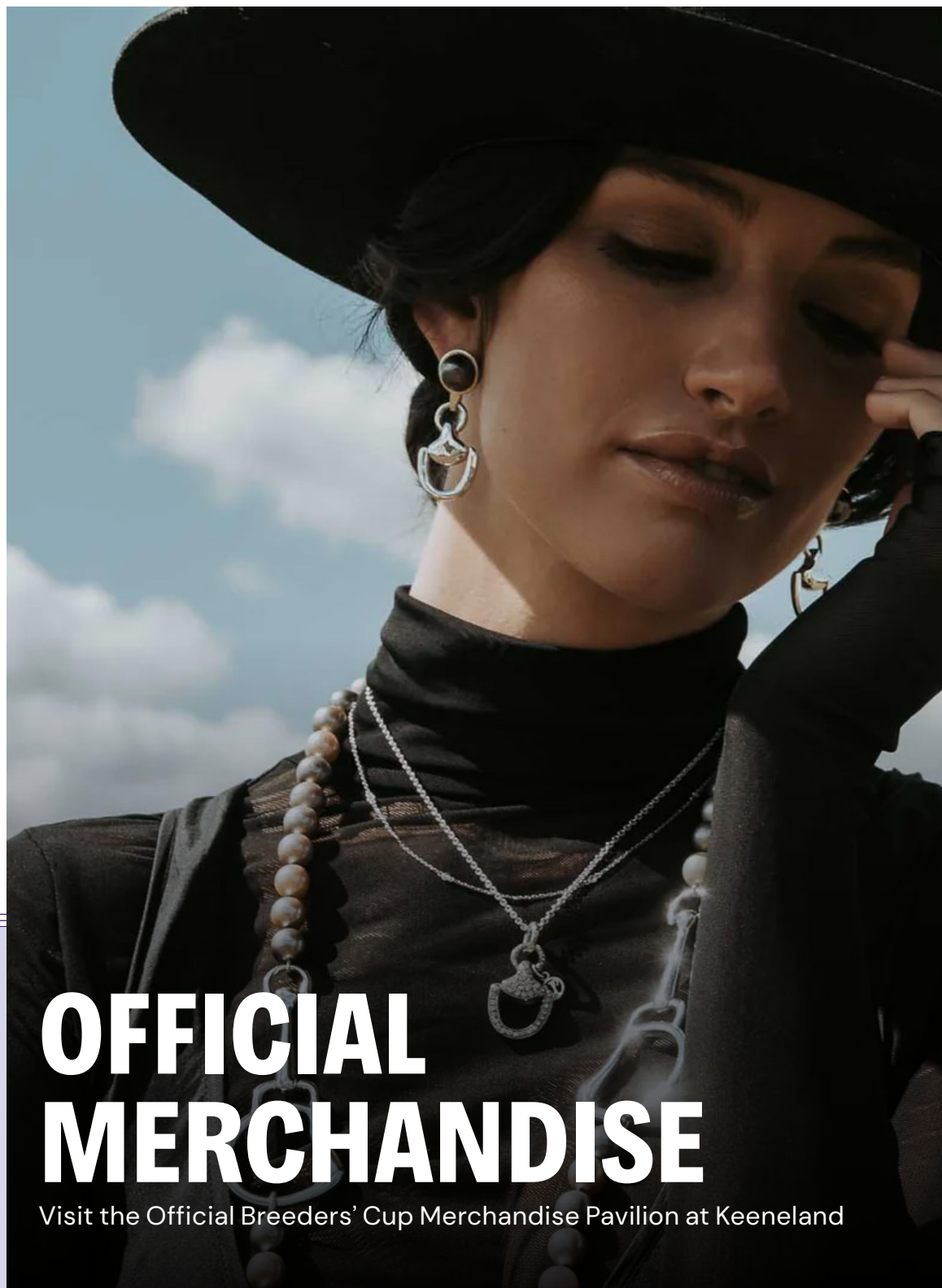
Only later, after leaving Kentucky for boarding school in Connecticut, did he realize how unusual his upbringing had been. "I realized that most people had no idea what any of this was," Thomas says, laughing. "I was the only one getting a subscription to *BloodHorse* magazine."

Now, as the Breeders' Cup returns again to Keeneland—the sport's spiritual and commercial heart in Central Kentucky—John's legacy feels especially visible. Keeneland occupies a singular place in racing as both a world-famous racetrack and a global sales company, embodying every layer of the Thoroughbred industry the Breeders' Cup was designed to celebrate.

"You get the added benefit of showcasing both things in one place," Thomas says. And yet, for all its success, Thomas suspects his father would not spend much time basking in nostalgia.

He believes John would still be focused on the future—on the sport's challenges, on attracting new fans, on keeping racing culturally relevant in an increasingly crowded entertainment landscape. That may be the clearest measure of John's legacy. The Breeders' Cup was never simply about one weekend of racing. It was about forcing the sport to think bigger than it had before.

Forty-four years later, the industry is still shaped by the ambition of that vision—and still benefiting from the standard John set when he imagined what racing could become. [BC](#)



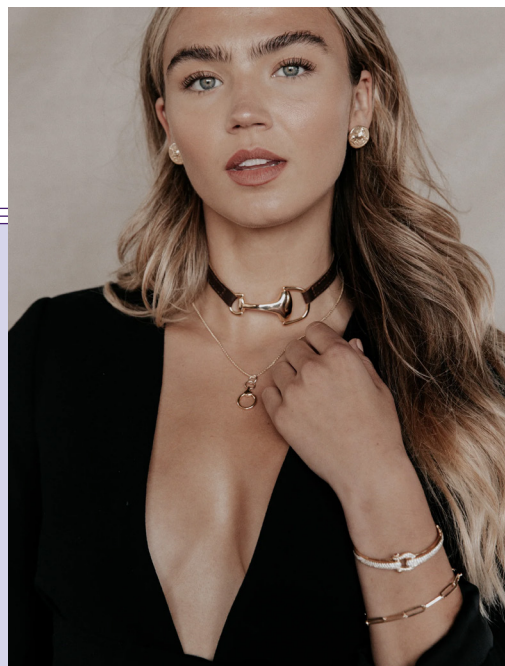
OFFICIAL MERCHANDISE

Visit the Official Breeders' Cup Merchandise Pavilion at Keeneland

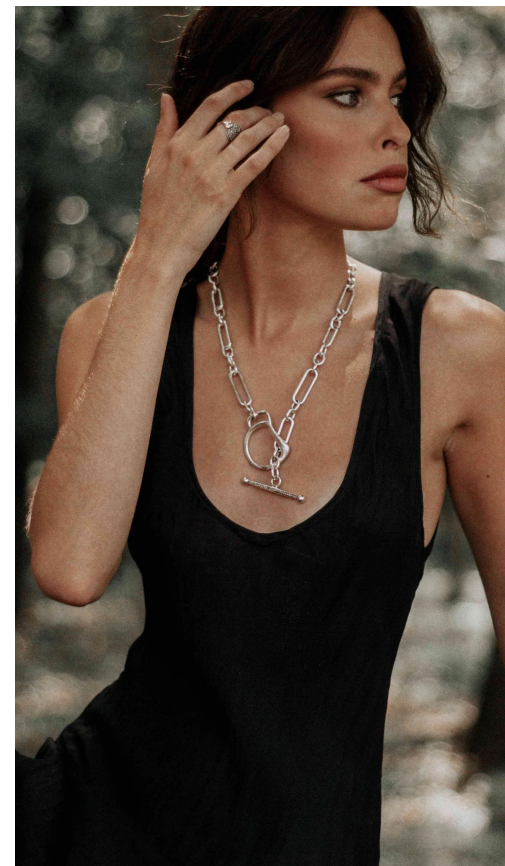


LEFT: Vincent Peach Fine Jewelry Full Diamond Necklace. **CLOCKWISE FROM TOP LEFT:** Vincent Peach Stirrup Lock Bracelet; Tom Beckbe Livingston Jacket; AtelierCG Easton Necklace and AtelierCG Malin Vest Long; Barbour Lowerdale Vest.

CLOCKWISE FROM TOP LEFT: AtelierCG Songbird D-Bit Bracelet; AtelierCG Malin Vest Long; Vincent Peach Gold Choker and Bracelet; Tom Beckbe Tensaw Jacket.



FROM LEFT: Vincent Peach Le' Michelle Cheval Chain; Barbour Lowerdale Gilet.



PURPOSE IN EVERY PURCHASE

Within the purview of Breeders' Cup Charities, industry causes are put at the heart of the action using the global stage of the World Championships to spotlight the vital work of Thoroughbred-focused nonprofits. In a powerful initiative launched last year, 100% of Breeders' Cup royalties from merchandise sales will go directly to support these causes, which shows that style can make a difference.

Visit the official Breeders' Cup Shop online and sign up for the mailing list to receive exclusive news, special offers, and early access to limited-edition gear while supporting a greater cause.

DON'T MISS A BREEDERS' CUP MOMENT



FRIDAY, OCTOBER 30

1:00–6:00PM ET: USA Network/Peacock

SATURDAY, OCTOBER 31

1:00–3:30PM ET: USA Network/Peacock

3:30–6:30PM ET: NBC Network/Peacock

7:00–8:00PM ET: USA Network/Peacock

All races will be streamed live on Breeders' Cup social channels and broadcast live on FanDuel TV.

In the UK/Ireland, tune in to Sky Sports Racing and Racing TV for live coverage.



The official race order and final post times for the 2026 Breeders' Cup World Championships will be released on October 21.



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1-800-MY-RESET.

Age and residency restrictions apply. Customers who have previously placed any wager on FanDuel Sportsbook, FanDuel Daily Fantasy Sports, or on any of FanDuel's Casino offerings, including FanDuel Casino, Betfair Casino, or Mohegan Sun Casino are not eligible. Offer valid on first real-money wager of \$10 or more. Bonus issued as non-withdrawable Racing site credit that expires 7 days after issuance. Visit racing.fanduel.com for offer terms. Call 1-877-770-7867 (LA).



HENRY CAVILL



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