



Cornelio H. Velasquez

Born: September 28, 1968 in Panama City, Panama.

Resident: Pembroke Pines, Fla.

Family: Roxanna (wife), and three daughters, Stephanie, Connie and Katherine.

Cornelio Velasquez's record at Keeneland

Total wins: 43

Stakes Wins (7)

- Won his first Breeders' Cup race in the 2003 Sprint aboard longshot Cajun Beat, and his second in the 2005 Distaff with another longshot, Pleasant Home.
- Leading rider at Churchill Downs (2003 spring meet).
- Leading rider at Calder and Tropical-at-Calder two times each.
- Won three stakes at Keeneland last spring—the Ashland (G1) on Bushfire, the Coolmore Lexington (G2) on Showing Up and the Stonerside Beaumont (G2) on Diplomat Lady.
- Rode six winners at Calder on Nov. 24, 2002.

Highlighting 2006 for jockey Cornelio Velasquez were Grade 1 victories by Bushfire (Ashland), Take D' Tour (Ogden Phipps Handicap) and Showing Up (Secretariat and Hollywood Derby). He ranked ninth by earnings for the year with nearly \$12.4 million and 21st by wins with 237.

Among his many other graded winners last year were Teammate, Pommies Frites, After Market and the very promising Triple Crown prospect Nobiz Like Shobiz.

A year earlier he scored his second Breeders' Cup victory when he piloted 30.75-1 shot Pleasant Home to an impressive 9 1/4-length score. He also posted his best finish in the Kentucky Derby to date, a second aboard Closing Argument, beaten just a half-length.

A three-time leading rider in his native Panama before coming to the U.S., he won his first Kentucky riding crown in the spring of 2003, when he topped all jockeys at Churchill Downs. He also won his first Breeders' Cup race that year on longshot Cajun Beat.

The now-38-year-old rider attended the national jockey school in his native Panama and was leading apprentice there in 1985. Other graduates of the Panamanian jockey school include Braulio Baeza, Laffit Pincay, Jr., Jorge Velasquez and Jacinto Vasquez, all four of whom are enshrined in the National Museum of Racing's Hall of Fame.

Cornelio Velasquez grew up around horses and started riding when he was about 4. He says that the only profession he was interested in was becoming a jockey. He was also leading rider in Panama in 1994 and repeated in 1995.

After he tried riding in the U.S. a couple of times in the early 1990s, Robert Perez brought him to Maryland to ride his *Secreto de Estado* in the 1996 Preakness (G1) and he stayed. He started out in New York and relocated to Florida in 1997 where he has since dominated the standings at Calder.

In 2001, he won 275 races and his mounts earned \$6,243,236. But he made a

much bigger splash the following year when he won 332 races, second only to Russell Baze in the national standings, and his mounts earned \$8,483,039, ranking him 20th. He recorded the first Grade 1 victory of his career that year aboard *Cetewayo* in the Feb. 16 Gulfstream Park Breeders' Cup Handicap. He also won five races on a single Gulfstream card on April 7. On the Oct. 12 Festival of the Sun card at Calder, he won four stakes races—with *Trust N Luck*, *Castlebrook*, *Pay the Preacher* and *Cellars Shiraz*. And on Nov. 24, at the Tropical Park at Calder meeting, he won six races to equal a track record.

Velasquez tested the waters on the Kentucky circuit in 2003 for the first time, which resulted in a very quick payoff. After finishing third at the Keeneland spring meet, he broke Pat Day's streak of seven consecutive spring meet titles at Churchill Downs, winning 63 races to 51 for Day. He won the Debutante Stakes (G3) with *Be Gentle* during that meet, and during the Churchill fall meet, he won the Cardinal Handicap (G3) with *Riskaverse* and the *Pocahontas Stakes* with *Stellar Jayne*.

His biggest win in 2003, of course, was the upset aboard *Cajun Beat* in the Breeders' Cup Sprint at Santa Anita. Third after a quarter-mile, *Cajun Beat* and Velasquez took the lead in upper stretch and pulled away to win by two and a quarter lengths at odds of 22.80-1.

Other highlights during the year included winning the *Fountain of Youth* (G1) with *Trust N Luck* and capturing his first graded stakes at Keeneland. He also won the *Deputy Minister Handicap* (G3) at Gulfstream Park aboard *Native Heir*, the *Azalea Breeders' Cup* (G3) at Calder on *Ebony Breeze*, the *Kentucky Cup Sprint* (G3) with *Cajun Beat* at Turfway and added-money events at *Arlington* and *Mountaineer*.

During the Keeneland fall meet, he tied *Robby Albarado* for second with 15 wins, including his first three stakes. The first, the

Alcibiades, was aboard *Be Gentle* for Hall of Famer D. Wayne Lukas.

Velasquez then won the *Rood & Riddle Dowager Stakes* aboard *Spice Island* for John Pregman Jr. and the *Bourbon County Stakes* with *Commendation* for *Graham Motion*.

"He's resilient and he keeps trying," said agent *Richard de Pass* of his client. "He's a strong finisher. He's easy to hustle. Any trainer who's ridden him, likes him. If you watch him ride, what's not to like. He's a good rider."

De Pass added that Velasquez "was elated with his Breeders' Cup win. He was always confident in the horse and (trainer) *Steve (Margolis)*."

By year-end, he had won 273 races, to rank seventh in the national standings, while his mounts earned \$10,577,461, to rank 13th in earnings.

Wayne Lukas once told *Jenny Rees* of *The Courier-Journal* about Velasquez: "I don't think he's looked up anybody's statistics. He doesn't come out of the (jockeys') room awestruck of *Pat Day*, *Jerry Bailey*, *John Velazquez*, *Edgar Prado*, anybody. He rides his race; he's oblivious to others' reputations. He rides very aggressively. Inside, outside, wherever they have to go."

He had an even better year in 2004, winning 240 races while his mounts compiled earnings of \$11,098,689. His victories ranked him 15th nationally while his earnings ranked him 10th. He won the *Alabama* (G1) with *Society Selection* and the *Flower Bowl Invitational* (G1) on *Riskaverse*. He also won the *Fair Grounds Oaks* (G2) with *Ashado*, the *Davona Dale* (G2) with *Miss Coronado*, the *Saratoga Breeders' Cup Handicap* (G2) with *Evening Attire*, the *Mr. Prospector Handicap* (G3) with *Cajun Beat*, the *Holy Bull* (G3) with *Second of June*, and a division of the *Glens Falls Handicap* (G3) with *Humaita* (Ger).

"I think I've gotten to the stage where I can compete at the top level and with the top-level riders as long as I'm riding the right horses," he told *Daily Racing Form* prior to the 2005 Gulfstream Park meet. "Business is good now. I've gotten in with a lot of trainers from New York and Kentucky and I think there's a good chance I'm in position to pick up a key Derby horse down here this winter."

He wound up with a very competitive Derby mount in *Closing Argument* in 2005 and won 216 races to rank 24th, while his \$11.4 million in earnings ranked him ninth. In addition to the Breeders' Cup victory, Velasquez also won the *Secretariat Stakes* (G1) with *Gun Salute* and other graded races with *Closing Argument*, *Mr. Light* (Arg), *Cool Conductor*, *Ecclesiastic*, *Noisette*, *Folklore* and *Wonder Lady Anne L.*

