

BARN NOTES

OCT. 2-24 | NO RACING Mondays & Tuesdays | First Post 1 p.m. | Gates Open 11 a.m.

Yomar Ortiz Jr. Ready to Realize a Lifelong Dream

As a boy, Yomar Ortiz Jr. had a favorite seat for watching horse racing: his grandmother's couch.

Ortiz (no relation to brothers Jose and Irad Ortiz, Jr.) would pretend to be a jockey, "riding the couch," while watching the races and imagining the day he would compete on the track himself. On Wednesday at Keeneland, the 17-year-old will take a step toward making that childhood dream a reality when he is scheduled to make his professional riding debut aboard Eli's Promise in the third race.

"I've waited for this my whole life," Ortiz Jr. said. "I grew up watching my dad ride (races), and I grew up watching racing, and it's all I've ever wanted to do since I was a little kid, since I could remember."

Racing has long been a big part of the Ortiz family. Yomar's father, Yomar Orlando Ortiz, has ridden mostly in the Mid-Atlantic region since 2012. The elder Ortiz has 517 wins with nearly \$14 million in earnings.

The younger Ortiz, who like his father attended the Escuela Vocacional Hipica, a school for aspiring jockeys in Puerto Rico, learned his craft as an exercise rider for trainers Todd Wyatt, Justin Nixon and Suzanne Stettinius in Maryland then moved to New York to work for Hall of Fame trainer Shug McGaughey in 2025. He has since joined trainer Joe Sharp's stable, where he has continued developing his skills in the mornings and learned from accomplished riders.

"I'm excited for him," said Sharp, who named Ortiz Jr. on Eli's Promise in the 6-furlong claiming race on the main track. "He's a good rider, a really good rider. And a good kid, too. I asked him, 'Are you nervous?' He said, 'Nervous? Nervous? I'm excited. I've been waiting for this my whole life.'"

Liz Morris, Ortiz Jr.'s agent, and a former jockey, believes the young rider has the qualities needed to succeed.

"He's very special," Morris said. "He's unique. He's meant to be a rider. He checks every box that you want to see, especially in a young apprentice. He's beyond his years."

Morris said Ortiz Jr.'s maturity and natural ability in the saddle stand out, recalling how he has handled challenging horses during training.

"He's 17 going on 30; that's hard to find," she said. "If you see him on a horse, he's a natural. I've seen him on horses in the mornings, horses that were being difficult for Joe (Sharp) and he just floats with them."

Ortiz Jr. will begin his career at a track he already considers his favorite. Since arriving at Keeneland for the Fall Meet, he has developed a strong appreciation for the track and the opportunity to compete alongside some of the sport's best jockeys.

"I've always been told, 'You've got to ride with the best to be the best,'" Ortiz Jr. said. "Riding with the big jockeys here, I think it'll make me learn a lot faster."



Yomar Ortiz Jr.

His ambitions extend well beyond his debut. Ortiz Jr. hopes to win the Kentucky Derby (G1), a dream that began during those afternoons watching racing from his grandmother's couch. He also has his sights set on the Eclipse Award for outstanding apprentice jockey.

"I'd love to win a Kentucky Derby one day," Ortiz Jr. said. "Even just riding in the Derby, that is a big goal of mine. Of course, I want to win the Eclipse Award, so that's another goal. I mean, there's a lot of goals."

For now, Ortiz is trying to stay calm ahead of Wednesday's debut, though he expects the nerves to arrive when he enters the Jockeys Quarters before the race.

"I'll be nervous until I get on the horse," Ortiz Jr. said. "Once I get that leg up, I think all those nerves are going to go away, and the focus is going to turn to one thing, and that's to do my best out there." ■ *By Jax Rogers*

Race Day Essentials



How to Watch

Every Race Day

FanDuel TV
Keeneland YouTube

WATCH HERE

Sunday, Oct. 11

3:30-5:30 p.m.
FS1

Complimentary Digital Program



FREE DOWNLOAD

Upcoming Events

Friday, Oct. 16

College Scholarship
Day Presented by
Lane's End



COOLING OUT AFTER QE II CHALLENGE CUP

TAM TAM CAPTURES SECOND STRAIGHT GRADE 1 WIN SATURDAY

Tam Tam continued her breakout season Saturday at Keeneland by capturing the Queen Elizabeth II Challenge Cup (G1) Presented by Dixiana in gate-to-wire fashion.

"Maybe she'll start getting a little more recognition that she deserves," trainer Phil Bauer said. "She's done nothing wrong this year and just keeps getting better."

Winner of the Aug. 22 Del Mar Oaks (G1) in her most recent race, the 3-year-old daughter of Medaglia d'Oro broke alertly in the QE II Presented by Dixiana. She led the field of 10 from start to finish, crossing the wire 2½ lengths ahead of second-place finisher Faithful Departed.

"She just looked so happy and smooth down the backside with her ears just clicking forward," Bauer said. "The fractions were quick, but she looked like she was doing it so easy. The good ones will do it, and she's pretty special."

Following the victory, Bauer said the immediate plan is to give Tam Tam some time to recover before determining her next target.

"She looks great. We'll give her a few days off and see where we're at and maybe come up with a plan for that," Bauer said. "There's one more Grade 1 at Santa Anita on the 26th of December (American Oaks-G1), so maybe. But I think we'll also look toward next year and see what would be early and kind of work backwards from there."

Bauer said Tam Tam has shown she benefits from spacing between races, a factor that will help shape her schedule

NEXT START UNDECIDED FOR RUNNER-UP FAITHFUL DEPARTED

Trainer Grant Forster was not disappointed when Faithful Departed settled for the runner-up spot behind Tam Tam in the Queen Elizabeth II Challenge Cup Presented by Dixiana.

"It was fun to run in the QE II," Foster said about the Yoshida (JPN) filly. "I have always wanted to run in that race. Obviously the goal is to win every race, but she is running against some of the best fillies in the country. She's had some bad luck here and there and had troubled trips and races that didn't set up as we hoped. (On Saturday) it looked like there was more pace on paper but it didn't turn out that way. She's gives her A game every time."

Her A game has resulted in finishing first or second in seven of nine races on grass and an overall ledger of 3-4-0 and \$646,814 in 10 races. She has always been destined for turf competition in part because her dam, the Heatseeker (IRE) mare Speed Seeker, was a Grade 3 winner on the surface.

"Her first race (when unplaced on dirt) was just to get some fitness in her," Forster said about Faithful Departed.

Faithful Departed has since excelled while exclusively on turf with a victory in the Regret (G3) at Churchill Downs and second-place finishes in the Belmont Oaks (G1) and the Saratoga Oaks (G2) both at Saratoga this summer.



moving forward. The goal is to target the biggest opportunities while keeping the filly healthy and happy.

"I think at this point, you know, she's a filly that appreciates a little space in her races, and we'll probably target the best ones that we can from here on out," Bauer said. "Obviously plan on running her next year, as long as she's sound and happy." ■ *By Jax Rogers*

The filly has strong sentimental value to the partnership of Frank Ferrogine, Richard Rendina, Nick Coniglio and Greywood Farms of Joseph Haselton, Britt Haselton and breeder Robert K. Johnson. The group raced her dam along with Frank Coniglio, who died in 2020. Faithful Departed was named to honor Coniglio, who is Nick's father.

Forster said a decision will be made soon on whether to race Faithful Departed once more this year.

"We might want to just freshen her up for next year," he said. "We think she can be one of the best fillies in the country on grass. Maybe one more race and then a vacation.

"There was no shame in losing to Tam Tam. She is a multiple Grade 1 winner and that is what we hope to become."

On Nov. 3, Faithful Departed's half-sister Moonshine Dreamer will be offered as Hip 144 in Book 1 of the Keeneland November Breeding Stock Sale. The 8-year-old Malibu Moon mare is cataloged in foal to Locked, winner of Keeneland's Claiborne Breeders' Futurity (G1). ■ *By Liane Crossley*

COOLING OUT AFTER QEII (cont.)

NO PLANS YET FOR THIRD-PLACE FINISHER BRAIDA (FR)

Braida (FR) poked her head out of her stall early Sunday morning, waiting for Antoine Coutier to deliver her well-earned breakfast following her rallying third in the QEII Presented by Dixiana.

"She looks good, bright and happy," said Coutier, the work rider for trainer Francis-Henri Graffard who made the trip from France with the filly.

Braida came away well from the starting gate and took up a spot in fifth past the finish the first time in the 9-furlong QE II Presented by Dixiana, just behind Tam Tam, Luster, Kensington Lane (IRE) and Faithful Departed.

Jockey Vincent Cheminaud kept the daughter of Mehmas in that position around the first turn, up the backstretch and around the final turn, with cover to her outside most the way from Kensington Lane. Braida followed Faithful Departed out of the final turn and passed rivals to her outside. She finished third, 3½ lengths behind Tam Tam and 1¼ lengths clear of fourth-place Storm's Wake.

"It was a good race for her," Coutier said. "Maybe a little bit too soft (ground) for her."

Coutier said plans were on hold for the filly, at least for now.

"We'll have to check with the boss to see where she goes next," Coutier said. ■ *By Tom Law*

LUSTER EARNS TIME OFF AFTER QUEEN ELIZABETH II

Gainesway Stable and Andrew Rosen's Canadian classic winner Luster finished out of the top three for the first time in her seven career races in the QEII Presented by Diziana.

The daughter of Knicks Go, the 2-1 favorite for the invitational turf stakes for 3-year-old fillies, chased eventual winner Tam Tam in second and to the outside of Faithful Departed for the first 6 furlongs. Braida (FR) and Deep Learning passed Luster on the inside, and Soloist and Storm's Wake went by on the outside turning for home. Jockey John Velazquez didn't persevere from there and Luster finished eighth of 10, beaten 13½ lengths.

Luster spent the night in the stakes barn before heading to Gainesway in Lexington Sunday morning for some time off.

"She's doing well this morning," said Sue Lorimer, assistant to trainer Josie Carroll. "She jogged up good this morning. She's going to have a few weeks turnout now at Gainesway."



Gainesway's Ben Gowans said future plans would be made down the road.

"She's had a great year and earned a good rest," Gowans said. "We'll get her to the farm, give her a rest and figure out some plans for a 4-year-old campaign." ■ *By Tom Law*

FROM KEENELAND LIBRARY ARCHIVES

OCT. 11, 1936

Before hosting its first day of racing on Oct. 15, Keeneland held an open house to celebrate its tote board – the first of its kind in Kentucky. More than 15,000 guests attended.



PERSONAL

PICK 5

NICK & JULIE TOOTH

Keeneland BETologists and Tour Guides

Birthplaces: Sydney, Australia (Nick) and Muncie, Indiana (Julie)



Q: What's your favorite part of being BETologists?

A: Nick: My favorite part is meeting people. I work in the upstairs dining rooms and we have a lot of people who come here and have never been to the races, and they're just blown away by Keeneland and how picturesque the race track is. I love teaching them how to bet and how to win some money.

Julie: I love giving people an opportunity to appreciate the sport of Thoroughbred racing. A lot of people have never been up close to a Thoroughbred, and I love to use my knowledge and point out things that make them realize the incredible athletes they're seeing on the day.

Q: What advice would you give to a handicapping beginner?

A: Nick: I give them advice that 'We want to win some money.' My bet is across the board: win, place and show. We've got three chances to win something. We're not going to win a lot of money, but we're going to cash a ticket.

Q: Where has Thoroughbred racing taken you around the world?

A: Julie: We met because of Thoroughbred racing. We met here in Kentucky on a horse farm. We have been traveling over the past few years to international race tracks. We've recently traveled to South Africa and Hong Kong, and we are planning on going to Australia next year.

Q: Do you have any hobbies outside of horse racing?

A: Julie: I enjoy trying to stay in shape by riding my e-bike and I also help with our two grandsons — ages 3 and 5 — whenever I'm called upon. They live less than two hours away so I enjoy that.

Nick: My relaxing is walking eight to 10 miles a day if possible. I've got a lot of podcasts to listen to. I love true crime and there's a lot of Australian podcasts about racing and I enjoy those very much.

Q: What is your favorite Keeneland memory?

A: Nick: We are in a (racing) partnership, and we've won several races here at Keeneland. To see your horse go across the line first is just the biggest thrill, it's terrific.

WHAT'S IN A NAME

AG BULLET



A-Gee BUHL-it

Race 8

According to owners Calvin Nguyen and Joey Tran, "Ag" is the chemical symbol for silver, a nod to her silver-gray coat, while "Bullet" reflects her speed.

MEET LEADERS

LEADERS THROUGH SATURDAY'S SEVENTH DAY OF THE FALL MEET BY WINS:

Jockeys

10 | Tyler Gaffalione

9 | Irad Ortiz Jr.

Trainers

5 | Brendan Walsh

4 | Chad Brown, Mark Casse, Wesley Ward

Owners

3 | Klaravich Stables (Seth Klarman)

2 | Gainesway Stable (Antony Beck) and Andrew Rosen

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