

BARN NOTES

OCTOBER 2-24 | NO RACING Mondays & Tuesdays | First Post 1 pm | Gates Open 11 pm

High Hopes for Coach Pope in Claiborne Breeders' Futurity

More than one Coach Pope could be in Keeneland's Saddling Paddock for the \$650,000 Claiborne Breeders' Futurity (G1) on Saturday.

The sure participant in the race — a "Win and You're In" event for the \$2-million FanDuel Breeders' Cup Juvenile (G1) at Keeneland on Oct. 30 — is the 2-year-old colt Coach Pope. His namesake, Mark Pope, head coach of the University of Kentucky's men's basketball team, is a probable onlooker.

The equine athlete, who comes to the Claiborne Breeders' Futurity off a 12½-length score on Sept. 12 at Churchill Downs, campaigns for Gainesway Stable, Shamrock Stables and Michael Mackin. He is trained by Kenny McPeck, a UK graduate who grew up in Lexington.

"It's fun to have horses named for people and in the in the case of Coach Pope, he's a friend of mine," McPeck said. "He lets me come to practices and as everybody probably knows, I'm a huge Kentucky fan."

The colt's moniker is both serendipitous and strategic.

"Every spring our stable gets a group of young horses come in from Florida that typically I had bought out of the yearling sales the previous fall," McPeck said. "I want them all named before they get to me but there was a long list that hadn't been named yet, and I kept telling all the owners, 'Would somebody please name these horses?' And then I ran out of patience, and I said, 'I'm just going to name them myself.' I came up with some names, and I called my office to submit them (to The Jockey Club registry)."

An extra step was needed to secure Coach Pope.

"We had to send the coach a letter for him to approve the name in writing," McPeck said.

At the time of the submission, McPeck had only an inkling the colt was worthy but reasoned a son of breeding-shaping stallion Tapit had great potential.



reasoned a son of breeding-shaping stallion Tapit had great potential.

"But you don't really know until they race," he said.

In his career debut, Coach Pope hinted at better days ahead with a game effort on Aug. 8 at Saratoga. He raced just behind the leaders when he matched strides with the eventual winner Gaudreau late in the stretch before settling for second while beaten a half-length. The Claiborne Breeders' Futurity will be his third race.

McPeck, who won the 2024 Kentucky Derby (G1) Presented by Woodford Reserve with Mystic Dan, has conditioned a multiple of exceptional runners, including Claiborne Breeders' Futurity winners Tejano Run (1995), Noble's Promise (2009) and Rattle N Roll (2021).

"This is probably the most talented horse I've ever brought to the Futurity," McPeck said. "He's got that next-level presence. You could tell after his first start that this one's going to take us places. We're hopelessly optimistic that he is a really good one here. He is certainly acting special."

The McPeck team has christened other names nodding to local sports figures. They include Malachi Miracle, named for Malachi Moreno's buzz-beater basket against Louisiana State University in January and Kelz for University of Louisville men's basketball coach Pat Kelsey. — Liane Crossley

Race Day Essentials



How to Watch

Friday, Oct. 2

4-6 p.m.

Peacock, FanDuel TV

Saturday, Oct. 3

3-6 p.m.

NBC, FanDuel TV

Sunday, Oct. 4

5-6:30 p.m.

Peacock, FanDuel TV

Keeneland

YouTube

WATCH HERE

Complimentary Digital Program



FREE DOWNLOAD

Upcoming Events

Friday, Oct. 2-

Sunday, Oct. 3

Tailgating on the Hill

Saturday, October 3

Sunrise Trackside



Nobals Returns to Keeneland with Breeders' Cup in Mind

Trainer Larry Rivelli couldn't be happier with Nobals heading into Saturday's \$400,000 Woodford (G2) Presented by FanDuel.

"I'm as happy as I could be with him," Rivelli said. "He's never done anything wrong."

The 7-year-old son of Noble Mission (GB) enters the Woodford Presented by FanDuel off a third-place finish in his most recent start in allowance company at Saratoga, where Rivelli felt the gelding's trip was compromised from the start.

"For some reason he missed the break, and Flavien (Prat) ended up having to take back on him," Rivelli said. "He ended up running really well other than that."

Following his last effort, Rivelli believes Nobals has earned another opportunity against a strong field in Saturday's turf sprint. While he acknowledges the challenge ahead, he also sees a path toward another trip to the Prevagen Breeders' Cup Turf Sprint (G1) Oct. 31. Nobals won the Breeders' Cup Turf Sprint in 2023 for Rivelli and owner Patricia's Hope.

"It's a tough field — definitely not as tough as the Breeders' Cup," Rivelli said about the Woodford Presented by FanDuel. "I think the outside horse (Doncho) looks good, but I think we have a good shot. We'd like to get him back to the Breeders' Cup."

A key part of Rivelli's confidence comes from Nobals' durability. He said the veteran has never experienced an issue and his team has been thoughtful about giving him time off when needed.

"Knock on wood, he's never had a soundness issue ever," Rivelli said. "We always give him three to four months off when he needs it."

Rivelli has also noted a physical difference in Nobals this year. After seeing him at Churchill Downs in June, the trainer noticed the horse had added weight, something he believes has helped him perform well.

"He's actually gotten fatter this year," Rivelli said. "When he was at Churchill earlier, I looked at him and said, 'That horse looks like he's added 10 to 15 pounds,' and it must have helped because he ran well that day."

Nobals will exit the starting gate from post four in the Woodford Presented by FanDuel. He will be ridden by Gerardo Corrales. —*Jax Rogers*



Evanescence Puts Unbeaten Keeneland Mark on Line

Green Lantern Stables' Evanescence shares plenty in common with five of her six opponents in Saturday's \$400,000 Thoroughbred Club of America (G2) at Keeneland.

The 4-year-old daughter of Munnings, like those five other fillies and mares, shows a fondness for Keeneland in her past races. She's 2-for-2 over the track and both wins have come at the 6½-furlong trip she'll face Saturday.

"She likes Keeneland and she's run OK in the mud," trainer Eddie Kenneally said, acknowledging the chance for rain Friday.

OK might also be a stretch, as two of Evanescence's four wins came on tracks not listed fast, including her first Keeneland victory over a track labeled good in an allowance during the 2025 Spring Meet. She also won on the slop at Churchill Downs and finished third on a good track last time out in the Twin Bridges July 19 at Ellis Park.

"That's the facts right there," Kenneally said when that record was pointed out.

Regardless, Kenneally said the \$250,000 Keeneland September Yearling Sale purchase will be ready off a steady string of works at his Churchill base. She takes on those five winners – 2026 Resolute Racing Madison (G1) winner Eclatant, 2025 TCA winner Praying, 2025 Myrtlewood winner Echo Sound, 2024 TCA winner Zeitlos and Jersey Pearl – along with stakes winner Queen's Martini, who makes her Keeneland debut.

"We'll see, we're ready to go," Kenneally said. "Prestigious race, Grade 2, Keeneland, home track, it's a perfect spot for her. It's a good field with a Grade 1 winner in there. Short field, but a good field." —*Tom Law*

Walsh Well Stocked for Saturday's Grade 1 Turf Stakes

Trainer Brendan Walsh sends out three runners in two Grade 1 turf stakes Saturday at Keeneland — the \$1.25 million Coolmore Turf Mile and the \$800,000 First Lady — including a pair that own wins at that level in Lexington.

Dixiana Farms' Lush Lips (GB) and Farfellow Farms' Expensive Queen (IRE) are two of that trio and are part of a competitive field of 11 entered in the First Lady. Lush Lips won the Queen Elizabeth II Challenge Cup (G1) Presented by Dixiana during the 2025 Fall Meet, and Expensive Queen took the Jenny Wiley (G1) in a dead-heat with Segesta at this year's Spring Meet.

Walsh felt they both could be headed to productive spring and summer campaigns before setbacks derailed those plans.

"Lush Lips, we thought we were set up for a good year with her," Walsh said. "She ran a really good race in the Honey Fox (G3) in February at Gulfstream, came here and had an issue just before the Jenny Wiley and we had to scratch her."

Lush Lips didn't race until late August, when she finished second in the Ellis Park Turf Stakes. The 4-year-old daughter of Ten Sovereigns led in that 1 1/16-mile event before being caught late to finish a length behind Totally Justified. Walsh expects a move forward in the First Lady off that run.

"She ran well enough at Ellis, but I think I had her a little undercooked than what I thought," Walsh said. "She turned for home, kind of sprinted away from them and then she got tired. Her work since has been very, very good. We have her back to as good as we had her in the spring."

Expensive Queen, 3-for-3 this season, comes into the First Lady without a prep.

"She had a little injury after the Jenny Wiley, which put us out of action until now," Walsh said. "She's a lighter-made filly and I don't think she would have needed to run like Lush Lips did."

We have her ready. She's been working really good actually. Very, very much looking forward to running her."

Walsh is also eager to run Title Role for the first time in the Coolmore Turf Mile. Owned by Will Stroud, Title Role spent time in Walsh's barn at Saratoga this summer for trainer Simon Crisford.

Title Role won the Belmont Derby (G1) July 4 and finished third in the Saratoga Derby (G1) Presented by Qatar Racing Aug. 8. Walsh and assistant Charlie Lynch took over the Too Darn Hot colt's training after that race, breezed him twice on the Oklahoma Training Track turf before two more works on Turfway Park's synthetic track to prep for the Coolmore Turf Mile.



Brendan Walsh

"The boys got to know him, it was a pretty easy transition," Walsh said. "Nice horse, obviously. His form is very good. Seems like he's been doing well since. I think the mile will suit him, those other races were a little farther obviously."

"He's not the greatest worker in the world," Walsh added. "I saw him working up there. He works OK. He's an adequate worker. He looks very well in his coat. We're looking forward to it. It's a big step up, taking on older horses for the first time. Good field of horses. But we'll give him a go and look forward to next year as well." —Tom Law

FROM KEENELAND LIBRARY ARCHIVES

OCT. 2, 2004

The film Dreamer was in the process of filming its Breeders' Cup scenes at Keeneland.



PERSONAL

PICK 5 KURT BECKER

Track Announcer

Birth Date: March 17, 1969

Birthplace: Effingham, IL



Q: What's the best part of your job?

A: The dual nature of my role as announcer for sales and track announcer. I enjoy when a September yearling wins the Toyota Blue Grass (G1), which has happened several times, or a filly or mare comes out of a Grade 1 and goes through the ring at the November Breeding Stock Sale. I'm fortunate to see the racing and the sales side of industry.

Q: What's your favorite Keeneland memory?

A: The first time Keeneland hosted the Breeders' Cup (in 2015), the very first race of the weekend was the Juvenile Turf, won by Hit It a Bomb. When entries came out, I was surprised to see Aidan O'Brien training a horse owned by a lady I didn't recognize (Mrs. Evelyn Stockwell). I thought, 'How does this person get Aidan to train when he's private trainer for Coolmore?' I called Ashford and they told me it's none of my business, but I was just curious. They started laughing and said, 'That would be (Coomore partner) Mr. Magnier's mother.' I loved it. I thought, 'You know, here's John Magnier — one of most influential people in the industry — and if mom says she wants something, mom is going to be able to have it.'

Q: What do you do in your free time?

A: I spend a lot of time on the Illinois Fair Circuit, entering antique glassware contests. Late 19th century, early 20th century. Pressed glass, cut glass, colored glass, clear glass, custard glass, Vaseline glass, carnival glass, my collection is diverse.

Q: Who would be your three guests for a dream dinner?

A: I will keep it in realm of living people. European race caller Richard Hoiles, he is excellent. I have high regard for his work. Richard Petty from NASCAR. I've gotten to know him in passing through my work for Motor Racing Network. Charles Miller, a teacher and school administrator from my hometown Altamont, Illinois. He's approaching age 90, in good health and when I see him from time to time I always say, 'We need to get lunch or dinner.'

Q: Who is your role model?

A: There are two. One, my late father, Carl, a Standardbred announcer. And his mentor, Stan Bergstein. He took the raw material my dad brought to the table and he helped develop him into a track announcer. Long after my mother quit traveling and when I was about 19 and first involved in the harness industry, even years after my father passed Stan would ask, 'How's your mother, Bonnie?' I'm amazed that he asked but also that he remembered her first name.

WHAT'S IN A NAME

VIRABHADRASANA



**veer-uh-buh-
DRAH-suh-nuh**

Race 3 Virabhadrasana is commonly known as Warrior Pose in yoga. The name has a personal connection for owner Joel Politi, whose wife is a yoga instructor.

PEOPLE • HORSES • STATS

Worth Knowing

Due to the forecasted rain, the turf rail will be set at 20 feet on Friday, rather than the 10-foot setting listed in the program. The rail will return to 10 feet on Saturday and Sunday.

Browse the

**BARN
NOTES
ARCHIVE**



**Barn Notes
Contributors**

**Liane Crossley
Meredith Daugherty
Gabby Gaudet
Tom Law
Amy Owens
Jax Rogers
Keeneland Photos**