

Racing

In the early 1930s, Keeneland's founders set about to create a special race track in Central Kentucky. Their vision, as outlined in the track's original prospectus, was "to create a model race track to perpetuate and improve the sport and to provide a course that is intended to serve as a symbol of the fine traditions of Thoroughbred racing."

Since its first meeting in October 1936, Keeneland has continued to strive for excellence in its racing program, which perennially ranks among the nation's best in terms of purse money, field size and quality of racing. Recent notable events include

- Oct. 4, 2014: Keeneland presented its first million-dollar race, the Shadwell Turf Mile (G1). The winner was Keeneland-based two-time Horse of the Year Wise Dan.
- April 4, 2015: Keeneland's signature Kentucky Derby (G1) prep, the Toyota Blue Grass, became a million-dollar race. The stakes also was moved to opening Saturday of the Spring Meet, joining the \$500,000 Central Bank Ashland (G1) and three other stakes to create a blockbuster day of racing.
- On Oct. 30-31, 2015, Keeneland for the first time hosted the Breeders' Cup World Championships (page 132). One of the track's goals in hosting the Breeders' Cup was to enhance the quality of horses racing here during the Spring and Fall Meets. The success of the event heightened enthusiasm for racing here and introduced many horsemen to the track's world-class facilities and lucrative racing program. The Breeders' Cup will return to Keeneland on Nov. 6-7, 2020.
- In 2018, Keeneland paid a record \$9,975,000 million in stakes purses. The track hosted a total of 335,025 fans over 33 days of racing.

Spring Excitement

Each April, early symptoms of Kentucky Derby fever are apparent as contenders from across the nation compete in the Toyota Blue Grass (G2). Since 1936, 19 horses have used the Blue Grass as a steppingstone to victory in the Derby, most recently Unbridled (1990), Strike the Gold (1991), Sea Hero (1993), Thunder Gulch (1995) and Street Sense (2007).

The Central Bank Ashland is a premier prep for fillies with aspirations of competing in the \$1 million Kentucky Oaks (G1). Thirty-four fillies have won the Oaks off a start in the Ashland, including three of the past four Oaks winners: champion Monomoy Girl (2018), Cathryn Sophia (2016) and Lovely

Keeneland/Photos by Z

Bob Elliston | Vice President of Racing and Sales

Biography can be found on page 10.



Ben Huffman | Racing Secretary

Ben Huffman has been Keeneland's Racing Secretary since 2002.

A native of Louisville, Kentucky, Ben attended Western Kentucky University and the University of Louisville. He began working for his father, trainer William G. "Blackie" Huffman, as a teenager and for three years was his assistant. His first job in a racing office was at Ellis Park in 1990 when he worked as the claims clerk. His first job at Keeneland was also as a claims clerk.



Ben filled several positions before becoming Saratoga's co-Assistant Racing Secretary in 1996 and 1997. He later was Howard Battle's Assistant Racing Secretary at Keeneland in 1994; Racing Secretary at Ellis Park; Assistant Racing Secretary at Turfway Park; stakes coordinator at Fair Grounds; and Racing Secretary and Director of Racing at Fair Grounds. He was named Racing Secretary and Director of Racing at Churchill Downs in the fall of 2006.

A member of the Thoroughbred Owners and Breeders Association American Graded Stakes Committee, Ben resides in Crestwood, Kentucky, with his wife, Christi, and daughters Abby and Annie.



Maria (2015). These classic winners join such standouts as Oaks-Ashland winners Silverbulletday, Princess Rooney, Blush With Pride, Optimistic Gal and Real Delight.

The Toyota Blue Grass and the Central Bank Ashland are worth 100 points each to the winners on the Road to the Kentucky Derby and Road to the Kentucky Oaks, respectively.

In 2019, Keeneland will expand its Spring Meet, which will open Thursday, April 4, a day earlier than in previous years, and present two new stakes, both \$100,000 turf sprints, to its schedule for a total of 18 stakes worth a season-record \$4.6 million in purse money.

The Thursday opener means the Spring Meet will not lose a day because of Easter Sunday, April 21, when Keeneland is closed. Prior to 1960, the Spring Meet often opened on Thursday when the season was shorter.

With the new stakes, the 16-day Spring Meet will present 10 stakes on grass and eight stakes on dirt.

Other Grade 1 stakes during the Spring Meet are the \$300,000 Madison on opening Saturday; \$300,000 Maker's 46 Mile, one of the sport's key turf stakes early in the year; and the Coolmore Jenny Wiley, a 1 1/16-mile race for fillies and mares on the turf.

Fall Excellence

In October, Keeneland's signature Fall Stars Weekend offers an exciting kickoff to the Fall Meet, when nine graded stakes are contested opening weekend. Five of those races are Grade 1 events: Darley Alcibiades, Shadwell Turf Mile, Claiborne Breeders' Futurity, First Lady and Juddmonte Spinster.

A sixth Grade 1 stakes, the \$500,000 Queen Elizabeth II Challenge Cup Presented by Lane's End, is an internationally renowned invitational for 3-year-old fillies at 1 1/8 miles on the turf.

Fans see many Breeders' Cup-bound stars prep at Keeneland as a prelude to the World Championships. Nine Breeders' Cup Challenge stakes are run Fall Stars Weekend: Darley Alcibiades (a Challenge race for the Juvenile Fillies-G1) and Stoll Keenon Ogden Phoenix (G2) (Sprint-G1) on Friday; Shadwell Turf Mile (Mile-G1), Claiborne Breeders' Futurity (Juvenile-G1), First Lady (Filly and Mare Turf-G1) and Thoroughbred Club of America (G2) (Filly and Mare Sprint-G1) on Saturday and Juddmonte Spinster (Distaff-G1), Dixiana Bourbon-G3 (Juvenile Turf-G1) and Indian Summer (Juvenile Turf Sprint) on Sunday.

The following weekend, Keeneland will offer its 10th Breeders' Cup Challenge race, the JPMorgan Chase Jessamine (G3), which awards the winner a berth in the Juvenile Fillies Turf (G1).

Forty-eight horses that have won Breeders' Cup races made their final start before the World Championships during Keeneland's Fall Meet. The latest came

Katherine McKee | Director of Racing Administration



As Director of Racing Administration and Horsemen's Relations, Katherine McKee supports Keeneland's racing program through such responsibilities as completing the annual license renewal process required by the Kentucky Horse Racing Commission; compiling necessary materials for the National Thoroughbred Racing Association Safety and Integrity Alliance accreditation; ensuring Keeneland adheres to Alliance standards; coordinating horsemen's relations and overseeing the trophy program.

Katherine, who is from Henderson, Kentucky, is a graduate of Transylvania University in Lexington and has an MBA from the University of Kentucky. She has worked at Keeneland since 2006.

She has two children, Ava Katherine and Walker.

Javier Barajas | Track Superintendent



Named Keeneland's Track Superintendent on Aug. 5, 2014, Javier Barajas supervises maintenance of the 1 1/16-mile dirt track, along with the 7-furlong turf course and 5-furlong all-weather training track.

Javier has nearly four decades of expertise in international race track installation and maintenance. He began working on track and turf course crews at Arlington Park in 1976. In 1996, he was promoted to Track Superintendent, a position he held for 13 years. During that time, he managed the dirt track and turf course, and oversaw installation of the all-weather surface.

In 2009, Javier became Track Superintendent for the Dubai Racing Club, overseeing the care of Meydan Racecourse, home of the \$12 million Dubai World Cup (G1), and its associated training facilities. He also was Track Superintendent at Canterbury Park, which features a dirt track and turf course.

Javier has two children, Roberto and Elizabeth.

in 2018, when Shamrock Rose captured Keeneland's Lexus Raven Run (G2) and next won the Breeders' Cup Filly and Mare Sprint (G1). She was named the year's champion female sprinter.

Historic Vision

That Keeneland is such a special place is no accident. Grand thinking by Jack Keene, coupled with the shared aspirations of a group of prominent horsemen, most notably Hal Price Headley and Maj. Louie Beard, and the careful stewardship of subsequent management led to Keeneland's creation.

With the demise of the Kentucky Association track near downtown Lexington in 1933, horsemen faced a dilemma: For the first time in more than 100 years the city was without a race track. Concerned citizens began meeting in 1934 after determining it wasn't feasible to reopen the shuttered track. From among 20 locations, they selected Jack Keene's property, primarily because Keene was willing to part with the property for much less than its fair market value. Plus, the site included a mile-and-a-furlong private track, combination stone castle and barn, a 100,000-gallon water tank, a roadway and land for future stables and parking.

The facility, while a good start, still required much work. Headley, Beard and others worked feverishly around the clock, and a mere 15 months later, Keeneland opened its gates. It was managed by the Keeneland Association, which consisted of a team of volunteers under the direction of Beard and Headley, Keeneland's first President.

On opening day, more than 8,000 fans came to the races — ranging from locals who simply wanted to see racing in their hometown for the first time in years to titans of business who brought their best bloodstock to compete. By the end of the nine-day meet, Keeneland had scraped by, losing just \$3.47 in its first year. Lexington, a town of 46,000, had supported racing's comeback as the meet posted attendance of 25,337. And even with 15 million Americans out of work, those fans had taken a gamble or two, wagering more than \$500,000.

As Headley said, "We want a place where those who love horses can come and picnic with us and thrill to the sport of the Bluegrass. We are not running a race plant to hear the click of the mutuel machines. We want them to come out here to enjoy God's sunshine, fresh air and to watch horses race."