



breeders' cup legend

ZENYATTA

Zenyatta's historic Breeders' Cup Class victory



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By Jacqueline Duke

Zenyatta and the Breeders' Cup World Championships are indelibly linked. The Amazonian bay delivered her most memorable performances on the Breeders' Cup stage; the championships, in turn, gained in prestige from the glow of Zenyatta's star appeal.

Zenyatta appeared in three consecutive Breeders' Cups, heightening the excitement of each. In 2008 she kept her early unbeaten streak alive in winning the Breeders' Cup Ladies' Classic. The following year, her perfect record still intact, Zenyatta made history by becoming the first female to win the Breeders' Cup Classic. In 2010 she took her 19-0 record to Churchill Downs to attempt a repeat in the Classic. While Zenyatta might have come up a head short to the colt Blame, the post-race cheers of the adoring crowd were for her alone.

Bred by Eric Kronfeld, Zenyatta was foaled April 1, 2004, at Don Robinson's Winter Quarter Farm near Lexington. Kronfeld had bred Zenyatta's dam, Vertigineux, and raced her with modest success. She had produced two foals before Zenyatta, one of whom became millionaire Balance. Kronfeld chose the then-unproven Irish-bred stallion Street Cry for the mating that produced Zenyatta.

When the lanky yearling filly appeared at the 2005 Keeneland September yearling sale, she brought along a bad case of hives that scared some buyers away. But she caught the eye of bloodstock agent David Ingordo, who bought her for \$60,000 for music mogul Jerry Moss and his wife, Ann. They named the big youngster Zenyatta after the album *Zenyatta Mondatta* by The Police.

The Mosses placed Zenyatta into the patient hands of trainer John Shirreffs, who allowed the filly time to grow. Her large frame — she eventually reached 17.1 hands and tipped the scales at 1,200-plus pounds — postponed her first

start until November of her 3-year-old season.

From her first race Zenyatta demonstrated her trademark style of dropping far back early, only to devour her rivals at the eighth pole. On many occasions her late-running style threatened the cardiac welfare of her many fans when it appeared she might not make up the distance.

However, Zenyatta seemed always to have the measure of her rivals and instinctively know the location of the finish line, for she found it first every time. With her outsized charisma, she also captivated fans with her special paddock "dance" and her bond with her regular jockey, Hall of Fame rider Mike Smith.

As a 4-year-old in 2008, Zenyatta conquered many important stakes races and ended the season with her Ladies' Classic score. At 5 she culminated another splendid campaign with her historic Breeders' Cup Classic. Zenyatta's 6-year-old season continued with triumph after triumph. By the time she won her third Vanity, Zenyatta had surpassed the winning streaks of such legends as Citation and Cigar. When she won the Lady's Secret Stakes for her 19th straight, Zenyatta became the highest-earning female runner in North American history.

As her fame grew, Zenyatta's fan club spread from coast to coast. Churchill Downs drew 72,729 people for the 2010 Breeders' Cup, many hoping to see the grand mare close her career perfect in 20 races.

But Zenyatta trailed her Classic rivals even more than was her custom, at one point seven lengths behind the next-to-last horse in the 1¼-mile race. With only one horse behind her heading into the stretch, she appeared hopelessly beaten. Blame took the lead, and Zenyatta prepared to run him down, in the manner of her previous 19 races. But the wire came up a head too long.

Despite her loss to Blame, Zenyatta earned Horse of the Year honors for 2010, adding to her previous Eclipse Awards as champion older female.

Retirement ceremonies followed at Hollywood Park and at Keeneland, the latter on a frigid day that nevertheless drew more than 1,000 well-wishers. Retired to Lane's End Farm, Zenyatta has produced three foals. Her popularity remains undiminished. **KM**