



A jockey in a blue helmet and red and blue silks is riding a dark horse during a race. The horse is galloping on a dirt track, and another horse is visible in the background. The background is a green field with a diamond pattern.

Getting into GEAR

Two-year-olds get
a chance to shine
and reveal
classic potential
in Keeneland's five
fall stakes races
for juveniles

By Tom Pedulla



or intrigue, excitement, and unpredictability, few propositions match the 2-year-old graded stakes races that brighten Keeneland each October like golden autumn leaves.

The magnitude of the \$400,000 Darley Alcibiades, \$500,000 Claiborne Breeders' Futurity, \$250,000 Dixiana Bourbon, \$200,000 Indian Summer, and \$200,000 JP-Morgan Chase Jessamine is reflected in their presence in the Breeders' Cup "Win and You're In" Challenge Series. Winners of each race gain automatic and free entry into the Breeders' Cup World Championships, to be run Nov. 1-2 at Santa Anita Park in Southern California. The Breeders' Cup returns to Keeneland in 2020.

The five races are unlike any others that will be contested during an Oct. 4-26 fall meet that offers \$5.675 million in stakes purses. Juveniles, getting their first glimpses of prime time, are typically just beginning to figure out themselves and the game. Getting antsy in the post parade, balking at the starting gate, ducking in, drifting out, and gawking at the stands during the stretch run can all be part of the deal and, really, part of the fun.

Racing and horseplayers thrive on improbability. Is there anything more unpredictable than a green 2-year-old with raw talent and vast potential?

When Bob Elliston, vice president of racing and sales at Keeneland, was asked about the fall 2-year-old lineup, he provided a twist on Tom Hanks' famous line about life in "Forrest Gump."

"It's like a box of chocolates. You never know what you're going to get," Elliston said.

Fans delight in repeatedly dipping into that box of chocolates. When they are done, they may well have gotten an up-close look at future stars.

"There are some tremendously bred horses that emerge," Elliston said, "and you say, 'Wow, if they are this precocious as 2-year-olds, how are they going to be as they turn to 3-year-olds? Are we seeing the beginning of a tremendous horse?'"

Those questions are likely to be asked throughout the highly anticipated Fall Stars Weekend, which features four stakes



Trainer Ken McPeck congratulates Brian Hernandez Jr. for his winning ride on Restless Rider in the 2018 Darley Alcibiades.

for juveniles — three graded and one non-graded — among the nine events designated as Breeders' Cup Challenge races.

The grade 1 Darley Alcibiades (Tito's Handmade Vodka Breeders' Cup Juvenile Fillies) joins the \$250,000 Stoll Keenon Ogden Phoenix (TwinSpires Sprint) in highlighting opening day.

The grade 1 Claiborne Breeders' Futurity (Sentient Jet Juvenile) represents a key element in a blockbuster Saturday card also comprising the \$1 million Shadwell Turf Mile (Big Ass Fans Mile); \$400,000 First Lady (Maker's Mark Filly & Mare Turf); \$250,000 Thoroughbred Club of America (Filly & Mare Sprint); and \$200,000 Woodford Stakes Presented by Keeneland Select.

The Woodford gained appeal when Kentucky Downs established a \$1 million bonus for any horse able to sweep the \$700,000 Kentucky Downs Turf Sprint, the Woodford, and the \$1 million Breeders' Cup Turf Sprint.

The \$500,000 Juddmonte Spinster (Distaff); \$250,000 Dixiana Bourbon (Juvenile Turf); and \$200,000 Indian Summer (Juvenile Turf Sprint) help close Fall Stars Weekend on Sunday. NBC will broadcast the Shadwell Turf Mile and Claiborne Breeders' Futurity on Saturday followed by the Juddmonte Spinster and



Owner Debby Oxley leads in Heavenly Love after the filly wins the 2017 edition of the Darley Alcibiades.

Dixiana Bourbon on Sunday.

The Jessamine (Juvenile Fillies Turf), on Oct. 9, will be last and certainly not the least of the 2-year-old graded stakes.

Owners, trainers, and breeders like nothing more than seeing their maturing 2-year-olds tested toward the end of the season at Keeneland. The graded stakes races for them sell themselves.

“Every single 2-year-old stakes we offered at Keeneland last fall was overfilled,” noted racing secretary Ben Huffman. “That, in itself, tells you how important the 2-year-old stakes in the fall at Keeneland are.”

The “Challenge Series” designation surely helps. Yet the appeal extends beyond that.

“Other tracks and other jurisdictions have ‘Win and You’re In’ also, and they have good races,” Huffman said. “But there is something about Kentucky and Keeneland. It’s the place to be.”

The \$5.675 million in stakes purses represents a record for a meet in which Keeneland is not hosting the Breeders’ Cup

World Championships. Of that grand sum, \$3.95 million will be distributed when 10 stakes, half of them grade 1s, are contested Fall Stars Weekend.

The history-rich Darley Alcibiades, for 2-year-old fillies at 1 $\frac{1}{16}$ miles, helps kick things off. The race, to be run for the 68th time, is named for Alcibiades, the great foundation mare owned by Hal Price Headley, one of Keeneland’s founders.

Restless Rider, a \$150,000 purchase by trainer Ken McPeck at the 2017 Keeneland September yearling sale, proved herself by turning an Alcibiades victory into a second-place finish in the Breeders’ Cup Juvenile Fillies and another solid runner-up finish in the Central Bank Ashland Stakes the following spring at Keeneland on behalf of Three Chimneys Farm and Fern Circle Stables.

A daughter of Distorted Humor, Restless Rider followed She’s a Devil Due (2000), Take Charge Lady (2001), and Dream Empress (2008) as Alcibiades winners for McPeck. The trainer



Round Table, center of track, wins the 1956 Breeders' Futurity en route to many major victories over four seasons.

also has finished second five times since 2010.

McPeek grew up in Lexington. Races such as the Alcibiades are very much in his thinking when he works the sales, where he is known for unearthing diamonds in the rough. Dream Empress, for instance, was a \$60,000 bargain when she sold as a Keeneland yearling.

"I tend to buy a horse that I believe will handle a distance," McPeek said. "We train a lot of our horses to point toward the fall and get them in the routine of going two turns."

He does everything possible to have them primed for Keeneland's fall meet. "Typically, I see a lot of family and friends, so there is added motivation," McPeek said. "I've always enjoyed winning there. Who wouldn't?"

Katie LaMonica also grew up in Lexington. She is equally passionate about Keeneland as she discusses the reason Darley's sponsorship of the Alcibiades works so well.

"Having a grade 1, 2-year-old filly race here at Keeneland in the fall heading into the Breeders' Cup is the perfect spot for us," said LaMonica, speaking for Godolphin USA. "Sponsoring a filly race makes sense when we're trying to promote our stallions."

Darley, in sponsoring the Alcibiades since 2003, uses race day to entertain approximately 200 top clients. "What we are trying to do is make our clients feel special," La-

“

WE TRAIN A LOT OF
HORSES TO POINT
TOWARD THE FALL..."

— KEN McPEEK



Swale prefaces his 1984 Kentucky Derby and Belmont Stakes victories with a triumph in the '83 Breeders' Futurity.

Monica said. "Using Keeneland as the backdrop for that is the perfect combination."

When Walker Hancock took over as Claiborne Farm's president in 2014, he quickly moved to align an operation that has been in his family through four generations with the Breeders' Futurity. He views the 1¼-mile contest as "a great test for a young horse." Claiborne boasts an unprecedented five winners: Round Table (1956), Duel (1963), Dike (1968), Swale (1983), and Forty Niner (1987).

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Getting into **GEAR**



Classic Empire scores in the 2016 Breeders' Cup Juvenile for owner John Oxley, left, trainer Mark Casse, center, and jockey Julien Leparoux.

Round Table, of course, became arguably the greatest grass runner of all time. Swale captured the Kentucky Derby while Forty Niner missed by a neck to the sensational filly Winning Colors in the Run for the Roses.

Last year's edition provided a vivid reminder of how mercurial 2-year-olds can be. When Knicks Go pulled a stunning upset, it resulted in a \$142 straight payoff, the largest in the 105-year history of the storied race. Knicks Go reiterated his quality by snaring second in the Breeders' Cup Juvenile.

Fans should pay attention beyond the winners of each juvenile race. Henley's Joy offered a hint of his potential when he placed second last year in the Dixiana Bourbon, 1 $\frac{1}{16}$ miles on turf named for Bourbon County, home to some of North America's most productive Thoroughbred farms. He captured the \$1 million Belmont Derby Invitational Stakes this past July.

Dixiana Farm, founded in 1877 and owned

by William J. and Donna Shively since 2004, has sponsored the Bourbon since 2014. "Dixiana is pleased to support Keeneland in its mission to promote integrity and strengthen the sport," said William Shively, a Keeneland director. He noted that the corporate sponsorship program allows Dixiana to support important initiatives throughout Central Kentucky.

Dixiana aids the Markey Cancer Center, Grayson-Jockey Club Research Foundation, Blue Grass Land Conservancy, and Make-A-Wish Foundation, among many other causes.

While the 5 $\frac{1}{2}$ -furlong Indian Summer Stakes will be run for only the second time and is an important addition to the turf program, the Jessamine, at 1 $\frac{1}{16}$ miles on the grass, has become a launching pad for stars.

Rushing Fall, the 2017 victor owned by Bob Edwards' Five Racing Thoroughbreds, rolled in the Breeders' Cup Juvenile Fillies Turf. She is tied for second all time with Take Charge Lady,



Classic Empire wins the 2016 Claiborne Breeders' Futurity in a prelude to his Breeders' Cup triumph.

MARK MARIEN

trained by Ken McPeck, with four stakes victories at Keeneland (Wise Dan leads with seven).

"We expected her to be a good horse," said Edwards, "but, obviously, not what she is right now. It's unbelievable."

Concrete Rose, after controlling last year's Jessamine by three lengths for owners Ashbrook Farm and BBN Racing, has built an impressive resume that includes lucrative scores in the \$750,000 Belmont Oaks Invitational Stakes and \$695,000 Saratoga Oaks this summer. Glenn "Bo" Bromagen of Ashbrook purchased her for \$61,000 as a quirky 2-year-old. He rightly anticipated that under George "Rusty" Arnold, the family's trainer for more than 30 years, this rose would bloom. **KM**



COADY PHOTOGRAPHY

Two-year-olds have stakes options on the turf as well.



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