



Kentucky Derby

TRIVIA & FUN FACTS

On a warm, sunny, Monday afternoon, May 17, 1875, fifteen three-year old Thoroughbred racehorses went to the post to compete in the first Kentucky Derby. About 10,000 fans were on hand to see H.P. McGrath's colt Aristides set the pace and fight off all challengers to win. He was ridden to victory by jockey Oliver Lewis, one of thirteen African American jockeys to compete in the race. Since then, the Kentucky Derby has been held every year at Louisville's Churchill Downs Racetrack, making it the longest continuous held sporting event in the United States.

The race was developed by a group called the Louisville Jockey Club, led by Meriwether Lewis Clark, Jr., grandson of the famous explorer William Clark of Lewis and Clark. Clark traveled to Europe, studying Thoroughbred racing business practices, and upon returning to Kentucky, led the Louisville Jockey Club in the building of a racetrack south of the city on property owned by Clark's uncles, John and Henry Churchill. The track was not called Churchill Downs Racetrack until at least 1883, and not officially the name of the track until 1928. Clark patterned the Kentucky Derby after England's Epsom Derby, a race for 3-year old Thoroughbreds at a distance of one mile and a half. The Derby distance was shortened to one mile and a quarter in 1896 and remains that distance today.

After initial success, the track suffered financial hardship, and by 1894, the Louisville Jockey Club teetered towards bankruptcy. A new group bought the property, calling themselves the New Louisville Jockey Club. They made many changes to the track, the most striking being a new grandstand featuring two large "twin spires." Despite the changes, this new group failed to generate a profit, and in 1902, a new group of investors led by Louisville tailor Matt Winn took over the struggling track.

It was Winn who turned the Kentucky Derby into what it is today. He tirelessly promoted the Derby as a celebration of pre-Civil War antebellum culture and the race became a symbol of this romantic and largely fanciful ideal. Traditions such as the wearing of hats, garlands of roses, mint juleps, burgoo, and many other traditions were established. Winn also enticed celebrities to attend the Derby, such as Babe Ruth and Ginger Rogers, adding a dimension of glamor and glitz to Derby Day.



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Several legendary horses put the Derby in the racing spotlight as well. In 1913, a long-shot named Donerail shocked the crowd by winning at odds of 91-1, still the highest odds of any Derby winner. Two years later in 1915, a filly (female horse) named Regret beat the colts, becoming the first of three fillies to win the Derby. Then, in 1919, Sir Barton won the Derby – then won the Preakness in Baltimore and the Belmont in New York to become the first Triple Crown champion.

The Kentucky Derby continued to enjoy momentum in the 1930s and 1940s as seven horses won the Triple Crown, including Kentucky's Calumet Farm, which won twice with Whirlaway (1941) and Citation (1948). Radio and television grew Derby audiences further, painting a picture of old south romanticism and exciting Thoroughbred racing.

Perhaps the greatest performance by a Thoroughbred in the Derby was that of Secretariat in 1973. "Big Red", as he was known by his fans, set the track record that stands to this day, running the race in 1:59.40. Back to back Triple Crown winners Seattle Slew (1977) and Affirmed (1978) kept the Kentucky Derby in the national spotlight, despite the diminishing popularity of Thoroughbred racing as a whole.

2015 proved to be a banner year for the Kentucky Derby as the 141st running attracted the largest crowd in the history of the race. 170,500 people packed the historic facility to witness eventual Triple Crown winner American Pharoah win the race.

The 144th Kentucky Derby had a crowd of 157,813 watching as Justify traversed a sloppy track to win the Derby presented by Woodford Reserve. It was the rainiest Derby in 144 years. Justify continued Kentucky's dominance as the "racehorse capitol of the world" – being the 110th of 144 Kentucky Derby winning Thoroughbreds bred in Kentucky. Justify is the first in 136 years to win after not having raced as a two-year-old and became the thirteenth Triple Crown winner.

The Thoroughbred industry in Kentucky is one of the leading economic industries in the state, generating \$3.1 billion in revenue. The Kentucky Derby itself is also a great economic event for Kentucky, with around \$160 million spent in Louisville Derby weekend.

Frequently Asked Questions about the Kentucky Derby

How are horses entered in the Kentucky Derby?

The entry fee for the Kentucky Derby is \$25,000, and there is another \$25,000 fee if the horse enters the starting gate. Since the mid-1970s, no more than 20 Thoroughbreds may run in the Derby. Churchill Downs Racetrack currently guarantees a purse of \$2 million, with the winner receiving at least \$1.24 million. The owner also receives the gold Derby Trophy, which is the only gold trophy presented in major American sports. Owners must nominate their horses to be eligible for the Derby by paying a nomination fee of \$600 per horse during the early period (usually through late January), \$6,000 during the late period (usually through late March) or a “last minute” supplemental fee of \$200,000. Trainers prepare the horses for the Kentucky Derby by running them in various races around the country during the late winter and spring. These races are referred to as “prep” races and points are awarded based on top four finishes, with the top 20 horses earning the opportunity to compete in the upcoming Kentucky Derby.

What are the Kentucky Derby records?

- The fastest Kentucky Derby was run by Secretariat in 1973 (1:59.40).
- The slowest winning time was run by Kingman in 1891 (2:52.25 for the mile and a half).
- There have been three fillies to win the Kentucky Derby: Regret in 1915, Genuine Risk in 1980 and Winning Colors in 1988.
- Thirteen Derby winners went on to win the Preakness Stakes in Maryland and the Belmont Stakes in New York, capturing the Triple Crown.
- The last Triple Crown winner was Justify in 2018.
- The largest crowd to ever assemble on Derby Day was in 2015, when 170,513 jammed Churchill Downs Racetrack to watch the 141st running.
- Justify, winner of Kentucky Derby 144, is the first in 136 years to win the Kentucky Derby after not having raced as a two-year-old. The last horse that accomplished this was Apollo in 1882. Justify also went on to win the Triple Crown.

To learn about more fun facts about the Kentucky Derby, visit <https://www.kentuckyderby.com/media/reference>

