

ALL NEW SEASON

JOCKEYS

FRIDAYS COMING IN AUGUST 

HISTORY OF HORSE RACING

Horse racing is much more than the popular once-a-year Kentucky Derby. The sport has a rich history that extends back to prehistoric nomadic tribes and continues through the start of horse racing in the United States, which began when early settlers brought English thoroughbreds to the New World. For thousands of years, horse racing flourished as the sport of kings and nobility – always maintaining an air of superiority. However, that is no longer true of modern horse racing as the popularity now spans all classes, primarily due to the sport's legalized gambling.

4500 B.C. - The competitive racing of horses is one of humankind's most ancient sports. Man and horse have been together since prehistoric times. Its origins began with the prehistoric nomadic tribesmen of central Asia, who first domesticated the horse around this time.

638 B.C. - Chariot and horse racing events appeared in the Greek Olympics. During this time, horse racing became an organized sport in all of the civilizations from central Asia to the Mediterranean. Both chariot and mounted horse racing were events in the ancient Greek Olympics, and the sport became a public obsession in the Roman Empire.

12th Century (1101 to 1200) - The origins of modern racing began in this century when English knights returned from the Crusades with swift Arabian horses. Over the next 400 years, an increasing number of Arabian stallions were imported and bred with English mares to produce horses that combined speed and endurance. Matching the fastest of these animals in two-horse races for a private wager became a popular diversion of the nobility.

1530 - The earliest records of racing in England are recorded at York. Ten years later, Chester had its first race course. Two-horse match races for a private wager became popular among the nobility. That is why horse racing is still known as the "Sport of Kings."

1665 - British settlers brought horse racing to the New World, and the first American track was laid out in Long Island. For the next two centuries, tracks popped up and disappeared around the New York area. The tracks were operated by the rich and famous to showcase their horses.

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1702-14 - Horse racing began to become a professional sport during the reign of Queen Anne, when match racing gave way to races involving several horses on which the spectators wagered. Throughout England, race courses sprang up, offering increasingly large purses to attract the best horses. These purses, in turn, made breeding and owning horses for racing profitable.

1750 - With the rapid expansion of the sport in England came the need for a central governing authority. Racing elite met at Newmarket to form The Jockey Club, which still exercises complete control over the horse racing sport in England today. The Jockey Club wrote complete rules of racing and sanctioned racecourses to conduct meetings under those rules.

1791 - The Jockey Club also took steps to regulate the breeding of racehorses. James Weatherby, whose family served as accountants to the members of the Jockey Club, was assigned the task of tracing the pedigree, or complete family history, of every racehorse in England. In 1791, the results of his research were published as the "Introduction" to the General Stud Book. From 1793 to the present, members of the Weatherby family meticulously have recorded the pedigree of every foal born to those racehorses in subsequent volumes of the General Stud Book.

Early 1800s - The only horses that could be called "thoroughbreds" and allowed to race were those descended from horses listed in the General Stud Book. Thoroughbreds are so inbred that the pedigree of every single animal can be traced back father-to-father to one of three stallions called the "foundation sires." These stallions were the Byerley Turk, foaled c.1679; the Darley Arabian, foaled c.1700; and the Godolphin Arabian, foaled c.1724.

1814 - Since this time, five races for three-year-old horses have been designated as "classics." Three races open to male horses (colts) and female horses (fillies) make up the English Triple Crown: the 2,000 Guineas, the Epsom Derby and the St. Leger Stakes. Two races, open only to fillies, are the 1,000 Guineas and the Epsom Oaks.

1864 - John Hunter, William R. Travers and former American heavyweight champion John Morrissey had a track built at the popular summer health resort in Saratoga Springs. The inaugural meeting was conducted, and America's oldest stakes race – The Travers, named for the first president of Saratoga – was staged. Ironically, it was won by a horse named Kentucky when the purse was \$2,950.

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1865 - Although the sport became a popular local pastime, the development of organized racing in America did not arrive until after the Civil War. It wasn't until the Civil War that entrepreneurs began treating the sport as a business – organizing and promoting betting by the general public.

1875 - On May 17, 1875, in front of an estimated crowd of 10,000 people, a field of 15 three-year-old horses competed in the first Kentucky Derby. Today, the Kentucky Derby is the preeminent thoroughbred horse race in America.

1890 - For the next several decades, with the rapid rise of an industrial economy and gambling on racehorses, horse racing grew explosively; by 1890, 314 tracks were operating across the country.

1894 - The rapid growth of the sport without any central governing authority led to the domination of many tracks by criminal elements. In 1894, the nation's most prominent track and stable owners met in New York to form the American Jockey Club, modeled on the English, which soon ruled racing with an iron hand and eliminated much of the corruption.

Late 19th century (1890-1900) - Frenchman Pierre Oller developed the pari-mutuel wagering system, the process by which betting at American tracks is done today. In pari-mutuel wagering, people bet money on a specific outcome, and all of the bet money is placed into a pool. Once the outcome is decided, the pool is divided among the winning wagers. Wagering on the outcome of horse races has been an integral part of the appeal of the sport throughout its history, and today it is the sole reason horse racing has survived as a major professional sport. At all tracks, bettors may wager on a horse to win (finish first), place (finish first or second) or show (finish first, second or third). Other popular wagers are the daily double (picking the winners of two consecutive races), exactas (picking the first and second horses in order), quinellas (picking the first and second horses in either order) and the pick six (picking the winners of six consecutive races).

Early 1900s - Racing in the United States almost was wiped out by antigambling sentiment that led to almost all states banning legalized betting. By 1908, the number of tracks had plummeted to just 25. However, that same year the introduction of pari-mutuel betting for the Kentucky Derby signaled a turnaround for the sport. More tracks opened as many state legislatures agreed to legalize pari-mutuel betting in exchange for a share of the money wagered. At the end of World War I, prosperity and great horses like Man o' War brought spectators flocking to racetracks.

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1920s - Legendary racehorse Man o' War rescued American horseracing in the 1920s. Following his death, he was voted the greatest thoroughbred of the first half of the 20th century.

1950s and 1960s - The sport prospered until World War II, declined in popularity during the 1950s and 1960s and then experienced resurgence in the 1970s triggered by the immense popularity of great horses such as Secretariat, Seattle Slew and Affirmed. They were each winners of the American Triple Crown – the Kentucky Derby, the Preakness and the Belmont Stakes. However, during the late 1980s, another significant decline occurred.

1969 - Horse racing is traditionally a male-dominated sport although women have increasingly played a more important role. Female jockeys burst onto the scene when Diane Crump became the first woman jockey to ride in a pari-mutuel race in North America. That same year, Tuesday Testa became the first female jockey to win a race at a major American thoroughbred track.

1989 - Horse racing is the second most widely attended U.S. spectator sport after baseball. 56,194,565 people wagering \$9.14 billion attended 8,004 days of racing.

Present - Thoroughbred tracks exist in about half the states. Public interest in the sport focuses primarily on major thoroughbred races such as the American Triple Crown and the Breeders' Cup races (began in 1984), which offer purses of approximately \$1,000,000. State racing commissions have sole authority to license participants and grant racing dates while sharing the appointment of racing officials and the supervision of racing rules with The Jockey Club. The Jockey Club retains authority over the breeding of thoroughbreds.

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