



Bob Baffert leads all other Breeders' Cup trainers in money won with his starters accounting for more than \$30 million in purses.



SKIP DICKSTEIN



Secure at the Top

These Breeders' Cup
leaders demonstrate
their dominance
year after year

By Tom Pedulla

H

all of Fame trainer Bob Baffert could not take his eyes off of the action as he watched NBC's telecast of the inaugural 1984 Breeders' Cup World Champi-

onships run at old Hollywood Park. He was conditioning Quarter Horses at the time, but the world of Thoroughbreds caught his attention as one stirring race followed another.

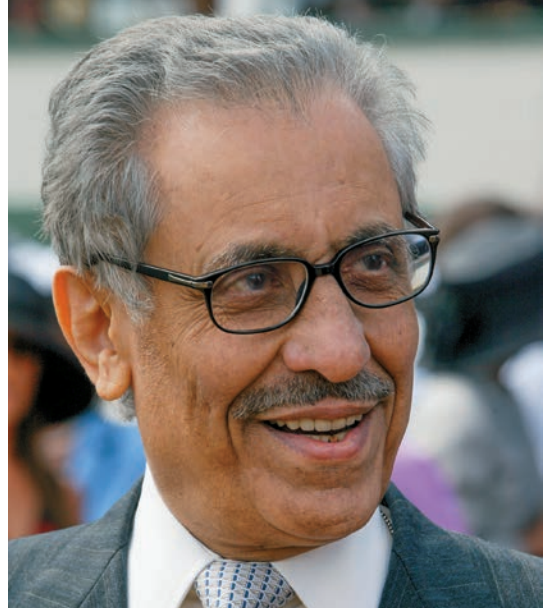
"I got hooked on Thoroughbred racing that day," Baffert said. "It was like the Olympics. It was really exciting because you had jockeys from Europe, trainers you've read about. When it was all over, I thought, 'Maybe I can do that.'"

He can do that, all right.

Based on earnings, no one has done it better in Breeders' Cup history. The same can be said for leading owner Juddmonte Farms, top breeder Adena Springs, and premier jockey Mike Smith, who made like Secretariat in the Belmont, creating a tremendous margin against his fellow riders.

To all of them, their unrivaled success means everything. "When you win a Breeders' Cup race," Smith said, "it means you beat the best in the country, the best in the world, in the category."

Here is a look at the best of the best in Breeders' Cup history:



BARBARA D. LIVINGSTON

Prince Khalid Abdullah has left his mark on the Breeders' Cup.

Juddmonte Farms

Leading Owner

From the moment the Breeders' Cup was established in 1984, it became a major target for Prince Khalid Abdullah of Saudi Arabia and Juddmonte Farms, his international breeding and racing operation.

No one imagined it would be a maddeningly elusive target until Banks Hill broke through in the Filly & Mare Turf in 2001.

"Every year we'd go to the Breeders' Cup and not get a winner," recalled Garrett O'Rourke, Juddmonte's manager in the United States. "You'd walk away and say, 'We've had some good days and horses that ran well.' You'd give all of the stock excuses."

Juddmonte, of course, is about performance, not excuses. There was little doubt the cream would eventually rise to the top.

Banks Hill leads a parade of impressive winners: Intercontinental (Filly & Mare Turf, 2005), Ventura (Filly & Mare Sprint, 2008), Midday (Filly & Mare Turf, 2009), Arrogate (Classic, 2016), Enable (Turf, 2018), and Expert Eye (Mile, 2018).

In all, Juddmonte's 80 starts have accounted for seven victories, 10 runner-up finishes, and eight third-place efforts for \$16,815,820 in earnings.

“

THE BREEDERS' CUP...
JUST DRIVES ME TO A
DIFFERENT LEVEL.”

— JOCKEY MIKE SMITH

Worthy rival Godolphin Racing owns an equal number of wins from 91 starts and ranks second with \$15,061,735 in purses.

As lofty as Juddmonte's success is, O'Rourke views it as keeping to Prince Khalid's vision.

“His goal has always been to produce horses capable of running in the very, very best events in the world, whether that be the classics in England, the Arc de Triomphe, the Breeders' Cup,” the manager said.

In the case of the magnificent Enable, she became the first to combine the Arc with a Breeders' Cup score when she staged a furious rally down the center of the track at Churchill Downs to beat rivals in the taxing one-and-a-half-mile Turf. She became just the fourth female to prevail in the Turf.

It doubled Juddmonte's pleasure that Expert Eye also delivered on the same day. He bore Prince Khalid's famous silks — green, pink sash and cap, white sleeves — across the finish line first in the Mile.

Six of Juddmonte's winners were home-breds. “It's like someone with their kids. There is an extra pride when they succeed,” O'Rourke said.

Arrogate stands as the lone exception. His acquisition — a \$560,000 purchase at Keeneland's 2014 September yearling sale — makes a powerful statement about Juddmonte.

When Prince Khalid sought success with Baffert, O'Rourke noted how difficult that might be for an operation focused on breeding for turf superiority.

“Let's go and buy them,” replied the



Banks Hill secured Juddmonte's first Breeders' Cup victory in 2001.



Intercontinental earned Juddmonte its second win in the Filly & Mare Turf.



Arrogate defeated California Chrome in a thrilling renewal of the Breeders' Cup Classic. He retired to Juddmonte's Lexington division (pictured with Garrett O'Rourke) before dying unexpectedly in 2020.



Secure at the Top



Juddmonte's Enable delivered an unforgettable Turf victory in 2018.



Awesome Again's victory in the 1998 Breeders' Cup Classic proved a harbinger for Adena Springs' success in the event.

undeterred Prince Khalid.

A team of experts was dispatched to the Keeneland auction, which perennially offers quality in abundance. And when Arrogate swept past the great California Chrome in the shadow of the Santa Anita wire in the 2016 Classic, he represented yet another bold and brilliant move by Juddmonte.

Adena Springs Leading Breeder

Frank Stronach and members of his family secured their place in racing and Breeders' Cup history more than a decade ago through Adena Springs' success.

Stronach received an individual Eclipse Award as Outstanding Breeder in 2000; then Adena rattled off five Eclipse Awards

in a row from 2004-08 before striking again in 2010 and 2011. The operation still holds a commanding advantage with \$10,112,400 in Breeders' Cup earnings. Juddmonte Farms, its closest pursuer, has \$7,973,820.

Stronach, 87, has never been afraid to think big. When asked during a 2017 interview with America's Best Racing about his accomplishments, he replied, "If you use your imagination, there is no limit."

In addition to his breeding prowess, Stronach earned four Eclipse Awards as Outstanding Owner and accepted the highest honor, the Eclipse Award of Merit, in 2018. He is the most decorated individual in the history of the awards.

Eric Hamelback worked almost 15 years for Adena and served as general manager from late 2006 until the end of 2014. He noted that Stronach and his family members set the bar high.

"I would define our mission as achieving excellence," he said, adding, "We are all very, very proud of the accomplishments we had as a team."



Frank Stronach

Adena produced Breeders' Cup victors Awesome Again (Classic, 1998), Macho Uno (Juvenile, 2000), Perfect Sting (Filly & Mare Turf, 2000), Ghostzapper (Classic, 2004), Ginger Punch (Distaff, 2007), and Judy the Beauty (Filly & Mare Sprint, 2014). Judy the Beauty was bred by Adena and was bought by and raced for Wesley Ward.

Awesome Again was indeed awesome

again because he sired Ghostzapper, Horse of the Year in 2004. Bobby Frankel, the late Hall of Fame trainer, described Ghostzapper as the “best horse I ever trained.” Ghostzapper still boasts the fastest Classic in Cup history, blazing the mile and a quarter in 1:59.02 as part of his gate-to-wire domination at Lone Star Park.

Hamelback said of Awesome Again: “From racetrack to breeding shed, he’s definitely the cornerstone of the program at Adena.”

He took equal pride, though, in Judy the Beauty. She was a \$20,000 bargain for trainer Wesley Ward at the 2010 Keeneland September yearling sale that earned almost \$2 million, illustrating one of the enduring beauties of racing. Great runners can come at any price.



Stronach leads in Juvenile winner Macho Uno.



Ghostzapper gave Adena another Classic victory in 2004.



Adena bred 2014 Filly & Mare Sprint winner Judy the Beauty.



Awesome Again went from racetrack to stallion success.



Adena Springs continues to breed high-quality Thoroughbreds.

B. Shiftlet
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Baffert began as a Quarter Horse trainer.

Bob Baffert

Leading Trainer

Baffert learned hard lessons that helped him to understand how much Breeders' Cup success depends on timing. With so many attractive races available during the spring and summer, it is no mean feat to have an elite horse ready to run its biggest race at the close of what can be a very long season.

Over time, Baffert learned to identify his Cup prospects early, then work back from the fall-ending championships.

"I was having these great years, but by the time I came to the Breeders' Cup, my horses, I was just sort of empty. They were tired, so I had to change the way I prepared for it," Baffert said. "I had to make sure there was still some juice in the lemon."

Brilliant trainers make great adjustments. There can be no doubt that Baffert ranks at or near the top, no matter the era. He has saddled 119 Cup starters to record 15 victories, 17 second-place finishes, and six third-place results for earnings of \$30,065,000. Aidan O'Brien, who



Thirty Slews gave Baffert his first Breeders' Cup victory when the gelding took the 1992 Sprint.

annually ensures the event will have an international flavor, ranks second with \$23,895,590.

Baffert got a late start and, for him, a slow start. Thirty Slews supplied his first winner, in the 1992 Sprint. The gray son of Slewpy illustrates Baffert's keen eye for a horse. He saw potential in Thirty Slews that others did not and landed him for a relatively modest \$30,000 at the 1988 Keeneland September yearling sale.

The silver-haired genius waited until 1998 for his next triumph, when Silverbulletday scored in the Juvenile Fillies, and then for four more years for Vindication to provide the first of four Juvenile triumphs. The others came with Midshipman (2008), New Year's Day (2013), and Game Winner (2018).

Baffert's powerhouse stable owns five Sprint victories. After Thirty Slews, Midnight Lute went back to back in 2007 and 2008. That high-octane burner was followed by Secret Circle (2013) and Drefong (2016).

Baffert credits his Quarter Horse

background for his Sprint and Juvenile accomplishments. It taught him how to bring out every bit of a runner's speed — at an early age.

It took him some time to decipher how to reel in the biggest fish of all — the Classic. But, of course, he figured that out, too. As in three in a row starting with Bayern and followed by American Pharoah and Arrogate.

American Pharoah's 6½-length tour de force at Keeneland was one for the ages. He emerged as the first Triple Crown champion to complete the Grand Slam by tacking on the Classic. And he did it with an overpowering display of horsepower in his career finale.

"American Pharoah just needed to get out of the gate clean," Baffert said. "He was just so much better than those horses."

Interestingly, Baffert does not list Pharoah's Classic as his finest Breeders' Cup moment. "My greatest Breeders' Cup win was with Arrogate in the Classic," he said. "He ran down a great horse, California Chrome."



ROB MOSKAL

Silverbulletday won the 1998 Juvenile Fillies for Baffert's second Breeders' Cup score.



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Bayern gave Baffert the first of three consecutive Classic victories.



ANNE M. EBERHARDT

The connections of Silverbulletday celebrate.



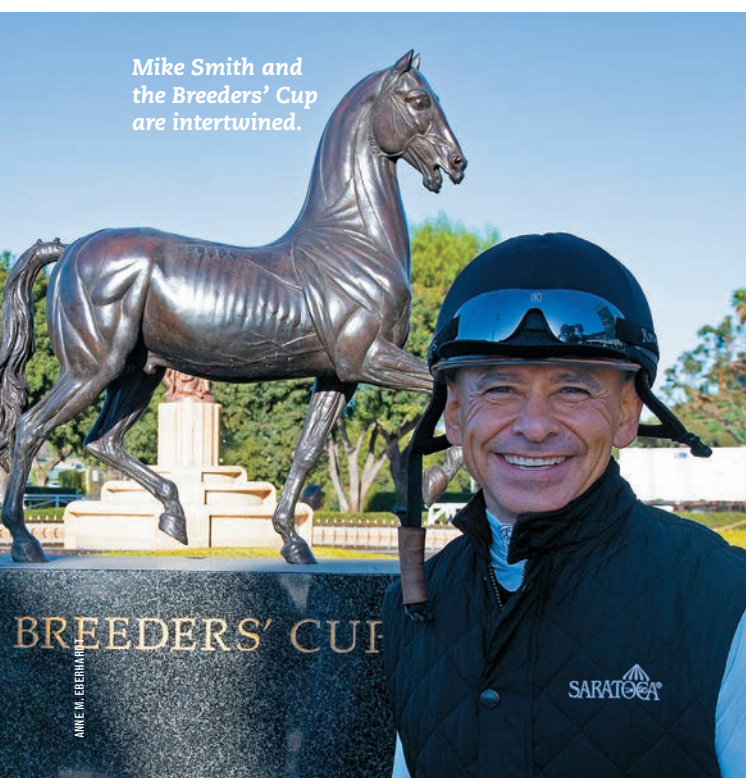
ANNE M. EBERHARDT

American Pharoah concluded his career with a Classic victory at Keeneland.



BENOIT PHOTO

Baffert considers Arrogate's 2016 Classic victory his greatest Breeders' Cup win.



Mike Smith and the Breeders' Cup are intertwined.

Mike Smith

Leading Jockey

Jockey Mike Smith loses no time searching for mounts that can take him to the season-ending world championships.

"It starts as soon as the Breeders' Cup is over," Smith said. "Who's next, man? Who's good enough to get you there?"

Smith's ability to make accurate assessments before the Cup and during the races themselves explains why he is the runaway leader among riders with 26 victories and \$36,634,605 in earnings. Runner-up John Velazquez has used 187 starts to produce 16 wins while ringing up \$27,760,275.

That level of success led Baffert to refer to Smith as "Big Money Mike." As one high-profile win followed another, the name stuck.

"The Breeders' Cup means a whole lot to me," said Smith, 55. "It just drives me to a different level. I

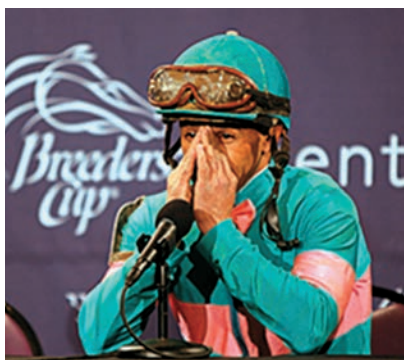
Secure at the Top



Lure gave Smith his first Breeders' Cup victory in 1992.



Smith guided Zenyatta to a wildly popular Classic win in 2009.



From left, Smith shed tears after Zenyatta's narrow Classic loss in 2010; rejoicing after Arrogate's 2016 Classic coup; celebrating Royal Delta's 2012 Distaff victory; guiding Songbird to a Juvenile Fillies triumph at Keeneland in 2015.

don't know what it is. I want to win those races so bad, I can't think of anything else."

Success did not come quickly. Smith did not pilot his first Breeders' Cup winner until Lure prevailed in the 1992 Mile, a result the colt would repeat the following year for his rider. Smith also repeated with Mizdirection in the Turf Sprint in 2012 and 2013.

Smith's gaudy total includes a combined nine victories in the Classic and Distaff. He got the job done in the Classic with Skip Away (1997), Zenyatta (2009), Drosselmeyer (2011), and Arrogate (2016). His Distaff winners are Inside Information (1995), Ajina (1997), Azeri (2002), Zenyatta (2008), and Royal Delta (2012).

His magical ride with Zenyatta was unforgettable. When she added the Classic to her Distaff success the year before, she became the

first horse to win two different Breeders' Cup races. Smith deftly guided her home when she emerged as the first female to defeat males in the Classic, a distinction she still holds. She ran her perfect record to 19-0 before losing by a head to unyielding Blame in the 2010 Classic.

Smith said of his time with Zenyatta: "It was awe inspiring. I was riding her during her winning streak, so there was always pressure. But it was the kind of pressure you like and you're looking for."

Zenyatta's running style, nerve-wracking as it was, also was a joy to behold. After breaking into her customary dance in the paddock, she would typically break so poorly and work her way into a race so slowly that it was almost as if she were spotting overmatched rivals a lead.

Smith, smart and patient, allowed Zenyatta

to do as she pleased. "It was her style. She was happy and comfortable doing it. As long as she was happy and comfortable, she was going to run big," he said.

Smith treasures all 26 of his victories. The day Zenyatta's breathtaking rally allowed her to turn back the boys in the Classic certainly belongs at, or near, the top.

"It was a great day to let the world see just how good she was," he said, "and she didn't disappoint."

Just when it seemed as if Zenyatta might be the distaff runner of a lifetime for Smith, along came Songbird. She announced her superiority with a 5¾-length romp in the Juvenile Fillies at Keeneland.

Smith does not take credit for that dazzling performance. "It was just a matter of me staying on," he admitted. **KM**