When it comes to racetracks around the world, none is more legendary than Churchill Downs – home of the America’s greatest race.

The Kentucky Derby Presented by Yum! Brands is the world’s premier horse race and America’s original, extravagant and glamorous springtime sports party. In fact, it’s the oldest continuously held sporting event in North America, dating back to its inaugural running in 1875.

To have a horse draped in the garland of roses while raising the solid gold trophy high atop the Kentucky Derby winner’s stand is the Holy Grail for horsemen around the world.

Restricted to 3-year-old Thoroughbreds, horses only have one chance to win the Kentucky Derby, and it’s quite an accomplishment just to receive a berth in the starting gate.

Approximately 23,000 Thoroughbreds were foaled in North America in 2013, but only 20 will be allowed to run in “The Run for the Roses.”

Horses that enter the starting gate for the Kentucky Derby are determined by points accrued in a series of 35 “Road to the Kentucky Derby” races that begin in September of a horse’s 2-year-old year.

Points are awarded to the Top 4 finishers in each race, and the tiered point system offers the most points in distance races for 3-year-olds that comprise the “Kentucky Derby Championship Series” in the 11-week run-up to the first Saturday in May.

Once a horse earns its coveted Kentucky Derby berth, it, in most cases, will race the extended 1 ½-mile distance for the first time. Most serious Derby prep races range in distance from seven furlongs (seven-eighths of mile) to 1 1/8 miles. A combination of speed and stamina it takes to complete the final eighth of a mile in the Derby often determines a win or loss.

Typically, the Kentucky Derby is completed in approximately two minutes, hence the nickname “The Most Exciting Two Minutes in Sports.” The legendary Secretariat ran the fastest Derby in 1973 with a final time of 1:59 2/5.

The Kentucky Derby also is the first leg of the challenging Triple Crown series: three races at three racetracks over three distances in a five-week period.

The other two events are the 1 ¼-mile Belmont, which is staged two weeks after the Derby at Pimlico Race Course near Baltimore, and New York’s 1 ½-mile Belmont, which comes three weeks after the Preakness.

A Triple Crown sweep – one of the most difficult feats in all of sports – has been accomplished on just 12 occasions: Sir Barton (1919), Gallant Fox (1930), Omaha (1935), War Admiral (1937), Whirlaway (1941), Count Fleet (1942), Assault (1946), Citation (1948), Secretariat (1973), Seattle Slew (1977), Affirmed (1978) and American Pharoah (2015). Fifty-two others have finished only one win shy of the honor.

Legendary sportswriter Charles Hatton of Daily Racing Form first coined the phrase “Triple Crown” during Gallant Fox’s historic run of 1930 — 11 years after Sir Barton won the first in 1919. Two years after the term was brought into American usage, the Derby, which had been run in mid-May since inception, was moved to the first Saturday in May to allow for a specific Triple Crown schedule.

The appeal of the Kentucky Derby is now international. In the last decade, more than 150,000 people annually attend the Kentucky Derby. For example, the 2015 event lured a record 170,513 on-track fans plus another 16 million viewers on NBC. Many more watch the race at racetracks and off-track betting facilities around the world. A record $194.3 million was wagered on the Derby Day event worldwide in 2015, a total unsurpassed by any other horse race in the country, including a record $137.9 million on the Kentucky Derby alone.

In recent decades, the day prior to the Kentucky Derby, known as Oaks Day, has grown to become the third or fourth largest attended horse race in America with a crowd of more than 100,000 on hand annually. The 2015 renewal attracted a record 123,763 guests. The highlight of the day is the Derby’s sister race, the $1 million Longines Kentucky Oaks, which is the nation’s premier race for 3-year-old fillies. Its focus on fashion and celebrities rivals Derby Day and features a “Ladies First” theme, complete with a “Pink Out.”

The Kentucky Derby has become much more than “The Run for the Roses” and “The Most Exciting Two Minutes in Sports.” It’s the biggest party in Louisville – a multi-week whirlwind of special events and entertainment with a little something for everyone: fashion, food, music, revelry, celebrity sightings, and, of course, great horse racing.

The Kentucky Derby is truly one of the few sporting events in the world that appeals to people from every walk of life. The crowd is largely made up of nontraditional racetrack patrons – men and women from the affluent to aspirants to the blue-collar workers to the party crowd. Mint juleps are the drink of choice and Derby hats are the traditional fashion accessory.

The roots of Churchill Downs and the Kentucky Derby trace back to the vision of Colonel M. Lewis Clark Jr., a well-connected, mid-20s Louisvillian who, in the early 1870s, conceived the idea of a dream track and a series of rich stakes races for Louisville to showcase Kentucky’s breeding industry.

Clark would convince his uncles, John and Henry Churchill, to lease 80 acres of their land approximately three miles south of downtown so the racetrack could be built. (Note: The first reference of the name “Churchill Downs” came in 1883 Kentucky Derby article reported by the former Louisville Commercial. It wasn’t until 1937, however, that it was officially incorporated under that name.)

The now famous Twin Spires, a simple architectural element that would become one of the most recognizable structures in all of sports and later the symbol of Churchill Downs, were added in 1895 when a new grandstand was constructed.

Today, Churchill Downs, which was registered as a National Historic Landmark in 1986, has the largest seating capacity of any racetrack in the United States with 55,638 reserved seats for the clubhouse, grandstand, Jockey Club Suites and Finish Line Suites.

The facility consists of approximately 147 acres of land, including a 26-acre infield, with a one-mile dirt track and the 7/8-mile Matt Winn Turf Course. The stable area has barns sufficient to accommodate approximately 1,400 horses.

Churchill Downs is the flagship racetrack of Churchill Downs Incorporated, the premier horse racing company in the United States. Three race meets are held annually over approximately 70 live race dates. The 38-day Spring Meet begins on the last Saturday in April (April 30, 2016) – exactly one week in advance of the Derby – and typically concludes nine weeks later (Saturday, July 2, 2016). An 11-day September Meet, first introduced in 2013, returns in 2016 (Sept. 16-Oct. 2, 2016). A four-week, 21-day Fall Meet generally occurs during the month of November (Oct. 30-Nov. 27, 2016).

The 142nd running of the Kentucky Derby Presented by Yum! Brands is scheduled for Saturday, May 7, 2016.