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'MORE THAN 30 YEARS, UNDER 30 STALLS': SALUTING VETERAN TRAINER DONNIE HABEEB

LOUISVILLE, Ky. (Friday, June 21, 2024) – For veteran trainer **Donnie Habeeb**, his morning starts with a familiar routine but it's a routine unlike most on the backside of Churchill Downs. Habeeb, who trains for horses, handles every aspect their care alongside his wife of 40 years, **Beth**. Donnie gallops each horse every day and together they share working as a groom and hotwalker, embodying a hands-on dedication to every horse in their care.

A Louisville native, Habeeb's journey in horse racing began at the young age of 13. While growing up in the Camp Taylor neighborhood of the city, Habeeb graduated from Male High School and went on to work for late trainer **Dravo Foley**, where he honed his skills in grooming and galloping.

"I'm really showing my age now, but when I worked for Dravo, I started learning how to do a lot of things in this industry," Habeeb said. "My sister used to work for an equine dentist and that's how I got introduced to horse racing. I started with Dravo being a groom and then started galloping horses out at Skylight Training Center."

Habeeb took out his trainer's license 40 years ago and celebrated his first win on June 19, 1985, at Churchill Downs with a horse named **Kibosh**. Since then, he has amassed 290 victories and \$5.4 million in purse earnings. Remarkably, Habeeb has never trained more than 12 horses at a given time, a testament to his hands-on, quality-over-quantity approach.

"I think 12 is the maximum number of horses I've had at one time and that was a long time ago," Habeeb said. "We used to have a farm out near Valhalla Golf Club on the east end of town but sold that about 10 or so years ago."

One of the standout horses in Habeeb's career is **Bruce Hutson's** homebred **Private School**, who won 15 of his 42 starts, including a stunning 16-1 upset in the 1990 Ohio Derby (GII) under jockey **Jacinto Vasquez**. Later in his career, Private School went on to win six consecutive races at Turfway Park from Dec. 20, 1992, to Feb. 27, 1993.

"He was a pretty fun horse to be around, and I think after he won six races, we got a little attention," Habeeb joked. "I've been in this game a long time and sometimes forget a lot of things that have happened over the years but, more than 30 years later, you don't forget horses like him."

As the husband-and-wife duo finished their daily barn chores Friday, Habeeb shared a lighthearted moment about the future.

"She keeps telling me she's going to retire July 1 and that's a couple days from now," he said, pointing to Beth. "I've got 290 wins right now, with an average of about four or five wins a year. Maybe when I get to 300, I'll retire, too. Hopefully, before I do, maybe I can get another stakes winner in the barn."

The dedicated Habeebs typically keep their horses at Churchill Downs for eight months of the year, relocating to Fair Grounds in New Orleans during the winter. On Thursday, half of Habeeb's barn is set to compete at Churchill Downs: **Royal Blood** (Race 4) and **Dame Maude Chardin** (Race 8).

DOWN THE STRETCH – Live racing resumed Friday at Churchill Downs with a nine-race card and first post of 12:45 p.m. There was a \$228,877 carryover in the 20-cent Derby City 6 Jackpot which spanned Races 4-9. ... Race 4 on Friday was named in honor of late trainer **Dan Sanner** who died in early 2023 at age 61 following a long battle with cancer. ... Leading rider **Tyler Gaffalione** was absent from the action Friday at Churchill Downs, serving a one-day HISA whip suspension. ... "Inside Churchill Downs" is back Friday at 6 p.m. on **ESPN 680/105.7**. Join Churchill Downs Communications duo **Darren Rogers** and **Kevin Kerstein** as they preview the weekend action at Churchill Downs with handicapping expert **Bob Ike**. Those outside the Louisville area can listen live on www.espnloouisville.com. ... For more information about the Spring Meet, visit www.churchilldowns.com.

ABOUT CHURCHILL DOWNS RACETRACK

Churchill Downs Racetrack ("CDRT"), the world's most legendary racetrack, has been the home of The Kentucky Derby, the longest continually held annual sporting event in the United States, since 1875. Located in Louisville, CDRT features a series of themed race days during Derby Week, including the Kentucky Oaks, and conducts Thoroughbred horse racing during three race meets in the Spring, September, and the Fall. CDRT is located on 175 acres and has a one-mile dirt track, a 7/8-mile turf track, a stabling area, and provides seating for approximately 60,000 guests. The stable area has barns sufficient to accommodate 1,400 horses and a 114-room dormitory for backstretch personnel. CDRT also has a year-round simulcast wagering facility and Race and Sports Book. www.ChurchillDowns.com.