

\$500,000 Lukas Classic (Grade II)

12th Running – Saturday, Sept. 27, 2025 (September Meet)
3-Year-Olds & Up at 1 1/8 Miles on Dirt at Churchill Downs

Stakes Record – 1:47.85, Knicks Go (2021)

Track Record – 1:47.26, Gould's Gold (2025)

Name Origin: Known as the Homecoming Classic during the first two runnings, the race was renamed in 2015 to honor Hall of Fame trainer D. Wayne Lukas. The Lukas Classic was introduced in 2013 and designed to be a prep for the \$7 million Breeders' Cup Classic (GI) to be held Saturday, Nov. 1 at Del Mar. The former Homecoming Classic was renamed to salute Lukas' accomplishments, contributions and influence on Churchill Downs, the Kentucky Derby and Oaks, and the horse industry. The legendary horseman, a native of Antigo, Wisc., passed away June 28, 2025 at the age of 89. Lukas had been based at Churchill Downs' Barn 44 since 1989 and conditioned an astounding 26 Eclipse Award-winning champions, as well as four winners of the Kentucky Derby and five winners of the Kentucky Oaks. Lukas recorded 15 victories in Triple Crown races and a record-equaling 20 triumphs in Breeders' Cup World Championship races. Also, he was recognized four times with an Eclipse Award as America's top trainer and was a 14-time national leader in money-won. "Along with the enormity of the numbers of his total victories, the stakes races he has won and earnings by his stable's horses throughout his Hall of Fame career, D. Wayne Lukas forever changed both the Kentucky Derby and North America's horse industry," said Kevin Flanery, former president of Churchill Downs Racetrack, in 2015. "It is Churchill Downs' honor to salute Wayne Lukas by placing his name on this race. We are enthusiastic about the potential of the Lukas Classic and believe it will very soon be an important annual stop for older horses who are working to prepare for and earn starting spots in the Breeders' Cup Classic. We think the presence of Wayne Lukas' name on this race will enhance its attractiveness and its status." The gap near the six-furlong pole is commonly referred to as "The Lukas Gap" because of its proximity to Barn 44. Lukas, whose given first name is Darrell, was born Sept. 2, 1935 – the second of three children – and raised on a 10-acre farm in a small farming community outside of his birthplace, Antigo, Wisc. During his youth, he raced his pony at the Antigo County Fairgrounds and began developing skills for evaluating and buying horses before he was in high school. With the help of his friend Clyde Rice – a successful horseman and father of trainer Linda Rice – Lukas bought mustangs headed to the slaughterhouse, broke and trained them and resold them in auctions. Lukas went to college and graduated with a master's degree in education from the University of Wisconsin where he later worked as an assistant basketball coach for two years. He taught high school and was a head basketball coach for nine years, which included a seven-year stint in LaCrosse, Wisc. Those formidable years led to his respectful nickname around the racetrack later in life: "Coach." In 1968, Lukas began to train and race Quarter Horses at Park Jefferson in South Dakota during the summers before turning to training full-time. He settled in California in 1972 and quickly established himself as a top Quarter Horse trainer, averaging more than \$1 million in purse earnings a year. Lukas, who would be inducted in the American Quarter Horse Hall of Fame in 2007 to become the first person to enter both the Thoroughbred and Quarter Horse shrines, developed 24 Quarter Horse champions and was a three-time leading Quarter Horse trainer in earnings (1974-76) and races won (1970, '74-75). He once regarded iconic Quarter Horse Dash For Cash, the 1976-77 World Champion, as the best horse he's started. In California, he saddled him to victory in the Los Al Derby trials and final and Champion of Champions in 1976, and Vessels Maturity, Los Alamitos Championship and a Champion of Champions repeat in '77. Lukas, who collected his first documented win as a Thoroughbred trainer on Oct. 20, 1977 at Santa Anita at age 42, turned to training Thoroughbreds on a full-time basis in 1978 with seven horses. He arrived at Southern California's Santa Anita Park and trimmed his barn with white picket fencing, beds of flowers and freshly-painted feed tubs used only for decoration – a trademark he used throughout his career. Effervescing was one of Lukas' early success stories. The 5-year-old gave Lukas his first graded stakes win when he won the \$110,500 American Handicap (GII) on turf at Hollywood Park by three lengths on July 4, 1978. Immediately thereafter, Lukas convinced co-owner Albert Yank to wheel the son of Le Fabuleux back five days later to win the July 10 Citation Handicap on dirt. Laffit Pincay Jr. was aboard for both triumphs. Lukas' first major Thoroughbred on the national stages was Terlingua, the dam of Storm Cat and one of the best juvenile fillies of 1978. His first major break with Thoroughbreds came in 1979 when Hall of Fame trainer John Nerud, the manager of Mrs. James Binger's Tartan Farm, gave him Codex to train. The following year, Codex scored an upset win in the March 30 Santa Anita Derby and then won the April 13 Hollywood Derby by two lengths. He wasn't nominated to the Kentucky Derby so he was pointed to the 1980 Preakness and won by 4 ¾ lengths after surviving a claim of foul for possible interference with Kentucky Derby winner Genuine Risk while swinging wide under Angel Cordero Jr. on the turn for home. Lukas revolutionized the training of Thoroughbreds in the late 1970s and 1980s. He employed skillful assistant trainers and had horses in training from coast to coast. Top horses from his high-powered satellite stables would regularly fly into town for top stakes events at locales around the country, which led to the popular racetrack phrase "D. Wayne off the plane." The Lukas "training tree" includes former assistants Bobby Barnett, Randy Bradshaw, Mark Hennig, Mike Maker, Kiaran McLaughlin, Todd Pletcher, Dallas Stewart and George Weaver, just to name a few. His favorite assistant, however, was his late and only son Jeff, who suffered devastating injuries during a morning training accident at Santa Anita in December 1993 when precocious 2-year-old and emerging star Tabasco Cat broke loose from his handlers. Jeff Lukas, 36, stepped in front of the runaway horse and tried to stop him but the colt slammed into him, shattered his skull and left him in a coma for several weeks which resulted in permanent brain damage. Jeff was bravely recuperating and recovered well enough to eventually return to work on a part-time basis in June 1994 but it lasted for a brief period. After residing in the small town of Atoka, Okla., Jeff Lukas passed away at age 58 on March 24, 2016. Lukas, who was well-known for his sharp eye and often was described as flashy, self-confident and a sharp dresser, actively recruited wealthy owners that would spend millions of dollars at the yearling horse sales. One of his most principal clients in the early years was former San Diego Chargers owner Eugene Klein, who would buy a \$575,000 filly named Winning Colors in 1986 that would become Lukas' first Kentucky Derby winner. On behalf of a four-man syndicate made up of himself, Klein, Bob French and Mel Hatley, Lukas was the underbidder on the world-record \$13.1 million yearling that sold in 1985. Klein once told a Sports Illustrated reporter, "It's said that no horse owner can give Lukas a credit card that the trainer can't max out!" Lukas had many important clients through the years and won classics for Tartan Farm; Klein; William T. Young's Overbrook Farm; David P. Reynolds; Michael Tabor; Gainesway Stable; Bob and Beverly Lewis; Brad Kelley's Calumet Farm; and the MyRacehorse fractional ownership group. Lukas also trained for Mary Lou Whitney, M.C. Hammer, Mike Francesa, Bobby Knight, Pete Newell, Bill Parcells, Paul Hornung and the first horse for the Churchill Downs Racing Club – Warrior's Club who boasted of a record of 32-5-9-5—\$854,779 from 2016-19 including a win in the \$250,000 Commonwealth (GIII) in 2018. Lukas would routinely establish records in the sport. He won 92 stakes races in 1987, a record that was held until his former assistant Pletcher won 100 in 2006. Lukas won 53 graded stakes races in 1987, a mark that wouldn't be eclipsed until Pletcher won 57 in 2006. In 1988, Lukas earned \$17,842,358, which was a single-season record held until Hall of Fame trainer Bobby Frankel won \$19,147,129 in 2003. Lukas passed Hall of Fame trainer Charlie Whittingham as the sport's all-time leading money winner in 1988. He became the first trainer to amass \$100 million in career earnings in 1990 and \$200 million in 1999. But there is a mark that might never be broken. In 1994-95, Lukas won a record six-consecutive Triple Crown races: 1994 Preakness (Tabasco Cat), '94 Belmont (Tabasco Cat), '95 Kentucky Derby (Thunder Gulch), '95 Preakness (Timber Country), '95 Belmont (Thunder Gulch) and '96 Kentucky Derby (Grindstone). In '95, he became the first and only trainer to sweep the Triple Crown classics in the same year with different horses. Lukas made it 7-of-8 in Triple Crown classics when Editor's Note won the '96 Belmont. Lukas loved the spotlight and often shined at championship events. He started horses in the Breeders' Cup every year from its inception from 1984-2006 and had runners sparingly thereafter for a total of 169 starters. Three of his 20 Breeders' Cup wins came during the 1988 renewal at Churchill Downs: Is It True (Juvenile), Open Mind (Juvenile Fillies) and Gulch (Sprint). In fact, Lukas' Open Mind, Darby Shuffle and Lea Lucinda ran 1-2-3 as part of a five-horse entry in that year's Juvenile Fillies. Lukas had a penchant for victories in the main arena at long odds. Lukas had often said: "You can't win it if you're not in it." His notable victorious longshots included Spain in the 2000 Breeders' Cup Distaff at 55-1; Cash Run in the 1999 Breeders' Cup Juvenile Fillies at 32-1; Charismatic in the 1999 Kentucky Derby at 31-1; Stellar Jayne in the 2004 Mother Goose at 29-1; Codex in the 1980 Santa Anita Derby at 25-1; Thunder Gulch in the 1995 Kentucky Derby at 24-1; Cat Thief in the 1999 Breeders' Cup Classic at 19-1; Commendable in the 2000 Belmont at 18-1; and Is It True over odds-on favorite and eventual juvenile champion Easy Goer in the 1988 Breeders' Cup Juvenile at 9-1.

Lukas conditioned Serena's Song (1994-96), Spain (1999-2002) and Azeri (2001-04) to become North America's leading money-winning females (a record since eclipsed by Zenyatta). He was no stranger to pitting females against males with success: Winning Colors won the Santa Anita Derby by 7 ½ lengths and the Kentucky Derby in 1988; Althea won three graded stakes in five tries against males, including the 1984 Arkansas Derby; Lady's Secret, who had seven attempts against males, won the 1986 Whitney Handicap; Serena's Song, who faced males seven times, won the 1985 Haskell Invitational and Jim Beam (she was 16th in the 1995 Kentucky Derby); and Surfside won the 2000 Clark Handicap by four lengths in her second attempt versus the boys (she was fifth in the 2000 Santa Anita Derby). Other females Lukas tested against males included Life's Magic, who was second in the 1983 Norfolk and 1985 Brooklyn Handicap (she finished eighth in the 1984 Kentucky Derby); Sacahuista, who was beaten a nose in the 1986 Del Mar Futurity; Family Style, who finished third in the 1986 Arkansas Derby; Cara Rafaela, who was fourth in the 1996 El Camino Real Derby; Sharp Cat, who finished sixth in the 1997 Santa Anita Derby; and Azeri, who finished eighth in the Metropolitan Handicap and fifth in the Breeders' Cup Classic in 2004. In addition to his training titles at Churchill Downs, he was the leading trainer at major tracks such as Belmont Park, Hollywood Park, Keeneland, Oak Tree, Oaklawn Park, Santa Anita, Saratoga and Turfway. He won the 2011 training title at Oaklawn Park with 27 wins from 126 starters – his first title since the 2005 Turfway Fall title. During the latter part of his career, Lukas would typically invite a randomly chosen child from the grandstand to join him in the winner's circle after a victory for the winning photo and would purchase a winner's circle photo for that child's family.

Year (Race No.) Dis. (Starters)	Winner (Age/Sex) Owner(s)	Jockey (Weight) Trainer	Second Third	Time (Cond.) Odds (Margin)	Sire Bred (Color)	Gross Purse-Gr. Winner's Share-#
2025-Sept 27 (10th) 1 1/8 Miles (7)	D-Mystik Dan (4c)* <small>Gessaway, 4 G Racing, Hamby III & Valley View Farm</small>	Francisco Arrieta (123) Kenny McPeck	Disarm Banishing	1:49.25 (fast) 1.57-1 (¾ length)	Goldencents Kentucky (B.)	\$500,000-Gr. II \$303,040—12
2024-Sept 28 (10th) 1 1/8 Miles (8)	Hit Show (4c) Wathnan Racing	Florent Geroux (123) Brad Cox	Cooke Creek Rattle N Roll	1:50.44 (sloppy) 3.28-1 (neck)	Candy Ride-ARG Kentucky (Gr or Ro.)	\$438,660-Gr. II \$300,560—11
2023-Sept 30 (10th) 1 1/8 Miles (8)	Clapton (4c) RRR Racing	Cristian Torres (123) Chad Summers	Trademark Blue Devil	1:48.79 (fast) 8.16-1 (head)	Brethren Florida (Ch.)	\$438,660-Gr. II \$240,560—10
2022-Oct 1 (10th) 1 1/8 Miles (6)	Hot Rod Charlie (4c)* <small>Roadrunner Racing, Boat Racing, Strauss Bros Racing & Gainesway</small>	Tyler Gaffalione (125) Doug O'Neill	D-Rich Strike King Fury	1:49.77 (fast) 1.33-1 (head)	Oxbow Kentucky (Dk B or Br.)	\$498,000-Gr. II \$305,520—9
2021-Oct 2 (8th) 1 1/8 Miles (6)	HM-Knicks Go (5h)* Korea Racing Authority	Joel Rosario (125) Brad Cox	Independence Hall Shared Sense	SR-1:47.85 (fast) 0.10-1 (4 lengths)	Paynter Maryland (Gr or Ro.)	\$337,000-Gr. III \$184,140—8
2020	No Running					
2019-Sept 28 (9th) 1 1/8 Miles (10)	Mocito Rojo (5h) Wayne T. Davis	Gerard Melancon (121) Shane Wilson	Silver Dust Sir Anthony	1:48.91 (fast) 8.80-1 (neck)	Mutadda Kentucky (Ch.)	\$250,000-Gr. III \$147,250—7
2018-Sept 29 (9th) 1 1/8 Miles (8)	Mind Your Biscuits (5h)* <small>Hotel Paris, 1 Hotel, Host of Photo Partners, Mt Scott, Oneida & Chad Summers & Michael Miller</small>	Tyler Gaffalione (121) Chad Summers	Toast of New York Honorable Duty	1:48.64 (fast) 1.30-1 (4 ¾ lengths)	Posse New York (Ch.)	\$200,000-Gr. III \$120,280—6
2017-Sept 30 (9th) 1 1/8 Miles (7)	Honorable Duty (5g)* DARRS Inc.	Corey Lanerie (123) Eddie Kenneally	Money Flows Seeking the Soul	1:49.42 (fast) 0.60-1 (4 ¾ lengths)	Distorted Humor Kentucky (B.)	\$200,000-Gr. III \$121,520—5
2016-Oct 1 (10th) 1 1/8 Miles (9)	Noble Bird (5h) John C. Oxley	Julien Leparoux (123) Mark Casse	Hawaakom Bradester	1:49.03 (wet fast) 2.70-1 (1 ½ lengths)	Birdstone Kentucky (Ch.)	\$175,000 \$104,160—4
2015-Sept 26 (10th) 1 1/8 Miles (7)	Geothermal (6g) A.L. Luedtke	Robby Albarado (121) Steve Margolis	Departing* Smack Smack	1:49.93 (fast) 12.30-1 (1 ½ lengths)	Unbridled Energy Kentucky (Gr. or Ro.)	\$175,000 \$106,330—3
2014-Sept 26 (9th) 1 1/8 Miles (6)	Cigar Street (5h) Jake Ballis & Rashard Lewis	Shaun Bridgmohan (121) Bill Mott	Departing* Call Me George	1:49.86 (fast) 2.40-1 (1 ¾ lengths)	Street Sense Kentucky (Dk. B. or Br.)	\$135,500 \$83,170—2
2013-Sept 28 (7th) 1 1/8 Miles (6)	Fort Larned (5h)* Janis R. Whitham	Brian Hernandez Jr. (125) Ian Wilkes	Windswept Worldly	SR-1:48.58 (fast) 0.30-1 (1 ½ lengths)	E Dubai Kentucky (B.)	\$191,275 \$117,405—1

*-Favorite . . . H-Horse of the Year . . . M-Champion Older Male . . . D-Kentucky Derby winner . . . Known as Homecoming Classic, 2013-14... The 2022 featured a second-place finish by that year's upset Kentucky Derby winner Rich Strike. . . . In 2021, Knicks Go prepped for his Breeders' Cup Classic win with a victory in the Lukas Classic . . . Reigning Breeders' Cup Classic winner Fort Larned won its first running in 2013 and subsequently finished fourth at Santa Anita in his bid for a repeat Classic victory. . . . The race was won in 2014 by Cigar Street, who would finish seventh to Bayern in the 2014 Classic at Santa Anita.

Most Wins, Jockey:	2, Tyler Gaffalione (2018, '22)
Most Wins, Trainer:	2, Brad Cox (2021, '24)
Most Wins, Owner:	no owner with more than one win
High \$2 Win:	\$26.60, Geothermal (2015)
Low \$2 Win:	\$2.20, Knicks Go (2021)
Largest Win Margin:	4 ¾ lengths, Honorable Duty (2017) and Mind Your Biscuits (2018)
Smallest Win Margin:	head, Hot Rod Charlie (2022)
Largest Field Size:	10 (2019)
Smallest Field Size:	6 (2013-14, '21-22)
Favorites Record:	12-6-2-0 (Win=50.0%; ITM=66.7%)
Favorites who finished off-the-board:	Disarm (4 th in 2024 at 1.98-1); Rattle N Roll (4 th in 2023 at 1.30-1); Quip (6 th in 2019 at 2.10-1); Breaking Lucky (8 th in 2016 at 2.00-1)
Fastest Splits – ¼-mile:	:23.12, Five Star General (2023)
Fastest Splits – ½-mile:	:46.66, Five Star General (2023)
Fastest Splits – ¾-mile:	1:10.49, Fort Larned (2013)
Disqualifications:	none
Off-tracks:	Wet Fast (2016); Sloppy (2024)