



NICK ZITO

Born: Feb. 6, 1948 in New York, N.Y.

Residence: Garden City, N.Y.

Family: Wife Kim and son Alexander and daughter Sara by a previous marriage.

Triple Crown victories: Kentucky Derby – Strike the Gold, 1991; Go for Gin, 1994; Preakness Stakes – Louis Quatorze, 1996; Belmont Stakes – Birdstone, 2004; Da' Tarra, 2008.

Breeders' Cup victories: Juvenile Fillies – Storm Song, 1996; Juvenile – War Pass, 2007.

National Museum of Racing Hall of Fame: Inducted in 2005.



Nick Zito has been one of the major players in Thoroughbred racing since the early 1990s, sharing the spotlight in his easy manner with D. Wayne Lukas and Bob Baffert. Among them, they have won 22 Triple Crown events since 1991. Zito accounted for four, Baffert eight and Lukas 10.

Zito captured the 1991 and 1994 Kentucky Derbys with Strike the Gold and Go for Gin, respectively, and stopped Lukas' string of six straight Triple Crown wins by nabbing the 1996 Preakness Stakes with Louis Quatorze.

But after all that success, Zito found himself off the Triple Crown trail in 2000, only to return in 2001 with A P Valentine, who finished seventh in the Kentucky Derby, and second in both the Preakness and Belmont Stakes. He skipped the Derby in 2002 and 2003, but rebounded in 2004 and 2005, though without a victory. He did post his first Belmont Stakes victory in 2004 with Birdstone, who finished eighth in the Derby. He was a non-starter in 2006 and 2007.

Also in the 2004 Derby, The Cliff's Edge finished fifth. In 2005, Zito saddled five prospects, but could get no higher than seventh with Bellamy Road, who was the favorite after registering a stunningly easy Wood Memorial victory. Following Bellamy Road was Andromeda's Hero in eighth place, High Fly 10th, Noble Causeway 14th and Sun King 15th.

After five second-place finishes over the years, the trainer finally completed his Triple Crown cycle when Birdstone captured the Belmont Stakes while depriving Derby-Preakness winner Smarty Jones of racing immortality as a Triple Crown champion. To add emphasis to the victory, a second Zito runner, Royal Assault,

finished third. Those placings, plus Birdstone's victory in the Travers Stakes, helped Zito chalk up purse earnings for the year of \$6,967,792 and the 10th spot on the national trainers' list. For 2005, the trainer upped his earnings to \$8,199,368 and eighth place in the nation.

His 2008 was something of an up-and-down year. With high hopes riding on 2007 juvenile champion War Cry, Zito started the year on a high, especially after Cool Coal Man won the Fountain of Youth at Gulfstream Park. But War Cry flopped in his 3-year-old debut, and then after finishing second in the Wood Memorial and appearing on his way to the Derby, the colt came up with a fractured sesamoid and his racing career was over. However, Zito salvaged the year with a huge upset in the Belmont Stakes with Da' Tarra, winning at odds of 36-1.

The trainer was well out of the action in the 2008 Kentucky Derby, finishing seventh with Anak Nakal and 15th with Cool Coal Man. Even so, he finished the year with purse earnings of \$6,245,281.

His lone starter in the 2009 Derby, Nowhere to Hide, was well out of sight as he finished 17th in the 19-horse field, but after passing on the Preakness Stakes, Zito came back in the Belmont Stakes to finish seventh with Brave Victory and 10th with Miner's Escape.

Zito's two Derby victories were as opposite as they could be. Strike the Gold, as was his style throughout his career, came from out of the clouds to win in 1991 and Go for Gin led nearly every step of the way in garnering the Run for the Roses in 1994.

Zito, who used to go to the races with his father, was overtaken by horse fever at the age of 12, and at 16 he went to the racetrack as a hotwalker for Buddy Jacobsen. In 1966, he fell in love with the Bluegrass when he went to Keeneland with trainer Woods Garth. "I couldn't believe what I saw there," said the New York City native who was 18 at the time and wasn't used to the lush horse country around Lexington, Ky.

Later, he worked with John Campo for four years and then moved on to work with LeRoy Jolley. At that point – 1973 – Zito felt confident enough to try training on his own. He's had a public stable ever since and usually has 25-30 horses in training.

Other top winners for the New Yorker: Adonis, Agincourt, Albert the Great, Chelsey Flower, Doneraile Court, Greenwood Lake, Halory Hunter, Ride Sally, Schematic, Star Standard, Stephen Got Even and Storm Song.