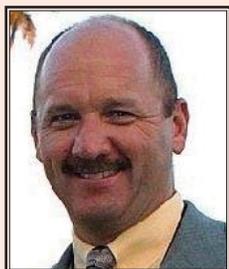


# TOUCHING BASE WITH KENNY MCPEEK



Trainer Kenny McPeek was born August 2, 1962, in Fort Chaffee, Arkansas, and was raised in Lexington, Kentucky. He graduated from the University of Kentucky with a Bachelor of Arts in Business Administration specializing in Finance. McPeek interviewed on Wall Street before graduation, but went to work on the racetrack the morning after finishing his final class at UK. McPeek applied for his trainer's license in 1985. His early successes included Tejano Run, which was second to Thunder Gulch in the 1995 Kentucky Derby. He broke through as trainer of a classic winner in 2002 when Sarava captured the Belmont Stakes. That year, he and now ex-wife Sue were voted the Big Sport of Turfdom Award by the Turf Publicists of America.

McPeek has purchased and/or trained such quality racehorses as two-time Horse of the Year Curlin, Harlan's Holiday, Hard Buck (BRZ), Repent, Take Charge Lady, Sweet Talker, Leah's Secret, She's A Devil Due, Wild Desert, Einstein (BRZ), Prince Arch, Noble's Promise, Kathmanblu, and Rogue Romance. His 2012 stakes wins include the Travers with Golden Ticket and recent gr. 1 Hollywood Starlet, with Pure Fun. He has won more than 135 stakes and is one of the all-time leading trainer at both Keeneland and Churchill. His Grade I victories, include the Belmont, Travers, Florida Derby, Spinster(twice), Ashland S., Blue Grass S., Breeders' Futurity, Alcibiades S and the Gulfstream Park Breeders Cup Handicap(twice). He has also won over 45 Grade 2 and 3 stakes races in his career. Currently he ranks 37th in racing history in earnings for Trainers.

McPeek owns Magdalena Farm in Lexington, which he uses as training facility and layup farm and he also keeps mares there.

*For most trainers in America, the backstretch is their venue although many go from track to track. You have organized your operation differently, with a training farm as your home base and your own racing partnerships as well as a public stable. Please describe your operation and tell us what led you in those directions?*

My early experiences around the horse industry was learning pedigrees and conformation. I was always intrigued by how horses were made and how they are bred, I have always studied the patterns of both and how they work together. Growing up in Lexington and having been around the farms and horse industry since I was young, it was only natural to one day own a farm. After 20 years of training at the track, I took a hiatus and decided to rearrange my business and buying a farm was the result of that break. Most people did not know, but my mother was very sick during the hiatus and I was able to spend quality time with her before she passed away, as well as working to set up the farm operation. It was one of the most difficult periods for me personally and professionally, but today I am seeing the rewards. The farm was abandoned before I purchased it, and there was a massive amount of work to be done on infrastructure. However, today I have more options than most trainers and it has been worth the time, money, and effort. I am able to see all my horses through all their stages of development. From foaling, weaning, to yearlings purchased, breaking, layup issues, and training over the European style grass course, the farm is the heart of my operation. The office staff keeps records on all divisions and overall it has made us more efficient in many ways. I cannot imagine my job without Magdalena Farm; it is a special place to work.

The partnerships that we offer are more a reflection of the economy. I have always worked yearling sales and have been successful enough that my large base of clients normally took nearly every yearling within a short time of purchase. I usually signed the tickets at the sale and then worked to find a proper owner. With the economy getting tougher around 2007, I found that several yearlings had not been easy to place. I had never had that problem before and wasn't really sure why it happened, but I ended up offering shares of one filly by Bernstein to a client. He bought 25% of her and two others joined at 25% and I kept 25%. She was the first Magdalena Racing partnership and was named My Baby Baby. Subsequently, she earned nearly \$600,000 racing for the partners. Since then I have annually bought yearlings that I felt were great prospects and undervalued in the yearling market and offered them to individuals. Normally, the shares are a minimum of 20% ownership. There are a lot of people that love racing horses, but being conservative in an uncertain economy is natural. The Magdalena Racing partnerships give someone the enjoyment of racing a horse, without the burden of all the expenses. They have been very popular and financially we have done very well. The list of stakes winners is growing each year, and I will continue offering them if there is demand for it from clients.

*Are there any disadvantages to training on a farm?*

The disadvantages are minimal. Typical of owning any piece of property, there are upkeep issues and expenses that are ongoing. These are the same as any other farm owner in Kentucky or elsewhere. I look at it as a racing stable with a lot of grass to cut and fences to fix. I have an excellent team that handles all those details.

*Magdalena has quite a history. Can you tell us about it and why you use that name?*

Magdalena Farm is undoubtedly one of Kentucky's most historic Thoroughbred farms, originally deeded to Captain David Shely for his service in the Revolutionary War. Captain Shely and his wife, Mary Hurst, came to Central Kentucky from Fredricksburg, Virginia, in the late 1790s. He was head of the Episcopal Society, of which Henry Clay was a member, and the first meetings were said to be held somewhere on this farm. For generations, the land passed down through the Shely family. On the north side hill of the farm overlooking what is now the turf course is the Shely family cemetery. Buried in the cemetery are David Shely's son, John, and his wife, Magdalena Weber Shely, a woman who we consider the Matriarch of the farm for more than 50 years. Magdalena married John when she was just 9 days shy of her 16th birthday and she died at Magdalena during the Civil War. Included in the cemetery plot are her mother and father, George and Sarah Weber, and several of her children and grandchildren. We named the farm Magdalena in her honor.

Eventually, the farm was developed into a Thoroughbred operation, specializing in stallions. During the early to mid-1940s it operated by the name "The Stallion Station" and was one of the first commercial Thoroughbred stallion businesses. At that time, the industry was dominated by the likes of Calumet and Claiborne Farms when The Stallion Station became home to such important horses as Tomy Lee (1959 Kentucky Derby Winner), Venetian Way (1960 Kentucky Derby Winner), Sassafra (Fr) (1970 Prix de l'Arc de triomphe Winner), and Devil Diver (1943 and 1944 Handicap Champion).

The mothers of both Seattle Slew and Silver Charm were conceived in what is currently called the “Breeding Shed Apartment”. Previously, this was the breeding room in which the bloodlines of many of the most relevant Thoroughbred stallions and mares mated.

The farm was next purchased by William DuPont Jr. and was re-named Pillar Stud, and land continued to lead the developing Thoroughbred breeding industry.

The selling and dividing of the farm several times after the duPont ownership left it in poor condition. In 2006, we acquired and refurbished the farm into a premier boarding and training facility, renaming it Magdalena Farm.

*Given that most trainers are more or less limited to using race track facilities, are there changes that tracks and horseman can make to come closer to the advantages of the training procedures you described above?*

Racetracks and horsemen are always discussing ways to make things better. I have over my career seen efforts to change, but they are minimal. Each track has limits on space and finances that restrict their ability to make major changes. The ability to train different directions would be easiest of them all, but there is resistance to changing track opening hours and horsemen don't all embrace the option to go the other direction. At Magdalena, we train right handed and there are horses that really enjoy the change physically and mentally. I believe it is each individual trainers' job to figure out what works for his or her horses to be successful. If a horse needs to go to the farm to train or rest, we send them there immediately. Another option at the racetrack that would be easy would be round pens. Horsemen would and should be required to install and maintain them. Some racetracks allow them, others don't, but they are a great option.

***“Horses need to go both directions to keep them balanced. Wear and tear on muscles and joints from going the same left hand turns all their racing careers isn't good for most horses.”***

*In addition to being competitive, there seems to be a hint of helping promote the game in your operation. For example, She's A Devil Due brought glory and a great deal of fun to a rather large partnership. How do you see a trainer's role in helping the overall sport succeed?*

I work hard at trying to expand the sport. I keep an open door policy at the farm and at the stables for clients and fans, within reason. I believe it is a great sport that is really misunderstood by the general public. We really need to do a better job of connecting to a larger fan base. The iPhone app, Horse Races NOW was a project of mine out of frustration with the industry and how difficult it is to watch horse racing. It is ridiculous that we have such a small percentage of fans in this day and age. Only 2 percent of Americans consider themselves fans of horse racing. Something is terribly wrong with how the sport is promoted, and the difficulty people have to watch a horse race is unreasonable. If you don't own a computer, satellite dish and/or have a wagering account, then you are going to struggle to see the races. Racetracks and the industry leaders need to take a hard look at the over controlling of the signals.

How can we create new fans if they can't watch easily? As someone that makes a living in this industry, I am going to push these issues until the day I die. The horses themselves are the ones that suffer if the industry doesn't answer these question quickly. It really is a domino effect, no fans=less wagering, less wagering=lower purses, lower purses=less horses, less horses=less mares, less mares=less farms, which naturally means less jobs, hay and straw sold, etc., etc. It all comes back to the fan base. We must find a way to grow this sport!! I am worried to be completely honest. I am competing on the high end of the game; I can't imagine the struggles of small time trainers, owners, breeders today. I want to help any way possible.

*The industry's frustrations have included a decades-long inability to achieve uniform rules. From the standpoint of someone who ships to race in many states, can you talk us through the mundane, but important, logistics of making sure you and your assistants know the specific medication rules of each state you race in?*

I have always been very conservative with medication. There was a time when I kept a graph chart of all the states and then all the medications we had access. The problem is that the states continually change their limits, and they are poor at communicating these changes to trainers directly. The state racing commissions are better at informing the local veterinarians. When we are not sure, we get veterinarian advice and of our timing to use certain medications. I am not sure how we can ever get National Uniform Medication; I just hope it happens soon. I really haven't had but one issue with medication violations in 27 years, only a minor violation in Illinois, that still has no explanation. The goal in the stable today is to never have a violation. It is a reflection of having quality staff that is paying close attention to details.

*You have been a generous supporter of Grayson-Jockey Club Research Foundation, but relatively few other trainers are members or donors. What message do you think we need to do a better job of delivering to your colleagues, for them to realize that what we do can be beneficial to them?*

I have been fortunate to have made a great living in this sport. The horses themselves have been the most generous to me. I just feel a need to give something back to the horses. Grayson is always looking for ways to improve the care of the horses and I feel comfortable that my donation is going to a good cause. I was the first trainer to give a donation to the TRF for each winner, but there were few other trainers that followed my lead. The research is important to the long term health of horses in general whether Thoroughbred or other breeds. It just seems to be the right thing to do, as well as a tax write off. I will continue to support, as long as my business stays strong.

*You also have given your time to committees of the Welfare and Safety of the Racehorse Summits, including one that addresses the claiming rules. California and New York seem to be leading the way in tweaking claiming rules in a way that decreases the incentive to run a horse of questionable soundness in the hope of it landing in someone else's barn. What is your feeling on that?*

I was early in my career primarily a claiming trainer. Those experiences were valuable making me a better horseman today. The claiming game is very difficult for many reasons, and I can clearly remember very, very difficult decisions to make regarding whether to run certain

horses. Claiming trainers walk the fine line with horses that are near the end of their careers; I know first hand how fine that line can be. As a claiming trainer, you can't imagine the list of issues that cross your desk---feet, tendons, knees, ankles, hind end, back, breathing,

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bleeding, as well as high pressure owners, etc. I decided to offer all my experiences to the Welfare and Safety Summit because I'm exactly the one who knows first hand what we are dealing with on a daily basis. I have had breakdowns, just like any other trainer that has been working for at this for many years. When a horse breaks down, it is devastating for everyone involved. It is one of the worst feelings in the world. I believe the claiming rule is fundamentally wrong in that when a horse leaves the gate

then ownership changes if the horse is claimed, but when and if the horse wins, the purse is collected by the owner that ran the horse. If the horse breaks down, then the ownership that dropped the claim is the new owner. It provides for incentive to run a horse that might be unsound. Change in ownership of any other piece of property would never have such parameters. I believe that if the horse does not finish the race, or is not included in the purse money, then the claim is voided. The horse must cross the finish line with rider aboard. This removes any incentive for running an unsound horse. If this type of rule saves ONE horse, then it is worth it. A veterinarian studying these issues years ago told me that the largest percentage of breakdowns happen in the first 1/4 mile of a race: Theory being that they already had issues before the race began. Changes like these would be positive for the industry.

*You also have supported the idea of training horses in both direction, as you mentioned earlier. What are the benefits of that, and how can it best be organized at race tracks and public training centers?*

Horses need to go both directions to keep them balanced. Wear and tear on muscles and joints from going the same left hand turns all their racing careers isn't good for most horses. I have mentioned the idea on several occasions at horsemen's meeting, but it hasn't taken root. Horsemen as a group need to make it important and up until now, few see it as important. I took a really nice horse named Hard Buck(BRZ) to England in 2004 that absolutely thrived training right handed. He was having issues with his left ankle and mentally he was tired from a long career, but still a fighter. I galloped him at Newmarket on the gallops going right handed and he came back to his best form. He ran second in the Group 1 King George and since then I send the older horses to Magdalena when they need a change of scenery. More racetracks should offer this option, but it will depend on several forces to get it done.

*What's your take on why American-trained horses race less often than they did when you first started training?*

There are a whole list of reasons. Year-round racing and the pressures to keep horses running is the first thing that comes to mind. There is constant pressure from racing offices to make a certain number of starts or they threaten to reduce your stall allotment. Financial pressures also are a factor, but depend on the ownership.

Trainer percentages are overanalyzed by owners and bettors. Since the *Daily Racing Form* started printing the trainer percentages the starts per horse dropped because trainers are judged by their win percentages, not necessarily the earnings per start or their ability to develop a young horse. Trainers have gotten more conservative about where they place their horses. This is bad for the racing office, owners, and the horses. I believe you are better off racing a horse for experience and/or fitness than working a horse 3 or 4 more times. I really have never obsessed about my win percentage, but some fans, owners and trainers stay awake at night worrying about them.

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Lasix dehydrates a horse each and every time it is given. It takes time to rehydrate lost fluids and that lost time usually translates into less races per season. It is common in the medical community for doctors to avoid giving elderly patients Lasix because it lowers bone density for fear of broken bones if they fall. If Lasix lowers bone density then wouldn't that correlate into less starts in the career of a racehorse? Why hasn't someone done a study about bone density and Lasix in the racehorse? There is a good project for the Grayson Foundation.

I do think there are certain horses that need Lasix and to completely remove it as a therapeutic medication would be a mistake. Graded races should be run medication free on race day and the allowance and claiming horses should get more than the current levels allow. These horses usually are run more often, they have deterioration of joints, stress from long careers, these horses need more help from trainers and veterinarians. Where do you draw the line on these issues is important and horsemen's groups should be involved in the decision making. I have always said that the Graded Stake committee should address this issue. They have already been successful in their effort to remove steroids. There really is a lot of work to ever get National rules.

Veterinarian medicine advances like digital X-rays and ultrasound are great, but they didn't exist years ago and our information is so good that sometimes too much is a bad thing. If I take a digital X-rays of all my horses, we will find all the little details like bone spurs, P1 ankle chips, some so minor that they are a non-factor. This knowledge just adds to the decision making process. If we digital X-rayed all the claiming horses running in the USA then the sport would come to a standstill.

*You have been involved in the bloodstock industry in Brazil and also have gone adventuring to major races in England. What have you been able to incorporate from observing training in other countries?*

I was introduced to South American racing in Brazil, Argentina, Uruguay, and Chile over the past 10 years. I found very good horses like Hard Buck and Einstein during my early visits and have continued to go back to find more. The dollar against other currency was very strong 10 years ago, but our buying power today is weakened by our current economy. I haven't been as active internationally due to the weak dollar, but I really enjoy racing worldwide. I have been racing in a huge list of places including Australia, Hong Kong, Macau, England, Ireland, France, Dubai, South Africa, and India. I have a bucket list that I haven't seen that

includes Japan, Italy, Turkey, Singapore, New Zealand, and German racing. I sold a nice horse to the Russians named Racecar Rhapsody that I was supposed to saddle in the Russian Derby, but they had an uprising with their neighbor Georgia and denied our passports to enter the country. It was like a spy novel, and the horse ran fourth for another trainer in the race.

The races that I've run in in England are priceless. I met the Queen of England twice during those visits, and can't wait to go back. Each horse ran very well at Ascot with a second and two thirds in four starts; the other colt was only beaten 3 lengths. The racing there is really special and so much different from American racing. We could learn a lot from them with the exception of the purses being weaker than they should be. They have little control over the wagering due to the system, but the sports is more popular and gets more press. I've taken more than a few nuggets of knowledge from each country that I have visited and always keep an open mind to ways to make the job I do better.

*Now, let's have some fun. Please tell us about some of your favorite victories?*

The Travers this past summer was really special. Even in a dead heat, it was a blast. We knew we had him ready and the ride was perfect. It was a win-win situation for both me and Kiaran McLaughlin, whom I've known since I was 11 years old. We both would have been sick to have lost that race. It worked out perfectly. Take Charge Lady winning the Spinster for the second time was special as well. She was undefeated at Keeneland for me.

*Do you have a favorite horse?*

Tejano Run was the first really good horse in my career. I bought him for Roy Monroe as a yearling, and he was my first millionaire runner. I spent more time with him personally because my stable was smaller during that period. I used to graze him, groom him, walk him. He was a monster and still probably the most talented colt I've ever had the privilege to train. Take Charge Lady is my favorite filly by far. I bought her for a client as well and her record at Keeneland was flawless. She is the all-time leading earner in Keeneland history by winning four graded stakes---Alciabides, Ashland, and the Spinster twice. How will they ever match that? Never! They should name a race after her. Noble's Promise was a warrior. Harlan's Holiday was the toughest and smartest colt that I ever trained as well. He accounted for my first Grade 1 victories in the Florida Derby and Blue Grass. He didn't run his best in the Kentucky Derby or the Preakness, which got me fired, but Sarava winning the Belmont made up for the pain of losing Harlan's Holiday.



*Future trainer McPeek on a pony at about the age of five, in the walking ring at Keeneland---scene of some of his most important later victories.*

*Was watching Curlin go on to such success after he was sold a bittersweet experience? And, conversely, how much enjoyment is it to see Harlan's Holiday and others you have trained be so successful in their breeding careers?*

I was really proud of Curlin and still am because I picked him out as a yearling. He had a serious issue with his ankle as a yearling, and I bought him without a client. Nobody wanted him originally. I offered him to 4 or 5 people after the sale and got "No" until Bill Gallion agreed to take him with his partner, Shirley Cunningham. After their farm manager saw the ankle, they called and told me they didn't want the horse. I convinced Gallion he'd be alright with time and I almost ended up owning a share of him, but they kept him. I asked to train him after my hiatus, but they had committed the horse already. It was hard to watch him sometimes, but there is still great satisfaction knowing that I bought the leading earner in racing history as a yearling. I want to find one better than him. Give me some time, I am going to try. Watching horses like Harlan's Holiday, Repent and other stallions that I trained be successful is definitely satisfying. I think that because we use so little medication that they have been more effective at stud. I think there is something to that. Even Take Charge Lady as a broodmare throwing the Florida Derby winner last year was great.

*In terms of what you bring to the lives of owners, can you recall some victories that gave you special satisfaction because it meant so much to one or more of your clients?*

Ray Cottrell and Roy Monroe were both father figures to me. It was more than a business relationship. They gave me early opportunities that I will never forget. Winning for those two men early in my career still brings a smile. Roy kissed me on the lips once after a big winner; it was weird, but funny. Ray always tells me how much he loves me at the end of each phone call; I still train for him today. Even today, I really enjoy the connection with my clients. Sometimes it works out long term; other times it doesn't. I always try my best, stay completely honest through good and bad, and I never quit my clients. I make every effort to stay loyal to them and hope they stay loyal to me. I want to finish my career with more clients like Ray and Roy and less that leave when times are tough. I have many clients now that I really enjoy; it really is more than just a business decision. My mom always said "Son, work hard for those that want you and don't put too much energy into those that don't "

*When you won that second Spinster with Take Charge Lady, were you aware that she became the only horse ever to win four stakes at Keeneland?*

Yes, I knew she was, but I was thinking she is the only horse to win three Grade 1's at Keeneland.

*What are some of the key steps in a young horse's career that give you satisfaction that you are bringing them along in a way to maximize their potential?*

Teaching them to finish a race is more important than being on the lead early. Pacing themselves is the focus of my training. They stay sounder this way. Overcoming a fast or slow pace is the key. I like running them longer as soon as possible. It doesn't matter the surface, but the pace of those races is better to keep them from getting physical and mental issues.

*In traveling professionally, have you also found some favorite vacation spots?*

Brazil is really special. It helps if you speak Portuguese. I speak good Portuguese with a Kentucky accent. Rio de Janeiro is awesome, but busy. I have been up and down the coast over the past ten years: Bahia, Santa Catarina, Buzios and around Rio are all some of the best beaches in the world. The Australian Gold Coast is The BEST beach I have ever seen.

*What are some of your interests other than racing?*

I am a big University of Kentucky basketball fan. I wish the football team was better, but they are trying. I support University of Louisville except when they play Kentucky, and I try to watch the games wherever I am racing.

I have many really good friends outside of racing. I have to work to stay in touch because of the traveling that training horses requires, but they come racing every chance possible. Whether I am in Kentucky, New York, or Florida they keep me balanced in my life.

*Please tell us something about yourself that will surprise even those who know you?*

I like to read, but don't always take enough time. I could read the *Wall Street Journal* every day, and I have a large library of books that have influenced my mind in a positive way. Whenever I have had an issue in my life that was a struggle, I found a book about the topic and read it front to back. My mother was the one who taught me this, and I miss her influence in my life more than ever. I guess you could call me a Momma's boy. She was a really special woman. I have always said that I was out of Grade 1 mare. My mother didn't find that funny, but she understood. May she rest in peace.