

Juarez, Nik: Born: From: Westminster, MD

23 (in 2017), father, Calixto, and grandfather (mother's side) were both jockeys. Nik is from Maryland and wrestled in high school, crediting the wrestling for making him a better jockey. The sport taught him great lessons, he said, and much of what he does in his career is a testament to the athlete wrestling shaped him to be.

"I wrestled very light and watched my weight," Juarez said. "My job now isn't like being physically strong; you have to be mentally strong too. You have to get through hard times, a lot of hard times and there's a lot more downs than ups."

"2017 was a good year for me. I bought my first house in Florida and, for the first time in 25 years, my dad is spending the winter in the sun and out of the cold." 2017 also yielded Juarez his first leading rider title when he led the jockey's standings at Monmouth Park. To date his Black Eyed Susan win in 2017 is the biggest win of his career.

Juarez retired his first stakes winner, Valid, as a personal riding horse. Currently riding him under and western saddle and may transition him to be a lead pony. He's boarded at a farm near Juarez's home in Florida and he rides him regularly.

Nik and his father, Calixto, are very close: "My dad is my best friend. We talk every day, after the races, before the races," said Juarez. "My dad is my biggest support system. I don't have much family, so it's just me and my dad."