

**Vargas, Jorge, Jr.:** Born: From: Puerto Rico

A native of Puerto Rico, Vargas was raised around the racetrack, the son and grandson of trainers. He first got on horses at age 11 or 12 and it wasn't long before he knew he wanted to make riding horses his living. "My dad and my grandpa [Salvatore Vargas] were trainers in Puerto Rico, so it was always in the family," Vargas said. "Going to the barns every day with my dad... I grew up seeing my dad and watching him training and when I saw the jockeys I thought, 'That's something different.' Growing up I was a groom and I learned all that, but I looked at the jockeys and said, 'I want to do that.' It looked like fun."

Vargas attended the country's famed Escuela Vocacional Hipica, a riding academy that has produced Hall of Famer John Velazquez and brothers Irad Ortiz Jr. and Jose Ortiz among others.

After winning a dozen races in Puerto Rico, Vargas made his way to the U.S., where his first mount was also his first winner, Randy Allen-trained Caymus Girl on March 17, 2013, at Parx. Other than brief stints in New York and California, the latter in the summer of 2014, he remained a mainstay at Parx and Penn National until shifting his tack to Maryland at the start of 2018.

Vargas, 23 (in March 2018), leads Laurel Park's current winter-spring meet standings with 35 wins and \$1,158,229 in purse earnings from 160 starters. With 30 seconds and 29 thirds, his top-three strike rate of 59 percent is also a meet best.