

Franco, Geovanni: Born: Jan. 28, 1991 From: Mexico City, Mexico

Franco made his way to Santa Anita by way of Turf Paradise but started out in his native country of Mexico. Tough childhood. Dropped out of school at age 16 and ended up on the streets. Had family who was involved with the horses and racing at earlier stages but the only family still working with horses by this point was an uncle who was a horse shoer.

Franco started working with the horses helping his uncle with the shoeing but it didn't take him long to realize that his diminutive stature would likely fare better on the horse rather than under it.

Began riding professionally in 2009 in Mexico then by 2013 was riding in the U.S. and earned his first leading rider title at Turf Paradise.

Went through some emotional growing pains—let the successes go to his head, got lazy, etc. But finally realized that he wanted to be riding at a higher level and that if was going to succeed at a place like Santa Anita, he would have to get more committed and improve. Smart enough to learn English in 6 months after moving to the U.S. so the tools were there—he just had to use them.

His first G1 win came at Santa Anita in early 2018 and he had a breakout year, winning 109 races. But his biggest break came when jockey Joel Rosario was out with the flu and Franco picked up the mount Next Shares in the G2 San Gabriel Stakes and won by a nose in a 3 horse photo finish (Jan. 5, 2019). Finished 2019 with 71 wins.

As of Jan. 2019 his agent, Jim Giannone, admits Franco is still learning and improving—that's he's about "70%" of where he potentially can be. Giannone has had Franco's book since the Turf Paradise days.