

**Gonzalez, Santiago:** Born: July 9, 1983. From: Maracaibo, Venezuela.

Born in the city of Maracaibo, the second largest in Venezuela, Gonzalez began riding races at the age of 14. (Maracaibo is the same hometown of Eclipse Award-winning jockey Javier Castellano, with whom Gonzalez is good friends.) He became known as “El Ciclón,” the cyclone, after an announcer used the term to describe the rider's unrelenting, aggressive style on the track.

Over the course of his Venezuelan career, Gonzalez won approximately 2,200 races, including multiple Group 1 events. He chased Emisael Jaramillo in the race to be Venezuela's leading rider for 13 years in a row before that rider made the move to South Florida.

Gonzalez's own relocation to the U.S. was predicated by the rising economic and political turmoil in Venezuela in recent years. The South American nation's economy is largely tied to its vast crude oil reserves; the price per barrel of oil has plunged significantly, taking Venezuela's stability down with it. “The situation there was pretty bad,” Gonzalez said. “It wasn't safe anymore.”

Gonzalez took a leap of faith, packing up his wife and four children to pursue a career in the United States in December of 2013. Arriving first in South Florida, the jockey was able to net 41 winners between Gulfstream Park and Gulfstream Park West over the course of 2014. But California was always in the back of Gonzalez' mind, tempting him. “It was always my dream, to ride races in California,” said Gonzalez, who grew up watching riding legends Laffit Pincay, Jr. and Angel Cordero, Jr. on television.

In 2014 Gonzalez made the switch to CA and within the first week had his initial winner. The hard-working rider would breeze as many horses as he could in the mornings, then spend a significant amount of time studying the form of every mount he had on the day's card.

He was reasonably successful in CA but as business started to taper he moved his tack to Arizona in 2018 and then back to South Florida in 2019.

The jockey's South American fan base is still very vocal in its support of the jockey, especially on social media. Gonzalez has more than 23,000 followers on Twitter.

As of 2020 he has not won a G1 in the U.S. (He won 3 G1's abroad). Gonzalez hopes to win his first US Grade 1 race in the near future. He'd also like to ride in the Breeders' Cup and follow in the footsteps of his fellow Venezuelan jockeys Castellano and Jaramillo to ride in the Kentucky Derby.

“Of course, that's the dream of every jockey,” Gonzalez laughed. “But I'm just so happy to be here.”