

Electric racing at Keeneland

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NUI Maynooth student Liam Elvidge reports from the first stage of his year studying in the University of Kentucky on an Equine Science and Management programme

THE Equine Business degree at Maynooth University offers students a great insight into the equine industry, both thoroughbred and sport horse and its management in Ireland and internationally. The course is essentially a comprehensive business degree with an equine specialism.

Maynooth University offers students as part of the BBS in Equine Business, the opportunity to take a one-year work placement or spend third year studying in the University of Kentucky on an Equine Science and Management programme. The duration of the standard Equine Business degree at Maynooth is three years although now I have taken this optional study abroad year, my degree is now a four-year BBA in Equine Business.

The partnership between the University of Kentucky and the Maynooth Equine Business course has been in place since last year with Cathal Byrnes leading the way as the first student from Maynooth to study in Kentucky.

LEXINGTON

This year it was my turn to spend my third year studying in Lexington, Kentucky and I could not have timed my year abroad better with the 31st Breeders' Cup being held in Keeneland for the first time, just 10 minutes away from the university.

Modules I am studying this semester have come from the Equine Science & Management, Agricultural Economics, Animal Sciences and General Agriculture departments.

These include Thoroughbred Investments where assignments have included a competition picking yearlings from the Keeneland September Sale and Mare Analysis using Financial Models and also Equine Marketing. An interesting aspect of the programme is the ability to bring in lots of guest lecturers from the local area and for students to go on field trips. The best guest speaker for me was Hall of Fame jockey Chris McCarron.

The highlight of the field trips was a day spent at the Kentucky Horseshoeing School which included a classroom lecture on hoof anatomy with Mitch Taylor, Director of Education, before learning the techniques of trimming and pulling shoes.

Since my arrival here in Lexington, most of my time has been committed to college but I have also attended lots of different events which have given me some excellent networking opportunities and experiences.

I have visited three magnificent farms Ashford Stud, Hill 'N' Dale Farm



and Mt Brilliant Farm which all have some wonderful history behind them.

SALES

I attended both the Keeneland and Fasig-Tipton yearling sales which were very different to the equivalent sales at home. The Keeneland autumn meeting ran for three successive weeks of racing and only finished as the preparations for the Breeders' Cup began in earnest at Keeneland a week before the event.

I also enjoyed a weekend in West Virginia white water rafting in the Upper Gauley River which drops over 335 feet and is ranked as the second most extreme place in the USA for white water rafting.

My first real American experience was a road trip to Saratoga at the end of August for the Travers Stakes. The 12-hour drive from Kentucky was well worth it when American Pharoah was confirmed to run and although he finished second that day, it was clear he had captured the hearts of the American public with the reception he got from the crowd after the race.

Needless to say it was great to see him bounce back in such fine style in the Breeders' Cup Classic. I have been at some pretty big race meetings before including seeing the likes of Frankel and Black Caviar at Royal Ascot and have witnessed A.P. McCoy's Grand National victory but being at the Breeders' Cup just outweighed all of them. The crowd queued outside the gates for more than an hour before they opened at 9am when people ran to grab a coveted bench and position on the rail, and this was nearly 9 hours before the main event would even start.

BREEDERS' CUP

The idea of the Breeders' Cup was born in Lexington when proposed by John Gaines in 1982. The Breeders' Cup being hosted at Keeneland, Lexington – described as the 'horse racing capital of the world' was described as a homecoming.

There was an electric atmosphere in the build-up both at Keeneland and in the city as they hosted a number of Breeders' Cup Festival events. The morning workouts titled 'Breakfast at

the Breeders' Cup' were well attended by racing fans hoping to catch a glimpse of some of the top horses training.

The weekend could hardly have gone much better with record crowds for Keeneland of 45,000 and 50,000 on both days and an amazing performance by American Pharoah in the Breeders' Cup Classic to earn horse racing's first grand slam adding the Classic to his triple crown achievement earlier this season. He has been an exceptional horse to follow during his racing career and I'll be hoping he does just as well as a stallion at Coolmore's Ashford Stud.

IRISH

Living in Lexington, it never feels too far away from home with a large welcoming Irish contingent directly involved in the thoroughbred industry calling Kentucky home.

So far my time abroad has far exceeded my expectations and I'm looking forward to what the next few months have to offer.

Plans include investing in a pinhooking syndicate for University of Kentucky college students that are hoping to buy a foal in the latter books of Keeneland's November Sale and attending a University of Kentucky college basketball game; the season has just started and hopes are high from the obsessed fans that the 'Big Blue Nation' University of Kentucky will win the national championships.

Home for a short period over the Christmas break, I will be hoping to catch some racing in Leopardstown (well it wouldn't be Christmas without it) and I will return to the USA in January for the second semester at the University of Kentucky before beginning my final year in Maynooth next September.

The Breeders' Cup at Keeneland

SHANTOU

Lifetime N-H winners to runners

King's Theatre	56%
Shantou	49%
Beneficial	45%
Old Vic	43%
Milan	43%
Kayf Tara	41%
Flemensfirth	40%
Presenting	40%
Oscar	39%

* Source: Racing Post October 2015

Recent impressive runners include Bun Doran, Death Duty, Shantou Village, Snag list, The Storyteller

Burgage Stud. Tel : 086-2681899