

No Horsing Around

A jockey won her first pro race when she was a teen.

Shannon Uske (YOO-skee) wanted to race horses since she was a very young girl.

"When I started to crawl, I'd get on my German shepherd and ride around," she said. "My mom would yell at me to get off the dog, and I'd go, 'He's my horsy!'"

By 2004, Shannon was living her dream. She had become a jockey. A jockey's job is riding racehorses.

In January 2003, Shannon rode a horse named Lilah to victory at the Calder Race Course in Miami. It was her very first race as a pro. The crowd was stunned. So was Shannon.

"This is so exciting; I can't believe it," she said. "This is the biggest thrill of my life."

Few jockeys win on their very first try.

"It's like a rookie baseball player hitting a home run in his first at-bat," one person said.

An Early Start

Shannon was born with damaged hips. As a child, she wore leg braces. Growing up in New Jersey, she spent a lot of time at stables.

In 2002, Shannon got a job at a racetrack in New York. She was an exercise rider. There she met Allen Jerkens, a famous horse trainer.

Jerkens has helped many young jockeys get their start. He has also helped many women enter the mostly male sport of horse racing.

When she turned 16, Shannon moved to Florida to train with Jerkens. The young jockey lives with her grandmother, who drives her to the track. Shannon didn't have a driver's license yet.

Shannon never thought she would win so soon. The other jockeys were happy for her. They dumped a bucket of water over her head. Pouring water on a first-time winner is a racing tradition.

Shannon said she wanted to keep racing. "I want to be a jockey as long as I can," she said. "The thrill of being on a horse going that fast is amazing."