

Oliver Lewis

(1856 – 1924)

First Winning Jockey at the Kentucky Derby



Oliver Lewis was the first African American and the first jockey to win the Kentucky Derby.



The first Derby was held at the Louisville Jockey Club on May 17, 1875.

Lewis, who was just nineteen at the time, rode a horse named Aristide. Lewis and Aristide were not expected to win. Chesapeake, a colt from the same stable was favored in the race. H.P. McGrath, the owner of both horses, told Lewis to set the pace and tire out the other horses, which would open up the race for Chesapeake. When the horses came to the last leg of the race, Lewis saw that Chesapeake was too far behind to catch up and win. Lewis and Aristide pulled away and won the event.

The Kentucky Derby is the premiere event in the sport of horse racing. Thirteen of the fifteen jockeys in the first Derby were African American. In the early years, Black jockeys dominated the event and won fifteen of the first twenty-eight races.