



Intelligence and ability bring people to the top of their profession. Intelligence and integrity bring them the respect of their peers.

In a relatively short time Johnny Velazquez has achieved both.

A husband and father of two, the 34-year-old Velazquez has won Eclipse Awards as the continent's top jockey the last two years. Currently he's out of action, nursing a broken shoulder he suffered in a nasty fall last month.

His wife, Leona, knows all too well that injuries are part of the profession. Her father, Leo O'Brien, was a steeplechase rider before turning to a training career. Velazquez' agent, Angel Cordero Jr., has scars running long and deep from his Hall of Fame career.

Velazquez' future Hall of Fame induction has been gaining momentum, especially the last few years, since his collaboration with trainer Todd Pletcher.

Among the highlights: Riding titles at marquee racetracks such as Saratoga (where he set a record of 65 wins at the 30-day meet), Belmont, Gulfstream and Keeneland. He set a record by winning six races in one day at Saratoga, has twice won two Breeders' Cup races on one day, and he hit the 3,000th career victory plateau on July 29, 2004, where else but at Saratoga, on "John Velazquez Bobblehead Doll Day" no less.

In addition to the demands imposed on a family man and a top-class rider, "Johnny V" has become an eloquent spokesman for his profession and has taken on the challenge of making life better for less-fortunate riders and, foremost of all, those who are permanently disabled.