

INFIELD

The infield on Kentucky Oaks and Kentucky Derby days compares only to Bourbon Street during Mardi Gras, pairing the legacy and history of the Kentucky Derby with that famous all-out party atmosphere. Every year approximately 80,000 revelers pack the infield, hoping to catch a glimpse of the next Derby winner (or just an actual horse), to reunite with old friends, “party maximus” and to have the experience of a lifetime.

Traditionally, the infield – often called the “centerfield” in yesteryear – offers two perspectives and two experiences: the third turn party, where the young and the young at heart indulge in all things fun, free-wheeling and, sometime, at little frisky. If you visit the third turn and participate in its madcap antics on Derby weekend, take lots of pictures but think twice about showing them to dear old Mom and Dad!

On the opposite end, the grassy first turn offers a more sedate, family-like picnic setting that’s G-rated and great for all ages. If you’re bringing kids to the infield, this is the place to go – just keep an eye on them.

In between these two encampments lies a vast sea of people with territories roped off, beverages in hand and people-watching skills at the ready. As the center of the Derby’s famed “acceptable excess,” the infield is a kingdom unto itself, and no matter which infield experience you choose, it’s bound to be a memorable one.

Since the first running of the Kentucky Derby in 1875, the Churchill Downs infield has served as one of the main ingredients in the recipe which has helped create Derby success.

The legendary Col. Matt J. Winn viewed the first Derby from the infield atop his father’s grocery wagon. The experience led Winn on a path which would take the once Louisville men’s clothier to the role as Churchill Downs’ most prominent president and greatest promoter of the Kentucky Derby.

Steeplechase racing was periodically held in the infield during the early years of Churchill Downs. The first steeplechase event was held May 18, 1882 over a course consisting of hurdles, stone walls and water jumps.

Tunnels were constructed under the track in 1937 to provide better patron access to the infield, which was also known as the “centerfield” in yesteryear. An additional tunnel, large enough to facilitate semi-trucks, was added in 1985 when the Matt Winn Turf Course was constructed.

Over the years, the infield also has served a variety of other purposes beyond racing. In 1910, one of the first recorded flights in Kentucky took place in the infield. Legendary aviator Glenn Curtiss, who founded Curtiss-Wright Aviation, shipped a plane to Louisville via freight train and after assembling the flying machine in the infield, lifted off and flew around the track at a reported 60 mph.

During World War I, in the spring of 1918, with the country experiencing a potato shortage, the crop was planted in the Churchill infield. One-thousand bushels were harvested and auctioned off, with the money donated to the Red Cross.

During the 1942 Fall Meet, soldiers from Fort Knox and Bowman Field were housed in the infield in tents with the area named “Camp Winn” in honor of Churchill Downs president Col. Matt J. Winn.

The infield was first used for the Kentucky Oaks in 1989.

In 2012, the infield was evacuated and racing was delayed at least 45 minutes as a strong line of storms with high winds approached Louisville around 4:30 p.m. It was the only ordered evacuation of the track’s infield in track history.

The infield, which does not offer a direct view of the racetrack and is only open on Oaks and Derby days, can be accessed with a General Admission ticket.

Starting in 2021, General Admission was limited to the Infield only.

In 2022, the Infield was opened for Thurby but was not opened that day the subsequent year.