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Remember Ohio's Champions: Tougaloo

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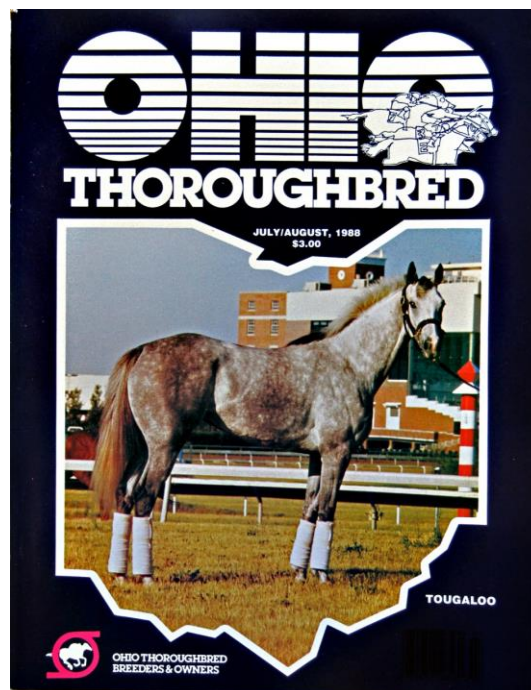
by Kimberly Rinker, Ohio Thoroughbred Race Fund

One of Ohio's best runners from the 1980s was the champion Tougaloo, a tough, hard-knocking mare who captured the Rose DeBartolo Memoria Handicap a record three times.

Named Ohio Horse of the Year in 1989, the striking grey daughter by Lot O'Gold-Bright Reply, by Gleaming was foaled March 22, 1983 for owners/breeders Landon and Cynthia Knight.

At the time of her retirement Tougaloo was the richest Ohio-bred mare in history with \$583,030 in her career coffers. She had been voted Ohio Handicap Mare of the Year for the 1987, 1988 & 1989 seasons.

Landon Knight had named Tougaloo after his favorite Jackson, Mississippi college (where he received an honorary doctorate degree) and contributed ten percent of the mare's winnings to the university. Knight was one of three sons of Knight Ridder Editor Emeritus John S. Knight and was the founder of the Akron Beacon Journal and first CEO of Knight Ridder Newspapers.



Trained by Sam Ramer, Tougaloo got her start in a maiden special weight at Philadelphia Park on June 24, 1986, finishing a smart second. She repeated that performance in a similar event at Thistledown on

July 3, then romped to victory on July 12 in the 8½ furlong Annie Oakley Handicap at the Cleveland one-miler. She then shipped to River Downs where she was third in the Queen City Oaks Handicap behind Destiny's Duchess and Hasty Lass on July 26.

Tougaloo returned to Thistledown for the final three starts of her 2-year-old season, finishing a disappointing seventh in the Cuyahoga Lassie Handicap on Aug. 31; fourth in the Forest City Handicap on Oct. 4; and second in the Rosie O'Grady Handicap to Flaming Rosebud on Oct. 11 of that year.

Wintering in Florida for the 1987 season, Tougaloo's 3-year-old campaign began with a second-place finish in an allowance race at Gulfstream on March 7. After shipping back to Cleveland, she then rattled off three straight wins—two of them stakes: the Darling Nellie Gray Handicap on April 11, besting Lombardel and Glacial Princess, among others; a May 31 allowance test at River Downs; and the Rose DeBartolo Memorial Handicap at Thistledown on June 13.

Tougaloo had two sub-par efforts in the Governor's Buckeye Cup Handicap on Sept. 6 at River Downs and again in a Keeneland allowance races on Oct. 13, but redeemed herself with a hard-fought triumph in the Best of Ohio Distaff Championship Handicap on Nov. 17, 1987 at Thistledown, besting Ohio Royal T and multiple stakes-placed runner With Gratitude.

As she got older, Tougaloo only got better, becoming one of the top mares in Ohio. She began her 4-year-old season by finishing third to Our Lucky Bell in a gutsy performance on an off track, beaten only three lengths in the Darling Nellie Grey Handicap on April 9, 1988 at Thistledown. She then won the Myrtlewood Handicap on May 14 at River Downs before capturing the Rose DeBartolo Memorial Handicap for the second straight year on June 18 at Thistledown. On July 16 at River Downs, she took the Miss Southern Ohio Stakes easily before winning the Ohio Matron Handicap at Thistledown on Sept. 24.

Shipping to Keeneland again, Tougaloo was fifth in an allowance start on Oct. 15, and two weeks later won the Best of Ohio Endurance Championship Handicap at Beulah Park, besting stakes winner Nordic Landing and 1988 Ohio Champion Handicap Male Buckabye. Her time of 2:01.20 for the 1¼ mile contest set a new track record standard.

Tougaloo then shipped to Kentucky where she won an allowance race on Nov. 16, 1988 at Churchill Downs, before finishing a solid fifth in the Falls City Handicap (Grade 3) over the Twin Spires dirt eight days later.

Tougaloo's 5-year-old campaign in 1989—which was to be her last year of racing—began slowly as she finished seventh in the Joe Namath Handicap at Gulfstream on Jan. 20. She showed signs of improvement on April 7, finishing third in an allowance test at Keeneland before finishing fifth in the Louisville Budweiser Breeders' Cup Handicap (Grade 3) at Churchill on May 5.

She then returned to her home turf, eating up the Cleveland dirt with her third triumph in the Rose DeBartolo Memorial Handicap on June 17, 1989. She was fourth in the Miss Southern Ohio Stakes at River Downs on July 15; second in the Ohio Matron Handicap at Thistledown on Aug. 2; and second by scant head to Prince Scott in the Governor's Buckeye Cup Handicap at River Downs on Sept. 3.

Fittingly, Tougaloo took her career finale with aplomb, winning the Writin' Mama Handicap at Beulah Park on Sept. 30, besting Ohio Champion 2-year-old filly Rose of Wendover in the process. She retired at the end of 1989 with 13 wins, six seconds and a trio of thirds in 31 starts, with \$583,030 in career earnings.

Tougaloo was mildly successful as a broodmare, with Private Stash her top performer. The daughter of Private Account earned \$90,508 from six wins, five seconds and two thirds in 25 starts, including several allowance victories at both River Downs and Beulah Park. Tougaloo also produced Mr Huckster, a son of Prized who earned \$10,090.

At age 26, the great mare was humanely euthanized on June 9, 2009 at Bruce D. Gibb's Greenfield Farm outside of Lexington, Kentucky. Owner Cynthia Knight stated at the time that Tougaloo had been suffering from the infirmities of old age.