



Divine Intervention

Hall of Fame Jockey Pat Day knows his steps to horse racing were no accident. It was by the grace of God he was given the natural talent to ride more than 8,800 horses to the winner's circle. The most prestigious of those being at the Kentucky Derby in 1992.

by Lindsay King, assistant editor

Cooped up in the locker room for a majority of race day, jockeys have plenty of time to themselves before they ever mount up in their silks. They aren't alone though; race track security guards accompany them everywhere as they protect the riders and horses from the public.

"Our main job is to provide personal protection for the jockeys anytime they are on the track," says Billy Fryer, an independent contractor for equine security at the Kentucky Derby and a police officer. "What is interesting about the job is that we work in the unknown area of the track mostly."

Fryer says most people don't really think of jockeys as professional athletes, but that's what they are. Most weigh in at about 110 pounds and ride 1,100-pound (lb.) animals at their top speed around an oval track.

"The neatest thing about jockeys is they realize everything they do can affect those other horses," Fryer says. "Safety is paramount in their mind. It is neat to be around professional people like that and then they stay completely grounded."

In Fryer's 35-year career on the track, he has never seen a jockey turn down an interview, autograph or photo from a stranger.

"If they are busy they will just say so and then actually show back up like they said they would," he adds. "It is refreshing in today's world to be dealing with people of integrity."

Hall of Fame Jockey Pat Day is just one example of the good-hearted people mounting those million-dollar race horses.

Horse of a different color

Day spoke to Angus juniors at

the 2019 National Junior Angus Show (NJAS) on July 17 just one mile from the Kentucky Derby track. He touched on his racing career, but his main point was how he found purpose in his God-given talents.

Perhaps it's because Day got his start in rodeo, a sport known for giving God the glory at the end of the day. Or maybe it's just a small piece of the puzzle that turned out to be the path Day's life was destined to take.



Billy Fryer, left, and Pat Day, right.



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“I rode my first winner on July 29, 1973, and went on to have a tremendous racing career for the next 32 years,” Day says. He won the Preakness Stakes five times, the Belmont Stakes three times, and rode in the Kentucky Derby 10 times, just to name a few career highlights.

At the start of his career, Day was simply racing by day and drinking the night away.

It was in the middle of a lonely hotel room in January of 1984 that Day’s life changed for the better.

“I was caught up in the throes of alcohol and drug abuse when I came to the knowledge of the saving grace of Jesus Christ,” he says. “I invited him into my heart, was set free from the bondage of drugs and alcohol and I have sought out to serve him ever since then.”

The change was immediately visible to Day when he refused alcohol on the plane ride home after realizing it was his kryptonite.

“It was a privilege to speak to the Angus youth about the joy and pleasure of knowing, loving and trusting in the Lord,” Day says. “The first 10 years of my career, I was not mentally alert. I was living a wild lifestyle. Once I recognized God had blessed me with tremendous talents and opportunities, I realized I should do the very best I could with that.”

All or nothing

Just like Day intuitively knew when to ask for more from his horse, everybody knows right from wrong. His message is simple: you can’t go wrong doing right.

“One of the biggest life lessons I learned through all of this was something my father taught me early on,” Day says. “Do all that you do with all of your heart. Do what you do and do it well.”

Growing up in Colorado, Day was not surrounded by horse racing. Rodeo was actually the sport of choice for most people in the area.

“I grew up in rodeo and after graduation I had a desire to become a professional bull rider,” Day says. “Through the course of my travels many people recommended — possibly because of my small size and competitive nature, but more likely because of my inability on the back of a bull — that I should be a jockey.”



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Originally, Day had no interest in horse racing. He says his steps were divinely directed by a higher power and he could not be more thankful for that.

Becoming a jockey not only gave Day a life he could have never imagined for himself, but it also sent him some of his lifelong friends.

"I knew Billy through his professional capacity on the track, and he knew me the same way," Day says. "We got very close when our dear friend Dean Kutz was battling cancer. We have remained close ever since then."

Speaking highly of not only Day's career, Fryer says he is the type of guy who worked for every single thing he ever earned. That was part of the message to the Angus juniors.

"A lot of people told Pat that he wouldn't make it. Well he did, he made it big time," Fryer says. "His underlying message to the juniors was to never let anybody tell you that you can't do something. Whether it's showing cattle, raising them or buying a ranch, whatever you think you want to do and are prepared to work for, you can."

Out of the blue Kentucky grass

With no real connection to horses or cattle, Fryer found his way into the agricultural industry through his career as a police officer in 1972. He later bought, trained and raced Standardbred horses.

That didn't exactly transition into horse racing, but it did lead to a small farm in the country and raising hunter jumpers for Fryer's daughter. Once the horses were gone, Fryer and his wife wanted to fill the pastures back up.



American Angus Association CEO Mark McCully, left, presented Hall of Fame Jockey Pat Day, center left, with a token of the Association's appreciation for his talk at the NJAS. Also pictured is Day's longtime friend and Kentucky Angus cattleman Billy Fryer, center right, and Alex Tolbert, right, American Angus Association regional manager.

"Two weeks after the last horse died, my wife told me we were getting into the cattle business," Fryer says. "We came home with two Angus mama cows and we started having calves."

Now up to 11 head, Fryer and his wife got interested in showing their stock. They have claimed second place at the North American

International Livestock Exposition (NAILE) twice.

"We raise them on our farm, halter break them and then we show them some," he says. "We have a blast. It is my wife's passion. She probably knows more about our Angus cows than she does about me." **AJ**