

Top Jockey Shares Faith Openly In Racetracks Nationwide

The nation's leading jockey uses his fame as a platform to share Christ within the horse-racing industry

At 4 feet, 11 inches and 106 pounds, Pat Day stands tall, sharing his faith unashamedly to the horse racing community and fans alike.

"Christianity to me is not a way of life, it is life," he said. "My heart's desire is to share that wonderful news."

He points to Christ in media interviews, while among jockeys and track employees, and at public speaking events sponsored by the Rack Track Chaplaincy of America Inc. (RTCA). Always pressured for autographs he writes, God loves you. John 3:16 alongside his signature.

Day's professional credits earned him a coveted berth in the Racing Hall of Fame in 1991. An ex-rodeo cowboy, he joined the thoroughbred racing circuit in 1973. At 50 years old, he has collected more than 8,700 victories and is the leading active jockey in North America. His winning purses top \$290 million.

Day learned long ago that scaling the pinnacle of success does not gain contentment. "I had fame and fortune and all that the world had to offer," he said. "I discovered that it was very hollow and short-lived."

Jostled out of a deep sleep in Miami in 1984, he turned on the television in his hotel room. His eyes collided with evangelist Jimmy Swaggart pleading with the audience to receive Christ. "I just got down on my knees and wept and invited Jesus Christ into my life," Day said. "My life changed radically and instantaneously. I had come to the conclusion that the moment I accepted Christ the chains had been broken. I had been set free from the addiction to drugs and alcohol."

In 1985 his wife, Sheila, became a born-again Christian.

Day considered leaving the racing circuit. "As I baby in Christ I wasn't sure what I was supposed to do or where I was supposed to go," he said.

Pursuing a seminary degree and becoming a minister were serious options. He shared his dilemma with an RTCA chaplain. Together they searched the Scriptures and prayed for God's direction. "And through that process the Lord revealed to me that He saved me to work within the [racing] industry and not to leave it," Day said.

Some jockeys knocked his conversion as a religious fad. "They called me a Jesus freak and Bible thumper," Day recalled.

But today he is a respected role model with a national reputation. "Pat is willing to help people," said Robert Landry, a veteran jockey. "He lets people know he believes, but he doesn't bother you about it. He's a great inspiration to young riders."

Christians have criticized Day for working in a field that abets gambling and have chided him for riding on Sundays. "I

don't have any problem doing what I sense and believe God would have me to do," said Day, who attends Northeast Christian Church in Louisville, Ky.

Besides sharing Christ in his daily walk, Day is RTCA's chief spokesperson to the racing industry. He recently launched an annual RTCA tour of racetracks, where he meets fans, participates in media promotions and shares his testimony. "Because of this tour Christ's name has appeared on a lot of sports pages," said Ed Donnally, a spokesman for RTCA ().

The association oversees 50 chaplains in 80 racetracks and training centers in the United States and Canada. About 20 of them represent Pentecostal denominations, including eight from the Assemblies of God (AG). "Salvation is at the forefront of what we do," Donnally said. "We hope to bring in 25,000 decisions for Christ in the next five years within the horse racing industry."

Racetrack chaplains minister to a forgotten and unchurched subculture of grooms, hot walkers, exercise riders, starting gate crews and trainers. Danger, low pay, long hours, boredom, loneliness, alcohol abuse and drugs are all part of the scene. "There's a city behind every racetrack of 800 to 2,500 people," says Alvin Worthley, director of AG Chaplaincy Ministries. "Many don't leave the racetrack. The church has to come to them."

Instead of reveling in success, Day leverages it as a platform for evangelism. "The only thing that I can take credit for is the desire to serve God," he said. "Everything I have and all that I am is by the grace of God."

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