

# PONIES 24-7

VOLUME 7 / ISSUE 2 / 2021  
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## Rick Vaive

Harness Racing Continues  
To Play A Role In Former NHL  
Sniper's Life

## Nicholas Campbell

Canadian Actor Remains A  
Dedicated, Lifelong Fan Of  
Horse Racing

## Talking 'Tech'

In 2021 With Woodbine  
Entertainment's Chris Lush

## The Racers Edge

A Wagering Primer



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Since the word "cancer" is not in the name, lymphoma is not commonly recognized as a type of cancer. Did you know that **lymphoma is the fifth most common cancer in Canada**, the third most common cancer in children aged 0-14, and the most common cancer diagnosis for adolescents and young adults from 15-39? There are over 80 different types of lymphoma and over 100,000 Canadians currently living with this illness.

**Lymphoma Canada** is the only national organization in Canada that is focused entirely on lymphoma. It is our mission to empower patients and the lymphoma community through education, support, advocacy, and research.

**Lymphoma Canada** provides information to patients and their caregivers through comprehensive resource manuals, educational forums, webinars, and national conferences. Lymphoma Canada advocates for equal access to lymphoma treatments and supports Canadian lymphoma researchers in Canada. With your help, we can continue to raise awareness, assist newly diagnosed patients, and seek equal access to treatments across Canada.

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# DON'T HORSE AROUND WITH LYMPHOMA

Thousands of Canadians are engaged in the fight against lymphoma, yet a large percent of the population are unfamiliar with this type of cancer. Lymphoma affects your lymphatic system, namely the lymphocytes that together with other cells of the immune system, work to fight infection and prevent disease.

Lymphoma is also the most common cancer diagnosis for adolescents and young adults in Canada. Though common early signs and symptoms can be minimal or mimic other conditions, it is possible that the lymphoma can remain undetected for many months or possibly years.

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**'Don't Horse Around with Lymphoma'** campaign.

# AT THE POST



## A MESSAGE TO OUR VALUED PONIES READERS

Last issue in this column, we introduced a new fundraising initiative, *'Don't Horse Around with Lymphoma'*, where PONIES 24-7 had aligned itself with Lymphoma Canada to help in their fundraising efforts, while concurrently raising awareness for the lymphoma disease. Naturally, as we move forward, we will be utilizing our two media properties for promotion purposes, our magazine, and of course, *Ponies 24-7, THE RADIO MAGAZINE*, which airs at 8:30 am ET on Saturday mornings, on 105.9 *The Region* and streamed live at 1059theregion.com. It is our hope to eventually make *'Don't Horse Around with Lymphoma'*, an industry-wide cause if possible and more information can be found on page 4 of this magazine. Also, watch further issues of PONIES, or listen to our radio show to find out more about some exciting fundraising plans that are in the works with Lymphoma Canada, later this year.

Speaking of our magazine, I am sure that you will love the array of topics covered this issue! They include an interview with Senior VP of Woodbine, Chris Lush who talks about what is in store for the company and Canadian racing in 2021 and how technology will play a key role this year. Also, Chris will talk about initiatives like Sports Betting and Historical Horse Racing, that Woodbine is 'all in' on, as they develop products that are designed to engage new fans and to increase continual revenue streams that will assist horse racing.



### ABOUT THE COVER

They're Off! Woodbine track photographer Michael Burns, catches an aerial shot atop the starting gate and a reminder that it won't be long until the Thoroughbreds will be back!

Also in this issue, you will read about former Toronto Maple Leaf, and multi 50 goal scorer, Rick Vaive and how harness racing has continued to give his life some balance, and actually began during his teenage days at Charlottetown Driving Park. Now Rick is a partner in a two-year-old harness horse, which he has high hopes for later this year and if you are looking for him, then look no further than the training center, where he can normally be found jogging a horse or two.

And finally, many of you know him from the CBC series *Da Vinci's Inquest* and currently *Coroner*, plus several other movies and shows on both sides of the border, but besides being one of the most recognized Canadian actors, Nicholas Campbell has also had a passion for horse racing, since his High School days, growing up in Toronto. This passion was cultivated by trips to now defunct Greenwood and sprouted to a world-wide level and continues even today, as like everyone during the pandemic, Nicholas needed to get used to betting through an online platform. We trust you will enjoy revisiting Nicholas through this interview and that it helps to rouse a memory or two of days gone by that were spent in front of the television.

*Until next time*

Larry Simpson  
lsimpson@ponies247.com

## EDITOR Larry Simpson

Larry Simpson is an avid and passionate writer, horseplayer, handicapper, and marketer for both Thoroughbred and Standardbred racing. He has published and edited several horse racing journals, conducted handicapping seminars for both breeds and is a major proponent for the education of new racing fans through publications like PONIES 24-7, and initiatives that develop 'fresh' demographics for racing, produce cultured bettors and promote the value of the horse racing advertising space!



## LIVING THE HORSE RACING LIFESTYLE

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## COVER STORY

# Chris Lush

Talking 'Tech' With Woodbine's Senior VP, Information Technology, and Wagering,  
As He Preps For Another Industrious Thoroughbred Racing Season!

By Larry Simpson  
Photos By Michael Burns

To say that Woodbine Entertainment's Chris Lush has a few irons in the fire, would certainly be an understatement. Unlike other professional sports, there really is no off-season for Chris and his team, especially nowadays, where the pandemic has prevented live attendance at Woodbine's two tracks and has made finding new ways of delivering the racing product to their faithful following, vital. On top of this, with no fans or at best limited ones in the stands, creating innovative products to help continue to sustain horse racing in Canada, becomes an even greater necessity.

Recently, we had an opportunity to speak with Chris and 'talk some tech' and touch upon just a few of Woodbine's initiatives and updates that are hopefully going to be rolled out sometime this coming racing season.

**PONIES 24-7:** Chris, once again technology is a hot topic for Woodbine Entertainment for 2021 and in particular, how you will continue to engage with your betting customer. Would you agree?

**CHRIS LUSH:** I would as 2020 was extremely 'telling' for us, and we did notice a real change in customer behavior. To be honest Larry, we were worried at the onset of the pandemic that we would have a great loss in customer engagement with horse racing, specifically, because all of the race tracks in Ontario were shut down and also many of our 56 OTB's in the province were also closed

to customers. But there was a bright side to the story, as we did see a large percentage of our customers transition onto our digital channels and that helped to sustain the industry through a period of tough times. Realistically though, we saw upwards of 80% of what we normally see on gross gaming in our market of Ontario, move to digital platforms and lucky for us our HPIbet and the capabilities that it provides, was available, stable and stayed online. One of the challenges obviously is dealing with capacity on our systems and although they are designed to handle large volumes such as what we historically experience on Queen's Plate or Kentucky Derby Day, we also had unprecedented amounts of new customers this past year who moved to both our digital channels of HPIbet and Dark Horse, successfully. One of the things that really saved us, was a project to migrate our HPIbet and Dark Horse data center from physical servers with capacity limitations to a virtual cloud, where with a click of a keyboard, we could simply add processing and bandwidth in tune with customer growth. With this, we were able to provide a more elastic platform to enable our horse racing customers and fans to still interact with their favorite sport and place a bet and we were very fortunate to have the digital platform that led this transition and supported the industry.

**PONIES 24-7:** What about moving forward in 2021?

**CHRIS LUSH:** I believe that we

are in good shape now. Last year, we launched Dark Horse which again was an expansion of our digital offerings and our HPIbet, has been designed to provide the most innovative and comprehensive betting platform available to our customers. It really comes with all of the 'bells and whistles' that you would normally expect from an ADW, but it actually goes far beyond that. When you stack HPIbet up against other ADW's across North America, I believe that we still have an innovation and technological edge, partly because of the investment that we continue to put into the platform. I'm excited for 2021!

**PONIES 24-7:** And what is the role that Dark Horse will play?

**CHRIS LUSH:** Dark Horse is a complimentary product that was actually launched to target the younger demographic. It has several unique qualities, one it exposes horse racing to this younger fan, it legitimizes horse racing as a sport which is key and provides a more simplistic and engaging wagering experience. The Dark Horse platform is all about the data, the algorithms and of course the artificial intelligence that the younger demographic absolutely engages with and this is really the technology shift that we are currently heading into. Unfortunately, Dark Horse when it first launched though, was a little too cumbersome and complex for the average player, so we are actually now in the midst of looking at changing the user experience, to present more of a streamlined, simplistic





approach when placing a bet and allowing the option to easily dive into the AI strategies that are available. We are actually ‘morphing’ Dark Horse in such a way now that it will appeal to a larger audience.

**PONIES 24-7:** Have there been any issues with HPIbet so far?

**CHRIS LUSH:** With regards to HPIbet, one of the biggest issues the last couple of years, has been the payment component, namely funding and whether it is ‘funds in or funds out’. There is actually a major evolution happening in that space now and we want to take advantage of it. I think the biggest piece that we added recently though, was the introduction of PayPal and

we are seeing quite a large amount of our players taking advantage of this offering and being able to ‘cash in, cash out’ through their PayPal account. We actually thought Larry, that we were introducing PayPal as an ancillary opportunity to fund accounts, but instead, it has almost become a primary. Going forward, I do believe that the funding landscape is going to continue to change, as ‘Funding Out’ and the ETF process to bank accounts is currently taking two to three days for the financial institutions to accept a deposit. As of today, it’s really quite simple to deposit into your account, through either a Credit Card or PayPal, the problem remains though, taking money out! All of our customers are asking for an ‘easy in, easy out’ process and we are trying to streamline to make this happen. Beyond that, we are probably three quarters of the way through a refresh of our HPIbet Home Page and again, there are many key innovations happening here, to make it a simpler process while exposing some different and new features that our customers should appreciate.

**PONIES 24-7:** Getting back to the introduction of PayPal Chris, was that more so for the convenience of your customer?

**CHRIS LUSH:** It was really a convenience factor by introducing an additional payment mechanism for our customers. PayPal has been expanding globally and it is just so much more comfortable to use it today whether it is attached to

a Credit Card or a bank account.

**PONIES 24-7:** We have spoken quite a bit, not only in this magazine but also on our radio show, about two additional projects you have in the works, legalized sports betting which includes single event and fixed odds wagering and Historical Horse Racing. Can you give our readers an update on where Woodbine stands with both of these initiatives?

**CHRIS LUSH:** Great question and as we have said in past interviews, horse racing today is the only sport in Canada where you can legally bet on the outcome of a single event, which is a horse race. This is accomplished through the pari-mutuel system, and regulated by the CPMA. Horse racing in Canada generates an estimated 60,000 jobs, and contributes close to \$5.6 Billion to the national economy. These are big numbers and when we look at sports betting, there is both an opportunity and a risk here. The real risk is what effect sports betting will have on the current pari-mutuel pools and our customer base, so we need to ensure that it will be introduced in such a way that both horse racing in Canada and the jobs that are attached, are protected. Also, sports betting needs to be legalized in such a way that our industry will benefit. We do believe that fixed odds, does present a significant threat to horse racing and we want to ensure that we have the components and legislative changes that protect the current pari-mutuel wagering system in

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place. As you are aware Larry, there are a number of changes that are currently in flight in regards to the legislation and we are doing our part to make sure that horse racing is taken care of. Part of the challenge is that the Private Members Bill that was put forward recently, does not have any 'carve outs' to deal with the pari-mutuel and horse racing aspects. If the bill is allowed to move forward through legislature as it stands today, it would essentially mean that anyone could place a fixed odds wager on a horse race and none of that money would actually be returned to the racetrack that is supporting and funding the event. Also, Woodbine wants to play a meaningful role in sports betting and we believe that there is a crossover opportunity between single bet sports and horse racing. Over the past 20 years or so, we have seen a continual decline in the liquidity of our wagering pools and customers and I think that it has become imperative to find other ways of sustaining the horse racing industry. The introduction of fixed odds sports betting would obviously meet this need. We are actually working with third parties, including international fixed odds sports wagering companies, as well as our broadcast partners in Canada, to find a way to produce a partnership and promote an initiative where a certain percentage of proceeds of sports betting would be routed back into horse racing.

Regarding Historical Horse Racing (HHR), essentially, it's a pari-mutuel gaming product where the individual can wager on the outcome of a horse race that has actually occurred in the past. This product is common in many jurisdictions and runs on existing software databases so there's not huge technology needed to operate it.

We also have been in ongoing discussions with both the AGCO and the CPMA and both indicated that they can and are prepared to take a role in regulating HHR as a pari-mutuel product. The key for us is understanding how we can use HHR to make horse racing more competitive as a form of gaming and to provide a continual revenue stream to aid in its survival. Part of the discussions during the legislative process, has been whether we can include changes in legislation that effectively remove references to what is the definition of a bet today, namely that a bet is placed on or any contingency of bets, that take place in or out of Canada and that a bet on a horse race takes place in the future. With HHR, it is essentially dealing with an event that has taken place in the past, so this definition needs to change. In addition, part of our approach as we continue to introduce additional betting opportunities to customers in Canada and traditional horse players, would be to try and cross sell and have them participate not only in sports betting, but also introduce additional products into the market, such as HHR which will also help to sustain horse racing by contributing additional revenue streams.

**PONIES 24-7:** One of the fears with sports betting and Historical Horse Racing though once they are approved, is the cannibalization of live horse racing? What is your thoughts on this Chris?

**CHRIS LUSH:** Live horse racing is sustained by purses and as long as there are purses paid out, then you are going to have people buying horses to race and breed, and trainers and jockeys wanting to train or ride, as this is just the cyclical nature of horse racing. Presently, our current and immediate



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need is to essentially fill the gap between our existing revenues through pari-mutuel wagering and the funding needed to sustain purses, which in certain jurisdictions is supported through government subsidies. By introducing a product like HHR, we are actually hoping to extend or expand our audience and bring new people into horse racing, while increasing the revenues that will sustain the purses and the costs associated with live racing.

**PONIES 24-7:** Which product do you think would be legalized first in Canada, sports betting or Historical Horse Racing, or maybe the question should be, which one is less problematic to become legalized?

**CHRIS LUSH:** Obviously, there's a lot of backing for the legalization of single event sports betting and not just from entities that want to participate, but it is also a significant step in dealing with the challenge that the 'grey' betting market in Canada poses. You look at the sports betting landscape currently and the way that it plays out and there are a lot of international players that are generally off-shore and taking wagers on single events, with none of this money ever coming back into the Canadian market through taxation or revenue. So, from that standpoint, legalizing, regulating and taxing 'grey' market betting is probably the biggest priority today. From Woodbine's perspective though, including HHR as a product opportunity, would 'just' benefit the horse racing industry and allow for that additional revenue source. If I had to say which one would be the biggest priority for all of Canada, it would have to be single event sports betting, but a priority for horse racing, would be HHR!

As for the legalization process and which one is less problematic, I believe that both products have their challenges and their own pros and cons. With sports wagering, obviously there are amendments needed to the Criminal Code and then there is regulatory reform that needs to happen in each jurisdiction across the country. The AGCO has the mandate now to essentially conduct and manage online gaming, which is internet gaming, that includes single bet sports. They are going to have to propose and build an entire framework

around the regulation of this, so it's not just the federal government's Criminal Code changes that need to occur, as the regulation needs to be at the provincial level as well. In regards to HHR, it too is a similar process, as again the Criminal Code needs to change to allow betting on an event that has occurred in the past and also the regulatory framework at the CPMA needs to be altered. The existing regulations of the CPMA insists that we provide our betting customers with the name of the horse as an example, or the name of the jockey and within the HHR world that information is provided differently. Instead of having the actual past performances, you have more of a charting and framework of race lines. This is something that will need to be changed at the CPMA level as well, in order for us to safely operate the product.

**PONIES 24-7:** As you are aware Chris, back in the early 2000's I was with a company that had developed a virtual horse racing product, which you could say was probably a pre-cursor to HHR and perhaps a 'trail blazer' to present day products. Back then, I found it very difficult to have the regulators even take a look at a new initiative. Obviously, nearly 20 years later, things are now different, where the government bodies seem to have an appetite for new gaming products, agreed?

**CHRIS LUSH:** Yes, I think that this is true now, as the one side of the government is looking at expanding gaming opportunities for customers in Canada and of course, at the same time, there's always the realization that something needs to be done to shut down the 'grey' market, which continues to operate illegally. Also, part of the CPMA's mandate remains to help us as an industry sustain horse racing, while making sure that wagering continues to be regulated and conducted in a legalized way.

**PONIES 24-7:** With HHR, it actually has some history in the US, so would this help expedite the legalization process here in Canada?

**CHRIS LUSH:** I believe it would as the best example is Colonial Downs in Virginia, which was forced to stop racing in 2014 because of poor economics around conducting race meets. The Virginia Racing Commission worked with the track

and approved HHR and Colonial Downs was able to reopen as a racetrack in 2019, because of the revenue stream created by Historical Horse Racing. And there are other examples across North America, where HHR has helped to sustain horse racing.

**PONIES 24-7:** I know it's still early, but would the HPIbet and Dark Horse App platforms be able to accept sports bet wagers and also wagers on Historical Horse Racing?

**CHRIS LUSH:** Great question, that I think is probably easier to answer from an HHR perspective. I would say that the digital distribution of that product would be fantastic, and we do believe that both HPIbet and Dark Horse would be the perfect conduits to put the HHR product into both. Also, because it is pari-mutuel in nature, HHR would be regulated the same way as any other pari-mutuel product. For single event sports betting, this is something that we are actually looking into today, on whether we want to extend HPIbet or Dark Horse to allow for sports wagering, or conversely, we could work with a partner who wants to put out a single bet sports wagering platform which would allow for pari-mutuel betting. The one piece that we are looking at though, is how we deal with the structure as pari-mutuel wagering is regulated by the CPMA at the federal

level, whereas single bet sports wagering would be provincial. We would need to build a platform that offers both, with a shared wallet as an example, where you would have customers that would be interacting for single bet sports that is regulated by the ACGO, and then a pari-mutuel horse race that falls under the CPMA. We just need to work on the logistics to see how this would work out.



**PONIES 24-7:** Will we ever see the day that you will be able to offer a multi-sports parlay including a horse race?

**CHRIS LUSH:** We would love to see that and again, the complexity around pari-mutuel and fixed odds is what we need to overcome initially. I think once we get into fixed odds wagering on horse racing, which again we will be supportive of if it is conducted and managed by the track in Canada, I do see a scenario where you will be able

to make a parlay bet on say the Queen's Plate, a Blue Jay's game and perhaps the Toronto FC. To me this would be very exciting to see happen!

**PONIES 24-7:** Finally Chris, maybeyoucandoaquicksynopsis on Woodbine's international market and how it has been holding up through COVID?

**CHRIS LUSH:** Actually, we have continued to see huge growth in the demand for North American product internationally, especially for our own products. Woodbine, besides being in high demand across North America, also has had some tremendous growth in Europe, where it is a little different than here, as our product has been introduced to various European bookmakers and that has helped contribute to a market of around \$50 million net, which Woodbine probably makes up 5 or 6 per

cent of this total. It's all fixed odds and because of the growth in Europe we are in the process of creating some other alliances in the country, which should only help increase revenues. Beyond that Larry, I believe the biggest opportunities remain Japan, and Korea. Japan is by far the largest betting Populus than any other place in the world and for them to open up their market and allow for the import of international racing, would be tremendous for Woodbine.





20 MINUTES WITH

# Nicholas Campbell

From Screen To The Racetrack,  
The Canadian Actor Is All In!

By Larry Simpson

For many of us growing up, we know him as Dominic DaVinci, the Coroner on the hit CBC series *Da Vinci's Inquest*, which enjoyed a successful eight-year run and then led to a productive spin-off, *Da Vinci's City Hall*. And some of us who are a little older, will probably remember the Toronto actor with bit roles in Classic films like *A Bridge Too Far*, *The Eagle has Landed* and the James Bond movie, *The Spy Who Loved Me*. Currently, Nicholas can be found playing the role of Gordon Cooper, on another CBC show, *Coroner*, which is now in its third season.

Nicholas, who has been acting in some manner since 1976, over the same time period has also become a big fan and promoter of Thoroughbred racing, since his Toronto High School days and has even enjoyed a stint as a horse owner.

Recently, I had the opportunity to speak with the star of television and cinema, as he was getting ready to watch some horse racing via his laptop from his downtown Toronto home.

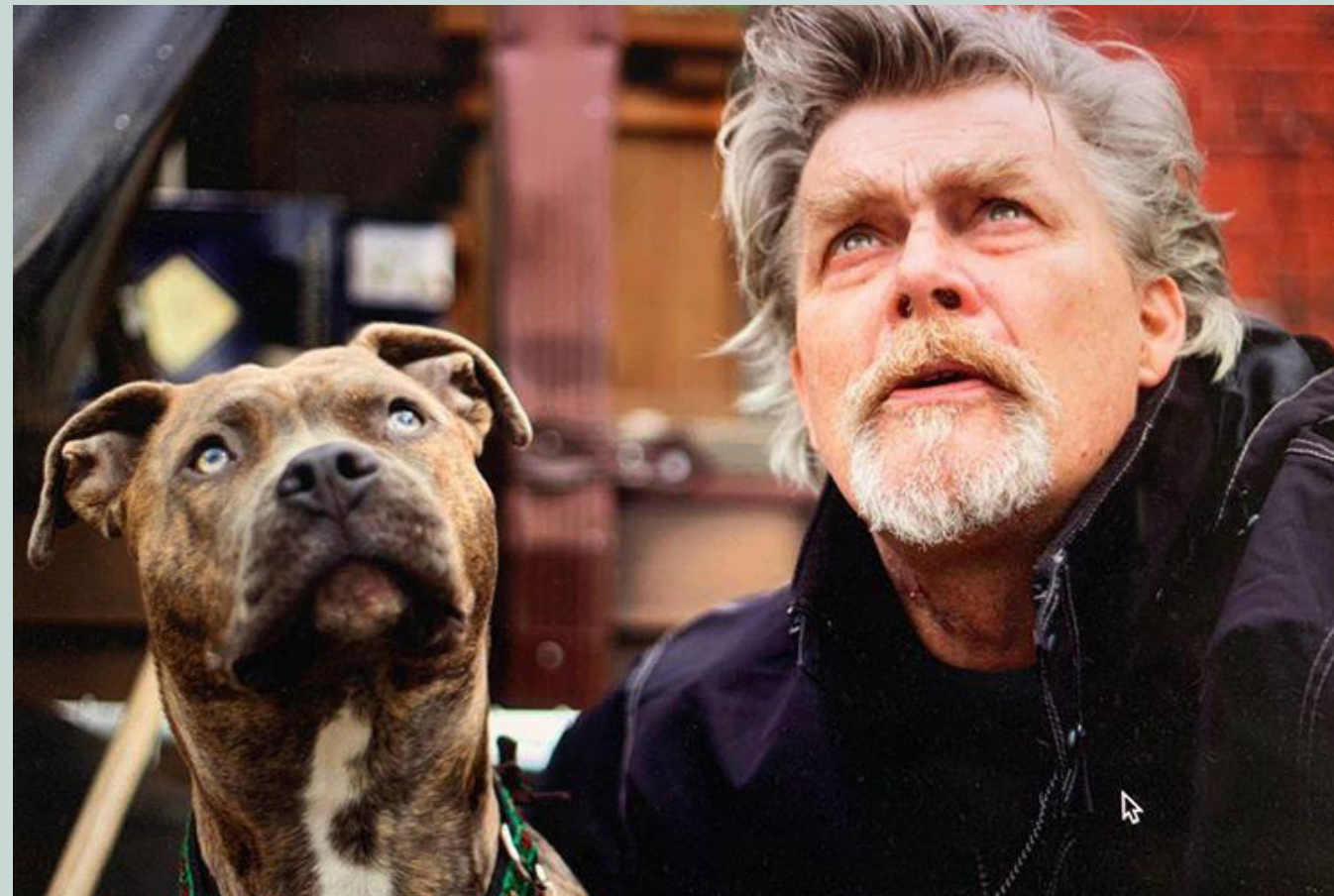
**LARRY SIMPSON:** Nicholas, it is great to connect with you again, for our reader's sake, tell us how you got interested in horse racing?

**NICHOLAS CAMPBELL:**

During my High School days, I met a new 'best friend', who invited me to attend a day of racing at the legendary Greenwood Racecourse in Toronto with his family. Honestly, back then I didn't even know that Greenwood even existed and that there was horse racing and on top of that we went to the track in a taxi, which was also a first-time experience for me. But to be honest, later on, I had some family members that owned horses and they actually had some with Carl Chapman, quite a recognizable name around these parts as he went on to a pretty successful training career in Canada. You could say that I have pretty much been a big fan of horse racing ever since!

**LARRY SIMPSON:** What made you want to become an actor?

**NICHOLAS CAMPBELL:** Actually, I originally wanted to be a lawyer and while in University, I took acting, more as an easy credit. Eventually, I just switched over to a lot of English and drama classes and two years later I found myself in Drama School in England. It was a totally unexpected journey and to be honest the decision wasn't very



popular on the home front. My mother was great about it though and really helped me get through school financially. Living in England for about eight years was great and although sometimes I wish I had never come back to Canada, I am glad that I did, as there wouldn't have been any 'Da Vinci' which was the role that got me established. Also, my access to horse racing wouldn't have been anything like it has been here.

**LARRY SIMPSON:** But you did spend some time patronizing the racetracks in England, correct?

**NICHOLAS CAMPBELL:** I did, but I do prefer North American racing more. I found over there, it was more about 'horses for courses' and with not a lot of 'form' to go on. Funny story, I actually went back to England to do a movie and during one of our last days of shooting the stunt guy came up to me and asked if I would still be in England in June, and we were talking March when he asked me (Laughs). So, I said yeah, I might still be here why do you ask, and he says 'Redcar', there's a horse running there' and gives me the name of the horse, 'Baba' and then said 'but only if it's raining!' I said, thanks, filed it away and surprisingly later

## HORSE RACING ENTHUSIAST

on, I was still in England and walking down the street with a couple of guys from the movie and it dawns on me that it's June, but what's the chances that this horse may be racing? I ran into the bookie shop and went up to the teller and said is it raining at Redcar and is there a horse racing by the name of 'Baba'? He says, 'Yeah mate it's raining there and Baba's in to go.' So, I bet the maximum that you could at the time, which I think was about 50 pounds to win and doesn't he win at enormous odds. I think I made almost as much on the bet as I did on the movie. (LOL) It was probably one of my biggest scores betting, but really, I'm still pretty much a \$2 or \$5 bettor. I have had my share of excitement wagering over the years though, but nothing matches the thrill of having your own horse. It could be a \$4,000 claimer, but winning a race as an owner, I would take that over winning an Oscar. Mind you, I haven't won an Academy Award yet, but give me standing in the Winner's Circle any day.

**LARRY SIMPSON:** Speaking of standing in the Winner's Circle, you did own your share of horses, correct?

**NICHOLAS CAMPBELL:** Yes quite a few in California and some at Hastings Park. It seemed that every time I started a new series or a movie I would go right to the track and buy a horse. (Laughs) A few times we got lucky and even won a couple of stakes races, but to me it was all about the thrill-there's nothing better than having your own horse!

**LARRY SIMPSON:** And since the days of Greenwood, and *Da Vinci*, you have continued to remain a true fan of horse racing, why is that?

**NICHOLAS CAMPBELL:** To me Larry, it's just the best game that has ever been invented! I love the horses themselves, even though I'm terrified to go





near them. *(Laughs)*. Horse racing fills out my life in a very unique way, but I do think though that we are overlooking one amazing factor in racing and that is the personalities of the horses. They do ‘sell this’ over in England and a horse by the name of Red Rum comes to mind. That horse used to get more fan mail than musician David Essex *LOL*, as the media was constantly releasing stories about Red Rum and his ‘quirks’ and I do believe that this really helped to sell ‘the game’ over there. I’m actually thinking of doing some one-minute pieces about certain horses and their peculiarities and if I can get the needed access for the information, I would put them on the Internet. I think it may help to develop some new fans, especially kids who will start following these horses and I am quite sure that there are probably millions of stories to tell. And you know, it doesn’t matter if you are talking Thoroughbreds, Standardbreds, or Quarter horses, you can sell horse racing with ‘quirky’ little stories like these.

**LARRY SIMPSON:** Obviously with an acting career that has spanned over 40 years and with plenty of travel, you have had an opportunity to visit a few

racetracks around the world. Any favorites?

**NICHOLAS CAMPBELL:** I like a little track in France called ‘Evry’ and it also helped that I had some really good luck there *(Laughs)*, but it is also very charming. A couple tracks I went to in South America were fantastic also, especially one in Uruguay, as it’s just a whole different experience there. But I think all in all, looking back now, there was always something special about Greenwood and the characters that were always hanging around there. That was where I first saw Sandy Hawley ride and I was fascinated with him as he was my age, had long hair and was winning tons of races. There were always some great jockeys, but Sandy was something special. In more recent times, a favorite racetrack would still be Woodbine, as it is one of the best in the world.

**LARRY SIMPSON:** How about a favorite horse Nicholas?

**NICHOLAS CAMPBELL:** By far Secretariat, I remember in 1973 when they brought him to Woodbine for his final race and I was one of the



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many that got to the track early one morning to watch his last workout. He was just amazing to see in person. Also, the one year that they had the Breeders' Cup at Woodbine, I saw Cigar race and he was very impressive. I remember them bringing him over from the backstretch for the race and he looked like a prize fighter, surrounded by his entourage.

**LARRY SIMPSON:** What is it that continues to make you a fan of horse racing, the horses themselves or the wagering?

**NICHOLAS CAMPBELL:** I thought originally that the betting side was fun, but I'm not really a big gambler now, so I guess I would have to say that my interest in racing continues because I like the horses and the ownership side. I like that racing provides a competitive platform that pits women and men against each other on equal terms and it is the only sport where you will ever see this happen.

**LARRY SIMPSON:** *Da Vinci's Inquest* was your first major television series and horse racing played a major part in its production, correct?

**NICHOLAS CAMPBELL:** It did, as part of the series was shot at Hastings Park in Vancouver, but when we did the follow up show 'City Hall', the major story line took place at Hastings. We were at the track for every episode and it was probably the best work experience I ever had in my life and nothing has come close since.

**LARRY SIMPSON:** And since 2019, you have been part of the CBC show *Coroner*?

**NICHOLAS CAMPBELL:** Yes, it's been a pretty good 'gig' for me and the best part is that I have always wanted



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to work with one of the Executive Producers, Adrienne Mitchell for the last thirty years and it just never worked out. It was actually because of having the opportunity to work with her, that I took the role of Gordon Cooper on *Coroner*.

**LARRY SIMPSON:** Nicholas, one thing that you have accomplished by way of your career is to prove that a Canadian can make it on the ‘big stage’ as an actor, would you agree?

**NICHOLAS CAMPBELL:** Oh yeah and there’s plenty more like me! Back then though, we all pretty well had to go somewhere, like the States or England to get started and that’s been going on since the 1940’s, but now, Canada has some really good actors.

**LARRY SIMPSON:** As someone that has been part of horse racing for over four decades, once we get through COVID, how do we get new fans and owners into horse racing?

**NICHOLAS CAMPBELL:** I believe that the owners are going to come back in, as racing has done pretty well dealing with the COVID environment. For a while, horse racing was the only ‘live’ sport out there and I know for a fact that a lot of friends of my kids, have really got into horse racing during the pandemic. So really, because of COVID and more people staying home and being introduced to horse racing by way of their computer, the sport is going to get a ‘shot in the arm’ as far as attracting new fans. I think Woodbine’s HPIbet has

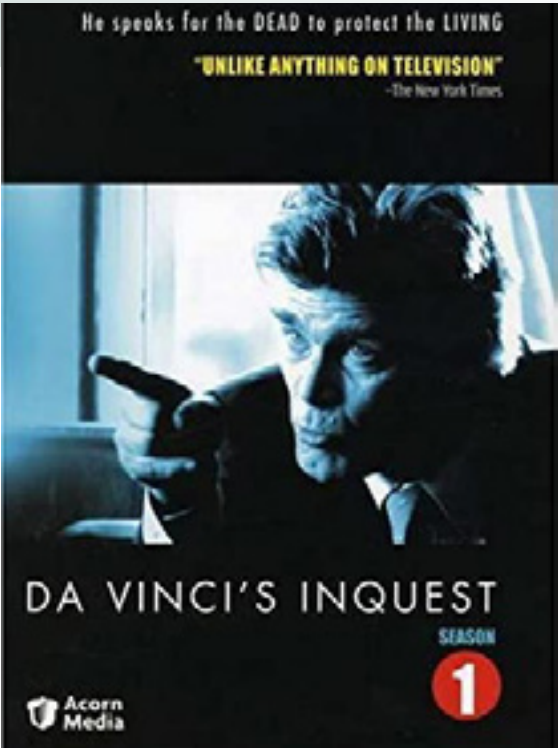
been a real help too, as it is a wagering model that is brilliant and we are very fortunate to have it available to us here in Canada.

**LARRY SIMPSON:** What does the future hold for Nicholas Campbell?

**NICHOLAS CAMPBELL:** Actually, every week a new acting opportunity comes up, but I’m being very cautious because of the COVID situation and travel restrictions right now. I think it’s better to be patient and give it a few more months, before travelling abroad again, so, you could probably say that I am still in a holding pattern right. For the time being, I will just stay at my computer and watch a few races.

**LARRY SIMPSON:** Finally Nicholas, you obviously have had a ‘complete’ life so to speak in both acting and horse racing. Any regrets or is there anything more that you want to achieve?

**NICHOLAS CAMPBELL:** No regrets in life at all, I have three boys and we are pretty tight and they have actually been my salvation. As far as my career, it all comes down to the one show, that has allowed for all of the other experiences I have had here in Canada to happen. Sure, the money may not be as good as it is in the US, but it could be and it’s a smaller world now with the Internet. I’m fortunate also to be able to live in Toronto and close to Woodbine with that fantastic racetrack and turf courses.



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# The Racer's Edge

## A Handicapping Primer

By Larry Simpson



(Note: Part one of this article appeared in our previous issue, VOLUME 7/ISSUE 1/2021. To read it and the entire issue, email, theponies247experience@gmail.com.)

## A LESSON IN PATIENCE

### A Realistic Approach to Investing For Profit at the Racetrack

In our first installment of 'A Lesson in Patience', we conducted our primary handicapping by separating contending horses from pretenders by doing our homework the night before, with a copy of the Daily Racing Form in hand. The second part of our handicapping will be done at the track, off track betting facility, or online, as we 'shop' for that perfect betting situation.

As mentioned last issue, a famous North American handicapper and racing personality, who I knew 'back in the day' was also an advocate of patient handicapping and once said that he would never wager on a horse unless he felt comfortable betting at least \$50 on it. Any smaller wager to him was a sign that his confidence did not match the ability of the horse in question. Although

you do not need to have the same \$50 minimum as our famous North American friend, it is still a good practice to figure out a comfortable minimum wager that will enable you to take a major stand when the time comes. In other words, if the bet isn't worth \$20 or whatever you arbitrarily decide, then obviously your confidence is not at the proper level it should be at when it comes to having an opinion on a particular race.

The other rule of thumb that should help you separate pretenders from solid plays was the previously mentioned 3 to 1 theory and again a product of this same friend. It was his opinion and something that has been instilled into me as well, that if you don't get 3 to 1 or better on your horse, you don't have a solid win bet. Remember, while waiting for that perfect betting situation

to arise, part of the selection process is based on unlocking good, solid value. Although some handicappers feel that 2 to 1 is good value and yes compared to a 3 to 5 shot it is, in my opinion a 3 to 1 or better horse just might be considered an overlay, especially if he or she has met all of our previously mentioned handicapping criteria. Sure, you will find that our betting situation will unlock its share of horses who are less than 3 to 1 on the board, and it is here that you will have to practice restraint as well. Your bank account will thank you for it.

Now then, lets recap the previous points mentioned in last issue's 'A LESSON IN PATIENCE' in order to continue to unravel our near perfect betting situation:

- eliminate any horse who has not raced or shown a serious workout in the past 21 days, in other words, recent form;
- eliminate any horse ridden by a jockey who has a win percentage of less than 10 percent, likewise, eliminate horses who have trainers with a win percentage of less than 10 percent while making careful notation of horses who have been claimed out of their last start by "claiming trainers."
- eliminate any horse who has not shown the recent ability to be competitive at today's class at today's distance, carrying the same weight or less as he or she is today.

And we can now add points 4 and 5 that were briefly touched upon last issue:

- eliminate any horse that YOU, do not have enough confidence in to make a major betting stand, (be it \$20, \$50, whatever you are comfortable with);
- eliminate any horse that has qualified under all of the above points, and is not going to post with odds of 3 to 1 or better.

As we mentioned last issue, the

LESSON IN PATIENCE series of articles, were originally published in another North American racing publication in the early 2000's, but the handicapping elements have continued to withstand the test of time and have been updated to reflect current horse racing handicapping conditions. Obviously, the points above can and should still be included in your handicapping preparation and to make your day at the track a little more enjoyable and hopefully profitable. These suggested points, as we indicated earlier, make up your pre-race day handicapping, or your 'homework' and are joined on race-day by several other aspects, which will depend on to what level you wish to take your handicapping 'experience' and can be broken down as follows:

**1** Pre-race or paddock handicapping, in other words how does your horse look? Is he or she alert, ears up and well aware of the surroundings, not sweaty? In other words, on their toes and ready to race! These are just the basics when it comes to inspecting a horse in the paddock, as it is a complete lesson in handicapping in itself and if you are interested in learning more, there are some great books out that will certainly help.

**2** Keep an eye out for horses that have a five furlong workout within the 7 to 10 days prior to today's race. Two five furlong works within the prior 14 days to today's start is even better. A trainer friend of mine was a staunch believer in the five furlong work, especially two of them within 14 days and I remember him telling me that five furlongs was like a happy medium, where not only can you drill some speed into the horse, but also add some endurance.

**3** Live Money On The Tote Board! I always found it a good habit of writing the opening odds down on my program or Racing Form and see who 'took' the early (live) money. Keep an eye on this horse or if the case may be,

horses and as it gets closer to post time, refer back to the morning line, the first change and current odds. A horse that takes 'early' money and then 'late' is probably a good candidate to hit the ticket.

As you get more schooled as a handicapper, you will soon discover some popular handicapping angles and over time, probably come up with some of your own 'go to' ones. And once again, there have been many books that have touched upon these helpful betting gems and as you start watching more races, you will start to have a better eye on what to look for.

Finally, you have completed your necessary pre-handicapping, watched the odds board and placed your bet, so the job is done, it's time to watch the race, right. Well, actually yes and no, sure you want to watch and keep an eye on your investment, but technically the handicapping process is not complete. Instead, you also want to watch the race as a form of pre-handicapping for the future, especially if your horse does not win. Why did he lose? Was he or she in trouble in the race? Was there a problem at the start which left the horse too much to do? Watch the replay, either after the race, or when you get home, or even the next day as thanks to the Internet, it is now so much easier to determine if your horse would have run better, or not, with multiple ways of watching replays after the fact. I personally also prepare a Watch List, which again, because of the computer age we live in, I will receive alerts via email or texts, when the horse is back in to go.

And then the handicapping cycle starts all over again!







## HORSE RACING PERSONALITY

# CATCH 22: MY BATTLES, IN HOCKEY AND LIFE

Photo By Brandon Taylor, ProAm Images

## Harness Racing Has Always Played A Major Role In The Life Of Former NHL Sniper, Rick Vaive

By Larry Simpson

Rick Vaive, it was said, played the game of hockey the way it was meant to be played, hard-nosed, with a ton of heart and a ‘nose for the net’. A three-time 50 goal scorer in the NHL and the first to net 50 for the Toronto Maple Leafs, at 22 years of age, Rick was named the Leaf’s Team Captain, a move that at the time, when combined with his acute confidence on the ice and his tremendous knack for scoring goals, had the fans in the stand believing that he had it all!

But did he?

A few months back, *CATCH 22: MY BATTLES, IN HOCKEY AND LIFE*, a book penned by Rick and sports writer Scott Morrison, was released and personally I read it and if anything, it certainly is an eye-opener on how life can go full circle, with its many ups and downs and even with a share of personal demons thrown in. And Rick would be the first to admit, that these so-called ‘sprites’, took him many years to come to grips with and closure finally coming in the form of a 168-page hardcover

book.

*CATCH 22: MY BATTLES, IN HOCKEY AND LIFE*, is the story of Rick Vaive, a tale of a life that was somewhat splintered, but did include some glitz and glamor (rubbing shoulders with actor John Candy comes to mind). Unfortunately for him though, there was not a lot of solace, except maybe in part those times spent with his buddies at Charlottetown Driving Park, that he says acted as a welcome escape from a tattered home life, that he was forced to personally grin and bear.

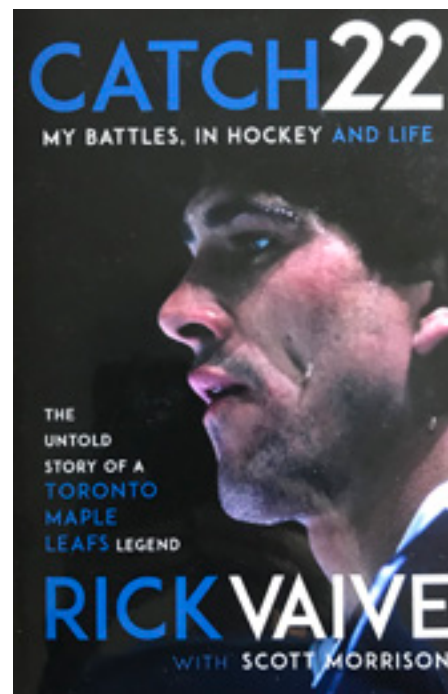
Fast forward to present day, and surely better times for Rick and not surprisingly, harness racing continues to be a major source of enjoyment for him. He’s a partner in Anthony MacDonald’s TheStable.ca., which also comes with an additional perk of being able to hop on the bike and jog the occasional horse at Anthony’s Training Center. Yes, life is good now for the Toronto Maple Leafs’ legend and recently, *PONIES 24-7* was able to catch up with Rick for an interview, where we

talked about of course hockey, horse racing and life, and how *CATCH 22: MY BATTLES, IN HOCKEY AND LIFE*, has helped to put to rest his own personal life’s demons.

**PONIES 24-7:** Rick, after a successful hockey career and a long interest in harness racing, now you are an author, what was the impetus behind wanting to tell ‘your story’ in book form?

**RICK VAIVE:** I think first and foremost I was finally in a ‘good place’ and have been so for quite a while. I’m a Grandfather now and I thought that I was finally ready to tell my story. I got in touch with Scotty (co-author Scott Morrison) and together we presented the book to the publisher in October, 2019 and they really liked the idea. We worked on the book from October to the following April and then launched it last Fall.

**PONIES 24-7:** Who’s idea was it to write a book about your life story?



**RICK VAIVE:** It was all mine! I contacted Scotty, although we were in touch with each other quite a bit since the ‘80’s and actually, I wouldn’t have even considered writing the book with anyone else other than him. We talked about the book’s content on numerous occasions and I told him that I wanted it to be ‘my story’, with ‘nothing’ left out and I think we have achieved that.

**PONIES 24-7:** Much of the book obviously centers around your playing career in Toronto, correct?

**RICK VAIVE:** My time with the Leafs was the book’s center piece, as it was in Toronto where I spent the majority of my NHL career. There’s also quite a bit written about my time with the other teams that I was fortunate to play for and of course, even about growing up. I think that when people read the book, they are probably going to say ‘Wow, I didn’t know that he went through all of that!’ It’s funny and unfortunate though, that the vast majority of people believe that because you played in the NHL for 13 years, that you lived a perfect life and now you are a millionaire, which is far, far, from the truth! (Laughs) But in my own case, I just wanted people to understand that even though you are an athlete and playing at the highest level, you are still a human being and complete with challenges that you need to work at overcoming.

**PONIES 24-7:** And being named Captain of the Toronto Maple

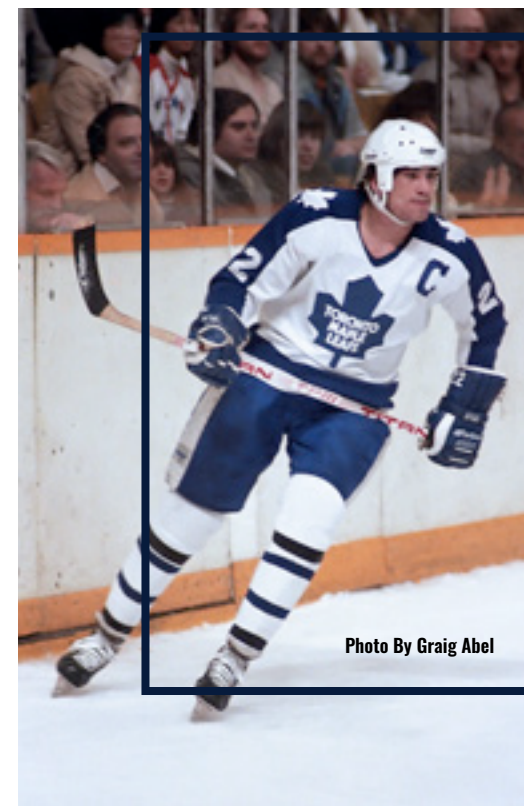


Photo By Graig Abel

Leafs at such a young age, certainly must have been a pressure cooker for you?

**RICK VAIVE:** I think the pressure was really whether or not to take the Captaincy role. Normally when you are named Captain, the team calls you in to a meeting and says that they would like to give you the role, now go home and take a couple of days to think about it and then let them know. But in Toronto, that didn’t happen. Also, it was one of those ‘Catch 22’ situations where I didn’t think that I was quite ready yet, but at the same time I was pretty sure that if I didn’t accept it, that Harold Ballard (the Leaf’s owner), was going to trade me. So, it became an easy decision for me to become the Toronto Maple Leaf’s Captain.

**PONIES 24-7:** Was there any additional pressures Rick, because you were Captain of a revered sports franchise like the Toronto Maple Leafs?





Photo By Graig Abel

**RICK VAIVE:** I didn't really look at it as pressure and if anything, in retrospect, I believe that it helped make me become a better hockey player. I knew that I had to 'show' by example, which I think made me play harder, but that being said, there's no question that the Captain's role came with its own challenges.

**PONIES 24-7:** Do you still miss 'the game' now?

**RICK VAIVE:** Of course, there isn't a day that goes by that you wish you were still out there playing, but actually prior to COVID, I was probably playing 60 games a year with the NHL and Leaf Alumni, Easter Seals and Hockey Helps The Homeless and just loving it!

**PONIES 24-7:** Do you think that hockey is a different game now?

**RICK VAIVE:** The game has changed, no question about it

Larry. All the NHL players have their own skills coaches now and from a skill level, they are just really talented! Even back when I played and it's pretty much the same today, all of the players that made it to the NHL were always the best wherever they played growing up. But, all of a sudden you get to the NHL and there are nine guys on the team that are better than you- in other words, you were maybe the best where you played originally, but now, if you aren't willing to conform to a different role, then chances are, you aren't going to stay long in the National Hockey League. That is just the way the game has changed, because there is such a large talent pool for the teams to choose from now and hockey is certainly much faster today than when I played!

**PONIES 24-7:** And why is it faster Rick?

**RICK VAIVE:** For one thing, the equipment is certainly better and also taking out the center red line has really helped. Players train differently now to be faster skaters and it's an 11-month job for them, because of the extra training and conditioning that they do.

**PONIES 24-7:** Switching topics now, in your book you credit trips with your friends to Charlottetown Driving Park, helping to instill a long interest in harness racing and also help you 'survive' your teenage years, is this true?

**RICK VAIVE:** Yes, my interest actually started when I was a teenager living in Charlottetown. There was quite a bit of 'chaos' in

my house back then, as people will find out if they read my book and I would get out of the house and go to the track with a couple of friends. We didn't have a lot of money Larry, so we used to hop the fence to save the admission, (Laughs) and this would give us a few extra dollars to bet with. One of my buddies knew a lot of the trainers and drivers, so after hopping the fence we would head for the barns looking for tips. Watching the races was not only an escape for me, but it was also a lot of fun at the time. Also, Charlottetown's 'Old Home Week' was just an incredible time, as they would have two cards of racing a day throughout the week and I think I was probably there every day for both cards! (Laughs)

**PONIES 24-7:** What was it that attracted you more to horse racing, watching the races as a spectator or betting the horses?

**RICK VAIVE:** I think it was a little of both! What started out as a distraction from a challenging home life for me, became something that I really enjoyed. I found that I started watching the drivers quite a bit and their strategies to win a horse race, which was fascinating. I loved it because the driver's reminded me so much of a hockey team, where you have a plan in place before a game, that you hope will be successful and reward you with a win. But, as we both know though, sometimes plans don't work out the way that they are supposed to, especially in horse racing and hockey.

**PONIES 24-7:** And now you are



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back in the 'racing game' so to speak, only this time it's as an owner?

**RICK VAIVE:** Yes, I have a piece of a trotter that just turned two and fingers crossed he gets to the races this summer. He's an Ohio-bred and his name is U Gotta Be Leaf and is part of Anthony MacDonald's TheStable.ca. Shayne Corson (former NHL player) also owns a piece of him. I love to go out to Anthony's Training Center and jog a few horses when I can.



Rick/U Gotta Be Leaf  
Photo By Mathew Milne

**PONIES 24-7:** What was it that attracted you to an ownership group like *TheStable.ca*?

**RICK VAIVE:** Well, I think the biggest thing is the way Anthony runs the ownership program. I actually knew his Dad and his Uncles from 'back home' and who I pretty much grew up with, but really, I just loved the whole concept where you can buy a small percentage of a horse and still have all the fun of being a horse owner. That was the appeal for me.

**PONIES 24-7:** Partnerships like Anthony's on the Standardbred side and Michael Behren's *myracehorse.com* for Thoroughbred ownership, seems to be the route to go for people that want big-time thrills for a small investment, would you agree?

**RICK VAIVE:** I would, it's also a way of moving the sport forward by attracting new owners and fans. Communication with people is key, and Anthony

does a great job of keeping the partners involved and updated on the status of their horses. Giving people insight into how their horses are training is very important, and I think that you are actually creating a satisfied customer, to the point that there's a better chance that he or she will come back in on another horse and maybe even bring a friend who wants to get in as well.

One of the other issues of horse ownership, especially for me back in the day, was that it was very expensive, as there weren't as many partners involved in owning the horse. But with Anthony's, as an example, you have 100 shares at \$300 a share and if you want to own 10%, well then that's only an investment of \$3,000. Sure, that's still a lot of money, but it is not as much of what you would have had to invest back in the '80's, because you were limited to only so many partners in the stable. And with social media now, people are more connected with their horse,

even if they can't make it to the track to see it race. I'm having a 'blast' owning part of a horse and would encourage anyone who is considering ownership, to get involved.

**PONIES 24-7:** Final question Rick, when you decided to write *CATCH 22: MY BATTLES, IN HOCKEY AND LIFE*, did you have an intended audience in mind?

**RICK VAIVE:** Actually, several people, first the ones who I mentioned earlier that thought that I was rich and had a perfect life because I played in the NHL and secondly, people who are struggling with their own issues like addiction and show that it is possible to overcome them. Of course, they can be challenging, but if this book only helps one person to have a more productive life, then I believe that some good has come from our efforts. You do hope though that the book helps more than just one person! It's funny though, before I wrote *CATCH 22: MY BATTLE, IN HOCKEY AND LIFE* I read Clint Malarchuk's book and I actually finished reading it in a day as I just couldn't put it down and even though I was his teammate, I didn't have a clue on what he was going through in life. Likewise, after I finished our book, I realized that some of my teammates would probably be shocked to read what was going on in my life at the time. I didn't want to write just 'stories' Larry, instead I wanted to focus on the battles and challenges that I had to face in my life and the many hurdles I needed to overcome!

*For 37 years...it all comes down to the Breeders Crown*

*Thank You*

To everyone who made it happen in 2020, especially our host track partner Harrah's Hoosier Park, the Indiana Standardbred Association, Indiana Horse Racing Commission and all our sponsors.

A special thank you also goes to all the bettors, fans, caretakers, trainers, owners, breeders and drivers who helped make the 2020 Breeders Crown presented by Libfeld/Katz Breeding Partnership another spectacular event.

*It was great to be back home in Indiana!*



*Congratulations to all the 2020 Breeders Crown Champions and their connections!*

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