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ISSUE #210 - NOVEMBER 14, 2025



Rick Ball with the horse that "just floated" Taboga in the mid 1970s. Family supplied photo.

### Remembering Rick Ball and the Horse Who Floated

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A celebration of life will be held in the spring of 2026 at Assiniboia Downs, where Rick's friends and colleagues will gather to remember a man who fell asleep in the stall with his favourite horse Taboga, who sang Elvis on karaoke nights, who made the racing surface safe for five years, and who died...

Talking about the horse he loved. [Full story here.](#)

### Watch the 112th Grey Cup at Assiniboia Downs!

Catch all the action of the 112th Grey Cup on Sunday, November 16th at ASD and enjoy Happy Hour prices all day long. Gather your friends, grab your favourite game-day drinks, and cheer on your team in our spacious and comfortable lounge. Kick-off is at 5:00 p.m.





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### **The fun never stops at Assiniboia Downs** **Winnipeg's place to play and win!**

Did you know that Assiniboia Downs is Winnipeg's #1 Spot for VLT Jackpots? Play any of our 140 VLTs in the Club West Gaming Lounge for your chance to win!

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- ♦ Free \$200 cash draws — Friday, Saturday and Sunday at 9 p.m.

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Travers Cummings

### **NFL Picks by TravyFootball** **Week 11**

Another week, another perfect 3-0 run — that's now 18-12 on the season. This week, I'm breaking down three matchups that could shake up the NFC playoff picture. One team is desperate to find its offensive rhythm again after back-to-back clunkers, another needs a bounce-back game to keep its postseason hopes alive, and the final showdown could very well decide who grabs the top seed in the conference. See my week 11 top three picks [here](#).



New apprentice Ciera Pruitt won 12 races at ASD in 2025, and she's likely to win a lot more next year after her first season in the saddle. (Jason Halstead / Assiniboia Photo)

### **Looking for a Special Photo?**

**Track Photographer Jason Halstead may have just what you're looking for**

Looking for that extra-special photo of your big horse, one you might not find in your win pictures?

Track photographer Jason Halstead takes numerous photos during the races, and not all of them can make it into the win photos. If you're looking for something frameable from your big race, or of your special horse, email Jason at [jjhphoto@gmail.com](mailto:jjhphoto@gmail.com).

Prices are excellent! Almost as good as his photos 😊



[Click photo to enlarge](#)

## A Snapshot in Time by Bob Gates

1981 marked only the second time in the history of the Downs that the thoroughbred live meet extended into the chilly month of November. In addition, the 1981 season was the longest ever, spanning 134 days. Pictured here is Bronze Decider, winner of race #2 on the ten-race card—and yes, that's trainer Clarence Marzolf at the head of the 4-year-old grey gelding. (Gerry Hart photo)



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One Magic Philly is the top win selection from Equibase's Ben Kudla for Saturday's Chilukki Stakes at Churchill Downs. (Coady Media)

## Looking Past the Favourites in the 2025 Chilukki Stakes

The \$300,000 Chilukki Stakes (G3) Presented by Resolute Racing at Churchill Downs is the third race on the track's Nov. 15 card, which also features the 27th running of the Claiming Crown in races four through 11.

A field of seven fillies and mares is set to line up for the Chilukki, contested at one mile on the dirt. It's a balanced group that blends proven graded stakes performers with rising talents. Handicapper Ben Kudla takes a closer look.

-- *America's Best Racing*

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Nobals and jockey E.T. Baird winning the Kennedy Road Stakes (G2) on

## Well-Travelled Nobals Back to Defend Kennedy Road Crown

Breeders' Cup winner and defending champion Nobals will face five rivals in the \$175,000 bet365 Kennedy Road Stakes (G2), for three-year-olds and up, Saturday at Woodbine. A six-year-old son of Noble Mission (GB) out of the Empire Maker mare Pearly Blue, the 2023 Breeders' Cup Turf Sprint winner, arrives at the six-furlong main track test off a narrow runner-up defeat in the Nearctic Stakes (G2T) at the Toronto oval.

November 16, 2024 at Woodbine.  
(Michael Burns Photo)

-- [Canadian Thoroughbred](#)

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Despite missing the Breeders' Cup Classic, Sovereignty is the favourite to win Horse of the Year honours.

### [A King is Crowned in Absentia](#)

Despite missing the Breeders' Cup Classic, Kentucky Derby, Belmont, and Travers Stakes winner Sovereignty is favoured to win Horse of the Year honours in the United States.

Hall of Fame writer Steve Haskin pointed out this horse as the Kentucky Derby winner long before he became the choice of many. This column is about the impact Sovereignty had on Steve and his family, and, as always, it's a beauty.

-- [Secretariat.com](#)

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Track Historian Bob Gates

### [The Best of Bob](#)

And now for something completely different. This week our faithful track historian has taken a swing at song-writing and re-worked Tex Ritter's 1961 hit Hillbilly Heaven. Click [here](#) to listen to the Ritter hit then check out Bob's Lyrics for his version of Racetrack Heaven [here](#). (From July 17, 2020)

## Feedback & Inside Track Archives

We would love to hear from you! Email your comments and/or suggestions to [theinsidetrack@ASDowns.com](mailto:theinsidetrack@ASDowns.com).

Did you know that past issues of The Inside Track are available on our website? Click [here](#) to read them now.



# Remembering Rick Ball and the Horse Who Floated

Nov 13, 2025 | The Inside Track



*Rick Ball (center) holding on to Taboga in the winner's circle.*

## **Remembering Rick Ball and the Horse Who Floated May 4, 1958 – November 5, 2025**

**By G.S. Thompson**

Veteran horseman, elite salesman, sought-after hockey player, part-time singer, and former Assiniboia Downs Track Superintendent Rick Ball passed away quietly in his sleep on November 5, surrounded by family. He was 67.

I went to visit Rick at his home in St. François Xavier the week before he died. Former trainer John Mulligan came with me. Rick and I had a connection, a shared memory from almost 50 years ago when we were still teenagers in the backstretch. He was galloping horses for his dad, accomplished trainer Glen Ball, and I was grooming horses for Don Gray.

One sunny day in 1977, we loaded up Rick's truck and headed for Seven Sisters Falls in Whiteshell Provincial Park, where we caught and cooked pickerel over an open fire on the shore. We reminisced about that day, about the hitchhiker we picked up who'd just gotten out of "the Pen" and the nervous "be ready" glances we exchanged in the truck as we headed to the local bar.



*Rick loved to fish. (Ball Family photo)*

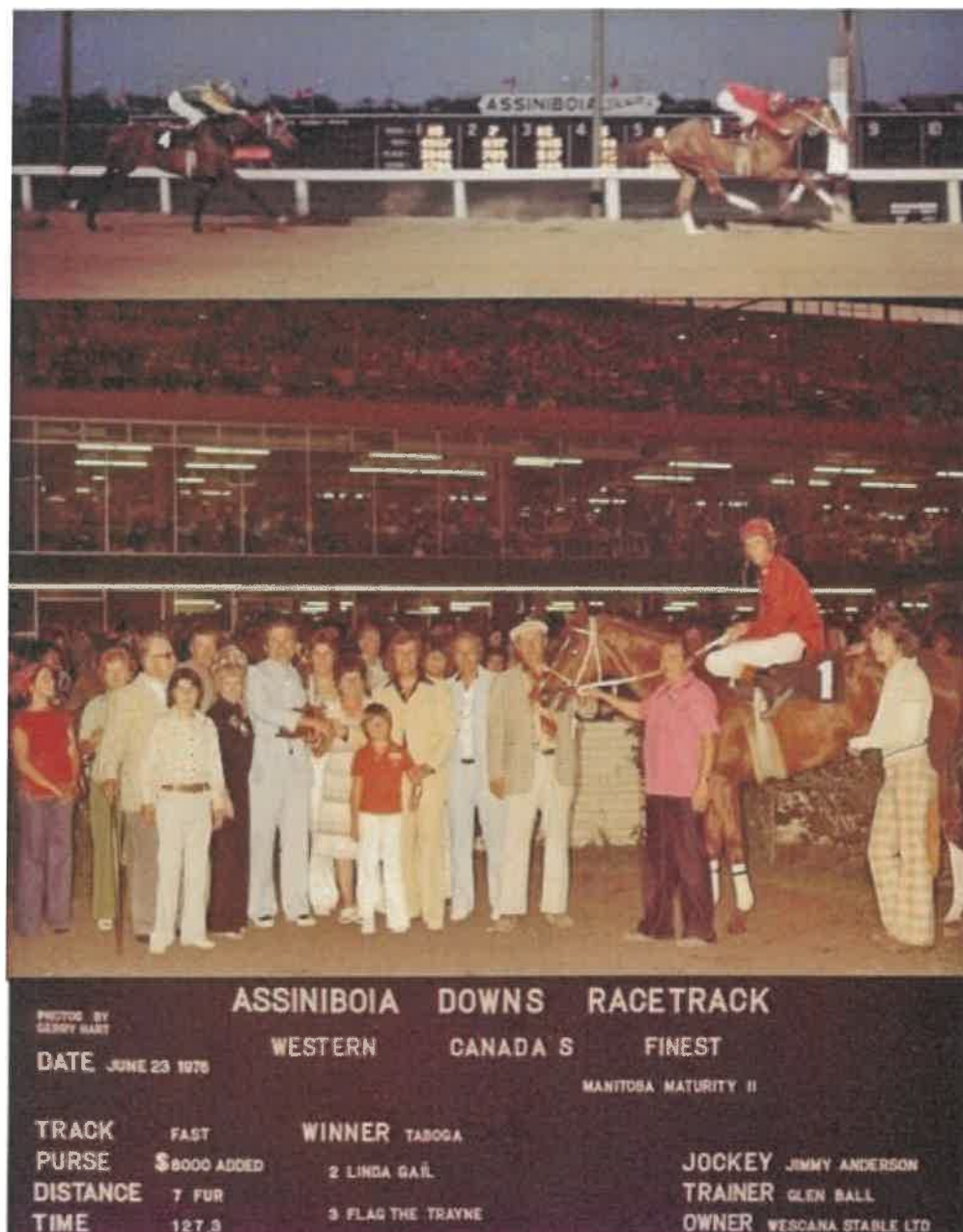
We dropped off the hitchhiker without incident and walked into the bar, where four 70-something men with acoustic guitars, drums, an accordion, washboard, and spoons were playing. Somehow Rick encouraged me to get up and sing "Blue Suede Shoes" that night, launching what became 45 years of weekend performances. I'll always be thankful for that.

Twenty years later, Rick also began singing Elvis at karaoke nights and Saturday afternoon jams. He loved "The King" almost as much as he loved his horses. But when I asked Rick about his favourite memories from the track, everything else fell away. His

answer came immediately, and his voice changed when he said her name.

“Taboga.”

### THE MARE THAT MADE HIM CRY



*Taboga wins the Manitoba Maturity. Rick on the far right. (Ball Family photo)*

Lying in bed, Rick's face transformed when he talked about Taboga. Forty-seven years melted away and he was young again, galloping the most beautiful horse he'd ever seen.

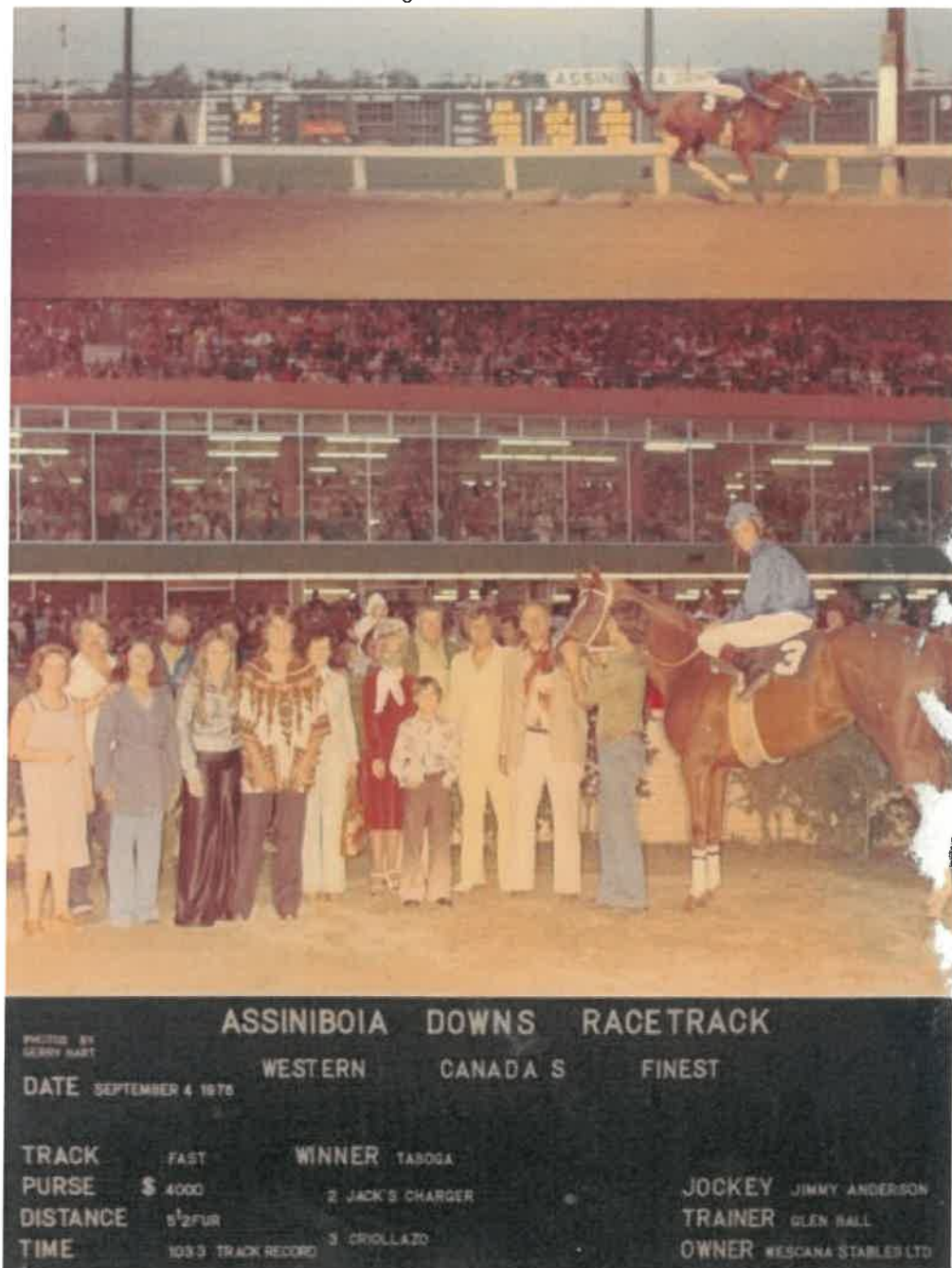
“She just floated,” said Rick with tears in his eyes. “She was so beautiful. The best looking horse I'd ever seen.” Rick went on to describe Taboga in precise detail, the way a man describes his first love: “She had a long giraffe neck like I'd never seen before.

Her eyes were smaller than a regular horse's, and she was long and smooth and 17 hands."

Rick's mother Louise remembered the day Taboga arrived at Assiniboia Downs from a sale in Florida. Word had spread through the backstretch that Glen Ball had bought something special.

"When she came off the trailer, she just stood there looking around and not moving, like she was happy to be home," said Louise. "We'd never seen a horse that looked that good." She surveyed her new home with the quiet confidence of greatness, and Rick, as her regular exercise rider and groom, would help her find it on the track.

Taboga would win multiple stakes including the Wheat City Handicap against the boys, the Manitoba Maturity, and the Inaugural Handicap, among others, while also finishing second to 1974 Eclipse Award winner and 1975 Canadian Horse of the Year L'Enjoleur in the Harry Jeffrey Handicap. "If that race was shorter, she would have beat him," said Rick. Taboga also set a track record for 5 ½ furlongs at Assiniboia Downs, but there was more to come.



*Taboga sets new ASD track record for 5 1/2 furlongs. Sept. 4, 1976. (Ball Family photo)*

When his father took horses to Calgary, young Rick took Taboga to Woodbine. "I trained her there myself," he said, his pride cutting through the pain medication. "I've been training her all my life."

He didn't just train her. He galloped her, worked her, knew every stride. "He used to fall asleep in the stall with her," said Louise. "He just loved that horse." A young horseman so devoted to his mare that he'd curl up in the straw beside her, listening to her breathe, making sure she was comfortable, safe, and content.

Taboga responded in kind, beat the best on the grounds on dirt at

Woodbine, and finish second beaten a neck on the turf.

Rick was what the old-timers called “a good leg man” — the highest compliment one horseman can give another. He could read a horse’s soundness by feel and touch, knew when to push and when to back off, understood that caring for a racehorse meant more than morning works. It meant rubbing their legs, applying liniment, spending time with them, understanding their psychology.

With Taboga, Rick took infinite care. “I worked her so many times,” he said. “I didn’t want her to work too fast. Jimmy Anderson worked her in a 34 and change. And Jimmy knew better. When I worked her, she went 36 max.”

That patience paid off at Woodbine, where the Toronto racing establishment, “so high on themselves,” as Rick put it, got a Manitoba education. “She beat the fillies in a big stake race. I think she won by about seven,” said Rick, his voice carrying the satisfaction of proving doubters wrong. “She equalled the track record and the jockey never had to ask her. He just hand rode her.”

“They came up to me and said, ‘Wow that horse can sure run!’” Rick said, imitating the surprised Toronto horsemen who suddenly had to acknowledge what Manitoba had brought them. Top trainer Frank Merrill certainly noticed. “I swear to God he offered about \$400,000 for her,” Rick said. “In 1970s money, that was a fortune. But you don’t sell the mare you fall asleep beside.”

When I asked Rick if Taboga was the best horse he ever rode, he didn’t hesitate: “This horse floated.”

And then, lying in bed knowing he had only days left to live, he began to cry softly. Not for himself, but for a mare who’d been gone for decades, for mornings at Woodbine when he was young and strong and the most beautiful horse in the world trusted him completely.

## **FROM BARN B TO EVERYWHERE ELSE**



*Rick and his mom Louise circa 1980. (Ball Family photo)*

Rick Ball grew up in two places simultaneously, the family ranch in East St. Paul where his parents Louise and Glen bred horses, and Barn B at Assiniboia Downs, where Glen trained.

"The racetrack, Barn B, was always our barn," said Louise. "He spent his childhood there."

By the time Rick was a teenager, he was galloping horses with the best on the grounds. "He was so good on a horse," said Louise. The ability to understand what a horse needed came naturally to him. He learned from watching his father and spending countless hours in the barn.

Rick followed in Glen's footsteps, working with horses from boyhood, breaking, galloping, assisting with training, eventually owning his own thoroughbreds and working as a jockey's agent. He travelled to racetracks across the US and Canada, always chasing that feeling he'd had on Taboga's back, that sense of floating above the ground.

But like many exercise riders, he started putting on weight. The career that seemed destined, becoming a trainer like his father, took an unexpected detour. What happened next surprised everyone: Rick discovered he was good at everything he tried.

He worked at MacDon Industries, assembling farm equipment so quickly and efficiently that some coworkers grew jealous. When he wasn't promoted as expected, he quit and became a vacuum cleaner and water filter salesman. "Rick was the leading salesman in the USA and Canada," said Louise, still amazed decades later. "He won everything that was in the book for sales accomplishments, pool table, leather jacket, all kinds of stuff."



*Rick the hockey player (second from right) with Bobby Orr (center) and Scott Taylor (far right). (Ball Family photo)*

Rick also played hockey for eight or nine teams, competed in industrial leagues and tournaments well into his late 30s. "I got the stats," he said with quiet pride. Teams would pinhook him, borrow him for tournaments when they needed goals. At 38, having been off skates for a month, he once helped his team come back from a 3-0 deficit in a tournament game, scoring all three goals, before they lost in overtime.

"He was just good at everything he did," said Louise."

But Rick never stopped thinking about horses. The backstretch was in his blood, planted there in childhood and watered by every morning he'd spent with Taboga. When Assiniboia Downs needed a track superintendent in 2021 Rick came home.

### **CARING FOR THE TRACK LIKE TABOGA**

For five years, Rick cared for the Assiniboia Downs racing surface with the same devotion he'd given that special mare four decades earlier. He showed unwavering dedication, making countless sacrifices to ensure the track was well-maintained and safe for the horses during every racing season.

Just as he'd worked Taboga slowly, he approached track maintenance with the same careful philosophy, with patience, attention to detail, and an understanding that you can't rush quality. The horses running on his track deserved the same consideration he'd given his own.

He was still a leg man, even when the legs belonged to horses he'd never meet, trained by people he might not know. The track

was kind because Rick cared enough to make it that way.

### THE DREAMS THAT SLIPPED AWAY



*Rick (second from right) in the winner's circle with Taboga. (Ball Family photo)*

Near the end of our interview, Rick's voice grew heavy with a particular kind of regret, not for things done wrong, but for things left undone. He had saved enough money to buy a place in Gimli, which was now never going to happen. He'd had a plan, but life kept getting in the way.

There were other trips that wouldn't happen, Mexico with friends during the winter, two months of retirement living he'd earned but would never experience. The cancer had stolen his future.

He warned us to spend the time with the people you love now, buy the cabin in Gimli, take the trip to Mexico. "Don't wait until you're out of time," he said.

But Rick did get one final victory. While in British Columbia for cancer treatments, he went salmon fishing with a friend who'd been trying for years to catch one. First time out, he landed a big salmon, his first ever.

### FLOATING HOME



*Rick with his daughter Alayna and one of his grandchildren. (Ball Family photo)*

Rick passed away peacefully at home on November 5, 2025, with his loving family by his side. He was predeceased by his father Glen, and is lovingly remembered by his mother Louise, brother Shane, sister Treasure (Hal), daughter Alayna (Donaldo), grandchildren Evan, Royce, Talia, Danica, Mateo, niece Brittany, and nephew Joshua (Stephanie).

He will be deeply missed by his family, the Assiniboia Downs community, and many close friends who knew him as the track superintendent who cared, the horseman who understood, and the leg man who made things right.

A celebration of life will be held in the spring of 2026 at Assiniboia Downs, where Rick's friends and colleagues will gather to remember a man who fell asleep in Taboga's stall, who sang Elvis on karaoke nights, who made the racing surface safe for five years, and who died...

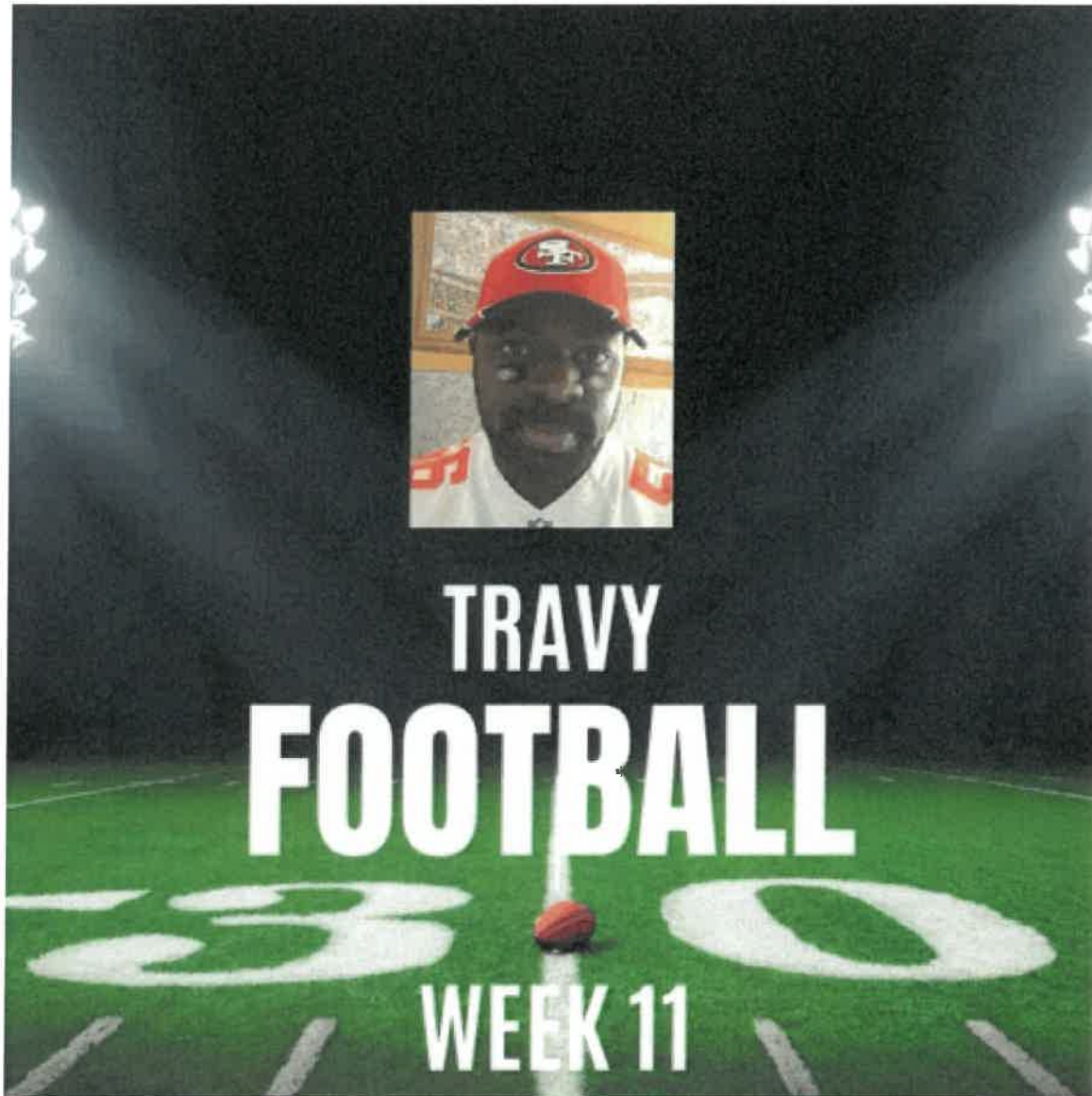
Talking about the horse he loved.



*Rick as a teenager exercising the horse that floated.*

# TravyFootball Week 11

Nov 12, 2025 | The Inside Track



**By Travers Cummings**

**Packers over Giants (Sunday noon):** I've said numerous times that as a young running quarterback, you cannot take too many hits, or else it's going to shorten your career really quickly. Well, it finally caught up to Jaxon Dart, as he had to leave the game against the Bears with a concussion. Hopefully, this is the rude awakening he needs to settle himself down and start running out of bounds and sliding to avoid contact. Not only did they lose

Dart *and* the game after blowing a 10-point lead in the 4th quarter, but Head Coach Brian Daboll was also relieved of his duties and will be replaced on an interim basis by offensive coordinator Mike Kafka. It doesn't sound like Dart will be ready to play this week, so 11-year vet Jameis Winston will get the call. The Packers dropped their second game in a row after another pitiful offensive output against the Eagles last Monday night. Green Bay has scored a total of 20 points over those two losses, and that is just not acceptable for a team with Super Bowl aspirations. The Giants also give up a lot of points, so this is the type of game the Packers need to figure things out.

**49ers over Cardinals (Sunday afternoon):** Both of these teams took pretty good beatings at the hands of the Seahawks and Rams last week, so both will look to rebound from those outings. The good news for my 49ers is that they managed to make it through a game without suffering any major injuries, so they're already winning in that department. This team lives and dies with Christian McCaffrey, so if he doesn't have a good game, they have no chance of winning—hence the loss last week after he only had 30 yards rushing. But a trip to Arizona to take on a crummy Cardinals team is exactly what they need to get back in the win column. The Niners currently sit 8th in the NFC, which is one spot out of a playoff position, so every win is going to matter from this point on. Arizona, on the other hand, isn't in the playoff hunt, so they're just out to derail San Fran's chances of making it in. There's a slight chance Brock Purdy will be back for this one, but I'm not getting my hopes up.

**Rams over Seahawks (Sunday afternoon):** In a battle of two heavyweights in the NFC, the Rams and Seahawks will face off with number-one seed implications on the line. Sam Darnold and the Hawks made short work of the Cardinals last week, jumping out to a 35-0 lead before even reaching halftime. I don't believe he even threw more than two or three passes in the entire second half, as they were pretty much on cruise control by then. Obviously, things will be a lot tougher against the Rams since divisional games are always tough, no matter the teams or their records (see Dolphins and Bills from last week), but these also might be the top two teams in the NFL, period—so that alone will make this a must-see game. Matt Stafford, at the ripe old age of 37, continues his MVP season as he dismantled whatever was left of the 49ers' defence last week, throwing for 280 yards and four touchdowns. I'll give the edge to the Rams only because it's a home game for them, although opposing fans seem to travel well when it comes to SoFi Stadium.

**Last week:** 3-0

**Season overall:** 18-12