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ISSUE #215 - DECEMBER 19, 2025



ASD Holiday Hours

- Christmas Eve - Wednesday, December 24 - 10 a.m. to 4 p.m.
- Christmas Day - Thursday, December 25 - Closed
- Boxing Day - Friday, December 26 - 10 a.m. to 1 a.m.
- New Year's Eve - Wednesday, December 31 - 10 a.m. to 2 a.m.
- New Year's Day - Thursday, January 1 - 10 a.m. to 1 a.m.

The next Inside Track will be published on Wednesday, December 24.



Rick Ball holding on to his favourite horse Taboga, one of the best mares ever to race at Assiniboia Downs.

The Tale of Taboga and Her Heavy Heart

A few weeks ago we wrote about Rick Ball and his favourite horse, Taboga. Sadly, Rick passed away on November 5, shortly after our final interview with him.

During the interview, Rick became emotional as he described Taboga as one of the best mares ever to race at Assiniboia Downs, and how she had beaten some of the best horses at Woodbine, but there were no official records.

There are now.

[Full story here.](#)



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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!

🎄 Join us for the 12 Days of Christmas daily through Wednesday, Dec. 24. Complimentary snacks and free draws to pick an ornament off the Christmas Tree for a chance to win \$100 cash!

🎁 Free Spin to Win draws — Friday, Saturday and Sunday starting at 6 p.m.

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

Click [here](#) to see our recent jackpots.



Travers Cummings

NFL Picks by TravyFootball **Week 16**

This week I'm breaking down three key matchups: my 49ers riding a four-game winning streak into Indianapolis on Monday night, the Chiefs hosting Tennessee in what's now a meaningless game after losing their superstar QB to an ACL injury, and the Lions facing Aaron Rodgers in a Pittsburgh uniform for the first time. With playoff spots on the line and only three games left, these matchups could make or break some seasons. See my picks [here](#).



Groom Hannah Kraychuk leads Sawasdee and jockey Ronald Ali into the winner's circle after their victory in the S S Pee wee Overnight Stakes for trainer Jared Brown on June 3. Click image for full size. (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.

Prices are excellent! Almost as good as his photos 😊



[Click photo to enlarge](#)

A Snapshot in Time by Bob Gates

In a few more sleeps, the man in the red suit will be making his annual rounds. Pictured here is our own 'Claus,' Manitoba darling Escape Clause from August 2017.

The 2018 Sovereign Award Champion Older Mare piled up US\$866,100 in earnings before being sold for US\$300,000 at the Fasig-Tipton Kentucky Fall Mixed Sale in 2019.

Assiniboia Racing Club Update

The non-profit Assiniboia Racing Club wishes to announce that it has sold out all available 48 shares for its 10th racing season in 2026. The goal of the Racing Club is to encourage interest in thoroughbred racing and to provide a low-risk path to racehorse ownership.

The 2026 Racing Club will be managed by Ron Zurba and John Field. The Racing Club has retained Mike Taphorn as its trainer.

We wish to thank all those who showed interest in the 2026 Racing Club. Lastly, we want to wish everyone a Merry Christmas and a Happy New Year!



- \$13.95 Daily Lunch Special
- Happy Hour (3 to 5pm & 9pm to close)
- Daily Evening Specials
- Details at ASDowns.com



'Rocket Ship Fast' Liberty National Favored In Gun Runner Stakes

With four stakes entries on Road to the Derby Kickoff Day at Fair Grounds this Saturday, trainer Kenny McPeck brings a double-barreled attack of 2-year-old colts into the \$100,000 Gun Runner Stakes, led by 7-2 morning-line favourite Liberty National.

"I think Liberty National is sitting on a big race," said McPeck. "It will be his third start. I think the timing's ideal. We're just kind of firing away with him. He's rocket ship fast."

-- [Paulick Report](#)

CLICK FOR FULL STORY

Liberty National is the 7/2 morning-line favourite in the Gun Runner Stakes on Saturday at Fair Grounds. (Coady Media)



- Wager on Top Tracks
- Simulcast Schedule
- Off-Track Betting Locations



Mandatory Payout Alert: Gulfstream will have a mandatory payout of their Jackpot Pick 6 on Sunday, December 21. The current carryover is \$209,911.



Undefeated Arctic Beast is Mike Curry's pick to win the Springboard Mile at Remington Park on Saturday. (SV Photography)

Betting on a Beast in the Remington Springboard Mile

The Remington Springboard Mile Stakes is always a fun handicapping and betting challenge. The one-mile race typically draws a strong local contingent and the \$300,000 purse ensures several out-of-state runners make the trek for a chance at a nice paycheck, along with the Kentucky Derby qualifying points awarded on a 10-5-3-2-1 scale to the top five finishers.

"The horse that really caught my eye is #1 Artic Beast (4-1)," says handicapper Mike Curry.

-- [America's Best Racing](#)

CLICK FOR FULL STORY



The road to the Run for the Roses has begun, and Steve Haskin of Secretariat.com is already on it.

Early Look at the 2026 Kentucky Derby Hopefuls

Last year, Hall of Fame writer Steve Haskin was all over Kentucky Derby winner Sovereignty long before he won that race, and he nailed it, as that horse not only won the Derby, but numerous other stakes, and almost always at a nice price. Haskin begins his early look at the Derby this year focusing on several aspects of each horse, both visual and statistical, with an emphasis on their Thoro-Graph patterns. Always worth a read.

-- [Secretariat.com](#)

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Track Historian Bob Gates

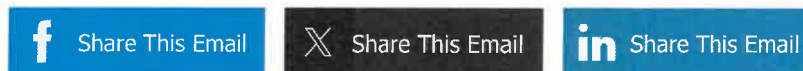
The Best of Bob

This week Bob has the story of a horse that was responsible for helping build a racing empire at the Downs. Don Gray gets the credit for finding this horse and putting in a timely claim for a horse that ran for a tag only once! Of this same horse, Downs all-time leading jockey Ken Hendricks once said, "They've got to pack 130 pounds on him... that's the only way we'll beat him!" Hint: The horse conducted his reign of terror from 1977 to 1979. Bob reveals his identity [here](#). (From June 26, 2020)

Feedback & Inside Track Archives

We would love to hear from you! Email your comments and/or suggestions to theinsidetrack@ASDowns.com.

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



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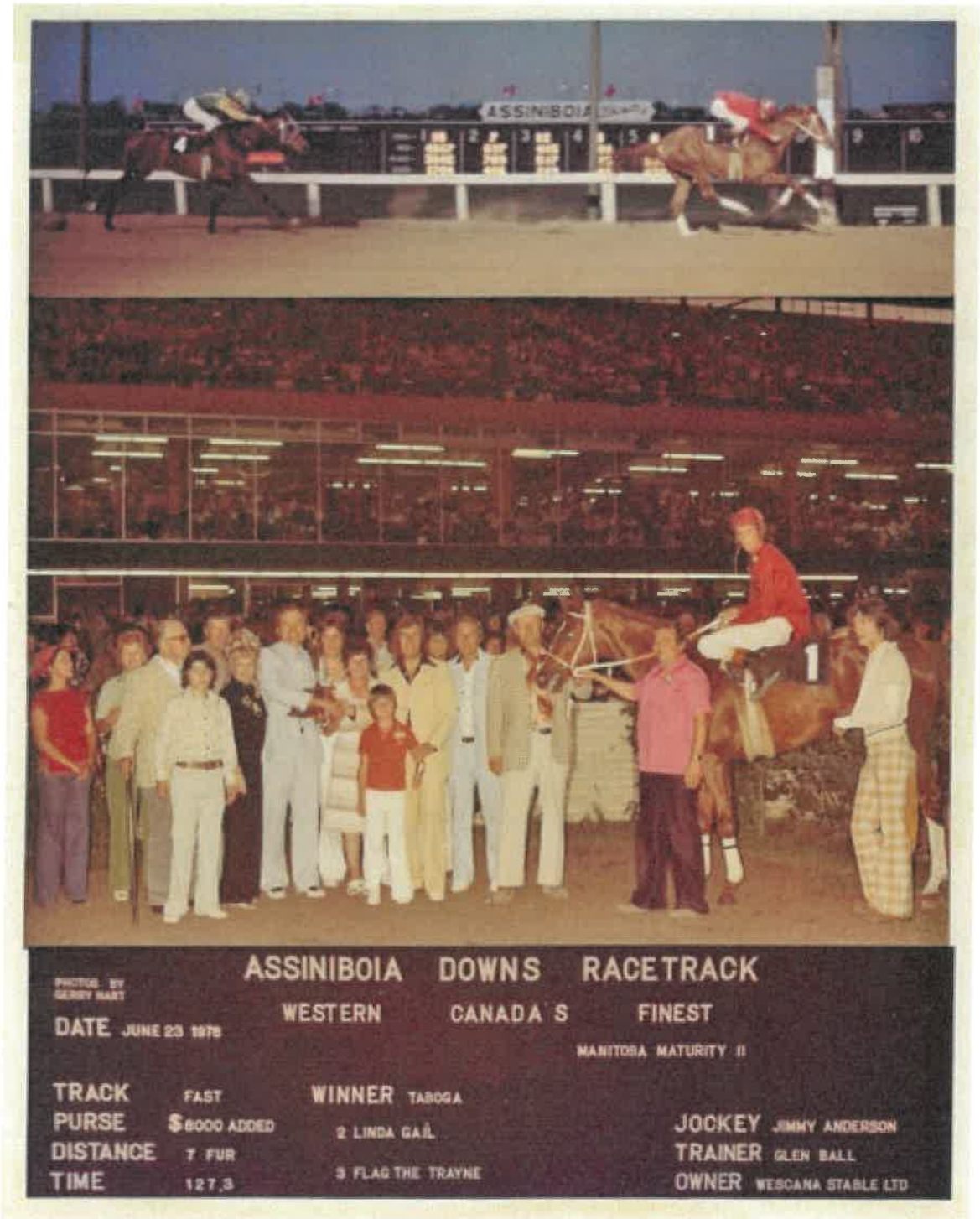
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The Tale of Taboga and Her Heavy Heart

Dec 18, 2025 | The Inside Track



Taboga wins the 1976 Manitoba Maturity. Her longtime companion, Rick Ball, far right.

By G.S. Thompson

A few weeks ago we wrote about Rick Ball and his favourite horse, Taboga. Sadly, Rick passed away on November 5, shortly after our final interview with him. During the interview, Rick became emotional as he described Taboga as one of the best mares ever to race at Assiniboia Downs, and how she had beaten some of the best horses at Woodbine, but there were no official records.

Now, thanks to Erika Williams, a research services associate at the Keeneland Library in Lexington, Kentucky, we have been able to piece together Taboga's entire record, including her three races at Woodbine. Turns out that the horse that "floated" did indeed beat some of the best at Woodbine.

But first... Taboga broke her maiden as a 2-year-old in a six-furlong Maiden Special Weight at Calder in Florida on August 28, 1974.

SECOND RACE		6 FURLONGS. (1.10%) MAIDEN SPECIAL WEIGHT. Purse \$4,000. Fillies, 2-year-olds, weights, 120 lbs.									
Calder											
AUGUST 28, 1974											
Value of race \$4,000, value to winner \$2,400, second \$800, third \$440, fourth \$240, fifth \$120. Mutuel pool \$25,952. Perfecta Pool \$34,860.											
Last Raced	Horse	Eqt.	A.Wt	PP	St	1/4	1/2	Str	Fin	Jockey	Odds \$1
	Taboga	2	120	1	5	1 1/2	1 1/2	15	18	Halder A	12.10
	Katonka	2	120	4	3	3rd	4 1/2	22	24	Marquez C	.80
17Aug74 3Crc4	Poor Family	2	120	6	1	6 1/2	6 1/2	41	32	Salinas J	3.40
9Aug74 2Crc3	Flickring Shadows	2	110	7	7	7 1/2	5hd	3hd	4nk	Tortora R D10	7.20
	Copperstitch	2	120	2	9	8 1/2	8 10	6 1/2	53	Mahon G	24.10
9Aug74 2Crc8	Cast a Dream	2	120	8	8	9	9	9	6 1/2	Clark W C	86.10
	I'm Ray's Darling	2	120	3	4	4 1/2	3 1/2	73	72	Garcia J O	7.70
	Dance Sylvia Dance	2	120	5	6	5 1/2	7hd	83	88	Hubberman C Jr	42.80
9Aug74 2Crc7	Polynesian Charm	b	2	120	9	2 1/2	2 1/2	5hd	9	Hernandez R	21.00
OFF AT 2:00 EDT. Start good, Won handily. Time, :23 3/5, :48, 1:14 Track fast.											
\$2 Mutuel Prices:		1-TABOGA 26.20 8.00 4.40									
		4-KATONKA 3.00 2.60									
		6-POOR FAMILY 2.60									
		\$2 PERFECTA 1-4 PAID \$80.00.									
Ch. f, by Better Bee—Face The Wall, by Dunc. Trainer Lopez E. A. Brod by Timberlawn Farm Inc (Ky).											
Owners— 1, Turf Inc; 2, Happy Valley Farm; 3, Shakarian C & R; 4, Heath B M; 5, Sunset Stable; 6, Bayleaf Farm; 7, The North Forty Stable; 8, Elias Bros Farm; 9, Plesa M.											
Scratched—Fialum (14Aug74 3Crc3); Paint and Powder (9Aug74 2Crc6).											
\$2 Daily Double 4-1 Paid \$432.60. Daily Double Pool \$54,750.											

Purchased privately after that race by trainer Glen Ball for Wescana Stable, she made her first start as a 3-year-old at Assiniboia Downs on May 19, 1975, in a five-furlong allowance race, and finished second. She won her first race at Assiniboia Downs in her next start on May 24, going 5 1/2-furlongs and romping by eight lengths in an allowance race as the heavy favourite under jockey Jimmy Anderson.

In her next start on May 31, Taboga finished second in a six-furlong allowance race. She then rattled off three straight victories in allowance company on June 8, 14, and 20. Stepped up into stakes company for her next start going a mile in the Wheat City Handicap, Taboga opened up by a length after a half mile, increased her margin into the stretch, and held on to win by three-quarters of a length.



High-class speed was Taboga's game and everybody knew it, but in her next race, the Harry Jeffrey Handicap going 1 1/16-miles on July 27, she ran into a monster in the form of Laurel Futurity (G1) and Queen's Plate winner L'Enjoleur. The game filly gave her best to finish second beaten 2 1/2-lengths to the Canadian champion, who went on to win the Manitoba Derby in his next start, and later the Prince of Wales Stakes.

In her next start going a mile in the Sears Distaff Handicap on August 13, Taboga led to the stretch, turned back one rival, and responded gamely when challenged by a fresh rival, but succumbed late to finish second beaten a length. She then reared at the break in her next start going a mile in the Kensington Building Handicap, rushed up and duelled to the final turn before fading to fifth, but she wasn't done for the season yet. Or was she?

Shipped to Woodbine with Rick, her constant companion and exercise rider, Taboga was sent off at 8-1 going six furlongs in an allowance race and finished last. The naysayers came out in full force, but...

In her next start in an allowance race going 6 ½-furlongs, the real Taboga showed up, dueling early, opening up and romping away to win by 4 ½-lengths over some of the best fillies at Woodbine including stakes winners La Bourrasque and Meadowsweet.

FIFTH RACE Woodbine October 10, 1975														
6 1-2 FURLONGS (1:14½). ALLOWANCES. Purse \$7,300. 3-year-olds. Fillies. Non-winners of \$3,540 three times other than maiden or claiming at any time. Weight, 123 lbs. Non-winners of \$9,000 in 1975 allowed 3 lbs.; of \$9,000 at any time, 5 lbs.; of \$6,000 at any time, 7 lbs.; of \$4,080 at any time, 9 lbs.; of \$3,540 twice at any time, 11 lbs. (Maiden or claiming races of \$20,000 or less not considered.)														
Value to winner, \$4,380; second, \$1,606; third, \$876; fourth, \$438. Mutuel Pool, \$32,624. Exactor Pool, \$63,204.														
Last Raced	Horse	Eqt	A	Wt	PP	St	¼	½	Str	Fin	Jockey	Owner	Odds	\$1
9-24-75 7W0	Taboga	3	114	5	2		1h	12½	15	14½	AndersonJE	Wescana Stable	4.10	
9-10-75 7W0	Pansy Jo	3	115	1	3		31½	3½	23	23	PlattsR	P & B Ottaway	4.25	
9-25-75 7W0	Knightly Princess	b	3	112	2	4	42	42½	3½	3h	FellJ	E B Seedhouse	1.85	
10-1-75 7W0	La Bourrasque	b	3	107	3	5	5	5	42½	49	BellJ	J L Levesque	3.40	
9-17-75 7W0	Meadowsweet	b	3	113	4	1	21½	2h	5	5	HawleyS	Viscount Hardinge	3.00	
OFF AT 3:26 EDT. Start good. Won ridden out. Time, :22½, :45½, 1:09½, 1:16½. Track fast:														
\$2 Mutuel Prices:														
6-TABOGA												10.20	6.00	2.80
1-PANSY JO													4.50	3.10
3-KNIGHTLY PRINCESS														2.30
\$2 EXACTOR (6-1) PAID \$45.30														
Ch. f. by Better Bee—Face the Wall, by Dunc. Trainer, G. Ball. Bred by Timberlawn Farm Inc. (Ky.).														
Overweights—Pansy Jo, 4 pounds; Knightly Princess, 1.														
Corrected weight—Pansy Jo, 111. Scratched—Rain Princess.														

Meadowsweet was conditioned by Hall of Fame trainer Frank Merrill, a 19-time Canadian training champion who also led the North American standings in 1955, 1958, and 1960. According to Shane Ball, Glen Ball's son and younger brother to Rick, Merrill liked what he saw so much that he offered \$100,000 for Taboga.

The offer was turned down, and Taboga made one more start at Woodbine, this time going a mile in an allowance race on the Marshall Turf Course against older males on October 23.

Sent off at 7-1, Taboga ran all but one of her rivals off their feet, opening up early and leading all the way to the wire, but couldn't quite hold on and missed by a nose to favourite Cast in Bronze, a 17-time winner and \$200,000 earner who had placed in the Woodlawn Stakes (G3) at Pimlico.

NINTH RACE
Woodbine
October 23, 1975

ABOUT 1 MILE, MARSHALL COURSE (1:34 $\frac{3}{4}$). ALLOWANCES. Purse \$7,500. 3-year-olds and upward. Non-winners of \$4,080 twice other than maiden or claiming since March 18. 3-year-olds, 122 lbs.; older, 126 lbs. Non-winners of \$9,000 at one mile or over in 1975 allowed 3 lbs.; of \$9,000 at any distance in 1975, 5 lbs.; of \$4,200 at one mile or over since June 13, 7 lbs.; of \$4,200 at one mile or over since March 18, 11 lbs. (Maiden or claiming races of \$20,000 or less not considered.)

Value to winner, \$4,500; second, \$1,650; third, \$900; fourth, \$450. Mutuel Pool, \$38,169. Exactor Pool, \$69,801.

Last Raced	Horse	Eqt	A	Wt	PP	St	¼	½	¾	Str	Fin	Jockey	Owner	Odds	\$1	
10-10-75	7W02 Cast in Bronze	b	4	116	1	6	2h	2½	3½	32	1 ^{no}	ArgentB7	Gardiner Farm	1.40		
10-10-75	5W01 Taboga	3	110	8	1	1½	1½	1½	1h	2 ^{nk}	AdkinsT5	Wescana Stable	7.45			
10- 3-75	9W02 Hurley Hills	b	7	121	6	4	54	54½	2½	2h	3½	FellJ	E Lieberman	2.55		
10-18-75	7W08 Bold Bagger	b	3	117	3	5	3h	3h	42	42½	43	BellJ	G F Hall	6.80		
10- 9-75	9W02 Tooktim	5	118	4	3	63½	62½	6½	5½	5½	5½	GrubbR	S M Douglas	7.05		
10- 3-75	9W05 Port News	b	4	115	5	7	72½	74½	8	62	6½	PlattsR	Stafford Farm	17.40		
10-11-75	9W07 Bill Fields	4	116	2	8	8	72	72	72	73½	LeBlancJB	H A Hindmarsh	13.40			
10- 8-75	7W07 Intuition	5	115	7	2	42	41½	52	8	8	DuffyL	Mrs F L Fletcher	59.30			
OFF AT 5:12 EDT. Start good. Won driving. Time, :25, :49½, 1:15½, 1:40½. Course yielding.																
\$2 Mutuel Prices:														4.80	3.50	2.90
1-CAST IN BRONZE															6.90	3.90
8-TABOGA																2.90
6-HURLEY HILLS																
\$2 EXACTOR (1-8) PAID \$33.60																
Ch. g, by Tobin Bronze—Moving North, by Northern Dancer. Tr., L. C. Cavalaris. Bred by Cisley Stable (Ky.)																
Overweights—Port News, 3 pounds; Intuition, 3; Taboga, 5.																

Attendance, 6,553; Total Mutuel Pool, \$814,516

ETOBICOKE, ONT., FRIDAY, OCTOBER 24, 1975.—WOODBINE.
 41st Day. Weather clear. Temperature, 67 degrees.

Taboga had truly proven her worth in her final start at Woodbine. There was more than one stakes-placed runner in the beaten field, and at least three of the horses that finished behind her in that race had earned over \$60,000, which would be worth over \$360,000 today. In other words, she defeated some very good horses in her Woodbine races, just as Rick said she had.

Returned to Assiniboia Downs for the 1976 season, Taboga won three of her six starts including the Manitoba Maturity and also set a new 5 ½-furlong track record at Assiniboia Downs.



In 1977, Taboga won her first start of the year in the Inaugural Handicap, defeating older males including Manitoba Derby winner Merry's Jay, and stakes winners Sunraysed, Turn to Rule, and Federal Ruler, among others. She also finished second in the Polo Park Handicap to Sunraysed, but again finished ahead of numerous multiple stakes winners.

Taboga went 2-for-7 in 1977 and was sold in a dispersal sale. She made five starts for her new connections in 1978, but could only manage one third-place finish before she was retired to the broodmare ranks.



Rick Ball exercising Taboga, circa 1977.

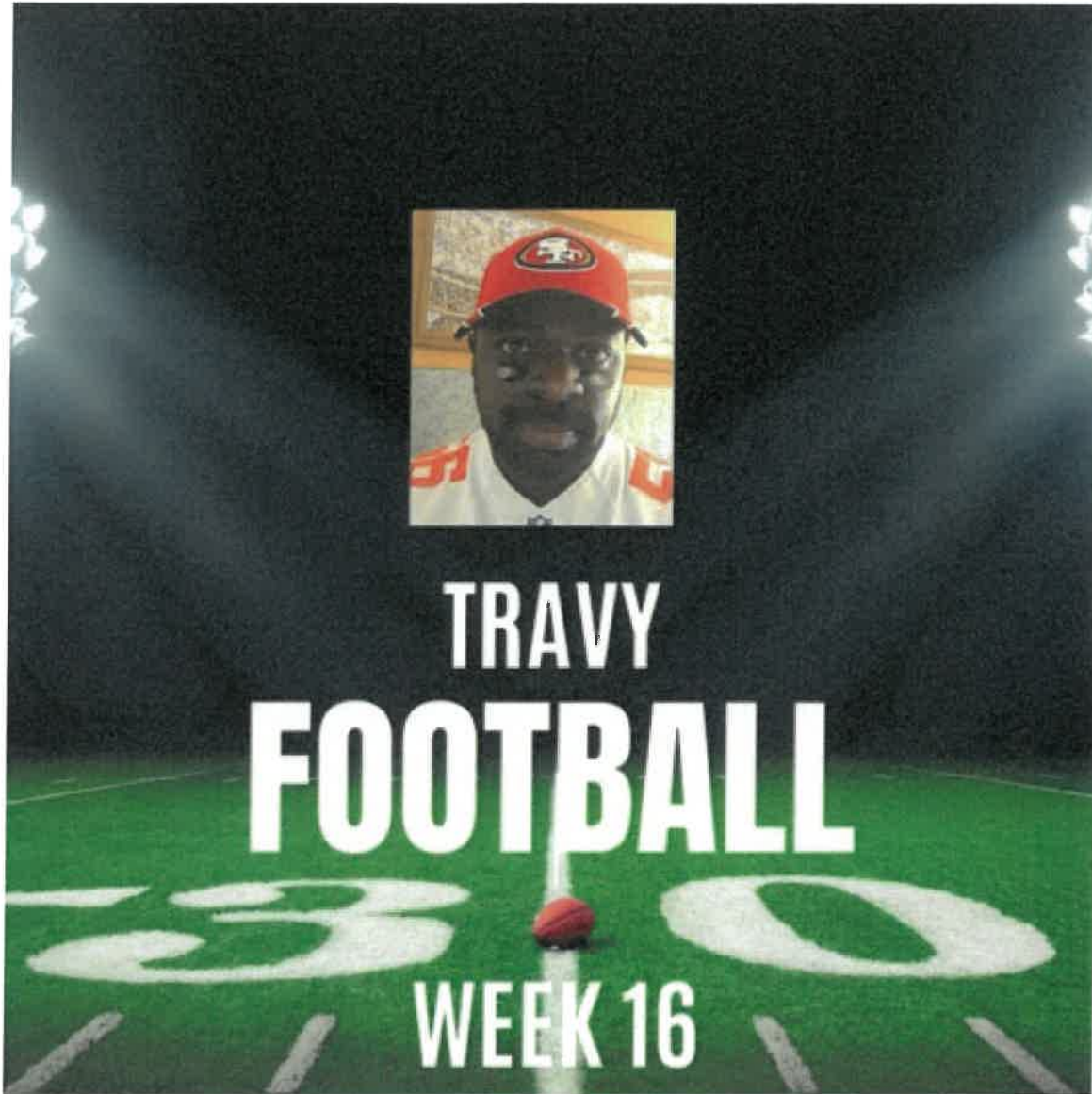
Rick, who had spent every waking hour with Taboga before she was sold, said that after she left for another barn, she just wasn't the same horse. "I spoiled her," he said with tears in his eyes. "I never put her on the walker. I always hand grazed her. I spent a lot of time in the stall with her, did extra work on her legs. I always talked to her during our gallops..."

With a heavy heart, Taboga missed her longtime friend and companion. He missed her, too...

Until the day he died.

TravyFootball Week 16

Dec 17, 2025 | The Inside Track



By Travers Cummings

49ers over Colts (Monday night): My 49ers will take their four-game winning streak into Indianapolis to take on the Colts and the corpse of what was once Phillip Rivers. Last week was Rivers' first start in four years, and he looked very, well...old. He's always had a very awkward throwing motion, but it looks much, much slower now. The Colts didn't ask him to do much, just very basic passes, and it did take a last-second field goal by the

Seahawks to win the game that was much closer than anticipated, but I don't think that's going to work against SF now that they have game film on him. The Colts are still on the outside looking in when it comes to the playoffs, so with three games left, they can't afford any more losses. Last week was easily Brock Purdy's best performance all season. Totaling 339 yards (295 through the air, 44 on the ground), he looks crisp and like his old self. The Niners are in a tough battle with the Rams and Seahawks for the NFC West crown, so every win matters.

Titans over Chiefs (Sunday noon): It was a very sad sight to see last week when Patrick Mahomes crumbled to the turf holding his knee. However you feel about Mahomes, Kelce, and the Chiefs in general, you never want to see superstar players get hurt, let alone tearing their ACL. For the first time since 2014, Kansas City will not be in the playoffs, which is just strange to say considering they've been in the last three Super Bowls. Veteran QB Gardner Minshew will start the final three games that are meaningless now, other than jockeying for a better draft pick. It's not that I believe the Titans are better, but Mahomes being hurt sucked the life and energy out of this team; the morale has to be at an all-time low. Tennessee stinks, but they did play decently against the 49ers last week.

Lions over Steelers (Sunday afternoon): After getting their backs blown out, courtesy of the LA Rams, the Lions will look to regroup back home to take on a familiar face from their past. Aaron Rodgers, who terrorized Detroit for years as a member of the Green Bay Packers, will now face off against them for the first time as a member of the Steelers. It looks like Pittsburgh will continue their tradition of finishing with at least eight wins on the season. How they manage to stay so consistent over the years is beyond me, but no matter the roster, they always seem to squeak into the playoffs. Detroit, for all the offensive weapons they have, are on the outside of the playoff picture, sitting a game and a half behind the Packers for the final wildcard spot. A loss here would essentially end their season, so I expect them to rally and get a win.

Last week: 2-1

Season overall: 29-16

SEARCH