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Ryan winning and loving it

By Peter Foley

After another day riding at Ipswich on Saturday, Ryan Wiggins was really looking forward to heading to Rainbow Beach for a three-day reset.

"I've gone for eight or nine months and that's a long time for me to go without having a proper break," Ryan said.

"I live in Brisbane and it's two hours to get to Rainbow Beach; it's like a different world.

"It's really good for you to block out for two or three days, no internet and that sort of stuff.

"I try and do that when I can; take the family away."

It is a habit that helps explain how a jockey who debuted in 1999 and has 1700 winners and $38 million in prizemoney is still riding keenly week-in, week-out.

"I'm not that old, but I'm probably getting to the stage where I'm in the twilight of my career.

"Probably another 10 years left, while my body's going well," he said.

"My weight's a big thing. I maintain that by trying to ride heavy, consistently all year, rather than trying to get down too light. I ride light for certain races or certain horses.

"I've got a good balance. I'm not wearing myself out."

Ryan was born in Canberra, the son of jockey-turned-trainer Peter Wiggins. Ryan wanted to emulate his dad but also learn from him.

"My dad was a very good jockey, but he had to retire from weight," he said.

Ryan was 17 or 18 when he decided he wanted to become a jockey; quite late at that time when most started by 15.

"My dad made me finish school so I could fall back on that and made me wait to see what was going to happen with my weight," he said.

Ryan reckons his father was hoping his son would change his mind.

"He didn't want me to be a jockey," he said.

"It's very painful on your body. They used to just sweat really hard and then put the weight back on and then sweat really hard again.

"It is no good for your kidneys. And they drank a lot of alcohol then.

"These days, with sports science, there's a lot more into it. I've been very lucky to be able to maintain it. Also, I don't drink alcohol anymore."

He wasn't always so disciplined. After starting out in Canberra in 1999, he moved to Sydney to finish his apprenticeship.

He went well, but from 20 to 26 or so, he just rode and didn't care about anything else; drinking, partying and spending money like there was no tomorrow.

Trainer Guy Walter convinced him there was, before Walter died suddenly of a heart attack in 2014.

"He trained a lot of Group One horses but he was always happy to sit down and go through your rides or give you a good ride to help you a bit," he said.



Magic Invader and Ryan Wiggins (yellow cap) get the better of their rivals before winning the Fertpro Maiden Handicap (800m). (Trackside Photography)

"I was lucky to meet him on my path.

"Then I had my first daughter when I was 27. That really turned my life around. There's someone else to look after now.

"My career could have gone down the drain but it went through the roof after that."

Ryan claimed his maiden Group 1 victory in May 2014 at Doomben, piloting Famous Seamus to win the BTC Cup.

Another landmark was moving to Brisbane. After becoming a fly-in, fly-out rider on the Queensland circuit in 2018, he became a dominant force.

During the 2022–23 season, he logged 139 winners, including five consecutive winners at Cairns and 12 from 22 rides in 10 days.

But he doesn't rest on his laurels. Every race day he goes through his rides with someone, even though he says he probably no longer needs to.

His workload is managed just as carefully. He flies to North and Central Queensland twice a week, usually returning the same day. His manager Brad Glendenning plans his rides a month ahead, so trips don't overlap.

"I try and ride 100 winners a season," he said.

Once the riding does end, he could see himself training, after learning under a trainer he respects.

Ryan left for Rainbow Beach on a high after winning the first race on the program at Ipswich aboard Magic Invader for trainer Kristie Clark-Peoples.



The field jumps from the barriers in the Queensland Solar Solutions Open Handicap (1350m). Ipswich darling Ratenotice won. Celestial Harbour sustained a severe injury to her near hindleg and was euthanised after the race. (Peter Foley)

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