

Jim knows it is time to go

By Peter Foley

The heart says if only. The mind says maybe. But the body says no. The decision hasn't come easily, but Jim Byrne knows the time has come.

After 35 years in the saddle, Jim has retired from a sport he's lived and breathed since he was 15.

Asked to sum up his feelings, he had one word but also opened up on a maelstrom of emotions he's dealing with.

"I'm definitely content," Jim said, then added: "Can I be honest and say that I go to the races and I don't want to race? No, that'd be a lie - every time I see someone jump up on a horse, or the barriers open.

"I don't go to the races as much because I go home and I have a longing. But I am content when I'm not here.

"When I'm here, I feel agitated, but when I'm away from here, I don't get as agitated.

I feel very content.

"I'm very happy with the way my family is at the moment, very happy that 90 per cent of riders would be chuffed to have the career that I've had."

Ipswich Turf Club celebrated the career of the retired champion at the Easter Monday meeting.

It befitted Jim, who won nine Ipswich jockey premierships, an apprentice title, three Cups starting with Ardeed in 1995, three Eye Liner Stakes beginning with Rancho Miss in 1992 and two Gai Waterhouse Classics.

Jim, who announced his retirement earlier this year, was trackside with his family and friends.

The club recognised his contribution to racing at Ipswich with the Happy Retirement Jim Byrne Handicap.

Newly appointed Racing Queensland board member Kim Daly praised the longevity of Jim's career and called him "a great servant to the industry."

ITC Chief Executive Nathan Exelby presented Jim with a framed photo detailing his record at Ipswich.

Jim rode more than 600 winners at Ipswich. The turf club believes that's more than any other jockey.

No wonder they called him the King of Ipswich.

During his career, Jim rode nearly 3000 winners including seven Group ones.

Jim thanked his family and fellow riders for their support, dating back to his apprenticeship in the late 1980s. Fellow jockeys formed a guard of honour in the mounting yard.

He also paid an emotional tribute to his former boss, the late Pat Duff, for giving him an opportunity as an apprentice.

"It's been a great, great time for myself. For me, I've always been about my family," he said.

"You're spending a long time away from the family, so you really had a massive support from them.

"To my colleagues, I've loved every minute with you guys.

"Every time I walk in the (jockeys') room, it's like a family."



Jim gathers with the jockeys riding at Ipswich on Easter Monday. He loved every minute with them. (Trackside Photography)

Jim said he had been thinking about retiring for a couple of years.

"I had a bad fall in 2019 and it changed everything thereafter. Recovery was really difficult. To this day it still affects you," he said.

"You lose that desire, and you don't bounce like you used to.

"I said to my wife: 'The first half of my life was fantastic; do I want to be continuing on, and all of a sudden, something happens?'

"I want the second half of my life to be just as good as the first half."

Asked about his first memories of riding at Ipswich, Jim recalled his admiration for legendary jockey Michael Pelling.

He carefully watched Mick ride Ipswich and spent hours preparing for meetings, watching races on video cassettes.

"But it was very much watching Pelling, who I idolised. I thought he was amazing," he said.

He nominated He's Back on Track in 1997 as his most outstanding Ipswich Cup winner because he made an early move 800m out and won by a good margin.

Jim plans to keep busy with his saddlery business and he's also president of the Queensland Jockeys Association.

He said jockeys were in a much better position



Retiring jockey Jim Byrne speaks at a special ceremony held for him by Ipswich Turf Club. He was known as the King of Ipswich.

than when he started riding but fatigue remained a major issue.

"Always with the jockeys' association, we look

at safety, first, second, and third," he said.

"I want to see every single rider go home to their wife, tuck in their kids at night."

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