

THE RACE & PACE

SEEDS OF A CAREER

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Almost every weekend, 19-year-old Blaine Chappell can be found in the same place: Century Downs' backstretch. Whether he's clustered around the TV in a corner of the barn to watch the races, lounging by the trailers with his friends, or joggling horses, he does it with a smile on his face.

“I'm happy as I can be in the barn,”

says Chappell. Like many of the other horsemen, he wouldn't rather be anywhere else.

But unlike some of the other horsemen, Chappell doesn't have his driver's license yet. He's currently a groomer/owner, finding work in the barns as he learns from some of the best in the trade until he can get in the harness himself.

Chappell describes himself as a backstretch kid. His earliest memories involve helping his mother put away horses, visiting the Winner's Circle for pictures, and running around with other kids in the backstretch. Born in Saskatchewan, Chappell was raised by his mother until she met veteran driver/trainer John Chappell. When the two married, John adopted Blaine and raised him as his own. Chappell credits everything he knows to his father, who was touted as one of Alberta's best harness racers in 2012. They even ended up following a similar path to their career.

In an interview with *Harness Link*, John Chappell talks about his lifelong love for horses. When he left high school, he went straight into harness racing. Once Blaine finished high school in Lacombe, he did the same thing. He says he became more involved with the barn at around 13 years old and got his owner's license at 15. He's worked as a groomsmen for his parents and drivers Rod Hennessy and Tyler Redwood, and has even made some money from the horses he owns.

Chappell is particularly proud of My Boss, who he bought from Kelly Hoerd. Trained by Chappell's father, the Standardbred has wins in Lacombe, Northlands and BC. Chappell is hoping for a win at Century Downs to make it four wins at four different tracks.

But while he's full of ambition for the future of harness racing, that wasn't always the case. He says that while he grew up with a handful of young horsemen, a lot of them found other jobs or went back to school when the outlook on horse racing grew bleak. With even some veterans exiting the industry, it was hard to believe that there could be a career in racing.

“I wasn't sure if I could do this, because [of] all the uncertainty. Now that Century opened, it makes it more promising that we're gonna be racing in Alberta for a long time,”

says Chappell. He says the future gives someone like him, who is just coming into the business, something to look forward to.

Aside from getting to race in a place he calls home, he gets to work alongside the people he grew up with. Among them is driver Preston Shaw and driver Tyler Redwood, who drove My Boss in Century Downs' meet on August 16, 2015.

Now, Chappell plans to get his trainer's license, followed by his driver's license after the mandatory waiting period of a year. After that, he's off to the races.



Photo Credit: Blaine Chappell's Instagram