

## Wayne Middleton - My Racing Story

My role within racing is the strength and conditioning coach for trainee jockeys in RACE and also for professional jockeys through Horse Racing Ireland.

Within both roles I'm essentially going through all areas of physical preparation, injury prevention and trying to ensure that the guys and girls are getting fitter and stronger and obviously trying to decrease the risk of injury.

The Jockey Pathway was an initiative set up to allow every licensed jockey avail of myself as the S&C coach, a physiotherapist, a sports psychologist and a dietitian. This was a first within racing and it's all about trying to get the jockeys to a gold standard.

Thankfully it is really working well and for me it was all about trying to get the jockeys to buy in and debunk the myth of training in a gym being a negative. Colin Keane Declan McDonogh, Rachael Blackmore, Patrick Mullins, Danny Mullins, Billy Lee, Shane Foley, Leigh Roche, Chris Hayes and a number of the up and coming jockeys too like Katie O'Farrell, Denis Linehan, Ross Coakley and Sean Kirrane are all regulars with me and a lot of what I do is try to educate them on why they would do certain exercises.

I don't try to force them to get to the gym, it is just about trying to help them get stronger as they are riding, and I think the whole thing is we are just trying to treat the jockeys more like athletes.

Every jockey is taken on an individual basis depending on whether they are riding that day or how they're feeling. This won't guarantee you winners, but it will certainly help them. Unfortunately, one thing you can't prevent is a jockey getting falls but when they hit the ground the chances are, if they are stronger, the recovery time or risk of injury is less and Dr Adrian McGoldrick has done a huge amount of work on this.

A number of the top jockeys are now availing of a variety of these different services. It is very hard to change the mindset of somebody who is riding for 20 years and I wouldn't try to do that anyway, but the jockeys that do engage with it are really finding it helps with less strains and fatigue.

I could have a session planned for a jockey and they'd walk in the door and tell me they're a bit tired and we'd change the session around to do a light session or if a jockey comes in and they're suspended for a few days they'll train really hard because they won't be going racing so it's always varying.

I was involved in team sports all my life and now all of a sudden to find myself working with individuals is really enjoyable and I'm relishing the challenge — so much so I even sat on a horse for the first time six months ago!

I'm getting to know the jockeys and how their bodies work and seeing their improvements but to understand it more I felt it would be no harm to get on a horse myself so Barry in RACE gave me a few lessons and I couldn't walk for a week after the first one!

For me, it was essential. I needed to see what muscles were being worked so that I could get an idea of what muscles could be sore when they go into a gym after a busy day and there is some great research being done now in Waterford Institute of Technology into energy expenditure in jockeys and when we get the results back from that it will help our training even further. It is important to get as much science behind us as we can.

Body shapes are changing all the time and that is a big factor for jockeys. We were down in Dingle recently and we took a height, weight and age measure of 29 riders and the

average 16-year-old was coming in at 5ft 9 and 5ft 10 and between 8st10lbs and 8st12lbs so straightaway there is a battle there to be a jockey.

As a population we are getting bigger and jockeys coming in at the entry level are tall and that is a challenge for us and them.

No one day in this job is ever the same. We do have instances where jockeys are very light and want to put weight on, which is great for me as you are putting on pounds of muscle that they can afford to put on and that adds up and makes them stronger.

Obviously, weight is a big issue for jockeys and they now trust me that they won't put on weight in the gym if they don't want to. I'll make sure I tailor the plan that they won't put on any weight. Some jockeys will come in needing to lose weight for a race and in that case, we'll do a high intensity session and the knock-on effect is that they see they can manage their weight without the process of weight spiking up, coming back down, going up again and back down.

There have been some challenges because there is a population out there that don't want their jockeys going to the gym. They're afraid that if their jockeys go to the gym that they'll put on weight and there are some jockeys that believe that. We can't change their thought process, and that is the same on the international jockey's circuit, but thankfully the numbers coming into the gym are increasing all the time.

Historically it is something that jockeys never did but by word of mouth they will see they are good options.

It is hugely satisfying for me when I see the jockeys continually coming back week after week because you know then that they are enjoying it and seeing the benefits. We would still like to see more coming through the door, a lot of the jockeys in Ireland aren't yet availing of this service but it is very positive and a great move by HRI and the IHRB to provide this free of charge for the jockeys. They certainly deserve it.