

Iconium Honored

(Editor's Note: the following was written and read by Allen Bosworth on Friday evening of the NC State Championship.)

As trainers Mary and Evan Orr, and loving caretaker Pablo Guido prepare Iconium for his final victory pass, we're reminded by the song that Vickie Byrd rode in on of the ultimate underdog, Rocky Balboa. And in the words of Rocky, "Every Champion Was Once A Contender Who Refused To Give Up". There are no truer words ever spoken about Iconium than those. Because the story of Ike, as we know and love him, is the story of "Never Giving Up".

As they sat in the warmup ring on Saturday night of Lexington this year waiting for the call of the Amateur Gaited Championship, Vickie knew that it would be her final show on this unforgettable horse. And she also knew that he was two points short of earning Ike's CH designation that would forever give him the title, Champion. We all know he's a champion with a champion's heart but Vickie wanted it so badly for her big gelding with the wild eyes. And what a show they put on—with a unanimous win in the final Amateur Gaited Class on the final night of competition at the final Red Mile show that Ike and Vickie so love. Forevermore, Champion Iconium.

Ike's career is marked by many of these improbable moments. This North Carolina-bred horse has always been a crowd favorite back to when his breeder Steve Allred started him as a junior horse by winning a blue ribbon at the North Carolina State Fair in 2006. For the next three years, Steve showed Ike all over the Carolinas at shows large and small. Then, Karen Folkers campaigned him after she and her mom, Carol, bought him from Steve in 2009. The "I Like Ike" Fan Club was starting to take shape.

How Ike and Vickie came together is another improbable underdog story. Karen had gone to work with Melinda Moore in Kentucky and, of course, she took Ike with her. Mary and Vickie were on a shopping trip for a different High Caliber Stables customer when they came across Ike. Karen showed Ike to Mary and Vickie that day among some other horses. On the way home, Mary turned to Vickie suddenly and yelled, "I've found your next horse!!! We are going to get him!!!" Vickie was stunned and confused. "Who are you talking about?" Mary screamed, "Iconium, of course". A week later, Vickie and Ike began their journey together in April of 2013.

And what a journey it's been. It's certainly had its ups and downs. After having Ike for less than three weeks, Ike and Vickie went to Asheville. After a memorable ride, and not in a good way, Vickie thought, "What in the world have I done?" But they looked each other in the eyes—Vickie's kind, determined eyes to Ike's wild, searching eyes and decided, together, they would become a team. So, they went home to High Caliber and went back to work. Later that year, they went for their first trip together to Lexington Junior League—the fabled Red Mile. They were wild but somehow, improbably, they were wild together—and they'd get it right for a few memorable strides and the crowd would go wild. All of them—Ike, Vickie, the crowd, wild together.

It was coming along.

And then in the spring of 2014, another improbable underdog story began. One of Ike's wild eyes that so define his look and soul developed uveitis. Despite all of the best treatment, it continued to worsen. They went to one of the best veterinary ophthalmology departments in the world, right

around the corner here at NC State. They implanted medication in his eye but it didn't really improve. A month later, back to surgery—this time on both eyes. There were severe complications. Every person involved was afraid of losing Ike. But the ultimate underdog never gave up—he kept fighting with that big heart. After 105 days in the hospital, it was back to work.

And some of the most memorable shows were yet to come. 2015 at Midwest when Ike hit the gate like he'd been shot out of a cannon on his way to blue. And who can forget that night in Lexington in 2015 when he won blue in the Amateur Five Gaited Stallion and Gelding class in a driving rain storm? Again, in the same class at the Red Mile in 2016 and, of course his memorable wins at Lexington this year. But what we'll really remember is that Ike and Vickie took on all comers, all over the country. Win or lose, they came to play. They showed in the hot. They showed in the cold. They showed in the mud. They showed in the rain. Always with tons of fans from the "I Like Ike" fan club. They gave their best—every single time. They were a team. Ike and Vickie. Mary and Evan. Always Pablo by their side. And that's why we loved them.

In the words of Vickie, "There are no words to describe the gratitude I feel for the support shown to Ike and myself over the past few years. The kind words, messages, cards, and calls have been unbelievable. They are tremendously appreciated.

It has been quite a journey for my man, Ike, and me. So many individuals have worked tirelessly to make it possible. Saying thank you is not nearly enough.

Regardless, I'd like to thank Pablo Guido for the impeccable care he has given Ike. Pablo is a knowledgeable horseman and a great friend. I especially want to thank Gordon Ingram, Ike's farrier and friend for all of his hard work and expertise over the years, as well as Dr. James Talbot, Dr. John Cummins and everyone at the North Carolina State University School of Veterinary Medicine. Ike would not be here for this retirement without all of them. He literally owes his life and his eyes to them.

Many thanks to my High Caliber family. And we are a family—win or lose you were always there for us. Ike and I are truly grateful.

And then there is Mary and Evan. I don't know where to begin. They are my trainers, coaches, and supporters but most importantly they are my best friends. They have made this all possible and I am grateful to have shared this journey with you. I love you both.

And finally, to the most important one, thank you to the one and only Ike. You have always given me 100 percent of yourself. You have a huge heart and an even bigger motor. I love your wild eyes and wild mane, but most importantly, I love that you never give up. You deserve a wonderful retirement. You have earned it. I love you."

Now, ladies and gentleman, let's show our appreciation for a truly unforgettable horse, and a truly unforgettable team. Born in North Carolina and retiring back home in North Carolina. We'll never forget the two of you bursting through the gate, wild eyes and wild mane, smiling from your immeasurable hearts in a way that made us all warm and compelled us to cheer as one, "We Like Ike".

