

Jockey Follows in Father's Tracks but Also Blazes Her Own

By MARIEL SYKES CLARK

When the former jockey Robbie Davis's daughter told him she wanted to race horses, he was completely against it. "Your biggest fear," he said, "is going out and scraping your child off the track."

Though Robbie Davis had a successful 25-year career with more than 3,300 wins, he paid for it in injuries and mental anguish. He did not want to see his daughter get hurt. "When I came to him and said I wanted to be a jockey he was like, 'No, there's no way,'" Jackie Davis said.

Jackie Davis grew up following her father from track to track, watching him ride. For her, this career choice was not a stretch. For Robbie Davis, who retired from riding in 2002, her announcement came as a surprise.

"She had always been into dresses and makeup and Barbie dolls," he said of Jackie, the second-oldest of his six children.

She would not take no as an answer, so her father made a deal with her. If she attended jockey school and could win six races, he would not only support her decision but also become her agent.

So in 2006, Jackie Davis applied for the inaugural year at the North American Racing Academy in Lexington, Ky. Chris McCarron, the Hall of Fame jockey and one of Robbie Davis's friends, runs the academy. But McCarron did not connect the name on the application, Jacqueline Davis, with his friend. "I wanted her to be selected on her own merit," Robbie Davis said. "And then she got in." Only after she was admitted did McCarron make the connection.

After a year and a half, Jackie Davis graduated with racing experience and an associates de-

gree in equine sciences. She started racing professionally last August and won her first race Nov. 5, at Aqueduct. Then she won five more, and true to his word, Robbie Davis met his daughter just after her sixth win and became her agent.

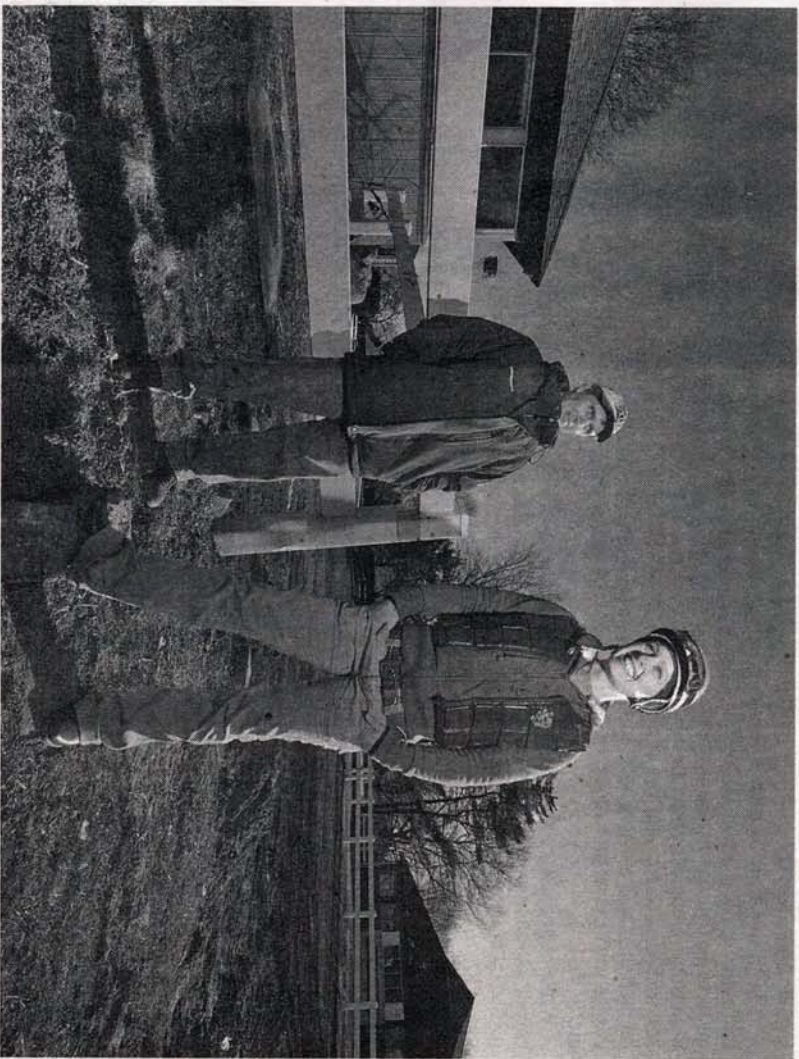
"We're still learning how to balance our relationship as him as my father and him as my agent, my employee," Jackie Davis, 22, said, grinning. Robbie Davis laughed at the arrangement as well. "I can see right through her little ways. I know all her bad habits. And her good ones, too."

Davis said her father passes along tips from his racing years, connections to people he knows in the business and on occasion even hand-me-down racing gear. "My dad rode in this helmet," she said as she brushed dirt off what she considers to be a good-luck charm. "It's the only thing of his I fit into."

So far, the lucky helmet is working. Though she has fallen twice (once she says she was "slingshotted" off her horse while in the starting gate), she escaped both times with bruises. "My dad raced for 25 years and never broke a bone," she said, superstitiously knocking on the table.

Her father's career was not without difficulties, though. In 1988, his friend and fellow jockey Mike Venezia fell during a race and was killed when Davis's horse ran over him. The event traumatized Davis, who left racing for about six months. Later in his career, he spent a year in extreme pain because of ripped cartilage in his knee. "I couldn't even walk up the stairs, but I was riding horses and about to pass out," he said.

Injuries are part of racing, Davis said. Being Jackie's agent is a way of staying close by his



Jackie Davis with her father, the former jockey Robbie Davis. She has six wins in over 100 races.

JOHN DUNN FOR THE NEW YORK TIMES

daughter in a dangerous sport in which he knows "she's going to get hurt with me or without me."

As her agent, Davis tries to get his daughter on as many racehorses as he can. He said he could not make the trainers hire her but he could "get her talking to the right people," like the trainer Gary P. Gullo, who has a long history with Davis.

Gullo used Jackie Davis in a recent race, and although she did not win, Gullo said he would continue to use her. "She's still got a lot to learn, but Robbie is doing a good job bringing her up," he said. "The racetrack is like a family, and we want to help one an-

other."

Even after helping her get the mount, Robbie Davis acknowledged he had a difficult time watching his daughter race. "I watch the start. Then I pace. I do a lot of pacing. Then I walk away. Then I come back and ask how she did." He laughed and said, "But I can watch the replays with no problem."

Jackie Davis finished second by less than a length on the 41-1 shot Sounds Tacky on Thursday at Aqueduct; later she placed third. Her six wins in over 100 races on the New York Racing Association circuit have helped her earn purses worth more than

\$200,000. But it has been nearly six weeks since her last victory and she wants another win for her confidence and for her bottom line. "If you're not winning, you're not making any money," she said.

If she does not place, Jackie Davis is paid \$100 a race but nearly a third of that goes to people who help her. As her agent, Robbie Davis receives 25 percent. Take out taxes and what is left over is not much, but, Jackie Davis said, "It's not bad for two minutes of work out there." She paused and grinned again. "But you are risking your life."

Not if her father can help it.