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FAREWELL, ACE

TWO-TIME WORLD SHOW ALL-AROUND AMATEUR HORSE ZIPPUS ACE OF SPADES LOSES BATTLE WITH LAMINITIS

BY [CHRISTINE HAMILTON](#), JOURNAL EDITOR

The Barnes family of Northbrook, Illinois, said good-bye to its longtime equine family member, Zippos Ace Of Spades, on Friday, February 5. "Ace," a two-time AQHA World Championship Show all-around amateur horse, was euthanized due to complications from laminitis.

The initial laminitic episode began in late October 2009. Ace had been at Merritt and Associates Equine Hospital in Wauconda, Illinois, since mid-December.

"It was unexplainable," said Nicole Barnes of Glenview, Illinois, Ace's owner, in an interview with *The American Quarter Horse Journal* on Tuesday. "We can't pinpoint it to anything. For as much traveling up and down the road as we did with him, he always stayed very, very sound. Last week, we made the decision that it was not fair to him to be suffering any longer."

"They tried every trick in the book," said AQHA Professional Horseman Brad Kearns; Brad and his wife, Valerie, trained Ace and Nicole through youth and amateur competition. "The veterinarians and techs involved with Ace took care of him like he was their own. They did everything they could do and were not able to maintain him. He was getting progressively worse, and they said it was time."

Familiar at AQHA shows across the country, the gray gelding was a once-in-a-lifetime horse. Foaled in 1997 by Zippo A Ward and out of Nosilsocks by Mr High Socks, he was bred by Judith Box of Lewisville, Texas. His accomplishments included numerous all-around titles, high-points, Superior awards and more than 4,500 AQHA points in everything from showmanship to western pleasure; he even had points in reining. He earned \$39,168 at the AQHA World Championship Show and \$29,416 through National Snaffle Bit Association competition.

Nicole's parents, Peter and Francine, purchased Ace for Nicole in 2002, when the gelding was just 5 and Nicole was 16. In addition to the 2006 and 2008 World Show all-around amateur titles, Ace took Nicole to the 2004 all-around high-point youth title, four amateur world championships and one youth world championship. He earned two Select world championships with Nicole's mother, Francine.



Zippos Ace Of Spades and Nicole Barnes winning the 2008 amateur trail world championship.



Nicole and "Ace" won the all-around amateur title at the 2008 AQHA World Championship Show; pictured with AQHA Professional Horseman Brad and Valerie Kearns.

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"I would not be the person I am today had I not had him for the last seven years," Nicole said. "I've had so many doors that have been opened for me because of Ace and AQHA and showing. I was really fortunate that he was able to teach me to become a better rider and really excel as an equestrian. He made me a better person, too."

"He had a good life and he was always surrounded by good people," Brad said. "He was with Rusty Green, then Ty and Karen Hornick, then Dianne Eppers and then us. He was always loved by his people. He never had a trainer that wasn't a compassionate person who cared about horses and their health and welfare."

Nicole and the Kearnses were with Ace to the very end. Nicole brought him his favorite treat, a box of Life cereal, to make sure "he knew we loved him."

"I went to visit him several times a week, and he was always in a good mood," Nicole said. "He was, to the end, in my pockets looking for treats. He never lost his spark, which made this decision that much harder."

"But you have to keep the animal's welfare the No. 1 priority," she said, with a catch in her voice. "I could have been selfish and continued to try to make progress, but there comes a point where you know in your heart they are better off not in pain. He'd been so good to us; we needed to do the same for him."

"I just want everyone to know how much he meant to me and my family."

The Barnes family initially became interested in showing when Nicole's grandfather, "Apou," started riding and put a horse in training with AQHA Professional Horseman Dianne Eppers, Valerie's mother.

"My 8-year-old daughter, Nya, asked me why this was happening to Ace," Brad said. "I said, 'You know, Nicole's grandpa is in heaven, and it's time for Ace to be his show horse.' And that's what I told Ace when I told him goodbye. I said not to be ornery because Apou was not that good a rider, and he would fall off."

"What made (Ace) a great horse was his willingness to please, to try, to pull that extra 10 percent out and put himself ahead of the pack. Ace gave his all to whoever rode him, but I think Nicole was always his favorite."

"He was a good athlete, but he had more heart than anything."



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