

RUDY BAEZ

Rudy Baez was at the top of the game when he suffered a career-ending spinal cord injury after a fall from Gator Bait at Rockingham Park on Aug. 4, 1999. Despite the devastating accident, which left him paralyzed from the chest down, Rudy has kept an optimistic spirit, convinced that God saved his life for a greater purpose.

“I don’t want people to feel sorry for me,” he said a few months after his accident. “I was doing what I loved.”

Among his career highlights: He rode seven winners in one day and was within 10 victories of tying Pat Day for the national title in 1990.

These days Rudy visits hospitals and rehabilitation facilities to offer encouragement to others with similar injuries. His positive attitude and contributions toward helping others are credited for his winning New England’s prestigious “Spirit of Giving” Award in 2005.

He is 56 now and, through the years, the idea of giving up has never entered his mind. Despite being in a wheelchair, he works as clerk of scales at Suffolk Downs and goes about other daily activities that most people take for granted.

“Rudy has an amazing will and determination and a strong belief in God,” said Judy Baez, his wife of 27 years. “He is an inspiration to others and that’s what I think he’s here for.”

As for the industry fundraising effort, Judy is very appreciative.

“We’re doing all right, but there are others who are disabled that have nothing,” she said. “Everything that comes with a disability is so expensive. It takes your breath away.”