

## Don't Fuck With a Horse Girl Amy Fung

You don't fuck with a horse girl. Their riding thighs could crush your thorax (if you were so lucky), but the general advice to respect your pure-hearted, hard-headed horse girl is to never underestimate her aptitude for horse play.

Nikola Jokic, the unassuming 6'11" 285lb Serbian who plays centre for the Denver Nuggets, is not your typical horse girl. Jokic was selected 41<sup>st</sup> in the second round of the 2014 draft class; the televised proceedings of the National Basketball Association (NBA) draft was actually playing a Taco Bell commercial promoting the new quesarito when a chyron running on the bottom of screen announced the Nuggets had picked a European prospect few had ever heard of.

As a chubby teen who did not match the usual defined physique expected of most professional basketball players, Jokic's reputation for his soft touch and skilled passing grew quickly. If he had been two feet shorter and 140 pounds lighter, he would have traded it all to be a jockey. Jokic's passion for horse racing, specifically of the trotted race that pulls along a jockey on a cart, became well known among his teammates and NBA observers. He bought his first of six race horses after entering the NBA, dividing his attention between the court and the stable, where he would spend as much time as possible in the off season. His love for horses and quirky earnest humour, which has earned him the nickname "Joker," has not been widely embraced by the masses. When Jokic became only the fifth center in NBA history to win multiple Most Valuable Player (MVP) awards, he was ushered into a very small and exclusive club of basketball legends including Kareem Abdul-Jabbar, Bill Russell, Wilt Chamberlain, and Moses Malone. Yet, Nikola Jokic is hardly a household name.

In the beginning of 2021/2022 season, Markieff Morris, then of the Miami Heat, laid an unnecessary foul into the ribs of Jokic, as the big man had his arms raised passing the ball up court. A horse girl did what a horse girl does when provoked: after absorbing the blow, Jokic leaned his frame forward, picked up his gait, and checked Morris hard across the back, sending the 6'8" player flying from the half-court logo past the three-point line. While ejections, fines, and suspensions were handed out for the on-court altercation, Morris was medically diagnosed with whiplash, sidelining him for four months.

When Jokic won his second MVP trophy later that season, key members of his team respectfully flew out to Sombor, his home town in the north of Serbia, to surprise their reigning leader in points, assists, rebounds, steals, and blocks, at his personal horse farm. On the live stream, a visibly emotional Jokic trailed in on his scully—the formal name of the jockey rig—as live folk music welcomed him to his own MVP celebration. His long limbs dangled off to one side as he and horse pulled into the stable. Gingerly, he squeezed the tears behind his eyes. He is touched, and still, a true horse girl takes the time to properly secure reins to halter before greeting his guests.

About his affinity with the half-ton beasts, Jokic has said, "I like the smell of them. The best feeling ever is when you feed them. The sound of them eating in the stable is the best sound you can ever hear. It's just something that I think just a horseman can feel."