

Rocky Carroll, "NCIS"



Rocky Carroll's current role as Director Leon Vance in "NCIS," one of TV's most-watched series, has earned him international recognition. However, this stardom has certainly not been an "overnight success story" as the 51-year-old actor has enjoyed a critically-acclaimed career in theater, film, and TV for almost 30 years.

Born and raised in Cincinnati, Carroll graduated high school from the renowned School for Creative and Performing Arts (SCPA) and then received a B.F.A. degree from The Conservatory of Theatre Arts at Webster University in St. Louis.

Director Joseph Papp hired Carroll to perform in his celebrated New York Shakespeare Festival, and, after serving his apprenticeship there, Carroll was

nominated in 1990 for a Tony Award for his Broadway performance in August Wilson's "The Piano Lesson."

Carroll's career blossomed in 1991 with his portrayal of Joey in the comedy-drama "Roc." His next role in a TV series was as Dr. Keith Wilkes in "Chicago Hope," where he met and worked with Mark Harmon. He has guest starred in a number of other TV programs as well. His movie credits include "Born on the Fourth of July," "The Chase," "Crimson Tide," "The Great White Hype" with Samuel L. Jackson, "Prelude to a Kiss," "Prisoner," "Talk Radio," and "Yes Man" with Jim Carrey.

Rocky Carroll lives in LA with his wife Gabrielle, a graduate of the Rhode Island School of Design, and their daughter Elissa.

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NEGM: What's it like working with Mark Harmon again?

RC: Just great! I feel very fortunate that Mark and I have reunited and are working together again. I have been with CBS now for 20 years. The network has always tried to build and solidify successful relationships and has had a lot to do with why Mark and I are together again. Also, Mark Harmon was an outstanding quarterback at UCLA, and he is the ultimate team player. He has always understood that the team is stronger than the individual—which is rare in a profession that is very much about individual achievement and self-preservation.

NEGM: You play the role of Director Leon Vance in "NCIS." What has made this drama a perennial Top 10 show since its inception 11 years ago?

RC: Here's my theory. In the real world, justice comes very slowly, sometimes not at all, but in "NCIS," where Jethro Gibbs has a strong moral compass, and he is supported by the similar moral code of his supporting characters, at the end of the hour, the bad guys have been brought to justice. Gibbs follows his instincts and his guts, and to the viewer, he is "everyman," representing us and doing it very well. Of course, the writing, plots, and character development are superb, too.

NEGM: Tell us about working with Joseph Papp and his New York Shakespeare Festival.

RC: Papp hired me right out of college, my very first acting job. He saw in me, I think, a raw undeveloped young kid who had potential, but that potential needed to be nurtured and developed. Papp understood talent and how to fashion it. I was never the star in those productions, but Papp gave me the opportunity to be in the company of great actors from whom I learned the craft. I appreciate my apprenticeship with him more now than ever before.

NEGM: Where do you play your golf? What is your handicap? Best part of your game? With whom do you play?

RC: I play all around LA, where the many public courses have layouts that rival the private clubs. I decided not to join a club because I didn't want to be "married" to one course only, even though I live a strong

3-metal from Wilshire CC. My current index is 15.6, not bad for a weekend golfer. I have a pretty good feel for the short game, and I putt pretty well. Samuel L. Jackson is an avid golfer, and he really got me involved in the game. We have worked together professionally, and we play golf together regularly. I have a great time playing golf with Cheryl Ladd, Andy Garcia, William Devane, and Kevin Sorbo [Hercules].



NEGM: What are your impressions of New England?

RC: I have spent the last four Fourth of July weeks in Hyannis. I love the serenity and ambiance of Cape Cod, and I found Hyannis to be laid back and relaxed—a great alternative to the LA lifestyle. If my wife and I wanted to sit out and read a book, take a stroll along the beach or around town, go play golf, or have a lobster dinner within walking distance of the house, you can't beat Cape Cod. I had a lot of fun playing golf at Hyannis Golf Club, The Captains Golf Course, and Falmouth Country Club.

NEGM: Who would be in your Dream Foursome of today? Of any time period?

RC: Fred Couples, Jack Nicklaus, and Hall of Fame catcher, Johnny Bench (so I could talk to him about the Big Red Machine that I grew up cheering for). Seve Ballesteros, Joe Louis, and Frank Sinatra (so I could hang out with him after the round).

NEGM: With what charities are you involved?

RC: The Girl Scouts of Greater Los Angeles, through my wife. Camp Gid D Up, run by my friend and fellow actor Glynn Turman, which has been a free, western-style summer camp program for disenfranchised inner-city and at-risk youth ages 9-18. Childhelp, through the efforts of Cheryl Ladd.

NEGM: Why are you an avid poker player?

RC: Why not? I'm an actor, and isn't poker where you make people believe something that probably doesn't exist? I like it because it is such an active game. You win with good cards, yes, by making believe you don't have them, but you absolutely have to sell the bad hand as if it were a great one. Poker is the perfect game for actors.