

# NBC Sports Group Media Conference

Tuesday, September 1, 2020

**Mike Tirico**  
**Jerry Bailey**  
**Randy Moss**  
**Eddie Olczyk**  
**Larry Collmus**  
**Rob Hyland**  
Press Conference



Louisville, Kentucky, approximately 30 cameras in Louisville, but the production will be done in Stamford, Connecticut, utilizing a series of mobile units in our parking lot here at our world headquarters.

Mike Tirico, Jerry Bailey, and Randy Moss will be based here in Stamford, Connecticut, and we'll have six announcers on site in Louisville, Kentucky Britney Eurton, Donna Brothers, Kenny Rice, Laffit Pincay III, Larry Collmus, who will be calling all the races, and NBC News correspondent Blayne Alexander.

We'll also feature Rutledge Wood from his home in Charleston, South Carolina, checking in on some Derby celebrations around the country happening at home. And Eddie Olczyk will be handicapping all the races and providing insight both Friday and Saturday from the NHL hockey bubble in Edmonton, Canada.

With that, a very different production plan, but I'm confident we will deliver an entertaining broadcast on both Friday and Saturday. Dan?

DAN MASONSON: Thanks. Mike?

MIKE TIRICO: Thanks, Dan. We are really fortunate as announcers to have Rob and Pierre Moossa, our director, weaving this. I've been involved with a lot of calls with these guys, and that's one tenth of the calls, maybe one hundredth of the calls they've done to make this all technically work. We are all really very fortunate to have them leading our ship. Gosh, I'll be brief so we can get to the folks who know horse racing best.

This is strange. After working from home a lot with different technology over the last few months, I've got Kentucky Derby, TOUR Championship, season opening NFL game in the studio, Notre Dame football, first Sunday Football Night in America, and the U.S. Open golf all six events coming up in 20 days here. So this is going to be a bit of a whirlwind, but I can't wait. I've got books and piles of paper and video to watch here that I'm just excited to dive into, and I love that it starts with the Derby.

As Rob said, this will be as unique a telecast as we're all a part of given everything that's gone on in our country, in the sport, and the fact that the Derby is usually this big celebration that just has a very different feel, as everything

DAN MASONSON: Thank you. Good afternoon. Welcome to today's call for the Kentucky Derby, which has been moved to the first Saturday in September and uniquely features the Belmont winner Tiz the Law. NBC's five hour broadcast begins at 2:30 p.m. this Saturday.

Joining us on today's call are host Mike Tirico; Hall of Fame jockey and two time Derby winner Jerry Bailey; analyst Randy Moss, who's covering his 40th Kentucky Derby; handicapper Eddie Olczyk, coming to us from the NHL Playoff bubble event in Edmonton; race caller Larry Collmus in his tenth year as NBC Sports Triple Crown race caller; and Rob Hyland, who has been lead producer for NBC Sports Triple Crown coverage since 2012.

We'll open with some comments and then take your questions. We'll have a transcript later on today or early tomorrow at [NBCsportsgroupinbox.com](http://NBCsportsgroupinbox.com). With that, I'll turn it over to our producer, Rob Hyland.

ROB HYLAND: Thanks, Dan. Randy, congratulations on 40 derbies. For the past 145 years, the Kentucky Derby has combined atmosphere, tradition, and competition as much as any other major sporting event. Over the years, the backdrop for the television broadcast has relied on a heavy dose of atmosphere that includes hats, juleps, long lines at the betting windows, and large crowds taking in a great American sports event.

This year's Derby will have a very different feeling without crowds. I think, as sports television has evolved as a result of the global pandemic, so has this week's Derby production plan. Our cameras and audio will be based in



does this year. We'll do our best to cover the sport, cover the things that are going on around us, cover everything that's going on around Louisville as well, and try to balance it.

Sometimes when you're covering a live sporting event, you can just focus on the sporting event, but since the event takes two minutes and change and the multiple races that we're going to show, there's about 12 minutes of action in our long broadcast window on Saturday. So we'll be dancing back and forth to a little bit of a studio show, little bit of play by play. That's what makes covering the Derby fun.

As for the race itself, it's really cool to have a Kentucky Derby with a horse that's the favorite who's already got a Triple Crown win on his resume. We haven't been there before. So it will just add to the uniqueness of this year and the uniqueness of this Kentucky Derby.

I couldn't be more fortunate to have Randy and Jerry by my side to shepherd us through all this stuff that goes on through the weekend. So we're looking forward to being together with these guys. Dan, thanks.

DAN MASONSON: Thanks. Jerry?

JERRY BAILEY: Yeah, hi, Jerry Bailey here. Yeah, it's going to be something different, that's for sure. For me, I have yet to leave my home on any of these shows, including the Belmont Stakes. My trek up to Stamford for the studio will be a unique experience for me in 2020.

Getting to the race, my feeling is that other than from the gate to the wire, I don't think the public is going to miss anything because of all the great camera work that NBC and all the crew will be able to do. Now, obviously, you're not going to see crowds around there, but you're going to get the same coverage of the race from the start to the finish that I think you've always gotten, which is excellent quality.

Speaking of excellent quality, Tiz the Law, the 3 5 favorite at post 17 is one of those uniquely special horses. As Mike mentioned, he's already won the Belmont. He looks like he's almost invincible going into the Kentucky Derby. Never is, but he's a heavy favorite, deservedly so. He has no tactical weaknesses. He doesn't have the crowd to contend with, and he's already answered the question of the distance by winning the Travers at 1 1/4 miles. He's checked all those boxes, and I believe he very well could win the Triple Crown this year. Obviously, getting through the Kentucky Derby, but special feel.

And of course, you have Mike Smith and Bob Baffert back.

They won the Triple Crown in 2018 with Justify. They're on different sides this time. Mike riding the second choice, Honor A.P., and Bob coming in with a couple of horses, and he's always tough to beat. So a special field in a weird year. Thanks.

DAN MASONSON: Thanks, Jerry. Randy?

RANDY MOSS: I was in the NBC Studio for the Belmont Stakes, the Stephen Foster, the Haskell, and the Alabama. Jerry's already told me, look, I'm going to get on an airplane for the first time since March. I'm going to stay at a hotel. I'm going to be on the set, but I'm not going to dinner with you. So I'm having dinner in my room every night. He's already laid down the law about that.

Look, in my 39 past Kentucky Derbys, either in the newspaper business or the TV business, I've seen a lot. There's been a lot of great stories to tell that I probably tell too often, especially after a margarita. A lot of fun times, maybe some not so fun times along the way. This is hands down the most unique Kentucky Derby that not only me, but pretty much anybody else has ever experienced, unless you go back to the World War II Kentucky Derby of 1945.

Unfortunately, we've kind of become accustomed to this since we've been doing horse races from the studio instead of at the track. Since we've been watching horse races without fans primarily at almost every racetrack in America, even Saratoga, since March.

It's not something we want to continue to be accustomed to. I mean, we're all hoping this is just a one off and that things will be back to normal next year. It's the hand that we're dealt in 2020. It's the hand that we've sort of gotten accustomed to playing so far this year.

I agree with Jerry that I think we can still put on an outstanding telecast on Friday and Saturday Friday for a fantastic Kentucky Oaks and then Saturday for the Derby. I share Jerry's sentiment that Tiz the Law is the real thing.

DAN MASONSON: Thanks, Randy. Edzo?

EDDIE OLCZYK: It's great to be on this call, and really looking forward to being a part of our coverage, even though I am north of the border and currently in quarantine for the next couple of days. I will be over handicapping, considering I'm not allowed out of my room for the next couple of days, but I'm really looking forward to being a part of our coverage.

Nobody does it better, and with the leadership we have at the top with Rob, it certainly takes our broadcast to another



level. We're going to find a way, even though the great horse racing fans can't be a part of it, but there are going to be millions of people watching, even though it's a few months later than normal.

So competitive fields up and down Friday and Saturday, as far as the Kentucky Derby, really interesting to see the post position draw earlier today with the key components the Derby all on the outside, in my opinion, but I do think there's some value in that 18 horse field.

Just really looking forward to having a hand in our broadcast and going to be a lot of fun to be a part of it, even though I'll be part of it remotely from Edmonton, Alberta, Canada.

DAN MASONSON: And Larry Collmus?

LARRY COLLMUS: Thanks, Dan. I'm certainly looking forward to calling the Kentucky Derby for the tenth time. I never would have thought I'd call the Belmont Stakes for the tenth time first, which is a little bit different, but everything is different this year. It certainly is going to be different for me up calling the race. Normally, I'm surrounded by 160,000 or so of my best friends watching this thing together. It's going to be a little bit different this year with no spectators there.

There's other differences too. The new starting gate that we have this year. In years past there's always been two starting gates, the auxiliary gate having the last six horses in it will not be in use. There's a brand new gate that handles the entire field, which is 18 horses this year. So that will be a different thing to look at when the horses come out of the starting gate.

The other difference, I think, for me, as far as the race call goes this year, is the fact that there is such an overwhelming favorite in Tiz the Law that there has to be some additional focus on him in the race call, just because everybody is going to be wanting to know where he is. He's the story of the 18 horses.

So certainly a lot of differences this year, but it's the Kentucky Derby, and there's just nothing like it.

DAN MASONSON: Great. Thanks, Larry. Now we can take your questions.

**Q. Hey, guys. Thanks for doing this. This is a question for Jerry and Randy, in particular. You guys have made it clear how bullish you are on Tiz the Law, and you've made that clear for some months now. At this point, are you ready to compare him in a good way with the best 3 year olds we've seen over the last ten**

**years, whether that's American Pharoah or Justify or California Chrome or on down the line?**

RANDY MOSS: Well, I can tell you this. Watching Tiz the Law win the Travers Stakes, to me was reminiscent of some of American Pharaoh's best races. When you think back on American Pharaoh in the Haskell, after he swept the Triple Crown, he gave you that quick burst of acceleration to just break a race wide open. He gave you that wow factor, and then he just completely sort of eased up the last part of the race and won with something left.

That's exactly what Tiz the Law did in the Travers, and his Belmont Stakes was pretty darn good too. So I think he's a very special horse.

JERRY BAILEY: Yeah, I would agree with what Randy said. There's an old saying. You don't have to be the best horse, but the best horse on that day. You have to be kind of peaking coming into these Triple Crown races. His last race was his best race by far. So he's coming into the Derby in fine form.

And his style just makes it so easy for him and his rider. He always breaks well. He's got tactical speed. So he can get the jockey out of about any situation that he finds himself in, which makes it easier on the horse in the end. The less problems horses have during races, the more consistent they're going to be, and he's certainly been consistent.

The only race he's lost and Randy pointed this out was at Churchill Downs, but that was on a wet track last fall. He's a much better horse now, and the forecast calls for sunny skies and about 80 degrees. So it's unlikely he's going to get a wet track again. I think he's pretty good all around. And, yes, he does compare to some really good 3 year olds that we've seen in the last 20 years.

**Q. Hey, guys. Thanks for doing the call. Production question for Rob. Rob, you've talked about it. Obviously, it's going to be a challenge to kind of replicate that ambience of Churchill Downs. What are some tactics that you guys are going to take to give it that kind of big event feel even though, obviously, there won't be crowds there?**

ROB HYLAND: We're going to be looking around the country at how Derby fans are celebrating the day. We have live remotes in Denver, Los Angeles, and Saratoga with live view cameras, providing imagery for some socially distanced gatherings that are outside. One of them, I believe, is a drive in sort of movie type experience for the broadcast.

And in addition, we're going to lean a little heavier on technology, something we dipped our toe in at the Belmont, but we're going to have three jockeys wearing microphones for every race that they're in on Friday and Saturday, the same three jockeys. And three owners on Friday and Saturday wearing mikes as well to hear those final instructions. So we hope to provide a little bit more of an intimate experience without that crowd roar.

The outrider will continue to have a microphone and a helmet cam as the winning jockey crosses the line to meet the outrider. I think we're going to lean a little bit harder on sort of the intimacy that we can provide because there are no external distractions in terms of noise and crowd. So once we're on the track, I think it will be an enhanced experience because of that.

**Q. Thank you. I've got a couple questions for Rob and Larry. We'll start off with Larry. Larry, what are the specific challenges of calling the Kentucky Derby with no crowd noise?**

LARRY COLLMUS: That's a good question. Normally, when the horses leave the starting gate, you kind of go into your own zone, and I really don't hear the crowd that much, at least I don't think I do. I just concentrate on what I'm doing. So I don't know how much I'll notice it during the race. In the lead up to the race, that's another story. That's going to be a weird thing for me to not have that crowd noise around me. It might end up being a good thing for me because that huge crowd noise and all that really gets you fired up.

Hopefully, not having it will let the heartbeat come down a little bit more, and maybe you can see a few more things because you aren't quite as excited or overwhelmed by what's around you.

**Q. Rob, I have a couple for you. As specific as you can, can you give me a sense on the production end of how you're social distancing and who is social distancing on the production?**

ROB HYLAND: Sure. To begin, down in Churchill Downs, even our meeting spaces where our camera operators will be will be socially distanced. Our director Pierre Moossa will arrange a Microsoft Teams call to conduct a format review for both Friday and Saturday's show. So operators and technicians can either be a part of this site where we'll conduct the meetings, or they could go to their car or somewhere else to take in the format. That's one example in terms of communication with this staff of 100 people down in Louisville and a staff of close to 45 people here in Connecticut. Everything's being done virtually.

In terms of the actual production, yeah, we're all socially distanced in every mobile unit and control room. We're utilizing a lot of the building here in Stamford, not just the production trucks that are outside in the loading dock area, to account for social distancing. Obviously, everyone's wearing masks. I can't go into the tape room, if I want to, to go look at a package. I have to see it through the front of the truck or have a link sent.

So the technology through which we've done television for years has all changed. And I think the idea of typically being in Louisville together and having offices where Larry Collmus could pop into where I typically spend the week and ask a question about a specific item in the rundown, that now happens through a phone call or a virtual meeting or an e mail.

As if the Derby wasn't hard enough, as Mike touched upon earlier, it's a five hour beast with only about 12 minutes of action. The mechanics of how we're doing everything in the show have become a little bit, obviously, more challenging. But we've got an incredible technical operations team that's ensured the safety of not only the people in Louisville, but the people here in Connecticut. While it just may be different than it was in the past, I don't expect the broadcast to be much different in terms of the operation of the show.

**Q. Rob, one more, if I could. Obviously, this is you're going to put the production on as best you can, and everyone who's working on the production, obviously, would approach it as if it was another Derby. The reality is it's not another Derby. It's a Triple Crown race where the Preakness usually is. It's in a different time slot on the calendar. And I think, as we've seen, it's very hard to figure out what will get viewership right now and what won't.**

As far as your understanding, does NBC expect the same kind of robust viewership as other derbies have had, or just based on your own thought exercise, do you have honestly no idea what this program will race?

ROB HYLAND: Listen, I think Dan could probably speak to the numbers and the expectation of the numbers. Rich, I've known you for a while. It will not affect the way I approach the show. Obviously, we're learning much less into the atmosphere because there is no atmosphere, but we've been planning this show for the last couple months, and we began planning this show in February was our first meeting for an event we thought would be the first Saturday in May.

So the production will still be fast paced. We'll tell great stories. We'll still entertain the viewers, but in terms of



viewership, I think that's more for Dan Masonson in terms of what they expect.

**Q. For Rob specifically, but if anybody else wants to comment, feel free. The news release mentioned that the news division will do some coverage about the protests in Louisville that have been going on downtown, and I just wondered if that was the plan was to make that coverage part of the Friday and Saturday racing coverage, or is it just for the news broadcast, or is it a decision to be made later?**

ROB HYLAND: The news reports will be a part of the Friday and Saturday Oaks and Derby coverage. NBC News will have additional reporters in Louisville that weekend for multiple news platforms and outlets, but Blayne Alexander will be working specifically with our production at NBC Sports to report on expected protests following the fatal shooting of Breonna Taylor this March in Louisville, and that decision was made a while ago.

**Q. This is for Edzo. Obviously, we know that Tiz the Law is the heavy favorite, but you did mention there's some value in the field. I would just like to get your take on handicapping the Derby, if you will.**

EDDIE OLCZYK: I think, when you get the field and the post position and running style and with Authentic being on the outside, who seems to be the quickest horse, how do you see, how do I see this race playing out with the big horses, as I mentioned earlier, on the far outside?

So the breakdown of out of the gate, getting position, Larry touched on it. Randy, Jerry touched on Tiz the Law, positioning. Everybody's going to want to know where he is when he breaks out of the gate. If you can get 3 5 on Tiz the Law right now, would that be something I'd be willing to jump in on? Probably, because I think he's going to be a little bit lower than that from the value aspect of it.

But will he be my pick? You'll have to tune in on Saturday? I don't know if I'll want to pick a 2 5 or a 3 5 in an 18 horse field. It's hard to look past Honor A.P. and Tiz the Law and Authentic and Ny Traffic. But one horse I'm zeroing in on will be the 3 horse, Enforceable. I believe there's a little more speed in this race than some people maybe would think.

Now especially with the post position draw, I think it becomes so intriguing, and I think our very own Hall of Famer, the great Jerry Bailey, could speak to the mindset, and I'm sure he will on Friday and Saturday setting up the races. How do you handle being on the far outside? What does King Guillermo do to the inside?

I was just looking at a horse like Enforceable, who has just had a couple of brutal post positions in his last couple of races. He got beat a good healthy amount to Art Collector, who would have been my pick, just for the record. Unfortunately, he scratched. I look at his last couple of races, and I think they're much better than they seem on paper. I think he's going to get a good pace to run at. He seems to enjoy running on the track at Churchill Downs.

So Enforceable may be every bit of 30 1 in the morning light, Tyler? Yeah, he might be, and I certainly would want to use him up and down in a lot of my wagers.

How does the race play out? Where's the class? You know where it is. But at the end of the day, it's about managing and making money, and that's part of my that's my role on our broadcast. Hopefully, people will be able to put the right numbers together, and if I can give them a 30 1 shot to hit the board in the Kentucky Derby, then it doesn't matter if Tiz the Law wins by five or wins by one, it's going to pay if a horse like Enforceable can hit the board.

**Q. Thank you. One follow up for Jerry Bailey and Randy Moss, and one more for Rob. Jerry and Randy, this is sort of a bit of a thought exercise. If you're covering any other sport, there's certainly debate about whether any of these sports inside a bubble should get an asterisk or not. I personally don't want to think so. I'm sure you guys are sports fans. You've sort of seen that debate.**

From your perspective, if Tiz the Law goes on to win the Triple Crown, how would you see that accomplishment against the traditional Triple Crown winner who did the Derby, the Preakness, and the Belmont, in that order?

RANDY MOSS: We're going to have the same answer, so go ahead.

JERRY BAILEY: Yeah, we're going to have an asterisk. First of all, if Tiz the Law wins all three, that's a tremendous accomplishment. Take nothing away. It's a good horse, and that would be noteworthy, to say the least. However, just because of the fact that the Belmont was not 1 1/2 miles, and it was run at 1 1/8 miles, the shorter distance, yes, there has to be an asterisk.

Many could argue that, because of the spacing, the races might be tougher because more horses can prepare and jump in and run against the winner of the first or the second leg, but in terms of an asterisk, because the Belmont Stakes was not 1 1/2 miles and it was a shorter distance, it has to have it. Randy?

RANDY MOSS: Richard, is it fair? Probably not. The horse has done everything let's assume he sweeps the Triple Crown. The horse has done everything that's been asked of him. And, oh, by the way, he won the Travers Stakes in between the Belmont and the Derby, so it's almost like a quadruple crown. Could he go 1 1/2 miles if asked against these horses? Probably so. It's just unfortunate for the horse that he's going to have a COVID asterisk if he sweeps the Triple Crown. It's inevitable. But, again, it's still a heck of an accomplishment.

**Q. One last one for you, Rob. One of the things that NBC deserves absolute praise for is your just how you guys approach audio, no matter what the sport is. I'm wondering if you could just give me a sense of how you set up the microphones around the track and the microphones around Churchill. Just given that there is no crowd, I feel like as a viewer I may be hearing things that I might not hear on a traditional Derby broadcast.**

ROB HYLAND: To begin, thanks for acknowledging that. We've got a great audio team, and that audio will be coming out of both Louisville and our control site here. You know, Rich, I don't think there's a lot of different mike locations. I do think you'll hear a lot more because of a lack of crowd, but there will be microphones on the starting gate, ambient microphones in the paddock, microphone, like I mentioned, on the outrider, various microphones spread out throughout this 150 plus acre venue.

As I mentioned earlier, the jockey mikes will really be leaned into a little bit harder than we've ever done before. I think, while the strategy has gotten more aggressive in terms of adding the jockey mikes into the mix, I think you'll probably hear them all clearer because of the lack of crowd.

MIKE TIRICO: The hard part on our end, even if we were there in person, the venue's so big I know when you're doing a football game, if you have good natural sound at the line of scrimmage, if you're picking up the quarterback or the linebackers really well, you know don't talk up to the snap if you're conscious of it, of the audio quality, because you can see when the guys are up there.

At a track, when you're walking around, it's a little bit harder to see when you're going to be in a position to hear sound from there. So it's an artful dance of when do you lay out so you don't step on good audio. That's one of the things that we'll try to be navigating from our end of that. The last thing you want to do is step on good audio, but by the same token if you're sitting there waiting for 20 seconds and somebody says nothing, it's not the best TV. So that's the balance we'll be working on to try to figure out how not

to get in the way of good stuff if there's good stuff to get.

DAN MASONSON: Thank you very much for joining us, everybody. We'll see you at 2:30 p.m. Eastern on NBC on Saturday and 3:00 p.m. Eastern on NBCSN on Friday. Thanks and have a good day. The transcript will be available on [NBCsportsgroupspresbox.com](http://NBCsportsgroupspresbox.com) later today.

FastScripts by ASAP Sports

