

# NBC Sports Group Media Conference

Tuesday, May 3, 2022

**Randy Moss**

**Mike Tirico**

**Lindsay Schanzer**

**Jerry Bailey**

**Steve Kornacki**

**Eddie Olczyk**

**Larry Collmus**

Press Conference

DAN MASONSON: Good afternoon, everybody. Thanks for joining today's conference call for NBC Sports' coverage of the Kentucky Derby. Coverage begins this Friday at 1:00 eastern on USA Network with a full day Kentucky Oaks coverage, on Saturday at noon also on USA Network is our early Kentucky Derby day coverage, and then Saturday at 2:30 p.m. eastern on NBC and Peacock is our five-hour Kentucky Derby show.

Joining us today are Lindsay Schanzer, our senior horse racing producer; our host, Mike Tirico; analyst Randy Moss; two-time Derby winning analyst Jerry Bailey; handicapper Eddie Olczyk; the race caller, Larry Collmus; and back for a second time, our insight analyst from NBC News, Steve Kornacki.

With that, I'll turn it over to Lindsay Schanzer

LINDSAY SCHANZER: Hi, everyone. I want to start by saying I'm grateful to be part of this event this year. I've worked as a part of our Kentucky Derby production team for the past nine years, but I'm honored to mark my tenth year as a part of this production team for the first time as the lead producer of our coverage.

To me there is no day like the Kentucky Derby. It is a singular event in all of American sports and beyond, and after a crazy stretch of dramatic and controversial finishes plus a September Derby in the middle of a pandemic and an empty Churchill Downs, we are looking forward to a full capacity venue and hopefully a great race with a true



celebration in the winner's circle.

As for coverage notes, we've got a great team in place for as what Dan mentioned will be over 12 hours of coverage. We've got 16 announcers who will cover every nook and cranny of this unique and special venue. We welcome back the duo of Rutledge Wood and Dale Earnhardt, Jr., who will be conducting a Derby Day scavenger hunt of sorts and take you to places around this venue that hopefully you've never seen before and have a boat load of fun doing it.

As Dan mentioned, Steve Kornacki is back to take us through all the intricacies of horse racing and the Kentucky Derby specifically. We have Dylan Dreyer back. She'll be joined by a new face to our team, Zanna Roberts Rassi, fresh off her work at the Met Gala last night. She is our fashion expert for the weekend, and she's got the credentials to back it up.

We also have coverage originating from Churchill Downs on Saturday hosted by Rebecca Lowe, who will do the Football-Derby double, and when she's done with her coverage on Premier League she'll flip over and join our show, which we're really excited about having her back, as well.

We've thrilled to bring this event to viewers across the country and the globe, and with over 50 cameras, including drone coverage to cover the full scope of the event and jockey cameras on the helmets of jockeys in the race, we think we're in a position to give you and all of our viewers the best seat in the house.

MIKE TIRICO: Thanks, Dan. Thanks, Lindsay. Hi, everybody. I'll be brief so you can have time to do questions with our analysts. I echo Lindsay's statement. There's no day like this in American sport. There's no day like this in sports television. It's such a unique mix of different elements.

It's a pleasure to bring it to everyone at home. It's one of those broadcasts you can have throughout the day, and it provides a little bit of something for everyone, from the person who only watches one horse race per year, to the heavy handicapper who's interested in the intricacies of the sport and its biggest event.



I am thrilled that Lindsay is leading our team. I can't think of anyone who is better experienced or positioned to handle this group of 16 announcers and 20 horses and one big event. We're so excited to have her lead our team, and the team is the best part of it. From working with Jerry and Randy on the set, to Edso and Steve and everybody on the call, the breadth of what this takes in is a fun day for a host, everything from 20 two-minute inquiries to what people are wearing.

It's rare that you get all of that under one rundown for a TV show. That's what makes the Derby special. Everyone says you have to come experience it. It's a bucket list experience. I would love to find that out some day not working. It sounds like it's a lot of fun for the people who are in the stands, and hopefully we can bring some of that to America through their TVs.

With that, I will toss it to Randy and Jerry. Randy, you first.

**RANDY MOSS:** A lot of fun storylines this year. A lot of good horses that we're really looking forward to watching. Not just the Kentucky Derby, but the Kentucky Oaks on Friday, as well is just a spectacular race.

But the Derby, you've got a guy in trainer Steve Asmussen that's won more horse races in North America than any trainer in the history of the sport here and he's never won the Kentucky Derby.

His owner Ron Winchell has run one of the stables in the country never; has won the Kentucky Derby. Got a chance with a horse named Epicenter. Got a horse named Zandon that's the program favorite. His trainer Chad Brown has been a champion trainer in this country; has never won the Kentucky Derby.

And two horses trained by a guy named Tim Yakteen who is I guess you could say subbing in a way for a trainer that's famously not here at this Kentucky Derby, Bob Baffert. The two horses are Taiba, the Santa Anita Derby winner, and Messier, the Santa Anita Derby runner up.

And that's not all, either. We've got a lot of other horses in here with a good chance to win. It makes for a really compelling race that we're excited to bring you.

**JERRY BAILEY:** I'm Jerry Bailey. Randy is a storyline guy, but more to my kind of line of thinking, there are a couple of jockey stories in here.

Mike Smith, who's won two Kentucky Derbys already, at age 56 is attempting to be the oldest jockey to win the Kentucky Derby at age 56. You also have, quote-unquote, a plethora of French riders in here. Not only Flavien Prat

who rides the favorite; Florent Geroux, who is now the winner of last year's Kentucky Derby.

We have other three other riders from France coming in to ride horses, so a lot of jockey storylines. I sat down this morning with Flavien Prat and Florent Geroux in the winner's circle in the infield at Churchill Downs and brought back a flood of memories. And kind of like what Mike was referring to, he wished he could come see it as a fan, as a bucket list type of thing.

I actually was caught in that moment looking at the Twin Spires thinking how magnificent of an event this is, how majestic the grandstand is, and how special it is to be able to partake in this. I feel honored. I feel honored to be with the people I'm working with and this production team, and I will turn it over to Larry Collmus.

**LARRY COLLMUS:** Thank you, Jerry, and just mentioning this grand building, that's where I am right now. I'm actually up in my calling spot where I'll be calling the Kentucky Oaks on Friday and the Kentucky Derby on Saturday; getting a little practice in up here right now.

This will be my 12th call of the Kentucky Derby, and I'll tell you, the excitement and the nervous energy, they never wane. It's going to be great to see a full house here and to have 150,000 plus people all around when you call that race and the challenge of following 20 three-year-old horses around the track with all the pageantry and the buzz around you.

It just is a lot of fun. There's nothing quite like it, and I'm excited to be back and doing it and working with this great team. And as Randy said, not only do we have a tremendous Kentucky Derby on Saturday, but a Kentucky Oaks with just an amazing field on Friday. Some undefeated fillies and then just a great race.

So looking forward to both days and looking forward to calling all of the action here up on the top level. It's great to be back because I get to see once again what it was like, and it's a little quieter today on Tuesday, but it's going to be raucous here on Friday and Saturday.

**EDDIE OLCZYK:** Larry, not only the voice of the Triple Crown but also moonlighting as a handicapper here recently, so might have to put his feet to the fire at some point here over the next couple of days.

It is great to be back again and part of this incredible team I've been just so blessed to be a part of since 2015. It's just been an unbelievable ride to be a part of it and to be back again this year.

From a gambler's point of view, from a handicapper's point of view, the two cards, Oaks Day and Derby Day, you really have opportunities to go in a lot of different directions. Very deep fields. Some races look very formful, but opportunities to go ahead and to make some educated wagers and look to pad the bank roll from Friday to Saturday, and that's something as a handicapper and as a horse player you really just gravitate to when you have full fields, so competitive, all of the Grade 1s, the top trainers, the top jocks, the top equine athletes all in the same place is just -- it's an exciting 24 hours, and it doesn't seem like there's enough time in between Oaks Day and Derby Day, but that's why you start prepping a couple of days out.

In particular, the two big races, the Oaks and the Derby, and I think Randy alluded to it, not many people that have their pulse on specific races better than Randy Moss in our game. I think you could just kind of tell that you could go and make a case for a bunch of fillies on Friday and a bunch of colts on Saturday, and from a handicapper's point of view, that really makes it very exhilarating and very exciting. Hopefully we can make some people some money on Saturday when they tune in and a full day of coverage.

Nobody does it better, and I'm just so humbled to be a part of this team, and it's great to be back.

STEVE KORNACKI: I'd echo what everybody is saying. I feel very fortunate to get a chance to play a role with this team. I've been a fan of this sport as far back as I can remember. There's always been something extra special about the Kentucky Derby. I think I have watched it pretty much every year since I was a kid. I'm the kind of person who will go and watch old Triple Crown races on YouTube kind of for the fun of it.

To actually get a chance to play a role in the broadcast of it, I just kind of feel very lucky and to get to work with this group.

Last year -- first year getting to do it -- one of my favorite memories is right after the Oaks standing next to Eddie. I'm sure Eddie won't mind me sharing this. He had a pretty big Exacta ticket that he hit in that race, and he showed me the ticket and my eyes kind of bulged a little bit. I said, okay, way to go, Eddie.

So getting to see that in person was very cool, somebody I've been watching on TV for years. And just looking forward to hopefully contributing this year, looking at some of the patterns, some of the trends that have defined this race in recent years.

Certainly I know one we're going to talk about it is since the points era kind of dawned in 2013 how the winners have been horses who have been able to get on to the lead or near the lead early and have just stayed there, kind of raising the question of is this a year you finally see one of those pace collapses or does that recent history hold up.

One other thing I'm really eager to kind of track during the day Saturday is our friend Mattress Mack, and we saw him last year come in there and plop down all that money on Essential Quality.

A really cool thing I got to do last year was we could watch the real-time wagering in the win pool at Churchill, and you could see almost minute-by-minute, bet-by-bet for Mattress Mack how he was distorting the win pool by putting all that money on Essential Quality, maybe creating some value, some extra value around the other horses.

Looks like he might be up to something similar with Zandon this year, so really eager to see how that affects the betting pool.

**Q. This is a question I guess primarily for Jerry and Randy. I've asked Randy about this a little bit already, but with the two horses from Baffert's barn, how big of a deal do you think it will be for them that he's not directly involved? And then I'm interested to hear both of your thoughts on Yakteen as a horseman.**

JERRY BAILEY: I don't think the horse is going to realize there's much difference at all. They've got the same groom, the same exercise rider, the same assistant trainer, the same veterinarian, the same farrier, practically everything is the same -- same food, same routine.

They have training charts, these horses, and they're big with 30 squares, one square for each day, when he gallops, when he walks, when he worked out faster, and that goes with the horse.

Tim Yakteen the new trainer will know exactly what they've done and is probably mimicking that, so I don't think the horses are going to notice anything.

RANDY MOSS: The reality in thoroughbred racing is there are a lot of trainers out there, a lot of them, given an opportunity with a really good horse can do a great job.

Tim Yakteen has had some good horses, not Derby horses, but he's had some good horses in his career and has done a good job with them.

Look at the Santa Anita Derby. He finishes one-two with Taiba and with Messier.

**Q. I'll throw this out to anyone who wants to answer it. Randy and Jerry might have thoughts on this. Just curious your impressions of the kind of quick rise of Sappy Joseph and what he's been able to do down in that Florida circuit and now bringing a horse to the Derby that looks like he's got a real chance here.**

JERRY BAILEY: Yeah, he started out with a relatively? Small stable. Randy will give you the backstory coming from Barbados and has dad was a trainer there, I guess. I was on a plane with him 2019 going to Philadelphia for the Parx Derby, and that was his first major impact that day on national TV.

I think he had 20 horses or so at that point in time. It's exploded. His stable has exploded, but he works hard. He's recruited -- he's got a lot of nicer horses now. He's focusing a lot more on young horses and he's developed White Abarrio into a very nice horse. I think he does an excellent job, but it's not without hard work.

RANDY MOSS: His father was successful trainer in Barbados, Sappy was a successful trainer in Barbados, and he decided he wanted to come to the United States to try his luck in the U.S. in Florida. His father told him, don't do it. It's a bad idea. You're successful here. It's so competitive, so tough to succeed in America.

You've got it made here. Why would you go and leave what you have here so far? And he said, well, it's something I've always wanted to do and I feel like I have to try it. He came to the United States, came to Gulfstream Park, and early on pretty much fell flat on his face and called his dad back and said, you were right, I'm coming back to Barbados.

His dad said, no, you're not. You're going to stick it out there. You haven't given it enough time. You're there already, so keep going with it.

He turned it around and the stable is getting better and better every year, and now here he is with an excellent chance with White Abarrio.

**Q. For Steve, you know that we live in very politicized times; it's interesting to me that in some other areas, some other networks, anyone who's connected to politics, even if they're not an opinionist, and I know that's not necessarily your role, but a lot of times the public does not want that person on a sports network, but you seem to not get any kind of -- at least anecdotally -- criticism about your role on NBC Sports properties, and I wondered just from your perspective why that is, why you don't think there's been any**

**push-back from someone from the, quote-unquote, political realm, being part of a sports program?**

STEVE KORNACKI: I like to think that when it comes to politics and elections that what I do is maybe for better or worse somewhat unique in political media these days in that I think -- you know, I cover elections. I cover election results. I'm going to be covering tonight the results of the Ohio primary, mainly a Senate race, but a few others, as well.

I think everything that I will say as I cover that I think I could say and would say on any outlet, left, right, middle, in between, because I think I'm covering the one thing that everybody on the left, everybody on the right, and everybody in the middle wants to know.

They want to know who's winning and they want to know who's losing and they want to know why. If their side is losing they want to know why that is and what they need to do to win. If they're winning, they want to know why that is and what they need to do to keep winning.

I'm looking at elections. I'm trying to understand. I always say it's sort of the presidential election every four years to me is America's family photo, and we take one every four years and then we spend the entire next four years kind of breaking it down, state by state, county by county, neighborhood by neighborhood, and really getting a sense of who and what we are at that moment.

And then we take another picture four years later, and that is kind of the business I am in, is sort of analyzing those family photos that emerge from elections.

I think one thing I've found is the way I talk about it, the way I break it down, the material I'm working with, I feel like it works with all audiences, because believe it or not, it can seem inconceivable in the incredibly polarized and tribalized times we live in today.

But there are still some areas of common interests between the two sides, between the two tribes. I think I'm fortunate enough to work in that kind of zone of common interest.

**Q. Lindsay, you're obviously no stranger to sitting in the producer's chair on big races. That includes Triple Crown races. For you, two parts. What do you think it's going to feel like for you going to be taking that seat in the truck on Kentucky Derby race day, and in your experience sitting at the front bench so far in your career, what is the most memorable event that you've worked?**



LINDSAY SCHANZER: What it's going to feel like? I think hopefully given the experience that I've had it won't feel too different, and I think part of the beauty of this job and the way it's been set up for me is that I will be surrounded by people I've been working with in some capacity for 10 years.

That familiarity and that feeling of family, and I mean that when I say it, I'll have Amy Zimmerman to my left and Drew Esocoff to my right, and they have been here for a lot longer than I have and doing this job.

I think what it will feel like is a comfortable position with a lot of responsibility, and I'm sure there will be nerves, as I think my predecessors would say they had, as well. But I think I'll feel excited and grateful and really that sense of comfort and peace that comes with the people around you being the people that you call family and are really lucky to work with.

As far as my most memorable experiences in the chair, the ones that stick out will be from sort of smaller tier events, let's say, that you may not have watched. But early on in my career producing horse racing I think the first real kind of chaotic experience I had was at the Whitney several years back in an absolutely torrential downpour, deluge situation that caused a 45-minute rain delay. Not something I had planned for in the very detailed and scripted format.

I remember Nick Luck was hosting and I have this image burned into my mind of Rick and Randy and Jerry next to him, I believe holding a blue tarp up over their head.

And I think we took the shot on camera and I'll never forget it, and this feeling of absolute madness as Britney Eurton and Matt VerMeer mere was running around to collect various interviews. And it was one of the most fun experiences that I've had, but definitely one I'll remember.

And the second one I'll highlight is the Haskell a couple years back at Monmouth Park when we had planned a one-hour show on NBC and the heat index was so high that they took the racing out of our window entirely. So we did a one-hour show on the network with no horse racing, and that one was special. Those are my standout memories.

**Q. I think you answered the first part of my question which is the Mattress Mack angle going to be part of the broadcast. So for Steve, unlike last year when there was pretty much a clear established favorite, is this a 50/50 election, and is Mattress Mack, Maricopa County, or Florida 2000, and I mean, what's the math of his \$4 million at play in the pools?**

STEVE KORNACKI: Yeah, I'll work on coming up with the right election analogy between now and Saturday for it, but last year it was so interesting because I think he made his last bet -- he was doing it incrementally and he made his last bet at about 6:00, a little bit less than an hour before post time.

At that point I remember we looked at the win pool, and if you took the Mattress Mack money out, there was almost identical sums of money on Essential Quality, Rock Your World, and Hot Rod Charlie. So without the Mattress Mack money, they would have kind of been -- if everybody else was still betting the same way, they would have been kind of coequal choices there, and instead obviously Essential Quality went off as the clear favorite.

What I'm looking at this year, to some it was a surprise, others I guess saw it coming, seeing Zandon established as the morning line favorite. If Mattress Mack is going to now go with Zandon as his horse, I'm wondering if that's going to create some significant separation between Zandon and Epicenter, two horses I think if you look at both of them, you could make a case that Epicenter ought to be the favorite.

You could certainly make a case that they've got a pretty equal chance of winning the Derby. Different running styles but maybe an equal chance.

Potentially if we see the kind of movement we saw last year with that essential quality money, he could create some real separation, and Zandon could be significantly lower priced, shorter priced than Epicenter, and maybe there ends up being some value around Epicenter that we didn't necessarily think there would be say a month ago.

So that's one thing I'm looking at.

And then obviously just the other question, are there other horses? If so much money is coming in on Zandon, are there other places on the board where there's some extra value of some horses maybe going into 10 to 1 or more who otherwise wouldn't?

But it was a real eye opener to me last year when we did that math and we realized that -- I think at the moment we did the math, technically, and I don't think this was true when the race went off, but as of about 6:00 p.m. last year, technically Rock Your World would have been the favorite at the moment without the Mattress Mack money. It was that big of a difference.

**Q. He has said that his promotion, the idea is to end up on the favorite. In talking more about Zandon, do**

**you think he's already decided, or is that just kind of based on the morning line betting Zandon as the favorite?**

STEVE KORNACKI: Yeah, no, I'm speculating that it would be Zandon based on Zandon being established as the morning line favorite. But Mattress Mack can be a man of surprises, so we'll see where he goes somewhere else.

I know he also apparently will put some, apparently a very small amount on Smile Happy. He's got the Run Happy connection there. Doesn't sound like that's going to be a significant amount.

But whichever direction he chooses to go with the big money, we clearly saw last year how that can distort the win pool, and I'd anticipate seeing something similar this year.

**Q. Mike, you're at the set on the track; Larry, you're in the race caller's booth; and Eddie, you're in a betting area. How do your surroundings impact the way you do all of your jobs on race day, especially this year with fans returning?**

LARRY COLLMUS: It will make a difference for me for sure because with the last couple of years, and especially two years ago when the race was in September and seeing absolutely no one around and then last year with the limited crowd, it's just a different buzz and a different feel. Now this year is going to be back to a full-fledged Kentucky Derby, and with that, you get all the different colors of clothing and everything that you see in the stands and a full infield and just lots of stuff around you that you try to keep from distracting you from following those 20 horses around the track that day.

Yeah, it adds a little bit. It makes it a little bit more fun and then a little bit more challenging at the same time.

EDDIE OLCZYK: Yeah, I think the adrenaline part of being amongst the betting crowd is something that hopefully comes across the air, not only from my vibe but I think the feel of the positioning of where I will be and Steve will be. The interaction of going with the fans and with the bettors and a lot of things that happen off of the cameras sometimes are even more engaging and exciting than when I get on the camera and talk about who I might like or why I'm going in a certain direction.

It does go to a whole 'nother level when you have a whole boat load of people from every type of background, and to be able to feel the vibe and to have the windows there and to get in line every once in a while when Lindsay doesn't want me on the air and go ahead and get my feet wet and

have those tickets, and hopefully I can show a few more of those tickets to Steve this year and we can have some fun.

But there's nothing like having fans in a building and being amongst them, and hopefully people will feel that and people will say, hey, geez, I'd love to be a part of that, and they get themselves an opportunity to get to the Derby or to the Preakness or the Belmont or the Breeders' Cup. It's quite the rush being there and then obviously building to the biggest races on each day.

MIKE TIRICO: I know for me, it's funny when you said that, I just flipped through my phone real quick, I take a picture when the horses come around the first turn at the Derby every year from our set. We are very lucky, me, Randy and Jerry, our set is right on the first turn. We have fans -- we're up on the platform. Fans are about 10 feet below as they sit there and we're surrounded by fans almost everywhere you look.

That look back in '21, there were a lot of people there. There were over 50,000. That was the largest gathering at that time. It was just great to see that many people.

But then I look back to the picture in May of 2019 and May of 2018 and the place is jammed and the colors and the people and everything about it. I think it's very additive to the energy of the day to have the constant buzz of fans right around you.

This is one advantage of where our set is on turn 1. We are, although raised up a little bit on a platform, right amongst the fans. You just get a sense of what their day is like, from eating to their feet hurt because of their shoes to their wardrobe is a little more rumpled than it was when they walked in through the gates at 11:00 in the morning, through their highs and lows of wagering through the day. It is such a cool event.

I had the chance to go to Augusta, as I do every year, and since the Masters back at full steam with fans, I know it's going to be the same way when we go to the Indy 500 at the end of the month, and I'm so excited for this because this will be probably as large a gathering in American sports as we've had since the pandemic, only to be topped at the end of the month by the 500 in Indianapolis.

I think the energy of being back amongst that larger group of fans will come through for all of us in our broadcast and our presentation.

It's a great question I hadn't really given a lot of thought to, but it has me even more charged up to get there, be a part of Friday at Oaks Day when there are 100,000 people and then Saturday which is a once-a-year experience that is

unmatched.

DAN MASONSON: Thanks, Mike. Thanks, everybody, for joining us today. We will see you on Friday at Oaks Day, Saturday for Derby Day, and we will have a transcript of this coverage call this afternoon on [NBCSportspressbox.com](http://NBCSportspressbox.com).

FastScripts by ASAP Sports

