

NBC Sports Group Media Conference

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Dan Masonson

Lindsay Schanzer

Mike Tirico

Randy Moss

Jerry Bailey

Donna Brothers

Larry Collmus

Media Conference



looking forward to Derby 151. We're coming off a truly spectacular Derby 150 that was an event to remember in its own right, not to mention about the best finish of a race that we possibly could have asked for in a three-way photo that was won by Mystik Dan last year. We can only hope for as exciting a finish this year.

Every year the Derby brings something special and unexpected. We're looking forward to bringing that to all of you. We're honored to put on NBC's 25th broadcast of the Kentucky Derby. It's an event we look forward to every year.

We are excited that our extension will allow us to do that for many years to come. We have some new technology we're playing with this year. We bring back the excellent crew of announcers that I'm privileged to work with every year, led by Mike Tirico, who I will let jump in.

MIKE TIRICO: Thank you, Lindsay. Congratulations to Lindsay and the rest of our non-on-camera team that has done a remarkable job every year of putting the Derby on.

I have to be honest, when I first got into doing the Derby at NBC, when I first arrived, I had no idea how rewarding and satisfying being a part of this show would be, in large part because of the two guys I sit next to. I challenge anybody to find a better duo over a longer time in the history of television than Jerry and Randy working together, multiple networks. They have brought incredible personality, perspective, everything to the sport.

To get the chance to know those two are to the left of me for those five hours on Derby day is just such a comfort. I hope that everybody recognizes what a special duo they have been and they are to all of us.

For me, I love it because you have no idea what's going to happen when you climb onto that set. We've had everything from the rainiest Derby to the tightest finish with three horses in the Derby, to horses being disqualified, to everything imaginable.

The one thing that is true across all of it, every place I go, every sport I cover, everybody tends to ask, Boy, what is it like to be at the Derby?

I say someday as a fan I'd like to find out. As a TV host,

DAN MASONSON: Good afternoon, everybody. Welcome to today's call. This Saturday marks NBC Sports' milestone 25th presentation of the Kentucky Derby. When we began in 2001, we had a 90-minute show. Now we have five hours Friday for the Kentucky Oaks. Saturday we start at noon Eastern also on USA Network and Peacock before beginning our five-hour Kentucky Derby show at 2:30 p.m. on NBC and Peacock.

Joining us on today's call, our supervising producer, Lindsay Schanzer; Mike Tirico, hosting his ninth Kentucky Derby for NBC Sports; analyst Randy Moss, who works his 45th Kentucky Derby; analyst Jerry Bailey, who is participating in his 30th Derby, first as a Hall of Fame jockey and then with NBC Sports. Jerry is the only person on this call who has won the Derby. He did so twice.

Reporter Donna Brothers, who has the distinction of being the only member of the announce team to work all 25 Kentucky Derby shows with NBC Sports. And the race caller, Larry Collmus, who calls his 15th consecutive Kentucky Derby, the most in TV history, breaking his tie with Dave Johnson, who called 14 straight for ABC.

We'll begin with some brief comments from each speaker, then take questions.

We'll start with our producer, Lindsay Schanzer.

LINDSAY SCHANZER: Hi, everyone, from Churchill Downs. We've been on-site since yesterday. Really



there is no more enjoyable joyride than being able to host the Derby with our great crew.

Looking forward to being there with everyone. I'm sure most of your questions are for Randy, Jerry, everybody else. Before I pass it to Randy, a tip of our hat to Donna for being on this show 25 consecutive years. She's defined that position. No one does it better than Donna. Such an honor to have her as part of this call as well.

Randy.

RANDY MOSS: I'm up next. As anybody who follows sports will know, there can be no better assignment for someone like me and Jerry to be sitting next to a guy like Mike Tirico, consummate professional. Not to make this a mutual admiration society, but it's always fantastic to get to work with Mike.

Last year we had history, the 150th Derby. We had drama with a three-horse photo finish, a little bit of controversy with some bumping coming down the wire.

This year we've got a horse in Journalism that I think is one of the more solid favorites that we've had in the Derby since American Pharoah and Justify, the two Triple Crown winners. I like to mention the undercard races. We will be doing 14 undercard races to support the Derby and the Oaks Friday and Saturday. Spectacular. They're like Breeders' Cup races some of them. We're really looking forward to bringing you those races as well as the two big ones.

JERRY BAILEY: Yeah, when I was listening to Dan Masonson give a little bit of lookback to our historical past here at Churchill Downs, it makes me feel kind of old all the years I've been coming here.

What's amazed me looking back is the evolution of the look at Churchill Downs, the amazing improvements that they've done. As a matter of fact, Randy and I were walking to the media center, somewhere we go every single year, because of the new clubhouse pavilion, we couldn't find it at first. Crazy how much work they've done here in a positive way at Churchill Downs that has made it what it is today.

But in terms of sitting next to these guys, you should be in this trailer when we do our work because it's a lot of back-and-forth between Randy and I and Mike. It's great because there are things that I will forget that Mike will remind me of or Randy will remind me of. So no matter who does the research, because we all do it together, it hits the air thanks to Mike and Randy. I'm really appreciative of the team that we have.

As Randy said, great undercard, great Derby. I think there is a clear-cut favorite this year, but as we all know, anything can happen in the Derby. It probably will.

DONNA BROTHERS: So much has changed since we first started in 2001 as you mentioned already, Dan. We had a 90-minute broadcast at that time. At that time we thought 90 minutes to cover a two-minute race? How are we going to fill all this time? Now we're on the air for seven and a half hours on Saturday, five hours on Kentucky Oaks day, and we are still trying to figure out how we're going to get this story in and that story in because there's so many great stories to tell.

I'll back up to Mike. Mike, first of all, you're very kind to say that, very kind words. But it's been a real pleasure to work with a legend. I'm so glad that you joined our team.

If I look back at some of the strangest Derbies -- Mike, you've been there for a couple of them -- I'll have to go back to 2004. It was memorable in that that was the Derby that Smarty Jones won. It was also Bob Costas' first time joining our team. The producer at that time was David Michaels. Bob Costas had never covered horse racing before. He had been assured by David Michaels he would not be put in a position where he would have to pretend to be an expert on the sport.

Well, about an hour and a half before the Kentucky Derby, before our coverage was to go on live, we had this massive deluge. All of our comms went down. Nobody's microphones or cameras were working. We're now an hour to go live. The only person who has any communication is Bob Costas. He wasn't too happy about that (laughter).

Luckily, as always, such a great production team, they got everything up and running. It was a great Derby to remember.

Of course the 2019 disqualification of Maximum Security after a move at the top of the stretch that affected the placing of multiple horses in the race. A 24-minute inquiry, the likes of which we've never seen, certainly not on our coverage.

In 2020, when we thought we might lose the Kentucky Derby altogether, we had it on the first Saturday in September, it was surreal to be there live because we didn't have a live audience of fans. It was also very interesting and memorable for lots of good reasons in that the stories were still prevailing. There were still winning connections who got their dreams finally realized. There was also the reality of loss for many people who didn't get



to win the Derby.

One of the things I do love about my role on horseback is that I'm in a position to talk to the jockey right after the race while they're still in their heart and before they have a chance to really start to intellectualize what happened. I try to get in there quickly, give them a chance to catch their breath, but quickly enough to where they're still feeling what they felt about crossing the wire first in the Kentucky Derby.

We try to capture that emotion right away. My first question is never going to be tell me about your trip. We try to capture that and bring it into the living rooms of people who are watching across the United States and elsewhere. We have the best team in the business to do that.

LARRY COLLUMUS: One of the things that Donna tries to do is make 'em cry right away, which is easy to do after winning the Kentucky Derby.

Dan told me yesterday about this consecutive streak that I had going on. This will be the 15th straight Derby. I knew that. I had no idea it would become the longest streak.

Just to hear the names Dave Johnson, Tom Durkin, and be considered alongside of them is an amazing thing because I grew up listening to them and idolizing them. Dave Johnson was actually a guy who was really helpful to me starting out. I called my first race at 18 years old. I was the backup announcer. He came up to call the Preakness. Oh, my God, that's Dave Johnson. He helped me out starting the business. Now to have called more consecutive Kentucky Derbies than him is mind-blowing to me.

It never gets easier. Every year it's a challenge. Every year 20 horses come at you. You never know if you're going to have to deal with a sloppy racetrack. One thing you're always having to deal with are keeping your nerves in check, your heart rate down, getting those horses around the track.

It's something that I love doing every year. When people say, What's the best part of the Derby for you? For me the answer is, When it's over. All the preparation that you put into it, it all comes down to those final two minutes. When they cross the wire, your job is done, it's an amazing experience.

I can't wait to do it again this year.

DAN MASONSON: Thanks, everyone.

Let's open it up to questions.

Q. Lindsay, you mentioned the technology that will be used for the Derby this year. A couple of the new ones, two drones, and the RED cameras. Can you go a little bit deeper into what some of the examples will be for those applications?

LINDSAY SCHANZER: Yeah, we're really excited about using a dual drone system for the first time this year. We've traditionally -- forgive me, I might get some of this terminology wrong, but sort of heavier drone has been our typical use on Derby day. It primarily covers the races. We've also had it cover the flavor and the venue of Churchill Downs. It has a certain amount of refueling time between its ability to go out and shoot.

This year we're having the heavier drone exclusively cover the racing. And we're debuting at least on our coverage with Beverly Hills Aerials, which is a group we work with for our aerial and drone coverage -- for our drone coverage, I should say, what's called a humming bird drone. That's what they call it, anyway.

It's a smaller device. It has a bit longer fly time. Our understanding is that because of certain mechanisms, safety mechanisms in particular, the fact that it is smaller, that it has in place, it will allow us to fly closer to fans and maybe over some fans, maybe through the TwinSpires, create some more dynamic shots than we've been able to do with our drone in the past.

We're really excited about that opportunity given what a character this event, Churchill Downs, the venue in itself is, not to mention all the fans dressed up to the nines. That will give us the ability to show what they're doing.

The RED camera is primarily something we will use on the red carpet to cover fashion and flavor of the day. What's special about it is our understanding is it's a first-time case use where the RED camera footage, which we traditionally use in a postproduction way, where it gets filmed, exported, dropped into our edit system for postproduction bumpers that we build, that sort of thing, this year it will go directly into EBS for our use on the truck so we can turn it around more in real time as part of our live coverage.

Last year we used something called a nucleus camera, which was a small camera we place right on the finish line directly across from the mirror, which is what they use for the photo to establish the photo finish. It was the right time to do it last year, since I mentioned that three-way photo finish, won by Mystik Dan. It became the defining look to adjudicate that finish and determine as quickly as we could that Mystik Dan would be the winner.



This year we have doubled down on that. We have four different nucleus cameras, two that will be exactly on the wire like that, on both the dirt and turf track, and two others on the opposite side that will create more of an artsy look, but we really like that, for obvious reasons, so we're doubling down on it.

Q. Randy and Jerry, with Journalism, four of his five races so far in his career, he's only been in five-horse fields. I'm curious how much of a concern is that for you from a handicapping perspective? Secondly, how do you interpret that as far as the overall state of racing in Southern California, which has for so long just been a hub of talent, Derby winners, great horse trainers?

JERRY BAILEY: We've continuously gotten horses out of California to run the Kentucky Derby that come out of short fields. Most of them are speed horses. It's not so much of an issue.

But Journalism, at least in my opinion, got in as much trouble in the Santa Anita Derby as he's liable to get in in the Kentucky Derby, even though it's only five horses. With five horses, the heavy favorite, which he was, has a bull's-eye on his back. It's easy for the competing jockeys to find him, trap him, get him into that kind of trouble.

In the Derby, it's not quite like that. There's so many horses, with 20, that you become anonymous. You can kind of fill in. It's hard for other riders to trap you and keep their eyes on you because there's so many other horses around, so many moving parts, so to speak.

I don't think it's going to be a huge issue. I guess the only question I would have is that he hasn't traveled outside of California. So the trip here would be the biggest difference for Journalism. But he seems to have settled in nicely and by all accounts is training really well here.

LARRY COLLUMUS: Dan, it doesn't impact my opinion, handicapping opinion about Journalism's chances in the Kentucky Derby, just because he did have such an eventful trip in the Santa Anita Derby.

To me, the real impact of the five-horse field in the Santa Anita Derby becomes the possible exclusion of Baeza, who is now on the also eligible list, on the outside looking in, which I think is very significant because in my estimation Baeza is probably the second best three-year-old in America behind Journalism. It would be a shame if he were to be excluded from the race.

I think Churchill Downs is probably going to reconsider

their policy right now of exactly how they go about reducing the available points in the event of short fields. Maybe in the case of this year's Santa Anita Derby, for example, the first- and second-place finishers could get the same number of points, 150. But maybe the rest of the horses don't get anything.

I think it's a little unfair, as we're seeing now, to penalize the 1-2 finishers. Even though there's not much depth at Santa Anita right now, there is quality. I don't think that quality should be penalized.

Q. Mike, Randy and Lindsay. Bob Baffert returns to the Derby after a three-year suspension, although he doesn't have the favorite this year. How much of the Baffert story is part of this Derby and will be incorporated into NBC's coverage?

LINDSAY SCHANZER: I'm happy to answer.

Listen, Bob Baffert is still I would say the most recognizable figure in the sport of horse racing. His return is a major headline at this year's Kentucky Derby. It's absolutely a story we'll tell.

I'll let Mike jump in here because Mike is going to sit down with Bob to get his perspective on his absence and return and will definitely spend some time informing the audience about why that absence was in place and why Churchill Downs has embraced his return at this point.

We'll also spend a little time with Bill Carstanjen to get his perspective, the Churchill Downs's perspective about allowing Bob back here. He has two contenders in this race, Citizen Bull and Rodriguez, who has a pretty decent shot at it coming out of a Wood Memorial win.

You'll definitely see that story as one we'll tell throughout our coverage. We think it will be interesting to the audience.

Mike?

MIKE TIRICO: In a race where the favorite is Journalism, we are absolutely going to do our part of that. That doesn't necessarily mean retelling a story that I think our group has done so well, not just in our Derby or other Triple Crown race coverage during the time that this Baffert story has played out, but also in the coverage of so many stakes events and other racing events as it's gone on through the last three years that we've had Baffert not a part of the Derby.

Absolutely looking forward to talking to Bob. Spoken with him a few times in the time intervening here. Interested to



sit down with him to hear his perspective on it.

Probably not the day or time to retell the entirety of the story, but certainly to get the perspective of someone who has been as successful as any trainer in the history of this race as he returns to the race.

So yes, we'll be talking with him. It's not going to be a constant drumbeat throughout the five hours, but if you're watching the coverage, you'll understand the perspective, again reminding everyone many of our viewers only watch one day of racing a year. It's this day. We'll try to find that fine balance between telling the story, updating it for the relevance of Baffert returning to Churchill Downs for the Derby for the first time.

He's been back before in the winter of 2024, but we will do our best complete job. Most importantly the closer we get to the race, turn our attention to the chances those horses have in the race. That will be Randy and Jerry's territory, among others.

Q. Donna, out of all the post Derby winner interviews that you've done, which one has been your favorite or most unique? Mike, with the number of hours and the mix between sports and entertainment, how much is the Derby a good prep for doing the Olympics, or you use your experience a couple weeks ago doing the Today Show?

DONNA BROTHERS: I guess the most memorable ones for me are probably the ones that are memorable for the viewers, too. Those are usually ones with Calvin Borel who is nothing but raw emotion and doesn't know how to be anything other than raw emotion and it's what we love about him. He really expresses what is coursing through his veins.

Certainly the most memorable would be when he won his first Kentucky Derby on Street Sense. He had been riding that horse since its first start as a two-year-old. He started crying about his mama and daddy not being able to be there, see what he's accomplished with his life. He had tears streaming down his cheeks.

The Queen was in the audience. Tom Hammond, who was the host at the time, really focused on how emotional that win was for Calvin Borel. The next thing you know, Calvin got invited to the White House to meet the Queen. I think that interview was memorable for a number of reasons.

For me the reason why it was the most memorable was because of his raw emotion. I sort of forgot the questions that I had intended to ask him. It just became a

conversation. That was really fairly early in my career working in television as a reporter.

My takeaway from that was to make it a conversation, to stay in the moment, just know what you know, let that carry you into a conversation. Made it feel more like people got a sit-in on a conversation between two people that wasn't staged and wasn't necessarily meant for television, but it was great television.

MIKE TIRICO: I love this assignment so much for exactly what you pointed out, the variety of it, much like the Olympic Games, the chance to host the Today Show last week.

My time doing the Derby helped me to do the Today Show last week, not vice versa.

This show is so cool. It goes from speed figures to fascinators. It goes from betting to bourbon. We cover it all in the five hours with a great team of people who dive in and take their space and own it.

We all build towards the race. The audience does the same. Over the years so many people have been the creative minds behind it. Lindsay over the last four years has put all this learning and ideas and packaging, the panoramic views of the track, the beauty of the day all together. It's just fun.

Just to be in the chair where you're point guarding to all the folks who have their area of expertise in this uniquely American day is an absolute privilege.

The chance to do the Derby has allowed me so many other opportunities along the way as well. Look forward to the five hours in the chair on Saturday and the Oaks before that on Friday.

Q. Larry, bit of an esoteric question. When word play can happen between two horses, that's interesting, as we could see the case at the Derby between Journalism and Publisher. How away are you of this prospect when calling a race? Does it ever throat float through your mind, the possibility of some memorable word play, given the names of the horses?

LARRY COLLUMUS: Definitely does. At some point you sort of think about that.

For the Derby, I try not to come up with too many lines just because there's so much involved. Getting the 20 horses right is the most important thing.

Under certain situations you definitely look into that. I was



telling someone a little bit earlier about this, that as far as like Journalism and Publisher, I thought of something in the middle of the night the other day. Just waking up at 2 in the morning and all of a sudden, Oh, yeah, what if this. You get your iPhone, you type that in, then you go back to sleep. A lot of times things like that tend to come into your mind at the most weird times.

Certainly it does come into play, but you don't want to be too scripted. At the same time you want to have something there just in case something like that happens.

Q. Donna, you covered this at the macro broadcast level with the example of the comms dropping. Over the course of your career on horseback with the broadcast, are there any other specific unscripted, equipment, whatever moments where you were like, Yikes, and you look back and laugh now?

DONNA BROTHERS: So many. I'll give you one example.

The year that Funny Cide won the Preakness Stakes, ran in the Preakness Stakes, at that time we had a little bit of an archaic system where we had a satellite dish that sat on top of the grandstand at Pimlico. Barclay Tagg chose to stable Funny Cide on the backside rather than in the traditional stakes barn at Pimlico. My job was to go back and report on Funny Cide, do the walkover from that area, report on Funny Cide, report anything that happened.

We also got rain during that race. Because of the fact that they couldn't get the satellite dish turned around in time to get to the walkover interview with us before the race, that interview never happened.

Then because of the rain, my comms were down completely. So that was a show where if you go back and watch it, you would think I was not in Baltimore, but I assure you I was there the whole time (laughter).

To NBC's credit, I got paid the same.

There have been other times because I'm out there in the field, there's not much protecting my equipment, we have rain, there are certainly times when my team has had to work overtime. When I say 'my team,' I mean my production assistants in the field, trying to make sure my stuff stays dry.

We have lost comms on a few occasions. We have such a great team, they seamlessly pretend like I was never meant to be part of that.

It happens to other people, too. Lindsay as the producer, Mike Tirico as the host, they seamlessly go to something

else, and the viewer never knows we lost communication here or there.

DAN MASONSON: Thanks, everyone, for joining us today. We'll see you this weekend. Have a good day, everybody.

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