

# NBC Sports Group Media Conference

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**Mike Tirico**

**Jerry Bailey**

**Randy Moss**

**Larry Collmus**

**Dan Masonson**

**Donna Brothers**

**Lindsay Schanzer**

Press Conference



get the whole mile and a quarter in, this time around on a personal note.

I mentioned this last year on this call, Randy and Jerry are, I think, underappreciated and underpublicized for being the greatest tandem of commentators on a sport that we've seen in television. It's a big statement, but find me two guys who have been together this long, multiple networks, all the big races, finish each other's sentences, never cheat the viewer -- they're just one-of-a-kind team, and the privilege of sitting next to them is right up there with anybody I've ever worked in television. And I'm blessed they make us all feel so comfortable and welcome with their knowledge. They can carry the entire show by themselves.

One real quick, in case I don't get a chance to mention it here, a public shout-out to Donna. Very rarely do you get to work in TV with people who define a role in sports television, and Donna has done that. It's been a privilege to work with her for the last decade. Hopefully we'll send her off with sunshine and a beautiful Derby day.

And from my seat and our perspective, the immediate reaction to Donna gets race after race and her observations is such a unique part of what we do in television. And she is one of a kind, and somebody will follow her but will not replace her because she's irreplaceable. An honor to be with Donna on this special day for her.

LINDSAY SCHANZER: I'm back. I'm just saying I'm thrilled to be back, and I was going to highlight, we're looking forward to presenting the Kentucky Oaks in prime time this year, 8:00 Eastern on NBC. It's an incredible race that hasn't quite had this platform before. It's going to be a great race this year, great stories to be told. And it will be a privilege to present a little bit of a different look under the lights at Churchill [lost audio].

LARRY COLLMUS: I'm standing on the clubhouse turn where my phone is working, thank goodness, here at Churchill, looking up at the Twin Spires and getting excited to do this for the 16th time. Every year is a new experience. The Derby never gets old. It never gets easy -- 20 horses.

One of the big focuses for me every year is the fact that

DAN MASONSON: Good afternoon, everybody. Thank you for joining today's call. NBC Sports presents the Kentucky Derby for the 26th time this Saturday.

Joining us on today's call, supervising producer Lindsay Schanzer, who is leading the production for the fifth times and it's her 14th Kentucky Derby with NBC Sports; host Mike Tirico, in his 10th Kentucky Derby assignment; analyst, Hall of Fame jockey and two-time Kentucky Derby winner Jerry Bailey; analyst Randy Moss, covering his 46th Derby; Larry Collmus, who calls his record 16th consecutive Kentucky Derby and finally, the only member of NBC Sports on-air team to have worked all 26 Kentucky Derbies, reporter Donna Brothers, who has announced that this is her final Kentucky Derby.

LINDSAY SCHANZER: This is my fifth Kentucky Derby in the producer's chair. My favorite week of the year in racing, incredible venue, incredible races and incredible team I get to work with.

I'll talk about the Derby in a second [lost audio].

MIKE TIRICO: I'm in New York, getting ready for our third playoff game in four nights on NBC and then looking forward to joining Randy, Jerry, everybody who is in Louisville and our entire team behind the camera as well.

I can't believe it's Derby number 10. It's a privilege. I hope to finish this one. I didn't last year. I had an allergy issue, and Ahmed Fareed was incredible jumping in. I'd like to



when they come out of the gate, I want to keep my eye on who the favorite is. I don't know who the favorite is going to be, to be honest with you, this year. I guess we'll find out. It's wide open this year.

I'm also really looking forward to calling the Kentucky Oaks on Friday at night under the lights. I think it's going to be a fantastic experience. Churchill's got some fantastic lights here, and it will make it easy to see, hopefully. Looking forward to a tremendous weekend, and can't wait to do this for the 16th time.

LINDSAY SCHANZER: We're trying this on a new phone. So I'm really hopeful that we can get through it. I'll try to be quick.

But talked about the Oaks. Now to the Derby. Larry Collmus, not a clear-cut favorite, which is a type of race that we love to set up because there's so many horses and there are storylines to tell. We do that. We've got a couple of exciting features that we're looking forward to.

We have a great team that I mentioned. Mike already said so eloquently some great things about Donna, but I'll echo them. We've had such an incredible run with her. And we're looking forward to sending her off in style. But we absolutely will miss her enormously. And just cheers to Donna and the great career she's had.

I want to shout out the return of Zanna Roberts Rassi to our coverage for all the expertise on fashion that you're looking for. And we're very excited to welcome John Fanta to the team this year. He will have the infield covered all day. He's been hard at work tracking down stories. Already talking to people. We've got some great things coming your way from the infield and all the energy that brings.

Those are the main things to pay attention to. We can't wait to see how Oaks and Derby shakes out this year.

JERRY BAILEY: To dovetail off what Mike was saying about the team, we've got the greatest producers, Lindsay Schanzer and Billy Matthews. We've got Amy Zimmerman. Of course, Randy and I, we're joined at the hip.

But I think an example that Mike was talking about, about how we work well together and we have so many years as a team is if the phone cut out twice. Mike picks it right up, never missed a beat. Then Larry picks it right up, never missed a beat. And that's kind of how the show is.

If one of us neglects to say something, you know, goes into a brain freeze, the other one picks it right up. And it's just, the audience really never knows because we prepare so

much together. We know each other's thoughts. We know the material.

And to give you an idea of how popular the Kentucky Derby is in Louisville, Kentucky, Randy and I were heading to the barn area this morning in our golf carts to do reconnaissance and gain information. There was a line before 7:00 a.m. to get in of, what, (indiscernible) people? That's a lot of people. It was unbelievable -- just to watch the horses work out in the morning. That has nothing to do with the races in the afternoons.

So it's not a surprise that the amount of excitement around here and how this event gets bigger and bigger every year. Of course, this year we have the Oaks in prime time, kind of encroaching on my bedtime, but it should be fun and it will be an exciting weekend.

RANDY MOSS: We promise the technology will be more effective on Friday and Saturday in our telecast. Special thanks to Dan Masonson for continually outing me on how many Derbies I've covered. Forty-six, I guess is the count right now. Fortunately, I started when I was 3 years old, so it's not really all that bad.

This is, we tell you this every year, it almost seems like a cliché and it almost seems like we're sort of passing the buck or something when we say, it's a wide-open Derby. This is even wide open by wide-open Derby standards. I mean, we've got six or seven horses that we think have a very, very legitimate chance to win. So that's just going to make the Kentucky Derby even more entertaining than usual.

And nobody wants Mike Tirico to get the full mile and a quarter more than Jerry and I do. We're privileged to be able to sit next to the G.O.A.T. on all these telecasts and we're really looking forward to that opportunity once again, to get the full mile and a quarter this time.

DAN MASONSON: Thanks, Randy. Let's go to Donna.

DONNA BROTHERS: First, I'd like to thank Mike Tirico and Lindsay Schanzer for testing my resolve on not to cry on this last Derby week of mine. So let's get that out of the way early in the week. I appreciate that. Thank you for all the love. It's accepted and received, and thank you.

It's been quite a privilege to do this for the last 26 years with this great team and with everybody we've had over the 26 years.

People keep asking me, what is my favorite moment? And there's no way that I'm going to be able to articulate a favorite moment because there's been so many great

experiences between the post-race Derby interviews, the walkovers, being right there next to people who are getting to experience being at the Kentucky Derby with a horse, a lifelong dream for the first time on that walk-over year after year.

And it brings the magic back to life every year. It never gets stale. The great thing about horse racing, particularly the Kentucky Derby, is every year we get new weather conditions, we get new track conditions, we get a whole new field of horses, we get a bunch of new people that we haven't met, whether it's owners or trainers or breeders, and jockeys, of course, also.

This year, I think we have seven jockeys who have already won the Kentucky Derby, but we also have six jockeys who are making their debut. So it's always something new and something exciting.

Lastly I'd be remiss not to mention Charlsie Cantey. When I was a jockey, I remember watching Charlsie Canty, and I had no aspirations to work in television. I wanted to be a jockey and I wanted to be a great jockey. But the first time I met Charlsie Cantey, I was a bit star struck, and thought oh, gosh, there's Charlsie Canty -- she's the woman on TV who riders look for the rider after the race on the horse. And I was just so impressed with who she was and I never thought I would have the privilege and the honor of being able to follow in her footsteps.

She definitely was the trailblazer for that role, and I was happy to follow in her footsteps. But I wouldn't be able to go out, I don't think, fittingly, without a tribute to Charlsie. And so thank you to this great team, and thank you to Charlsie Canty.

**Q. Lindsay, question for you, assuming you're still on. Obviously, so many toys at your disposal for this race. What are a couple of the cameras or other, you know, technologies that you're super excited for for the Derby this year?**

LINDSAY SCHANZER: Thanks. We're still on. Jerry's phone is better than mine, as it turns out. But yes, we're excited to bring a whole range of cameras and toys to the Derby this year.

We're really kind of just expanding on what we worked in last year. It's worked out really well for us. We have the whole place covered.

Something we introduced last year that we're excited to expand on with even more phones this year is bringing out cell phones to get reactions from as many Derby connections as possible. With a race with 20 horses, they

all have human connections. Any of them could win. And it's our goal to make sure we have eyes on ideally all of them, but as many of the horses as possible to really bringing you that human moment in victory or defeat after the Derby's over.

We have a whole series of phones that we'll send out into the grandstands at Churchill Downs and gather all those reactions.

We have cameras at every location, and several Steadicams to bring you closer to the action.

We have super slow-mo cameras all over, including those that are roving to pick up the flavor, and several static cameras on the finish line, both the turf and the dirt, to make sure we have every look at possible photo finishes so we can adjudicate the races.

**Q. This being your fifth Derby in the chair at the front bench, how has your strategy evolved from that first one to this one, in terms of everything leading up to the big race, because I know it's one of the most unique productions all year in terms of telling the story around the actual event?**

LINDSAY SCHANZER: Great question. I'm not sure my strategy has changed enormously. I'd like to say maybe I've just gotten better at it. But I spend a lot of time talking to our experts, the guys sitting next to me, Jerry and Randy, to make sure that I know what their focus is in terms of the horses and what the stories are.

To give you a little sense of kind of what I do personally to put the show together, I have this very colorful grid of different blocks that kind of identifies each element of the show, whether it's a horse-related conversation at the desk, a fashion hit, an infield hit, something tradition-related -- something food and drink related -- whatever it is. It's kind of an eye chart, but it's a little rainbow smattering of every color in the book that helps me visualize what a five-hour show looks like and get a sense of the balance between lifestyle and more horse-related content.

So I've gotten better, I think, at strategizing how to put all those pieces into play and make sure we're appealing to the very widespread audience that we have that kind of runs the gamut of real horse-racing fans that watch the sport every day of the year, and those that are just showing up for the Derby for the first time.

I'm not sure if that answered your question well or not, but I think generally I've just gotten a little more seasoned.

**Q. Jerry and Donna, this is the first Derby without D. Wayne Lukas. Curious, each of your memories and what do you think sort of D Wayne's legacy is with this race? And how fitting is it to have Todd Fletcher and so many people who worked for him still part of this?**

DONNA BROTHERS: I was out the last three mornings, and I can tell you that it's quite a void to walk by Wayne's barn and not see Wayne's pony sitting out there and know that you're not going to be able to go by Wayne's barn and talk to him about who he likes for this year's Derby and why.

He was a consummate horseman, knew his horses well, but he also knew the competition pretty well also, so it was always nice to go by his barn and pick his brain about who he likes and why. But beyond that, he's just a legend.

I was talking with Bob Baffert this morning about that, and he said that he saw a picture recently at somebody's house, and it was a win picture that Wayne Lucas won the race. And he asked them, do you guys own that horse? And they said, no, our daughter, who is now 19, was one of the kids that Wayne Lucas took into the winner's circle and it was a race that Wayne won, and we were there as fans, and it's one of our cherished memories from going to the track.

And I said Bob, you need to pick up that mantle and do that. Nobody would be offended if you were the one who started taking children into the winner's circle. He said, you know that's not a bad idea.

But we just really don't know how to honor Wayne, and we really don't know how to live without him, but we have to. And it's a bit sad. He was just a beautiful part of our sport, and I don't think we'll ever not miss him.

JERRY BAILEY: I knew Wayne since I was 8 or 10 years old in New Mexico when he was training border horses there. So the relationship went back a long way. But he was very instrumental in my success and my career, not only the Derby winner that he put me on in '96, Grindstone, but countless other stakehorses and winners that helped propel my career forward.

And then as a journalist for the last 20 years, Randy and I made a point to go by his barn every year, whether he had a horse in the Kentucky Derby or not, because he always had, as Donna said, a lot of great insights, not only on his horses but the horses running in the Derby and the Oaks.

And you know, toward the end, the last few years, I kind of had the feeling we never knew, you know, when this would end. So it was always a point to go by and see him.

And, I'll tell you, I told this story before. I rode a horse for Wayne one time, and he finished way up the track. And I swore after the race galloping out there that I would never ride this horse again.

I got back, and I got off the horse, and I talked to Wayne on the way back to the jockey's room. And by the time we got back to the jockey's room, he had to call on the horse for the next race. He was telling me this story of this went wrong and that went -- this horse is better than you think.

He was such a glass-half-full, positive guy. He had me believing this horse was the next coming of Secretariat by the time I got back to the jockeys' quarter. And that's really who Wayne Lucas was -- always Mr. Positive. And I think the game was better off for him.

**Q. Why was this the right time to announce that this would be your last Derby broadcast?**

DONNA BROTHERS: First of all, you haven't made me sideline reporter of the year for a long time, so I thought I might be losing my fastball.

To be honest, it's been 26 years. And it's been such a fun ride and I'm really grateful for every bit of it.

We are talking about horse racing, but because of NBC Sports, I've had the pleasure of going to Geneva, Switzerland and covering show jumping and Aachen, Germany to cover the World Equestrian Games. It's taken me all over the United States. I've covered bull riding and lots of other equestrian sports.

But I turned 60 this year. And 60 felt like a nice round number, and I mentioned Charlsie Canty earlier in the call, and I remember, I think I was 42 when she retired when she was 60. And I thought, why would she retire now? She's still so good. She looks great, blah, blah, blah.

Then by the time I hit 52, I thought, I don't know if I can make it till I'm 60. But I have made it till I'm 60. I feel like it's just time to pass the baton.

When I started covering horse racing for NBC Sports, I had just stopped riding three years prior, so I retired from professional riding in 1998, started working for NBC in 2000. And I don't want to be there so long that all the jockeys on the racetrack are jockeys that never rode with me and didn't know me as a jockey.

Thank God for Mike Smith and John Velazquez still being out there, so I still have some of my old buddies there, but I think it's just time to pass the baton. It's been an awfully

fun ride. But I'm also looking forward to not being in front of the computer for five or six hours a day and doing all the research. And I'm looking forward to being outside an awful lot, whether that's hiking or biking or stand-up paddleboard or golfing, I think it's just the right time for me.

**Q. Jerry, can I have you go back to your riding days a bit? I'm curious, there's such anticipation before big events -- the hundred meters at the Olympics, heavyweight fights back in the day, now the Derby. What goes through the mind of a jockey in those moments right before the race? What were you thinking about as you were coming up to the gate, when you were in the gate, and then when the gates opened.**

JERRY BAILEY: It kind of depends on where you are in the progression of your career. I can remember the first two or three -- actually, the first two Derbies I rode, I had no idea what to expect. So there were no nerves.

Then once I knew what was coming and I thought I had a chance on a horse or two, there was quite a bit of nerves. And toward the last five, six, seven years of my career, there were no nerves at all. There was just really a calm, because I think I came to realize that after so many Derbies that we're responsible for the effort as a jockey, not the outcome.

I can only put the horse in a place that he can win if he's good enough. That's kind of the mindset I had.

But definitely in the middle years there, there are nerves. I'm guessing John Velazquez will be ready, but I don't think he'll be nervous.

He's won three already. Irad Ortiz, he's yet to win. He might have some nerves.

But I think once the gate opens, the nerve goes away, and you just ride it like another race, basically.

**Q. When you say you were nervous, what is going through your mind at that point?**

JERRY BAILEY: Oh, am I going to break well? What if this horse outside me does this? What's going to happen in the first turn? I know the first turn's just like a cavalry charge. All those kind of things.

You really can't -- you can't get ahead of yourself in the Derby. It takes you a few Derbies to figure that out, but you can't get ahead of yourself. You just have to let the race come to you and react to what happens as you go around the track.

**Q. Randy and Jerry, the Triple Crown schedule has been brought up on this call before, and again last year when Sovereignty skipped the Preakness. There's now been talk about moving it to three weeks. But with trainers preferring to give horses more time off, does that even really make a difference in getting more Derby horses to run back? Your thoughts on that?**

LARRY COLLMUS: The answer to that is a resounding no. Three weeks compared to two weeks will barely even move the needle in terms of trainers opting to skip the Preakness Stakes and wait for the Belmont Stakes. We knew that ahead of time. But numerous trainers have told us that who are involved with the Kentucky Derby every year.

So the strategy right now to possibly just move the Preakness to one week, they might as well just leave it alone, if that's all they're going to do. It's going to take at least four weeks and maybe even five weeks between races in a perfect world -- that may be unattainable, the five-week plan.

But the Kentucky Derby, where it is, the Preakness Stakes, Memorial Day weekend, or the first weekend in June, Belmont Stakes, the 4th of July, or the first weekend in July, that seems to be the most workable option. The industry just has to get New York to buy into that.

**Q. Randy, you mentioned it's a wide-open Derby. Can you just give a quick analysis on how you see the race playing out?**

RANDY MOSS: Honestly, you can look at the Florida Derby, with the top three finishers -- Commandment, The Puma and Chief Wallabee. You can look at obviously the Arkansas Derby with Renegade. The Bluegrass Stakes, Further Ado wins by 11 and runs faster than any of these horses have ever run before. Emerging Market might be an emerging star. He won the Louisiana Derby. He's only had two lifetime starts. So Happy, the winner of the Santa Anita Derby. Might be a little short on mile and a quarter pedigree, but he looked good winning on the West Coast.

All those horses would be legitimate selections, would be no surprise whatsoever. It's so evenly matched that here we are on Tuesday, and Jerry and I still have not come to a firm opinion individually on who we think is most likely to win. We're still in reconnaissance mode.

We'll be out in the morning, beating the barns again, talking to a bunch of people, and getting a look at the horses again, and hope for some divine inspiration between now

and Saturday, because it is -- it's almost a cliché, like I said, but this year is even more wide open than usual.

**Q. Curious, the Japanese industry and operation there, what's your impressions so far of their kind of assent as a thoroughbred nation and their chances and desire to win the Derby?**

RANDY MOSS: That's a good question. They almost won the Derby and arguably maybe should have won the Derby a few years ago with Forever Young, who was beaten just two noses despite being herded throughout the length of the stretch. They've also had some decent efforts from some other horses.

Because of the success of Forever Young, not just running third in the Derby, but winning the Breeders' Cup Classic last year, it's really, I think, inspired a lot of the Japanese trainers that, yeah, we can do this. It's certainly not unattainable. Now it seems like they're redoubling their efforts to make sure that there's top Japanese runners in this race every year.

Whether this year will be the year that they break through is questionable. We don't think either of their horses this year in Wonder Dean and Danon Bourbon rise to the level of Forever Young.

But the Japanese racing industry has improved leaps and bounds over the decades. They continue to get better and better and better. And they've won internationally all over the world in major races.

So it's just a matter of time before they break through in the Kentucky Derby and other Triple Crown races.

**Q. With so many viewing options in today's world, could you speak more to the appeal of the Oaks as a prime-time event on a Friday?**

LINDSAY SCHANZER: So many platforms, as you mentioned, for people to pick and choose where they're going to watch TV. But at the end of the day, broadcast is still king, and I think the opportunity to put the Kentucky Oaks in prime time where it will have the biggest audience is of real value.

I think it's going to make the Kentucky Oaks, which is one of the best races on the racing calendar, in front of so many eyeballs and so many people, it's going to be great for Churchill Downs, great for the industry, and it's going to kick off the weekend in a really strong way.

I think it will get people talking about the Derby even beyond the Oaks, maybe a little bit earlier than they might

otherwise have because it's going to put the Twin Spires in front of people. It will put all the pageantry and tradition on display at Churchill Downs on Friday to kick it all off.

I think it will get people excited for Derby Weekend, and it will be a really big moment and a really big race.

MIKE TIRICO: I'll add where what I've been doing the last few nights on the air, the Kentucky Oaks has been promoted during NBA playoff games. That has not happened in the past. And the NBA playoff audiences are obviously better audiences than most of the other prime time offerings in the month of April.

So as you lean into the day before the first Saturday in May, people have a different awareness of the Oaks.

As Lindsay said, for such an elite race to have this kind of time slot, and the build is part of the weekend, it's a great idea to experiment with, see how it works, and see what the future might hold with it. So I think it will add to not just the Oaks itself, but also the entirety of the weekend.

**Q. Larry, everybody's saying that this race is wide open. With that in mind, does this change your preparation in calling the race? And what are the challenges posed by that in actually calling the race?**

LARRY COLLMUS: Yeah, I think it does a little bit. One of the things that I think is most important with preparing for the Kentucky Derby and the race itself, the Derby, is just a different preparation than any other race with the 20-horse field and everything else involved.

But when there are several horses that could be the favorite or figure to be a part of the betting in this race, I think it just gives me more to have to sort of pay attention to.

I mentioned earlier, for the start of the race, my eyes are always -- because there's 20 horses, it's hard to see everything, so my eyes are usually focused on wherever the favorite is leaving the gate.

As of right now, I don't know who that's going to be. It could be Renegade. It could be Further Ado. It could be Commandment. It could be a bunch of horses. I think the wide-openness of the race plays a role for me, but hopefully, you know, for my own sake, it won't be six horses across the track at the finish. We'd like to see it kind of spread apart a little bit just to make life a little bit easier at the end, but it would be exciting if it was that way.

**Q. Jerry, if I can make a quick comment and then ask you a question. Number one, thank you for still**

**singing the praises of the great Phil Georgeff. You're wonderful to remember him. As you know, he was one of the greats of the sadly decimated game up here. Number two, my question, if you were in your riding prime and the benevolent fairy godmother of jockey agenting popped into your room tonight and said you can pick whatever mount you want on Saturday, who would you take and why?**

JERRY BAILEY: Wow, I never had that opportunity before. Thanks for giving it to me now. I guess I would take Further Ado. I am somewhat skeptical that he ran so well in the Bluegrass, that it took some of his energy for this race, even though there's a month in between.

But just because of his past performances, we know he's the fastest horse in the race on a given day. He's got very much tactical speed, which means the jockey can place him anywhere at any moment in the race.

I think he's got more than one move, which is always helpful for a rider. You can improve positions without asking everything from your horse.

So, yeah, that would be -- to me that would be the ideal horse to ride. Quality, the distance is no problem, and placement and being tactical are all part of his toolkit. So that would be a great horse to ride.

**Q. And in any respect does he remind you of Sea Hero or Grindstone?**

JERRY BAILEY: No, those were horses that were dead closers, at least in the Kentucky Derby they were, had to navigate a lot more traffic, needed a lot more luck, actually, so completely different horses and styles.

**Q. I was mentioning and talking about the gen Z view of the Kentucky Derby. I have seen the headlines that the Derby is trying to attract that younger audience. What are you guys doing differently in the coverage this year?**

LINDSAY SCHANZER: I think probably the most standout, not direct appeal to Gen Z, but I think something that will appeal to Gen Z -- and per their response on social media, I'm getting the feeling that it already is -- is our addition of John Fanta. He is a really passionate member of our announce team, and we're going to spend a more significant period of time and more focused period of time in the infield this year, which I think is relevant to that group. It's where the energy is. It's where the youth, for the most part, come to watch the races.

And John Fanta's youthful energy will be the perfect

steward of that part of the Derby conversation. So I think that will be the most clear appeal to Gen Z in this year's show. But whether it's purposeful or not is up for discussion, but I think John will bring his A-game.

DAN MASONSON: Thank you. See you on Friday night at 8:00 for the Oaks and Saturday at 2:30 for the Kentucky Derby.

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