

Breeders' Cup World Championships

Friday, November 5, 2021

Del Mar, California, USA

Del Mar Racetrack

Steven Asmussen

Ron Winchell

Lee Levinson

Press Conference



Q. Congratulations Echo Zulu. Incredible victory in the Breeders' Cup Juvenile Fillies. And congratulations Lee Levinson, Ron Winchell, Steve Asmussen. Steve, we'll start with you first. Undefeated and just really untested. A lot of people had said because of so much speed would she get this extra distance in the two turns? Well, I think she settled that.

STEVEN ASMUSSEN: A very special filly. She means so much to us and the fact that she is the first crop of Gun Runner, everything that he did for us, it's surreal that we're back here at Del Mar for the second Breeders' Cup when his crowning moment was the Breeders' Cup here in 2017.

As you said, the filly, she's just done everything right from the first time and for her to win in such an authoritative fashion in such an excellent time stands for a true champion.

Q. As everybody will be looking forward to next year and to the Kentucky Oaks, a race that you all have had a great deal of success in. How does she stack up with some of your Kentucky Oaks contenders as far as her style?

STEVEN ASMUSSEN: Well, she's hard to compare against any horses at her age right now. I mean, the way that she just won, as fast as she has run, she's extremely rare for anybody.

Q. Ron Winchell, Gun Runner, so special, and this one is his first Grade 1 winner up at Saratoga and now a Breeders' Cup winner at his first crop. It's incredible.

RON WINCHELL: It's something you always dream about when you have a horse like Gun Runner, and first crop

getting a, what will be a champion two-year-old filly. So for us to actually own it and what we did with Gun Runner like Steve was saying it just makes it that much more special. I guess if I would have bred it it would be even better, but we'll settle for what we got right here.

Q. Pretty special indeed. Mr. Levinson, Lee Levinson, L and M Racing and then teaming up with this incredible group here, you have had success in the past, but Echo Zulu, what and incredible filly and bringing you to the world stage like this.

LEE LEVINSON: It's, I was telling Steve here, I can't even believe it and I told him earlier, I said, If something happens to me, I appreciate what you did for me because I'm still in shock. And I'm an attorney. I speak for a living, and I can't talk. (Laughing).

But, no, it's incredible and I just want to say thanks, especially, it is an incredible feeling, but I want to thank Steve and his dad, Keith. That team is hard to beat. And I think Ron would have the same comment. I mean, even though the horse is good, it takes proper handling and knows how to handle it, and I want to thank, beside the man sitting here, his dad's pretty special and I want to thank him.

Q. An incredible year, Steve, and capping off so far, your one win in the Breeders' Cup?

STEVEN ASMUSSEN: I appreciate Ron and Lee saying that, but just we're just very fortunate to be around them. Scott Blasi coming out here, being out here six weeks. We get on her all the time, but just how they feel about her, I just love to see them happy and how rewarded they are. But for them to move to California for six weeks for this opportunity shows their dedication and how much I greatly appreciate that.

Q. Steve, after a powerhouse performance like that, how surprised would you be if Echo Zulu's time winds up being quicker than the one in the Juvenile later today?

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STEVEN ASMUSSEN: I kind of expect it, same as the Frizette and the Champagne, same as she did in the Spinaway to the Hopeful. She has run faster than her male counterparts on the same weekends, not exactly the same days, but the following day, and she seems that way in our barn too. None of the boys want anything to do with her there either.

Q. Ron, because of that, what can you make with Echo Zulu to some of the top fillies over the last decade or two, like an Untapable, like a Rachel Alexandra, horses like that?

RON WINCHELL: I just think it's hard to compare her to any of our previous ones, because she's -- I think Steve said, she seems to be so special, she seems to be in an elite group, obviously Untapable was a top horse, she came in here undefeated, she showed everybody what she's about coming into that race and I think you can't describe that. And what's in store next, we'll see, but we feel real good like she's in a very elite group. I can't compare her to anything previous that we have had, honestly.

Q. Steve, besides being fast, what other similarities are there between this filly and Gun Runner?

STEVEN ASMUSSEN: I think what we've seen today, especially today, is how she carries it, what a fluid mover she is and the middle fractions where Gun Runner just seemed to move so effortlessly and horses didn't stay at the same rate he did, that's how she seems to be in her races. I think that we've noticed it more with the races that stretched out, the middle of the race in The Frizette and the middle of the race here, you could visually see she's doing it like she just started and they're starting to get under pressure to maintain the same pace she has. Listening to Ron talk about how you compare her with other fillies we've had, I think we've had other fillies that became champions, this filly started out that way. And where it ends up, I can't imagine her getting better, we're just trying to maintain the same. But for to us dream that there's a possibility she will move forward, we've been very fortunate, a couple Oaks winners that were very good fillies, they weren't like this at this stage. They developed into it and this filly has started here.

Q. Steve, we always like to keep getting ahead of ourselves, how much in the back of your mind or in the front of your mind are you thinking about possibly taking on males? I know the Derby you now have to race in the qualifying races against males, is that something you're already thinking about or down the line or just where are you at on that?

STEVEN ASMUSSEN: Well, we definitely -- we were focused on this. When she broke her maiden and runs a 92 at Saratoga, four races, championship, three Grade 1's, she's checked all those boxes. At this stage we, we appreciate her, back off, and then come again and then discuss the next plan. But this was the plan and we have not wandered away from it or even had any sort of discussion and we definitely appreciate the results.

Q. Where do you go with her? Where will she be going for the winter?

STEVEN ASMUSSEN: Our Breeders' Cup horses are scheduled to fly back on Wednesday to Kentucky. And I would expect we'll evaluate over the next few days. We're going to, obviously, have smiles on our face walking around here for a couple of days and appreciate it, but they will go, on Wednesday we're scheduled to go back to Kentucky.

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