

Breeders' Cup World Championships

Friday, November 4, 2022

Lexington, Kentucky, USA

Keeneland Racecourse

Mark Casse

Tyler Gaffalione

Jon Green

Press Conference



Juvenile Fillies

THE MODERATOR: We'll get started with Wonder Wheel. Tyler, the trip you had aboard her, quite different from the Alcibiades. And just take us through what happened leaving the gate and your entire trip to the wire.

TYLER GAFFALIONE: Things didn't really go as planned. We wanted to be more forwardly placed. She didn't get away too well. There was a lot of traffic in that first turn -- everyone trying to secure their spots. I kind of got pushed back.

And she settled nicely going into the backside, got into a good rhythm. And spots started opening up when we needed them. She did everything on her own.

THE MODERATOR: That seemed extremely professional for a young filly, for a 2-year-old who hadn't found herself in that position before. And we were watching the replay here. I don't know if you realized how close you were to that inside rail to make that move.

TYLER GAFFALIONE: Most definitely. Coming into the stretch, approaching the quarter pole, I was really close to it but she didn't mind it at all. She's full of heart and such a tremendous filly.

THE MODERATOR: Now you have your first Breeders' Cup win and here at Keeneland, a place where a lot of success, how does that feel.

TYLER GAFFALIONE: It's amazing. It's become my home. I love coming here every year. It's amazing.

THE MODERATOR: You've had a lot of titles here in Kentucky. Now getting that world championship.

TYLER GAFFALIONE: It means the world to me.

THE MODERATOR: Mark, tell us about Wonder Wheel. The Alcibiades win, obviously, here at the track. You've had her here stabled and training for quite a while.

MARK CASSE: I thought it was important, the way it works, we only got to come in about five or six days before the Alcibiades. And I thought she looked fine. I thought she could be better.

I thought her race in the Alcibiades was good, but I knew she would have to be even better. But I think I've told Jon the last couple -- I said I've seen her. This is the best I've ever seen her train.

And I told Tyler before we threw him up, I said you're sitting on a better horse today than you were a month ago.

THE MODERATOR: You've trained some very good horses, very good fillies, and where does she rank among those?

MARK CASSE: I've trained some good older fillies. This summer I was saying she's my next Classic Empire. And where I was putting her, why I was putting her in that category was he won our first 2-year-old Breeders' Cup. And I thought that she was that good. I told anybody who would listen. Today's rewarding.

THE MODERATOR: Jon Green, D.J. Stable, joins us now. I know you and your family, Len, your mom, have put so much into this industry. You're great supporters. And now with a filly like Wonder Wheel, just tell us a little bit just what that means to you and your family.

JON GREEN: It's an incredible feeling, not only to win a race of this caliber at Keeneland, but to do it with these classy gentlemen, Tyler's been phenomenal for us over the past couple of years, Mark has been training for us for three years now, and we've been in the Breeders' Cup every year.

We've had a horse in the Oaks. We've had a horse in the

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Derby. And I think we got our program rolling to the way that we wanted to. But to win a race like this is beyond compare. You just can't even talk about it.

THE MODERATOR: You won this with Jaywalk previously. So this race has been obviously very kind to you.

JON GREEN: Jaywalk won it, again, similar situation, she was third choice, kind of overlooked by a lot of people, which is fine by us; we like being the underdog, we're used to it, quite frankly.

And the difference was Jaywalk went gate to wire. And when this filly broke and everyone else kind of went in front of her, I'll say it for myself, but I was concerned. I was very concerned.

She's a classy filly. She never misses a day of training and she's got a great level head. But you still worry about asking a horse at this level to do something completely new. And that's why we employ somebody like Tyler because he just navigated her right to the rail and through an open hole and the rest is history.

THE MODERATOR: Mark, where do you go with her now?

MARK CASSE: She'll go back to our training center in Ocala. That's where she started. We bought her. Then she went down, we broke her. And we're going to sit and plan on --

JON GREEN: Actually, we're going to supplement her in the Fasig sale since we're right here. We might as well strike while the iron's hot.

MARK CASSE: We'll talk about that. I'm going to talk to Lois.

(Laughter).

So she'll go back there, and we're going to get ready to go and get our Eclipse Award.

Q. Mark, I heard the talk over the summer at Saratoga when you were talking about this filly as a 2-year-old filly. You were gushing with the accolades about her. When you do that, are you kind of going out on a limb?

MARK CASSE: Absolutely. Absolutely. I don't say it very often. So I kind of put a little pressure on myself. There was a few times I said, now why did I do that? And you know me, you've interviewed me a hundred times. I tell you the way I feel. And that's the way I felt. I wasn't holding anything back.

Q. To follow up, what do you think about her now as you go forward?

MARK CASSE: I have to watch the replay, because when we went to the first turn, I was like, oh, boy, this is not good. And I was watching her with my binoculars, and I saw her weaving. I thought it was her, but I wasn't sure.

And I said to my wife, I said, is that her in front? Because I was acting like it was her. I had a camera right on me. I was like, they'll have a lot of fun with that. I have to watch the replay. But 2-year-olds can't do what she did. It's just very difficult to come from out of it. She, on a scale of 1 to 10, 10 being absolute class, she's a 10.

Q. Tyler, your trainer and your owner were concerned. Were you concerned on the first turn there? Did you not have time to be concerned?

TYLER GAFFALIONE: Didn't really have time to think about it. Obviously it wasn't the position we wanted. But you've got to adapt and make the most of it. Like I said, she was there for me.

Q. When Mark told you that this is a better filly than you rode a month ago, and you won the great Alcibiades a month ago. What were you thinking?

TYLER GAFFALIONE: I was thrilled to hear that. I have been on this filly since I first sat on her. She broke her maiden and she's been all class since then. Last race, I believe I said in the post race interview, that she kind of got lost, was looking around quite a bit. And today she was all focus.

MARK CASSE: I've got to tell you a quick little story. This is what he thinks of her. So there was some issues -- he had previously got booked. He was going to ride at Kentucky Downs. So he wasn't going to get to ride her in the Spinaway.

As it turned out, two things happened. I had named Johnny Velazquez on, and they canceled that Kentucky Downs. He called and said, I'll come back, I'll ride her for free. I don't care. I just want to ride her. And I said, if you clear it with Johnny -- and so two things happened there.

That shows you how much he loved her and how classy Johnny Velazquez was. He got off to let him ride.

Q. This is way premature, but, Mark, you're not afraid to run fillies against boys. Only a few months to nominate the Triple Crown.

MARK CASSE: I'm sure we'll be nominating, if that's your question. Yeah, you know me.

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