

Breeders' Cup World Championships

Saturday, November 2, 2024

Del Mar, California, USA

Del Mar Fairgrounds

Drayden Van Dyke

Mark Cornett

Mark Martinez

Press Conference



THE MODERATOR: Congratulations Soul of an Angel. What a fantastic race.

I will start at the end with Drayden. Welcome back to Delmar. Homecoming for you. Tell us about the start of the race. Didn't look like things got away as well as they could.

DRAYDEN VAN DYKE: The start of the race was good. She's just not as fast as those other horses. Kind of a replay of the Princess Rooney. I just had to stay after her and believe in her. Kept her covered up.

When it was time to get moving, tip her out, get going.

THE MODERATOR: When you did, kind of seeing what was unfolding in front of you, did you think they were going pretty quick, that things could fall to your favor?

DRAYDEN VAN DYKE: Yeah, the pace felt quick. But I just trusted in her so much. She was giving it to me when I was asking her. I just keeping in close contact as I could. She did the rest. I just had to keep her straight and get her to the wire.

THE MODERATOR: Saffie, congratulations on your first Breeders' Cup win. This filly, kind of an outlier. This is her 10th start this year. How did you decide about taking her back from the two turns? Were you pointing for a race like this with her?

SAFFIE JOSEPH JR.: Yeah, start off with Mark. They wanted to buy her, trying to buy her. They didn't get it done at first. Mark was persistent. Very good at persistent getting these kind of horses. He said we're buying a one-turn horse. She won the Ruffian. Was kind of a surprise. Didn't expect to win the Ruffian. There's nothing

for these fillies unless you go seven-eighths. We stayed the two-turn route all the way through.

We went to the race, Monmouth, almost hoping that if she didn't run good, we'd have a reason to cut her back for sure. She ran a nose behind Idiomatic. Hard to cut her back after that. Saratoga, ran a lackluster third. Owner group talked it over, give her a try in the Princess Rooney.

After the first race, I was watching the race with Clint. I said she was going to get pulled up. She was that far behind. The rest was history.

Today I thought she would show a little more speed today. After the first quarter I felt good. Before the first split, I was very concerned. After that I thought we had a shot.

THE MODERATOR: Mark Cornett, partners, Mark Martinez. What went into the partnership, the purchase of this filly and your thoughts on that.

MARK CORNETT: We actually had a horse run in Royal Delta at Gulfstream, first time she caught our eye in the paddock. I noticed how beautiful a filly this was. She ran good, nice second that day. I tried to buy her after that race, couldn't get it done. They ran here in the Azeri Stakes, ran her there. I think she ran fifth. Got a deal struck with her there.

We just changed a few things up. We sent her to Palmetto to Saffie, wanted to give her a little freshening. They'd been running her every three or four weeks a year, shipping her across the country at the same time. Freshened her up there. I think she liked that.

Mark and I actually went back in her past performances. There was a race, one-turn mile race at Gulfstream that really caught our eye. That was really the only time they had run here in our opinion was the right distance, the right one-turn race. We thought she did something special that day. That's when we bought her, so...

THE MODERATOR: Mark Martinez, the same question. Being here, Breeders' Cup champion now with a filly like this, what does that mean to your partnership and these

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connections?

MARK MARTINEZ: My first Breeders' Cup win. It means a heck of a lot. I've known Mark. You asked a question how did the partnership get together. I've known Mark for, what, 20 years maybe. We kind of started. I would like to say he has a great eye for a horse. He does a fabulous job of managing them. We kind of share a common philosophy. That makes partnership easy.

We turned it over to Saffie and Drayden. Thankfully the race wasn't a quarter of a mile. It's seven-eighths. That's all we needed. It's an incredible experience. I've been in the game quite a while. This is special.

I would like to add I have my wife, her sister and husband with her.

THE MODERATOR: We'll open it up to the press for any questions. Anybody?

Q. Drayden, with your history at Del Mar, what does it mean to come back here and win this race back in California and at that track in particular?

DRAYDEN VAN DYKE: This is my favorite racetrack to be at. It's special to me. I won two riding titles here. I won seven in one day here, so this place is special to me.

To get a Breeders' Cup here is icing on the cake.

Q. Saffie, we've seen you emotional at the end of the race. What is your first remember of a Breeders' Cup? What it means for you now to win, a winner of Breeders' Cup?

SAFFIE JOSEPH JR.: I mean, it means everything. Best of the world horses come together, gather together. To win your first one is special. You kind of went it off the list because it gets attention and owners to get better horses. Mark and Clint, they've been big supporters of us.

I think what we went through last year, the biggest thing they ever did for me was giving me a way of buying her back. I mean, I understand why he had to move, I respected that.

Giving me back, I was never going to ask for him back. Mark called me one day and asked me if I wanted him back. I think that helped me heal a bit to give me that confidence, they had that kind of confidence in me. Thank God.

They were good enough to leave Drayden under the horse. He won the Princess Rooney. It was always set in stone

we wanted to keep him on. We just wanted to weigh all our options. Look at Drayden. I reached out him earlier this year to come over to Gulfstream. We needed a rider. He said he wasn't doing well. Come and give us a try.

Almost God's guidance. I met Drayden's dad in a golf cart ride. Had a little conversation with him. Drayden's dad passed away shortly after. It means a lot for me. They've given me the opportunity. I feel like I've given Drayden, and the rest is history. Thank God.

Q. Drayden, you took some time off last year to deal with some off-the-track issues. Can you reflect on the past years, the ups and downs of your career.

DRAYDEN VAN DYKE: I've learned a lot. It's how this game is. You're not always on top. Rare few guys stay on top. There's a lot of ups and downs. You got to get out of 'em. You always need support from some people. You got to be given opportunities. I'm super thankful for what Saffie has done for me.

But the time I took off, I just personally felt I needed it. I've been going non-stop since I was 18. I lost my father at 18. I just kept going, kept going, kept going. I never took time to really mourn and process everything. I took the time off for myself, you know?

When I felt ready to get back, and my mind was good, I was going to come back. So that's what I did.

Q. Drayden, you talk about the faith that you have in this filly. Can you describe what that connection is and what kind of signals she might give you during the course of a race?

DRAYDEN VAN DYKE: Only the second time I threw a leg over her. I don't know her that well. The way she looked and seeing the videos on Twitter and stuff, how she was getting over the track, I loved my chances.

I believe 100% in Saffie and the connections. The rest is history. I trusted in her. My main thing was to keep her in contention the best I could. I thought I would be a little closer, but we weren't.

Hey, we passed the wire in front. That's all that matters.

THE MODERATOR: We heard you out there say you were ready for some celebration. Congratulations, Soul of an Angel. Thank you.

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