

Breeders' Cup World Championships

Saturday, November 1, 2025

Del Mar, California, USA

Del Mar Fairgrounds

Turf

Willie Mullins

Michael Heffernan

Andrew Heffernan

Press Conference



really -- the tactics are a key part to him, and Dylan being the guy he is, he's very cool, and he executed it perfectly.

He didn't worry that he thought he might have been a bit out of his ground, I thought he might have been, but he told me the whole time he was happy with how the horse was underneath him.

THE MODERATOR: Could you just elaborate on what those tactics were, please.

WILLIE MULLINS: The first time I brought him to Royal Ascot, he had a similar draw, he was wide on the outside, and he just broke so fast. He was too free.

So now we just try and temper his early speed, which is a bit contradictory. Normally the Irish horses coming to America, we gun them up to try to get out of the stalls quick. We were doing the opposite with this fellow. We put a hood on him to slow him down.

When Dylan jumped out, he just wheeled him across and behind and just got him relaxed and got him spitting out the bit. That worked for our better, and it does work, as we can see. He's just improving now that we have refined the tactics.

THE MODERATOR: Michael and Andrew respectively, if you can just give your reactions to winning a big race like this.

MICHAEL HEFFERNAN: Coming here, we didn't think anything of winning it, first of all. Just the experience just being here in general would be amazing. Now that we've won it and conquered the Breeders' Cup, it's something very special to all of us.

ANDREW HEFFERNAN: It's really special. It's a privilege to be invited over in the first place. To have a horse of this caliber who can go up against those big, strong powerhouses, it's just fantastic. It's starting to kind of set in now what just happened, yeah.

THE MODERATOR: It happened.

THE MODERATOR: Down in the post-race press conference now. Unfortunately, Dylan McMonagle has a flight to catch and could not join us. We are happy to be joined by Willie Mullins in the center, flanked by on the left Michael Heffernan and on the left Andrew Heffernan, all associated with Ethical Diamond.

Willie, let's start with you. It's not often we see you here, certainly not in the Breeders' Cup. What was it about this horse where you said let's give it a go?

WILLIE MULLINS: We were trying to go to Melbourne, and then HOS Syndicate has Absurde going to the Melbourne Cup. We wanted to find a different route. Just with his medical history, they wouldn't allow him into Melbourne. That's the real reason. So we had to find a different plan.

My assistant trainer, David Casey, came up with this plan. He said let's go for the Breeders' Cup. I thought why not? We're not going to try to win it. We'll come over here to finish 5 or 6 hopefully.

When I saw the entries and our draw at 14, I said maybe 6 or 7th or 8th. Then when Aidan's horse won from 14 yesterday, that gave me a little bit more confidence that it can be done. If you can do it over a mile, mile and a half, it should be easy.

We discussed it with Dylan, discussed it with how we would ride the horse last week. Discussed it with him again while he was weighing out. And we came up with a plan that he executed. To me, it was the only plan.

He can be a very difficult ride. Now that we have figured out the best tactic for him, it's turned him inside out, so he's

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WILLIE MULLINS: I don't know whether you guys are aware how the HOS Syndicate came about. These guys' grandparents, grandmother and grandfather, Andrew and Margaret Heffernan, rang me up one day and said, Willie, I want you to get me a horse or two for my grandchildren. I only meet them at funerals and weddings, and none of the little feckers are getting married anymore, and I don't want to meet them at my funeral. She said, I want an excuse to go to big meetings, to bring all my grandchildren to the race meeting.

A big thank you to Andrew and Margaret from all of us, I would imagine. It's special to have grandparents like that.

Q. Willie, you may not know, you've won and you're into the Dubai Sheema Classic. Might you continue the overseas journey with this horse and head to the Middle East?

WILLIE MULLINS: Definitely. We'll look at -- I'm not sure when it is, but it would now be on the top of our priority list. We were actually wondering where we were going to go -- Dubai, Saudi Arabia, Bahrain. We just thought this is a horse that can travel. He can go on good to firm ground no problem. So we were looking at all those options. That sounds a wonderful option.

Q. March the 28th.

WILLIE MULLINS: I'll be home from Cheltenham.

Q. Willie, was it a completely different experience today? Just say, when you've had favorites for the Gold Cup at Cheltenham and Champion Hurdles and big races, that's a different kind of pressure, I would imagine, because there's expectation. Did you feel light shoulders today because the horse, you only expected him to finish 6 or 7? Was it a different experience watching the race for you?

WILLIE MULLINS: Totally. There wasn't pressure. We all knew coming out we couldn't finish in the first three. We were hoping, as I said earlier, finish in the first six. Then when we saw the draw, we said, wow, it will be trouble to get in the first six.

There was no pressure. My only pressure was that we wouldn't be tailed off and make a holy show of ourselves. Certainly the first furlong or two, I said holy geez, is this going to happen?

But then I could see Dylan just -- he wasn't panicking where he was, even though he was a bit off the field. I love it when jockeys don't panic. He just rides with such

confidence. He's got that big C.

I said, you know, he passed one, he passed two, and I said, he still hasn't budged on this horse. Then I thought he's come four wide or five wide around the bend. I thought, oh, God, is he going to use up his petrol just coming wide?

But he told me after the race, he said, he had so much petrol, he'd better go. When he got into the straight, I could see the minute they straightened up, the speed he was going compared to the frontrunners, and I thought this is on.

Next thing, when he hit the front, like, I very rarely celebrate before the line, but I think I was celebrating, which is unlike me, but it's pretty unlike me to have a winner in the Breeders' Cup.

Q. Can you take a step back and kind of put it in perspective, as American horse racing fans, they don't know you, like the folks in this line do and the accomplishments you've had in England and Ireland. Can you take a step back as an individual racing man, and just think Gold Cups, Grand National, Breeders' Cup. What's that mean to you now?

WILLIE MULLINS: That's just off the scope. You had the marathon race here, and you finished up with it, and I thought, if I was ever to win a Breeders' Cup, it might be that race.

This was just completely unexpected. It was only a very last-minute plan after winning the Ebor, when we knew we couldn't get down to Australia with him, and we thought let's have a go at this race.

David Casey, my assistant, came up with the plan. He said, look, the mile and a half there, he's good enough to run it and take a shot. You can't win these races unless you're in them. That's always been my policy, have a go.

Q. Any other upcoming hurdlers that you might shift to the flat in 12 months and surprise us?

WILLIE MULLINS: We have a few, but I can't tell you.

Q. Let me ask you, what role did hurdle races play in this horse's development?

WILLIE MULLINS: He's a very keen horse, and I often find jumping settles them down and teaches them not to over race.

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going to see me with today.

I met Josh in Chantilly after the Prix de l'Arc, and I introduced him to Armagnac, and he introduced me to the Breeders' Cup. So it's a bit of his fault as well. We've got bourbon here. He made me drink one already. He said I wasn't allowed in here unless I had one. So I had a quick shot.

But I think it settles them down and teaches them to relax in the race whereas a lot of flat racing horses, they're taught to run over 6, 7 furlongs, a mile, and they're out and gone. This fellow was losing his races doing that early on. He wanted to go all the time. Hurdles just make him think. Now he jumps out and he's way waiting for a hurdle to come out on the track. Halfway down, he goes, oh, okay, this isn't a hurdle race.

We have a hood on him as well. It's all about settling him down. That's the jockey's job as well. It's a huge improvement. The breeder, who's not here today, when he sold him to me -- well, I didn't exactly rob him at the price that we paid, but he was worried could I get him some black type? Maybe placed on the list, and I promised him I would. I think we overdelivered, but I'm sure he'd be delighted.

Q. Anytime you win a race like this at 25-to-1, I know it's a surprise, but the feeling of surprise and accomplishment when you beat a field this good, when you have the l'Arc runner-up, two-time Breeders' Cup winner?

WILLIE MULLINS: That is huge. To train a horse that is 25-to-1 and to win unexpectedly at a big festival like this, they're the fun ones. You win the ones when you're favored and money on, they're not fun. They're just relief. So I'm really enjoying this. This is fun against the head, against the odds. What a race to win.

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