

# 150th Preakness Stakes Media Conference

Saturday, May 17, 2025

Baltimore, Maryland, USA

Pimlico Race Course

**Michael McCarthy**

**Bob Baffert**

**Umberto Rispoli**

**Aron Wellman**

Media Conference

THE MODERATOR: We'll get started. I feel like Michael really wants to talk first. He's smiling. Michael McCarthy, congratulations! I don't know if you know, Michael McCarthy is a perfect two for two now. I would love your overall thoughts right now.

MICHAEL McCARTHY: I got a little bit anxious there obviously in the post parade. He was on his toes a little bit. Something had got him a little bit irritated. We were having a hard time getting the halter off him. I'm glad he was amenable to getting away from the crowd and getting over to the back side and being able to warm up a little bit.

First time by the stands he flopped over in his left lead, was in a little bit tight up the backside. I thought he was traveling okay coming to the half-mile pole. It didn't seem to me like he was traveling when he was traveling in the Kentucky Derby.

Umberto, all credit to him, he chose to save ground. That's what it takes to win these races like this. Found himself in a little bit of a conundrum there for six or eight jumps. Thankful he and the horses came out of it unscathed. That's the important thing, win, lose, or draw.

Wonderful effort by a wonderful group of people. As I said before, my guys that helped me do this, my assistants, my grooms, my riders, my hot walkers, I couldn't do this without them. Aron and Stella are floating around here somewhere. I'm sure you saw. I can't do it without them either once I drive out the stable gate. And this ownership group and everybody here today, appreciate their patience and their support. Big deal for me. (Applause).

THE MODERATOR: I think stall 40 gets to be the Journalism stall now. It's not the Derby stall, it's the



Journalism stall. Anybody who watched the Alibi Breakfast knows that.

**Q. Michael, what does it mean winning the last Preakness at Old Hilltop?**

MICHAEL McCARTHY: It's a little bit strange. I actually won the last El Camino Real Derby at Golden Gate Fields. Not sure if there's a pattern there or not. (Laughter).

A lot of history here. Of all the good horses who have run through the lane here, I think one of the things that really got it started for me was Sunday Silence and Easy Goer. I remember where I was watching that race that day.

Things kind of come full circle. Will be sad to see this place go, but we'll try to get back here next year, whichever locale it's at.

**Q. For Umberto, could you take us through the stretch run, how you saw it?**

UMBERTO RISPOLI: Well, going on the backside, passing -- he wasn't traveling like he did travel in the Derby, and at that point you think two things: You have no horse or just too relaxed. I think the second was the option, because as soon as I gave a smack on the shoulder he said, okay, I know what I got to do.

At that point, I was trying to go outside and follow River Thames but I had been suggested from some top world class riders, some Hall of Fame riders United States, you win this race saving ground, and I would say thank you to Jerry Bailey for the big tips (Laughter).

Going to the turn, I believe Clever Again would go at least at the eight pole. At the quarter pole he gets stopped and obviously Gosger was the first one have the jump on him. We didn't went that fast. The pace was just slow and Flavien had some trouble to come out of there having American Promise outside of him. He couldn't get rid of him soon.

Look, going the elbow, a little gap was opened and I say, it's now or never. So it's horse racing. It's a nice battle for

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the sport. Everbody come out safe. I'm sorry about Jose, and I had to give a shout to Flavien right away.

From that standpoint from where I was when I looked up, Luis opened up four lanes ahead of me, and the first time I use the crop on him, he switch his lead and, boom, he took off.

So more it was going close to the wire, more I was looking. I said at the 16th pole, I said, okay, I'm going to be lead but probably be on time. So I have to give credit to the horse, because I didn't see many horses, probably was Afleet Alex that he did that, but he almost -- Jeremy Rose almost fell off from the horse and that was for me probably the most spectacular Preakness I ever have seen.

Coming back after two weeks from a tough trip in the Derby and running against the track, it was an amazing effort. I wish I would have given him a softer race, but this is a part of horse racing, and we're here celebrating this. (Applause)

THE MODERATOR: I have a question from upstairs. Michael, this question was for you. Walk us through when you got into trouble and then what you thought.

MICHAEL MCCARTHY: It was basically more or less kind of what I thought coming to the 16th pole in the Kentucky Derby when I saw Sovereignty coming to us. I thought it was just another fantastic effort. Couple things didn't work out well for us Derby Saturday, but this here was a little bit more drastic than just losing some ground at the start and having to deal with an off going on a muddy racetrack. This looked a little bit ugly there for a couple of jumps.

As I said, I'm just glad that horses and humans are okay. But my initial thought was proud of the horse. Great effort. Just going to come up a little bit short.

THE MODERATOR: I have a followup question. Go ahead. What's it say about Journalism, the fact that he can do what he just did with a two-week turnaround?

MICHAEL MCCARTHY: I think it says a lot about him. I think it's basically he has validated what we have thought about him all along. This summer he was getting ready a little bit faster than your average two-year-old. We had to stop on him for some little aches and pains. When things got rolling, he was able to go ahead, annex three races in seven weeks, culminating with the Los Alamitos Future. I started thinking something like this. You certainly need the vehicle and we had it with him.

THE MODERATOR: Umberto, you're the first rider from Italy to have won a Triple Crown race. What does that

mean? (Cheers and applause).

UMBERTO RISPOLI: Actually, it was something I didn't even thought. Having Frankie as my idol, you always thought you couldn't do anything Frankie ever done. Zio, if you ever listen to me I think you have to ride a couple more years to get one of the Triple Crown to equal me.

No, I mean, it's a privilege. When I cross the wire, it looks like a flash of 20 years of my career went to my head, and it's even difficult to describe the feeling when you cross the wire on those races.

You just dream about that and my wife knows how painful I am when I'm losing a race, so she definitely wouldn't sleep... I would have to sleep somewhere else if I lost this race tonight, so.

But listen, I'm proud of this and for my country, races don't go very well, but I'm glad I keep my flags up and I wish everybody over there is proud of me. Thank you. (Applause).

THE MODERATOR: Having beaten the favorite -- (inaudible). Wouldn't be brave enough to come back to the Preakness. What went into that decision?

ARON WELLMAN: Yeah, look, it always starts with the horse first. I just think that this victory symbolizes so much about life. It took guts for Michael McCarthy to make this call to come here. It took guts for Umberto Rispoli to get sideswiped and threading the needle and power on through and it took guts from an incredible horse to somehow will his way to victory.

There are so many people to thank. It starts with Don, John Isaacs, Malone who have put so much into this game to deserve another classic win. Bob LaPenta. You see a guy... just how much it means, you know.

BOB BAFFERT: You know, this was a tough couple of weeks. We thought we had the best horse in the Derby and we did. A number of people text me and the consensus, remaining nameless was, hey, you guys took almost two weeks to decide you wanted to run this horse, so obviously there was a lot of concern.

Number two, do you know how many horses came in the second in the last eight or nine years won the Preakness? One. They said, so what are you guys thinking about? And I said look, Mike McCarthy is an incredible trainer. My team, my partners, we're not going to enter to this horse unless we think he can win.

And Umberto, I'm going to drink a couple of bottles of wine



tonight. (Cheers and applause) We upset all the apple carts. They said he doesn't deserve to be 6 of 5. A lot of people picked him for third, and I said, thank God.

THE MODERATOR: Anybody else in here have a question?

**Q. Congratulations for the team. My question, in my language, in Espanol. (Speaking in Spanish) Umberto speaks Spanish, Italian, Spanish, French, no? I prefer a short response because all the people don't know Spanish. (Speaking in Spanish)**

THE MODERATOR: I think he said he was very happy. Umberto, please.

UMBERTO RISPOLI: Michael and I want to say thank you. (Speaking in Spanish) (Applause)

**Q. Michael, I know a lot of trainers talk about the close quarters in the barns. What are you going to miss most about this place?**

MICHAEL McCARTHY: I have been here three times; I have won two Classics. The third time I came here, I got my tail whipped. We won't think about that.

But like I said, my start in racing as a fan, I think back to Sunday Silence, Easy Goer, all the great horses, all the great racers who have come through this place. I think of a lot of people I have come in contact with throughout my professional tenure.

Cot Campbell was fortunate enough to win a Preakness.

**Q. And they were second in the Derby and came back and won the Preakness. History repeats itself.**

MICHAEL McCARTHY: Exactly. Very proud to be part of this special fraternity. I will miss seeing that weather vane up there for sure. Sad to see it go, but we'll look forward to next year.

**Q. First of all, congratulations to all, Michael, Umberto... (inaudible). My question is this is the next one that is going to ask. Thoughts about the Belmont Stakes... (Laughter).**

THE MODERATOR: The question is what are your thoughts about Belmont? Who is going to answer that question?

ARON WELLMAN: Look, he ran a very taxing race in the Kentucky Derby under very difficult circumstances. He came back today and defied logic. Doing what he did it

was a very physical effort.

As I said before, and as will always be, the horse will come first. We'll evaluate him. Michael's going to stay here for a couple of days, assess his energy level, his appetite.

We would love to go. I think this ownership group, Eclipse on down has made it very clear we take this very seriously and we want to be good ambassadors for the industry and the sport at large.

If this horse is in good shape, we'll certainly keep it under consideration but we have two-plus weeks to determine that and we'll take all the time we need. We feel very fortunate to be in the position we're in and if Michael gives him the green light, we'll be there. If not, we've got a hell of a second half of the season to look forward to, so super proud of this horse. He proved that he's a true classic competitor today.

THE MODERATOR: Anything else from upstairs? Anything else from the room?

**Q. Aron, you talked about (inaudible)...**

MICHAEL McCARTHY: I thought in the Santa Anita Derby, albeit in a five-horse field I thought he overcame a lot, down and tight, down on the fence...

Look, What happened today is almost surreal. You don't see that happen. I don't know. It's hard to explain. That's a --

BOB BAFFERT: He's a warrior.

MICHAEL McCARTHY: Yeah, I think he showed today he's a gift from above.

THE MODERATOR: Michael, a lot of horses show immaturity and you say I can see a lot of room for growth he's just such a professional, how do you still know that there's growth in there when he acts like such a pro all the time?

MICHAEL McCARTHY: I think there's so many things that go into this, but him as an individual, you see what he's like. He's big without being too big. He's a wonderfully made horse. His mind is probably his best asset. He's bred top and bottom to run all day long. He has the physical likeness to Curlin, he has the athleticism of Uncle Mo, Mopatism, his dam, obviously very effective at two turns mile and beyond, so I could go on and on here about this horse and how it's blue skies ahead for him.

THE MODERATOR: Anybody else in the room? No?

Congratulations, guys.

MICHAEL McCARTHY: Thank you.

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