

Pegasus World Cup Invitational

Saturday, January 29, 2022
Hallandale Beach, Florida, USA
Gulfstream Park

Todd Pletcher
Irad Ortiz Jr.
Kenny Troutt
Elliott Walden
Robert Low
Jacob West
Media Conference

ACACIA COURTNEY: Hello, everyone. Welcome to the press conference following the Pegasus World Cup dirt and turf races. I'm your host Acacia Courtney. Really pleased to be joined by the connections of both of today's marquee races. We'll be joined by winning jockey Irad Ortiz momentarily. Don't worry, he won both of them. So he'll be able to speak, as did winning trainer Todd Pletcher.

With us from WinStar Farm Elliott Walden and Kenny Troutt. Winning trainer Todd Pletcher, trainer of Colonel Liam and Life is Good. And we have Mr. Robert Low with us as the owner, and Jacob West, racing manager for Mr. And Mrs. Low.

Todd, we'll start with you in the center, the man of the hour, of the day. Trainer of both -- certainly worthy of applause.

(Applause.)

Winning trainer Todd Pletcher, trainer of both Colonel Liam and Life is Good. Todd, first of all, the performance we just saw from Life is Good, that's not something you see every day. What were your take-aways?

TODD PLETCHER: He's just a phenomenally talented horse. We see it every day from him. Every time we breeze him, he's extra special. He has that unique ability to go really fast and just keep going.

Sometimes people ask what makes a good horse, and you say something like that, that seems to be basic and simple, but it really is just that unique ability to continue to throw



down those kind of fractions and seemingly do it so effortlessly.

ACACIA COURTNEY: When he got to the lead, and you could see right away that Irad Ortiz was keen on getting him to the front, did that give you confidence when he secured it pretty easily?

TODD PLETCHER: Yeah, it really did. We ran so many scenarios through our heads on how it could unfold. Ultimately, Elliott and I have been talking about it the last couple days. Really it was a rider's race. Irad just had to make some split second decisions.

We were committed to allowing Life is Good to run his race. There was a risk that, if Knicks Go and he got into a speed duel, that something had to give. But in this case today, he was just -- he was too fast and too good, and it's just a really special performance and fun to watch.

ACACIA COURTNEY: You had mentioned to me the other day that, if we saw a big performance from him, the Dubai World Cup could potentially be on the table. I know it's very shortly after, but do you think that could potentially still be the plans?

TODD PLETCHER: Obviously, we're going to see how he comes out of the race, and we'll talk to Elliott and Mr. Troutt and the guys at CHC and everyone and just -- you know, we're in no rush to make a decision, but we do feel like this horse is talented enough to do just about anything, and that includes getting a mile and a quarter.

ACACIA COURTNEY: We'll stick with team Life is Good, WinStar Farm CEO Elliott Walden. Elliott, you had described him as a rare talent. Talk about the emotions today.

ELLIOTT WALDEN: It's just great to see him do it around two turns like that against a very high class horse, Horse of the Year in Knicks Go. To take on the champ like that and to kind of beat him at his own game, it just shows how brilliant Life is Good is.

ACACIA COURTNEY: Huge performance today. I know



that there have, of course, been some hiccups on the road, some time off. How validating and how exciting for his potential future?

ELLIOTT WALDEN: It is. And you know, got to give a hand to the guys at the farm for bringing him back. We have a great rehab and training center, and he came back and then went to Todd first part of the end of June, first part of July, and was able to run in the Jerkens and run well. From there, it's just been going well.

Todd's done a great job. Todd and the whole team there just treat him with kid gloves but also have brought him along physically and mentally. He's grown mentally. He's not as tough a horse as he was when Todd first got him, and he's done a great job with him.

ACACIA COURTNEY: We'll pass the microphone now, if possible, to WinStar Farm owner Kenny Troutt. Kenny, tell me a little bit about what this horse has meant in bearing the WinStar colors and of course the partnership with China Horse Club.

KENNY TROUTT: What it's done for us?

ACACIA COURTNEY: Yes.

KENNY TROUTT: It's just been a blessing. God has really, really helped us. Yeah, this horse here has just been really special. My family's here today and all real excited about it and everything. So it's just been really special.

This horse is really one of the best horses we've ever had. He's just got all the talent there is, and how he did today, you know being off a long time and coming back, and boom. So it's been a blessing.

ACACIA COURTNEY: How excited are you for the rest of this year and being able to kick off 2022 with a win like this?

KENNY TROUTT: Well, real excited about it now. I mean, even more excited than I was before going in today (laughter). So, yeah, we'll be looking at different races and finding some special ones for him and everything. So it's going to be a lot of fun and a real blessing.

ACACIA COURTNEY: Big congratulations to you all and the entire team. We're joined now by winning rider Irad Ortiz Jr., the man of the hour as well. Irad, I want to ask you about the beginning of the race, and we'll talk about both horses, starting with Life is Good. I saw him kind of leap up a little bit. You took a look to your inside. Talk to me about the first few strides out of the gate.

IRAD ORTIZ JR.: Well, the plan was to break good, and we had a clean break. Going into the first turn, my heart was going really a little fast, but the right when I look inside, I see -- Knicks Go obviously was the other horse to win, and he was inside. I just stay a little off the rail, and the horse came back to me.

I never thought I was going to be in front like that. The problem was to sit second or maybe on the lead but close to Knicks Go. When I look around, I don't see nobody, just go on. And the trainer told me use your judgment. He's in the lead, and so that's what I did.

But he bring the horse ready, honestly. Todd do a great job. He does the race. Honestly, I just sit on it.

ACACIA COURTNEY: He seems to do everything so easily. Were you just feeling like you had so much underneath of you, it seemed, throughout every step?

IRAD ORTIZ JR.: Honestly, on the back side he relax so well, he come back to me. I can't wait to let him run, honestly. I know I have some horse, so I say, man, I want to go. I know it's early. It's going a little fast, but he's going the right way. So I was pretty confident.

ACACIA COURTNEY: You were sidelined with an injury. How validating is it for you coming back? How emotional? We saw some emotion from you earlier today to have these wins with Life is Good and Colonel Liam.

IRAD ORTIZ JR.: Thank God, first of all. Thank God for my health. A couple doctors told me I could make it. My friend Dr. Rafael Lopez, he always stay positive and tell me you can do it. Don't put pressure on yourself and just work on it, and that's what I did.

Thanks to the trainer. Thanks to the owner Elliott to wait for me and give me the chance and believe in me. Thank to my agent too, Steve Rushing. Thanks Robert Low. Thanks everyone who wait for me for ride this week, honestly.

ACACIA COURTNEY: It certainly paid off. We spoke about Colonel Liam's win. You played a big piece in working him and bringing him back. Talk about the performance today.

IRAD ORTIZ JR.: He don't lose a step. He come back where he left, honestly. He's healthy. He feel ready. He's strong. Trainer, again, he's done a great job with him bringing him back from layoff. He run like he never left. He do everything right. He broke good.

When I ask him to run, I ask him a little early, I know that. But I just trust the trainer, and I just go on, and he responded really well.

ACACIA COURTNEY: We'll bring in Mr. Robert Low to the outside here, winning owner of Colonel Liam, defending his title this year in the Pegasus World Cup Turf and off of a layoff since June. How special? Can you put that into words?

ROBERT LOW: Very special. I've got to thank my good friend Mike Repole, who had the horse way on the outside, the speed horse. I don't know if Mike's in here this evening, but I thank you for going out and setting that hot pace for us to run into. That was just great. That was the perfect setup for us.

We had a great horse and a great job from Todd training him and preparing him for this race. Very thankful for that. And we're also thankful that Irad is healthy. Lawana and I were praying for his health, as you turn to the track every night, and we got him back. So it's all good.

(Applause.)

ACACIA COURTNEY: And one more question for you, Mr. Low. Colonel Liam, he was a high priced horse. I know that you always had really high hopes for him. How meaningful is that to see that he has delivered so often on the racetrack and in races like this?

ROBERT LOW: Well, it's meaningful for us, but it's even more meaningful for my relationship with my bloodstock agent here, Jacob West. Jacob may have been looking for other avenues of employment, but the horse came around. No, Jacob did a great job. I'm just kidding, of course.

It was very gratifying. We're hoping for a Derby horse, but what could be better than this? Back-to-back Pegasus Turf wins, it's great.

ACACIA COURTNEY: We'll bring in your racing manager Jacob West. Jacob, I hear you get to keep your job.

JACOB WEST: Yeah, winning a Pegasus race is job security for guys like me. No, I couldn't be more thankful for the horse, for Todd, his team, for Irad obviously.

But there needs to be a special mention, much like Elliott talked about his team and bringing back Life is Good, Robert and Lawana are some of the most patient owners in this game. They're incredible. I always tell people they take bad news better than they take good news.

When we had to stop on this horse and Todd did what was

right by the horse, after the Manhattan, stopping on him, we sent him back to Taylor Made farm, and Gilberto Terrazas and that whole stallion crew took care of him. I was getting almost daily, weekly, monthly updates from those guys. They looked after this horse like incredible.

Then we sent him down to Todd's dad's place Payton Training Center, and J.J. and Gerard Butler were down there and got him back up and going, sent him straight into Todd. Todd put his hands on him, and it ended up resulting in a Pegasus defending title. Couldn't be more happy for those guys.

There's a lot of people that touch these horses that a lot of people don't really know about, and they deserve special recognition also.

ACACIA COURTNEY: So well said. Winning trainer Todd Pletcher, we'll go back to you. Quickly on Colonel Liam off of the layoff, you had mentioned to me even just a couple weeks ago that you still thought this could be a dirt horse. Do you still think that?

JACOB WEST: Yes, he does (laughter).

TODD PLETCHER: He's always trained really well in the dirt. When we had the time off -- he was on a very tight schedule, and like Jacob pointed out, it was at my dad's training center, and my dad and Gerard Butler said this horse is doing great. I said, you know, if we can get him in by a certain date and everything goes according to plan, we might be able to make the Pegasus Turf.

Really as it rarely does in this business, everything happened just like we wanted it to. We got on a good schedule and got some good works in to him. Thankfully, he was ready enough to do it again today. It's great when you see a horse come back off a layoff and run that well.

ACACIA COURTNEY: Gentlemen, we appreciate your time and patience. Are there any additional questions from the media? I think we have time for a couple if there are some more.

Q. Todd, the way the turf evolved, was that the way you saw it before the race?

TODD PLETCHER: The way I saw the race unfold?

Q. Yes.

TODD PLETCHER: Yeah, I was -- I felt like Never Surprised would definitely be the pacesetter. From when he drew Post 12, it kind of forced Luis to commit to that. I think Irad picked up on this because he's been getting on

Colonel Liam in the mornings and his breezes.

When we talked about sort of strategy on where we wanted him to be, he felt like the horse has been really sharp into his breezes early. So we kind of felt like we could hopefully get a good stalking position. He ended up being a little closer than I thought he'd be, but I think he was right where Irad wanted him to be.

Q. Todd, I heard you say on NBC that you thought Life is Good is as good as any horse you've ever had. I wonder, would you have said that before this race today, or was that performance today what put him up to that level? And what is it that makes him that good, do you think?

TODD PLETCHER: I didn't want to get in trouble with anybody else that I've trained for and talk about their horses. I said I can't think of one that's better than him. As I said earlier, it's just what makes him so special is his ability to just run fast and high cruising speed and keep going. He's just got tremendous mechanics. Yeah, just a phenomenal talent.

Q. Irad, were you surprised after about five steps out of the break that you saw Jose to your left and not Joel, as Joel's on maybe one of the faster horses we've seen here?

IRAD ORTIZ JR.: Honestly, they broke probably first couple steps faster than me, but as soon as I see that, I say, I'm going to clear them because I know I got speed. I just let my horse break without asking. Then when I see that he was sending and Jose was ahead of the other horse, I just asked my horse to go, and he respond right away. Then I was able to be in the lead.

Q. Irad, if Joel beat you clearly out of the gate, do you hook him, or do you sit off? If Joel beat you out of the gate, would you chase him?

IRAD ORTIZ JR.: Yeah, but I don't want to say that off of that horse honestly. I got a lot of his paper before the race. He's a great horse. He's got a great trainer. They do a good job. I know the horse isn't going to be easy to beat.

So I told Todd, if they're ahead of me, I'm going to be right beside him. I don't want to give a chance. If I don't have the horse, I don't have the horse. But he's the horse to beat. So I go with him.

ACACIA COURTNEY: I think that is it. Team Life is Good and team Colonel Liam, congratulations. Thank you so much for the press conference today. Thank you to all of our visiting members of the media here with us and for

joining us for the Pegasus World Cup. Good night, everyone.

FastScripts by ASAP Sports

