

Pegasus World Cup Invitational

Saturday, January 25, 2025
Hallandale Beach, Florida, USA
Gulfstream Park

Saffie Joseph Jr.

Irada Ortiz Jr.

Mark Cornett

Clint Cornett

Manuel Pagnano

Media Conference

SAFFIE JOSEPH JR.: He wasn't going to come back his best form, but we came up with a plan, and everyone stuck to the plan. Today was the reward of it, thank God.

Irada, it was important that he broke well today, and Irada did that, and he got him in the clear. When he gets in the clear is normally when he runs his best race. I thought the Breeders Cup Classic was the best race in his life, and this was probably close behind.

THE MODERATOR: Talk about the plan. You wanted to purposely run in the Mr. Prospector, seven furlongs, to set him up today for nine furlongs. We just saw it out there. It had to play out perfectly for you. At what point, did you do the Mr. Prospector to get ready for today?

SAFFIE JOSEPH JR.: Mr. Prospector wasn't the original plan. It was seven furlongs like what we did before when he ran bad in the Pegasus when he got on that good run.

After we won that, Mark said, you know what, let's go seven furlongs again. What do you think about that? I said, good idea. We were going to go to Harlan's Holiday, but we wanted to follow the same transition as last time. He ran seven furlongs, seven furlongs, then he ran Met Mile and two turn races, and he broke out.

It was a similar scenario, just kind of put our heads together. Mark said he paired back sixes, which is what he did before he broke out again.

Everything aligned. We came up with a plan. Sometimes it works. Most of the time it doesn't. Thank God it did this time.



THE MODERATOR: Irada, I'll bring you in, jockey Irada Ortiz Jr.

You know this same track as good as anybody. It needed to be close. It looked like out there today you made a concerted effort to be close early on.

IRADA ORTIZ JR.: We want to be close, but definitely the horse helped when he breaks out of there. After he breaks, he makes everything easier.

THE MODERATOR: You looked like you were cruising out there. You had to have a lot of confidence literally from the start.

IRADA ORTIZ JR.: Yeah, the last race, you watch the last race, Saffie told me after the race, he said he did today what he never did before. He come off the pace, getting there. He was in traffic, and he still wants to win.

So he showed up, and it was -- we have a lot of faith in him today if he break with the field.

THE MODERATOR: You know the horses to beat or who your main rivals are. Did you know Locked was breaking slow? Did you have any idea what was happening behind you, or you were just very comfortable with where you were?

IRADA ORTIZ JR.: Not really. I was very focused on my horse to break out of there, to be honest. Locked probably with the post position, he have too much speed, and we know we don't want to be close. But I was watching Saudi Crown.

THE MODERATOR: A good horse in front of you.

IRADA ORTIZ JR.: He's a nice horse, so I don't want to be too far from him. My horse helped me because by a 1/2 mile, he was by himself without asking, and he was improving his position, and that was great. It was a great feeling because I felt like I had a lot of horse.

THE MODERATOR: What was the feeling turning for



home because he brought you up there himself?

IRAD ORTIZ JR.: I was home. By the time I hit the stretch, and I went aggressive on him, and he really took off. I look at the TV because I know he was rolling. He was running. After that, I was home.

THE MODERATOR: I'll bring in Mark Cornett now, Mark and his brother Clint.

Obviously you've been there from the start, the highs with the Florida Derby with Saffie, and then the Classic and the Whitney. Talk about the full circle yourself and bringing him back to Saffie and sitting up here and winning the Pegasus.

MARK CORNETT: It really has been a full circle. We never really lost any faith in this horse after we shipped over to Saudi. The horse was on the plane for about 24 straight hours unfortunately, on the tarmac in Miami. Then we drew the 1 hole over there. I wasn't happy with that at all. In fact, I told Rick, go ahead and scratch the horse, and he laughed at me.

Then he came back over here and Met Mile, and I didn't like the situation, a lot of things that were going on. That's when I made the decision. I talked to Clint and the partners, and we decided, this is the perfect time to give the horseback to Saffie. Let's get him back down to Gulfstream to his home base, where we know he loves the circuit and this track down here.

Nobody lost faith in the horse. We kind of mapped out a plan from this race backwards. We went back and analyzed the two races prior to the big race he ran in the Whitney. They were both one turn races, and I kind of wanted to copy that. There's just something about it where the horse really excels coming off of two sprint-type races.

THE MODERATOR: Bring in Clint now, Clint Cornett. Nothing really went right last year. Here you are. Did you guys think you could get back to the top? That's where you are today. Did you think you could get back there?

CLINT CORNETT: Yeah, we were 100 percent confident we could get back with this horse. This horse has taken us on an unbelievable ride. I called Mark in 2021 and said, let's jump back in this game. I had no idea it would be this good. This is a once in a lifetime horse right here.

I couldn't be happier for Saffie, his entire team. They do an incredible job, not only with this horse, but every one of the horses we have in this barn. We're just ecstatic.

Irada, we love you, brother. You're our man. We appreciate

everything.

THE MODERATOR: I'll ask Manuel. You were here earlier. What did you see out there today, a horse that won the Pegasus today and a horse that you've known for quite some time now?

MANUEL PAGNANO: I was impressed. I couldn't believe what I was looking at when the horse was coming so easy with Irada, and he was so confident on the horse. I couldn't believe it. He's doing it again. He won pretty easy.

I'm out of words. I'm very happy, and I want to congratulate Saffie. I believe he did a great job with the horse, and I want to thank Mark and Clint for letting me be part of the team. I'm very happy. That's it. That's all I can say.

THE MODERATOR: Saffie, I'll ask you another question. When he got back into the barn, what did you see? Florida Derby winner at 3, but such a grown-up horse now. What did you see, and what were your thoughts going forward to get back to a spot like this?

SAFFIE JOSEPH JR.: It was a process. When he came back, he was very edgy. We couldn't really get him where we wanted to. We just took it easy for him at Saratoga and gave him a little time. He just was never coming around, he was never coming around. We waited a week, waited two, and then talked to Mark.

I said, we need to send him to the farm. Physically he was fine, mentally he wasn't there. He just was agitated, agitated, not happy. Sent him to the farm, we brought him back after a month or six weeks, and he still wasn't there yet. He still wasn't there. We raced him like once or twice in Saratoga.

I think when he got back to Florida and got back with his groom. The groom did a great job with him. That is probably the most important piece of the puzzle is the groom. He's been with us forever. I just feel like the horse got back and surroundings that he was accustomed to, and he started to come around.

Going into the first allowance race, we didn't know what to expect. He could win by five, ten, he could probably run last, and he would be retired. So that was a relief.

THE MODERATOR: Did you work with him after the Mr. Prospector when he didn't break, or was that just simple racing kind of luck?

SAFFIE JOSEPH JR.: When horses do that, there's not much you can do. You try to correct a couple things, stand



in the gate more, just go over them thoroughly and make sure they're fine. But you don't like developing that habit. As much as you do, you still need to see it happen.

Today was a relief. When he broke, he broke well enough. Irad got him in a spot. As I said, once he got on the back, I felt pretty good at the quarter pole. I don't know if he had enough horse or not because I respect that horse a lot.

The last part was kind of amazing to enjoy. I was looking to Skippy, hoping he would run second.

THE MODERATOR: Irad, you've been on the highs, the Breeders Cup Classic, the Whitney. How good was White Abarrio today compared to the highs of that?

IRAD ORTIZ JR.: Honestly, I think today is the best race ever. Since the break, he deserves a lot of credit. He's a nice horse. After everything, I rode him a couple times, and he didn't show up. To see him back, I'm happy for him. He's a fighter.

The whole way, he was going like a winner, to be honest.

THE MODERATOR: Clint Cornett. This is a 6-year-old horse now, Clint. He's worth a lot of money. Talk about the decision to bring him back at 6. What more does he need to do? It's pretty cool, I think, for the sport.

CLINT CORNETT: At this point, he doesn't need to do anything else. After this particular race, Saffie, Mark, and I will get together and make sure he comes out of the race well and figure out what we want to do next with him.

THE MODERATOR: I want to ask Mark. You know this horse as good as anybody. The question I have to ask, what do you think going forward?

MARK CORNETT: No comment, not yet.

THE MODERATOR: Okay. Understandable. We got questions? Do we have any questions? Good point, Mike.

Saffie Joseph Jr., Skippylongstocking, I talked to Tyler after the race, what a cool horse. He tried so hard. Another bad pot today, and he's just running his eyeballs out out there.

SAFFIE JOSEPH JR.: I kind of watched White Abarrio into the first turn, so I kind of missed where Skippy was, and when I looked back, he was already top 10.

Down the back, he was in a spot, taking a lot of dirt. That was our plan. We know he can run from behind outside.

Then I saw him. When Abarrio kicked clear, I started

paying attention to Skippy, and I was hoping that Skippy could run second. He was battling Locked the whole way. Locked is a really good horse. Locked edged him at the wire.

Skippy ran huge. He ran huge from a tough pole. Ideally his best trip is if he can be more forward. Skippy is going to win a Grade 1 one day. Hopefully, God willing, he stays strong, and he's going to his grade 1. *.

THE MODERATOR: Congratulations. I think we're good here, everybody. I appreciate it.

Connections, Mark, Clint, Manuel, Saffie, Irad, Rocco, congrats, guys. Appreciate it.

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