

Florida Derby

Saturday, March 27, 2021
Hallandale Beach, Florida, USA
Gulfstream Park

Todd Pletcher

Irad Ortiz

Vincent Viola

Media Conference

ACACIA COURTNEY: Welcome to the press conference following the Curlin Florida Derby. I am so pleased to be joined by the winning connections of Known Agenda. We have winning trainer Todd Pletcher, winning owner and breeder Vinnie Viola, and winning jockey Irad Ortiz.

Todd, we'll start with you. This horse had a very impressive allowance win the last time out. What were the thoughts after that leading into this big race?

TODD PLETCHER: We were looking for a couple of things. One is to see if blinkers made an improvement, wanting to be more tactical. Secondly, we wanted to see how he handled the Gulfstream surface. I thought we got very good answers on both of those questions.

The only thing was we were taking a significant step back in class. It wasn't an overwhelming field, but the way he did it, to win by 11 any time in a race like that -- and Irad kind of wrapped up on in the last part -- I thought it was not only an impressive race, but a step in the right direction. It showed us that the blinkers helped and that he handled Gulfstream.

ACACIA COURTNEY: What had been the thought process in adding those blinkers?

TODD PLETCHER: To be honest, he's a horse that reminds us a great deal of Vino Rosso, personality-wise, obviously being a chestnut son of Curlin, but he's taken a while to kind of put everything together, and we kept seeing talent in the mornings that he wasn't necessarily displaying in the afternoons, but we knew it was there.

John Velasquez had ridden him in the Sam Davis, and his recommendation was to put blinkers on him, which I credit Johnny a lot for that, for making the recommendation. In Johnny's case, he had some commitments out of town during the time the horse was running allowance race. So



Irad picked up the mount and fit him perfectly and has ridden him great both times.

ACACIA COURTNEY: Tell me what your thoughts were in the stretches. He did it nicely today. He pulled away against some salty company.

TODD PLETCHER: To be honest, I was really pleased with the progress he was making up the back side because one of the things we were a little bit worried about is, if he got stuck inside, he didn't seem to handle that in the Remsen very well, like a lot of horses are more confident when they're in the clear. But when he was making progress on the back side picking up horses while he was on the outside and behind horses, I had a pretty good feeling at that point that he was running his race today, and it was a matter that we were going to find out how good he is.

ACACIA COURTNEY: Todd, this is a record sixth win in the Florida Derby for you. What does that mean to you as perennial winning trainer here at Gulfstream?

TODD PLETCHER: It has so many great meanings, but for me, what is so special about this is to win it for St. Elias with a horse that they bred. I know how much that means to them and makes it even a little extra more special for us.

ACACIA COURTNEY: Todd, congratulations.

Speaking of records, Irad Ortiz, we'll go to you next. This was your 138th victory at this meet, a record by wins for a jockey in the championship meet. How does it feel to do it in the Florida Derby?

IRAD ORTIZ: It feel great. It feel great. Just have to say thanks to the trainers and the owners for their big support honestly. Great work. And I'm happy to have you all there and win those kinds of races.

ACACIA COURTNEY: Was that a big goal for you to break the record this season? Or as you passed 100, was that something you started thinking about then?

IRAD ORTIZ: I don't really look at the standings, to be honest. I just keep riding and enjoying the time out there



and enjoying all those winners. I was winning every day, like at least two, three races. I feel blessed, honestly. It was looking easy out there, but I feel like they were running for me, so I just enjoyed the moment. It's my life.

ACACIA COURTNEY: Todd mentioned Vino Rosso. This team, you've all teamed up for big wins before, but where does this stand? How special is this victory?

IRAD ORTIZ: It's special because we were trying to look for a horse for the Derby honestly. Every time I told him, I never give up. I told him, we're going to keep trying. We have to find one. We thought the other horse was really nice and probably he don't want to go that far. I was kind of like disappointed on that.

And I told him, you have to find me one, please. I was close to him. I was riding a lot of 2-year-olds for Todd. So I want to just have something with him. Look, it worked out great. I have this one right after in the end of the meet and for good owners. They are great with me. I win the Breeders' Cup Classic with them last year. We have some fun, and we have some success together.

So I'm happy to be available to stay on his horse in the right time.

ACACIA COURTNEY: And as a rider, what were you feeling from Known Agenda today and the way that he did it, going that 1 1/8 mile once again?

IRAD ORTIZ: It was another step, another level -- I told Todd like right before was an allowance race, those kind of horses, they are very different with these kind of horses. Greatest Honour is one of the top horses in the country, and he's in the race. So we're going to find out what we got. It worked out great.

We told them we're going to be in the clear, and we ended on the rail, and he was moving great. So I just go with the flow of the race, and it worked out great.

Really, I'm so happy for just let me ride the horse to both of them honestly.

ACACIA COURTNEY: Congratulations on breaking the record. I know you're riding all 12 tomorrow, Irad, so we'll let you go. Congratulations.

IRAD ORTIZ: Thank you very much.

ACACIA COURTNEY: Vinnie, we'll move on to you. Owner and breeder of Known Agenda. How does that feel?

VINCENT VIOLA: It's unbelievable, quite frankly. I have to thank John Sparkman and Roy Babich, Monique Delk. That's the core of our team. Before I go on, I want to say the two people I wish were here would be my wife Teresa and Mike Repole. We kind of missed part of our team right now, Todd and I.

But Sparkman was adamant about Byrama. We weren't quite sure we were going to get something out of her that warranted the mare's talent. John Sparkman was like I've got the sire. This is the sire. I think we bred back to Curlin, I think.

How does it feel? It's like you feel undeserving, quite frankly, because you know how hard your people work, starting with Todd. I mean, Todd has been very patient with this horse from the moment he got him, very confident.

I don't know how many times I've asked you in the last week or two, do you think we really have a shot in the Florida Derby?

So if it wasn't for Todd and Mike Repole and Teresa, this horse would be on a plane to California getting ready to run in the Santa Anita Derby because I didn't think he was quite up to this level of performance.

ACACIA COURTNEY: You mentioned to me when you saw him lowering himself and the way that he moves out there on track, he reminded you of his mother. Just what were the emotions as you saw him running the way he did?

VINCENT VIOLA: I hope this is the appropriate term -- this is probably from my days with my dad at the track, but when a horse kind of sucks down to the ground and takes it on its own terms, it's effortless. And my emotions were -- well, I can't believe we're going to win this race.

I want to say one more thing. Monique and I looked at each other -- Monique Delk, who's our head bloodstock evaluator. And we looked at each other, and I said, Monique, I think Jimmy is here with us, Jimmy Crupi. Of course, we wouldn't be here without Jimmy Crupi. He was sort of our everything in the game.

So when that horse sucked down -- I hope it's not inappropriate to say it that way -- and looked so effortless, I was kind of like I don't believe this is happening. I felt a little emotion from you, Todd. A little bit?

TODD PLETCHER: I got excited.

VINCENT VIOLA: A little different than normally because it was a plan that came to bear in a way that you couldn't write it any differently. I mean, everything Todd described

to me when they were in the gate actually happened in the race.

He doesn't like getting kind of pushed to the inside and dirt on him. The dirt here at Gulfstream for some reason is very pesky, but he started making up ground on horses at that one part of this track that I always feel tests the horse. Then when we got out to the shoulder, I'm like, okay, I said Greatest Honour is going to really have to run his best race, and the rest, as they say, is history.

ACACIA COURTNEY: So many things that can go wrong in horse racing, and when it all is right and comes together is an amazing thing. Are we on to the Kentucky Derby? What's the plan?

TODD PLETCHER: Well, that's certainly the hope. You certainly stamped his ticket today, and the one exciting thing about him, we've always felt like distance isn't an issue for him. We feel like 1 1/4 mile is going to be right in his wheelhouse.

So now, like everyone at this point, you want to have five healthy weeks and everything to go smoothly between now and then.

VINCENT VIOLA: Yeah.

TODD PLETCHER: But a huge, huge step in the right direction today, and a meaningful Grade 1 win for a really good looking, well bred son of Curlin. So it's exciting.

ACACIA COURTNEY: Gentlemen, thank you so much. Best of luck over the next five weeks. Huge congratulations on Known Agenda's win today.

Thank you, everyone, for joining us today at Gulfstream Park at the Curlin Florida Derby.

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