

Florida Derby

Saturday, April 2, 2022

Hallandale Beach, Florida, USA

Gulfstream Park

Saffie Joseph Jr.

Tyler Gaffalione

Mark Cornett

Clint Cornett

Media Conference

ACACIA COURTNEY: Thanks for joining us. We're here at the press conference following the Florida Derby. We have winning jockey Tyler Gaffalione, winning trainer Saffie Joseph, and winning co-owners of C2 Racing Mark Cornett and Clint Cornett. Thank you so much for joining us here today.

We'll take a start with Saffie. I just got to interview you, Saffie, but first of all, just reflect back on the performance from White Abarrio. What a display of guts in the stretch there today as well.

SAFFIE JOSEPH JR.: Most definitely. Today he was in a different position. He was a little further back than normal. You never know. Even when he's making his move, he's moving well, but in the back of your mind, until they really kick in -- you know the last week he missed some time.

So as a trainer, you don't really have confidence until you finally see him level out. Then Charge It made a run at him, and I'm like please don't get catch. And he was able to pull it off.

Q. Can you spell the owners' names?

MARK CORNETT: It's Cornett, C-o-r-n-e-t-t, C2 Racing Stables. I'm Mark. Clint is C-l-i-n-t.

Q. Saffie, could you once again go over the response and the decision to hold him out of -- basically, keep him off racing since February?

SAFFIE JOSEPH JR.: Going into the Holy Bull, we had missed time, we had missed two works. I didn't believe in the Holy Bull we were going to win because he missed two key works in a big race. We were giving up a big fitness edge. To see him win that day, I thought it was



remarkable.

After that, we talked it over. He ran such a big race, and we figured, if he's good enough and able to win that race, he should be good enough to give him a good chance to win in the Florida Derby.

Everything went perfect from then until 12 days ago, and we had a hiccup. In the back of your mind, you're like, geez, we should have run him in the Fountain of Youth, but it worked out.

Q. When you say hiccup, what do you mean?

SAFFIE JOSEPH JR.: 12 days ago, he had his major work with Tyler, and he came out of the workout, and on Tuesday morning, I got a text, he has a temp. You wake up to that text at 3:45 in the morning, it's the worst thing you want to see because I was like not again. Thankfully, he was able to fight it off. By Friday, his blood work started coming back to the point that we thought we were going to be fine.

We pushed back the work to Tuesday. This time I didn't think -- like it was no fitness concern this time because we were plenty fit. We didn't even need the last work, but we just wanted to make sure everything's working well. So you utilize it just to try him out a bit.

Q. Saffie, entirely, just on winning this race and I assume going to the Kentucky Derby, just your thoughts and how you feel about accomplishing that.

SAFFIE JOSEPH JR.: Tyler, as I said, when he started, I only had like 12 horses, but I rode him on my first ever good horse, a horse named Saraguera (phonetic). From there he's been the same person. He's much more successful and one of the top riders in the country. He's the same level headed, never changed, never got cocky. He's a great rider, and he's a great person most importantly.

Sometimes I want to know if he's a little fake because I never see the bad side (laughter).

ACACIA COURTNEY: And for Tyler Gaffalione?

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TYLER GAFFALIONE: Like Saffie said, we've been together for the past eight years now, and we've had a lot of success. We work well together, great communication. I have a lot of confidence in him and vice versa. I just feel so blessed and thankful to be given this opportunity, especially with them.

Q. It's very emotional today, obviously. Could you put that into words a little bit, just how you feel winning this race today.

SAFFIE JOSEPH JR.: This is your home track, Florida Derby. It's like the Kentucky Derby to me. You want to get this one. Like it's important.

Mark and Clint, they had some big offers, they could have sold this horse, and he could have been with a different trainer. There's a lot of pressure that you want to deliver, you want it to work out. As a team, someone who's been with you from the start, and now obviously we're a barn with a lot more horses and a lot better horses, it means a lot.

Q. A followup to Mark and Clint. What made you guys stick with Saffie? Your thoughts on just winning?

MARK CORNETT: We didn't stick with Saffie. This was basically the first horse we gave him. Tyler's agent is a good friend of mine. So I called him, and he hooked me up with Saffie. We talked for about an hour and a half. We just clicked from the first point on horse management, shipping of a horse for graded stakes and things of that nature, and our philosophies just really gelled, and we just got along really well.

Then I think I called him back a few hours later and said go pick this horse up.

Q. Saffie, does this horse's resilience surprise you?

SAFFIE JOSEPH JR.: Most definitely. The Holy Bull -- as I said, the Holy Bull was an eye opener. I know he's a quality horse obviously. After he ran in the Jockey Club, I was telling Mark and Clint, I said we're going to win the Holy Bull, I guarantee as much as horse racing goes. Then we had the hiccup, and I'm like we're not going to win the Holy Bull.

I didn't think he was going to win the Holy Bull honestly. I thought I didn't have him where he needed to be. I was actually scared that, if he runs and gets beat by 10 or 11 lengths and gets really tired because he was supposed to, that it would kind of make me look bad.

When he won, as I said, it was an eye opener. He is better than good. He's a quality horse.

Q. Even now this time, here 11 days ago he's doubtful.

SAFFIE JOSEPH JR.: That's what I'm saying. Those are things that average horses can't overcome those things. Just like an athlete, the star athletes can overcome things the average athletes can't. That's what separates him. That's what makes him the horse he is.

His temperament is so cool. He's the kind of horse that you almost would think that would on the morning he'll go away with you, but he does what you want. He feels like he'll go with you, but he is so smart. Even when Tyler takes the pony, he gallops however he wants to gallop.

He's almost a horse you almost would think would run off a bit, but his mind in the paddock, as you can see how he saddles, he's a quality horse. We're blessed to have him. Onwards it goes.

Q. Saffie, you came to South Florida from Barbados with not a lot of stock. Could you reflect on your journey to get to this point.

SAFFIE JOSEPH JR.: It's been an amazing journey. At a time when you're young and you're crazy and all you can see is success, and then you start doing it, and you realize it's not success. We never had more than 12 or 15 horses.

As I said, like four or five years in, six years in, we just couldn't get the owners. We were doing okay, but you have to win races repetitively for people to notice you.

I went to my dad because he was against me coming here because in Barbados I trained the better horses. Here I'm giving it up to come here and start over. He thought I was crazy to come, and six years in, I told him, Dad, it's not going to work out. And he's like we came too far to go back.

From there like everything just fell into place. I train now for quality owners, and owners make trainers. Without the horses and owners providing them, no trainer is any good. Anybody could train White Abarrio. That's the reality of it. I'm thankful we have the opportunity, and it is us.

ACACIA COURTNEY: For Mark and Clint, wanted to bring you in a little bit here. As you had said, this was the only horse you had given to Saffie. Will you tell me a little bit about how you got involved with this horse in the first place.

MARK CORNETT: Well, I saw him run -- Carlos Perez had

him. I saw him one. He came out of the 1 hole, which as a first time starter going 6 1/2 furlongs is very difficult to do. Raced inside the horses down the back side. He did something young 2-year-old first time starters don't usually do, which is split horses at the quarter pole. He actually split three horses, went through like a seasoned horse and drew off, actually did it internally into some pretty good fractions.

So he ticked all my boxes and what I look for when I buy a horse, physically, pedigree-wise. That's why we ended up and bought it. We were lucky enough to be able to work a deal with the owner, and here we are today winning the Florida Derby.

Q. Gentlemen, could you give us the background on the horse's name?

MARK CORNETT: What we were told --

CLINT CORNETT: Right. What we were told.

MARK CORNETT: I don't know if it's true. Abarrio is the original owner's city they were from in Spain. So White Abarrio, so they named it after their hometown in Spain.

CLINT CORNETT: Right.

Q. Saffie, talk about the whole meet, winning the meet, and then culminating in the Florida Derby. Would it not have been complete if you hadn't won this race today?

SAFFIE JOSEPH JR.: I mean, the meet is history, but if I could trade the Florida Derby for the meet, I would trade it. The Florida Derby is big.

To get it, like today we probably ran 11 horses, and we didn't win a race until the Florida Derby. We were just taking some shots in a lot of the spots, but it just shows you, you win the Florida Derby, no one's going to remember the other races.

Tonight when I go home, obviously I have other owners to answer to, and they'll be disappointed in some of their horses. I'm disappointed too in some of them, but that's just how it goes. You've got to keep moving forward at times. There's a lot of downs in this game. You've got to hold your head up and keep moving forward.

This is icing on the cake. Now it's done again, and now you've got to go to the Kentucky Derby, and there's more pressure again.

Q. Tyler, just talk about the ride. Did it go the way you

thought it would go? Or adjustments along the way?

TYLER GAFFALIONE: We had to make a few adjustments. I planned on being more forwardly placed. I thought Classic Causeway and Charge It would be the two on the lead, and I thought we would be able to stalk them. Jose and -- there was another horse, Pappacap -- they were pretty aggressive. I didn't want to get caught too wide. So I took back and saved some ground. But he traveled well throughout.

Q. Saffie, how do you feel about your Kentucky Derby prospects with this horse?

SAFFIE JOSEPH JR.: You feel as good as any prospect. You just want it to stay somewhat healthy and go there and get a clean trip. It's going to be a nice journey to enjoy. I'm going to try to enjoy it, and hopefully all goes well, and we'll get to show up at the Derby and enjoy it like we enjoyed today.

Q. Tyler, do you feel this is your best shot in the derby?

TYLER GAFFALIONE: I would definitely say so. A couple years back I was able to get the mount on War of Will, and it was a lot of fun leading up to the Derby. But I'd say this is definitely my best chance going forward.

Q. Is it different when you go on the track for that race?

TYLER GAFFALIONE: Yeah, you can't hide that.

ACACIA COURTNEY: Tyler, I asked Saffie, this is your home track, how special is it? It's also your home track where you started. You always come back to Florida. Talk about the emotions of adding the Florida Derby to your resume.

TYLER GAFFALIONE: It's so hard to put into words. I've been dreaming about this my whole life growing up down here. I never thought I'd be in the position I'm in. I would just be happy being able to ride races, but my dream was to always win the Florida Derby. Now we've made it happen. It's amazing.

ACACIA COURTNEY: Gentlemen, thank you so much for winning jockey Tyler Gaffalione, trainer Saffie Joseph Jr., and owners Mark and Clint Cornett of C2 Racing, thank you and congratulations for White Abarrio.

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