

# Florida Derby

Saturday, April 1, 2023

Hallandale Beach, Florida, USA

Gulfstream Park

**Todd Pletcher**

**Mike Repole**

**Vinnie Viola**

**Irada Ortiz Jr.**

Media Conference

THE MODERATOR: Congratulations on a job well done. We'll just start with Todd, I guess, and go down the row before we open it up. Todd, a wide post. A little trepidation maybe going in. He really had to earn it today. Coming out what did you think of the performance.

TODD PLETCHER: I thought in the end was spectacular. I was worried when the draw came out getting post 11. We know statistically a really big disadvantage going a mile and an eighth here at Gulfstream. Just concerned about that.

The main thing we wanted to focus on, we talked to Irada before the race, is just stick to your game plan, keep riding him like you've been riding him. Let's not overthink the post too much. And, you know, thankfully the horse just kept responding.

Irada road a terrific race. He road the race that he had to ride. It was the only option he had. Had to fan out pretty wide down the lane, but to me what was the most impressive part was the last 100 yards.

I mean, he came by me at the eighth pole, and he looked beaten. Then if you would have told me at that point that he was going to win by a length with his ears pricked, I would have said, no, couldn't do that. So pretty impressive performance.

THE MODERATOR: Mike Repole, your thoughts during the race? And picking up on what Todd said, entering the far turn really had to earn it today.

MIKE REPOLE: I knew it was going to be a big test for him. I didn't mind him having the 11 post because I think I run 20 in the derby. I thought he got an incredible education. I, too, at the eighth pole was saying, we're



going to get second or third, and he just kept going and going and going.

It was pretty special. I mean, I had four horses in today. We won the first three. If I would have went 3 for 4, that would have been the worst 3 for 4 of my life. So, yeah, I went 4 for 4. Todd went 4 for 11 today. So you guys do the math when you get a chance (laughing). He went 0 for 7 and me 4 for 4, but that's okay. And Vinnie went 3 for 3.

THE MODERATOR: Vinnie Viola. Vinnie, your thoughts on the race as a whole?

VINNIE VIOLA: I said to Mike after the race that the horse is not supposed to win that race, all things given. It was a dicey track. A really interesting -- a really interesting field because there were a lot of type of horses there.

I thought when Mage jumped him I thought, all right, but we had the best athlete in the sport of thoroughbred horseracing in Irada Ortiz Jr. The guys manufactures wins.

MIKE REPOLE: I thought you were talking about Forte, but it's okay (laughing).

VINNIE VIOLA: Well, horse/athlete. But he manufactured four to six lines out of the horse, and the gallop out was just demonstrative. So if your horse raced fair like myself, Mike, Todd and Irada in the room, you witnessed a magnificent performance, a definitive performance. Thank you, Irada.

MIKE REPOLE: Thank you.

VINNIE VIOLA: Thank you, Todd.

MIKE REPOLE: Thank you, Todd.

THE MODERATOR: Mage certainly got the jump on you on the far turn. Talk about the trip, but then digging in to run him down.

IRADA ORTIZ: To be honest, the pole position going into the first was the only thing to worry about it today. He have a clean break, but, still, going into the first turn was too wide, so I say there's no way I'm going to make that turn



that wide. So I have to take a hole and drop in, let Javier go with their horse.

When I go in and drop in, I was way back. I say, oh, my God, let's see. Then I just keep asking keep coming, keep coming and keep coming. I say, man, I'm never getting a break. Now I'm going to the quarter pole and try to wait as long as I can and ride with confidence. Like you said, it's a long stretch, a mile and an eighth.

Luis jumped on me. When he feel that horse, he jump on the bit, I say, all right, now he give me a great feeling like I have some horse. I say, beautiful.

Now away he goes. He declare, and he was there for me. He deserve all the credit. He is such a shocker. He deserves all the credit. He gets the job done.

THE MODERATOR: What about the determination to run down a good horse that had opened up on you, and it looked like he was screaming for extra ground today.

IRAD ORTIZ: Oh, yeah, he did. I hit him once, and then I take my time with him because I feel like if I hit him again, he is going to get there. So it's a long stretch. Let him get his stride, and now I hit a couple more times, and he give into me. He just performed so well, and he just go by him and keep going. It was really nice. Thanks to Todd and Vinnie and Mike.

THE MODERATOR: Did you think they were going quick early? Were you okay with where he was? Maybe a little farther back than at least anticipated?

TODD PLETCHER: Yeah, I thought we were a little further back than we anticipated. I felt a little better after they posted the half mile time. I thought that was okay.

But we had talked about it, and we felt like usually in a race like this you're able to really kind of envision the way the race is going to unfold because you're familiar with all the horses' form and their running styles. This race had such a hodge-podge of horses and maidens and six furlong horses that have never been long.

So it's really sort of difficult to say, okay, this is the way the race should unfold, this is the way we want to be. So, you know, Irad just had to kind of figure that out as the race unfolded.

THE MODERATOR: We'll open it up to questions.

**Q. Irad, about where were you when you started to ask the horse? It seemed like a drive that took forever. How far out were you when you asked?**

IRAD ORTIZ: To be honest, I was asking the first turn. I had the shoulder stick and just make him go a little. He was under pretty good to keep back. But, still, I was way back. I wasn't happy where I was.

I know he can go. I have a lot of confidence in him, but I don't want to just give him too much. Just keep asking, keep asking. Let him find his stride, but at the same time I'm kind of, like, rush him a little bit. He wasn't responding so well, to be honest, but going to the quarter pole he give me a great finish.

He jump on the bit, and I think he was ready because I ask him all the way. I make him give into me. I think that Todd did a great job because he was 100% today.

**Q. When Mage went by, did you think, hey, I'm in some trouble here?**

IRAD ORTIZ: He go by me so very nice. When Luis goes by, it feel like he was running. He was running.

But in the same time my horse give me a great feeling. He jump on the bit at that point, and I take my time because I wasn't worried about it. I say, I got the whole stretch. If I'm going to get there, I'm going to get there. So I just let him give me the confidence. That time he go by. Now I hit that clear, and he did the rest.

(Questions and Answer given in Spanish.)

THE TRANSLATOR: The question was, this was the fourth hardest race? And Irad said, yes, that given the chances it was his hardest race, and he did everything for the lead, everything that Irad asked him to do, and he definitely had to thank Todd because he knows that with the skills that Todd had teached him, he give everything.

The other question, when you saw Mage, were you concerned? And your answer, if I'm not mistaken, were that, yes, a little bit. But when you asked Forte to run, he respond, and you knew that he had what it takes.

**Q. Your biggest challenge with Forte in the road to the Triple Crown right now?**

MIKE REPOLE: Mike Repole (laughing).

THE MODERATOR: The question was for Todd Pletcher, the biggest challenge for Forte towards the Triple Crown.

TODD PLETCHER: I would say probably checking in with AT&T and see if I can extend my telephone hours because I'm pretty sure that Mike might be checking in every once in

a while.

MIKE REPOLE: I'm actually going to move in for five weeks, so we're going to be okay (laughing). And Tracy is moving in with Maria, so it's going to work out well.

**Q. Todd, is the difficulty of this race a good thing for the derby or cause for concern?**

TODD PLETCHER: You know, right now I think there's a lot of great things that happened today that are going to help us move forward.

You know, there was a crowded paddock. There were loud fans in the paddock. Very extended post parade. You know, a lot of things that, you know, worry you as it's playing out. But, you know, we're obviously going to encounter all of that at Churchill.

So I think the way that he handled all of that, he got on his toes, but in a good way and maintained his on composure. So I think all of that was good.

As far as having a harder race than he did in the Founding Youth, you know, everyone has different theories about that. Some people think you need a hard race before the Kentucky Derby. For me I'll always take the easiest way, but, you know, we have five weeks. I just hope that the next five weeks are as good as the last five months have been for him.

THE MODERATOR: Todd, talk about that, the preparation to get here. Not really anything went drastically wrong to get -- you mapped out a plan. It worked out perfectly. (Indiscernible) -- your champion season to now three in the Florida Derby. Really didn't miss a beat on the way here.

TODD PLETCHER: It's one of those rare situations where as a trainer you kind of lay out an idea of how you want to prepare a horse for a certain schedule, and usually you're going to have to call some audibles along the way. Even with rain in the forecast or something.

But, literally, the training chart that I laid out when he came back in, literally every day has gone according to plan. Hopefully that can continue.

THE MODERATOR: Vinnie, you have won the Kentucky Derby. Both of you. You've experienced it before. Your thoughts moving forward now with a horse that, you know, all things being equal, is the favorite? Have you and Mike talked about what that can mean to the both of you? I know you have partnered up together for a lot of nice horses.

VINNIE VIOLA: It would mean everything and more than any other championship. You get it; right? We're never satisfied. We want to win all the time, but Anthony Bonomo is phenomenal. Just family. Mike is family. I'm just very blessed.

Mike manages our horses. He is a phenomenal horseman, phenomenal horseman. Him, Todd, and Irad are like, yeah, one piece of metal. So I want to thank all three of you guys very sincerely.

I am actually -- I probably shouldn't say this, but I feel more comfortable going into this derby than the last one. I don't know why, but I just --

MIKE REPOLE: Because you're not nervous.

VINNIE VIOLA: I'm not nervous. I felt very confident. The horse ran today like you would expect and, quite frankly, how you would hope under difficult conditions. So we have every reason to be very optimistic going back.

Now, having said that, I think there's going to be a lot more people coming down to Kentucky than I expected, but I want the horse to win the Kentucky Derby for Mike much more than I want the horse to win the Kentucky Derby for me and my family.

MIKE REPOLE: And Vinnie and Anthony won that Kentucky Derby with Always Dreaming, and then Todd also had Johnny on that. I thought that was really, really special. You know, I said on a podcast this week, I feel like I owned a piece of Always Dreaming. I had heart-held equity in the horse, and it was really a big thrill.

Vinnie has always said that -- and Teresa, Mike, I want to win the next derby so bad for you. I know he means it.

And, you know, Vinnie, Teresa, me, Maria, it's a great partnership. I mean, Vinnie puts a lot of faith and trust in my relationship with Todd and me working with Todd. For someone who spends that much money with me to have that trust, and I think there's two people that take that really serious. It's me, and Todd treats our money like it's his money.

We have that relationship, and I think, you know, Todd and I -- this is the first race in a while I've seen this guy more nervous than me. I didn't think it was possible. When I see Todd that nervous, it means he feels like this is really, really special.

This guy has been blessed with, you know, 150 grade one champions, and you would love to have one of them. I think that when I talked to Todd, knowing him for 15, 16

years, I think in his heart he thinks that this one has a shot to be that top 1% of those 150, so it's pretty special.

So when he gets nervous, I get nervous. Vinnie has been hysterical because he is just, like, calm, I knew it, no problem, I'm feeling good. You know, telling me and Todd, oh you know... we're sweating here, but he is still confident.

You know who is even more confident than him? The little guy at the end, Irad ran. Holy cow. He comes in the paddock, I know what I'm doing, don't worry, don't worry. We don't have to tell him anything. Right now he is just, honestly -- I love so many jockeys. I hate to say this because really I'm friends with so many.

I like Jose the best (laughing). Jose, he is going to run Dreamlike next week. My favorite jockey by far. We haven't made a decision if we're going to use Jose or Irad. We will see.

But right now Forte is pretty far ahead of the 3-year-old crop. Irad is pretty far ahead of the jockey crop right now. I mean, he is just riding at a level, I'm telling you right now. This is like Michael Jordan in his prime right now.

VINNIE VIOLA: To overtake the 4 horse the way he did, man, that was sweet.

MIKE REPOLE: With confidence.

VINNIE VIOLA: Silk riding. That was silk riding. Really, Irad, you got the horse to even --

IRAD ORTIZ: Forte made me look good.

THE MODERATOR: Irad, you've been on him every start, and he is a horse with a lot of versatility. Kentucky Derby can present a lot of different scenarios. To do what he did today to close from back and found the close, the gears that this horse has has to give you a lot of confidence.

IRAD ORTIZ: It does. It does. Since he come back as a 3-year-old, he do everything so good. His mind is much better. He give me that confidence.

Going into the paddock and feeling like I just want to ride my horse. I know what he can do. I know Todd did a great job. Last couple of works he went pretty well.

Like you say, he can do anything. I road him on a sloppy track. I thought, alright, he handled it pretty well. He had no problem at all.

He can be close last time. The pace was slow, and he was

right there to win, and he handled it. How you don't have the confidence with a horse like that?

THE MODERATOR: We'll wrap it there. Congratulations to everybody.

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