

National Media Teleconference Thursday May 8 Previewing 150th Preakness Stakes

Transcript - 54:34

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OPERATOR

Welcome to the National Media Conference Thursday, May 8th previewing 150th Preakness Stakes call. Let me introduce our host, Mr. Jim Gluckson.

JIM GLUCKSON

Thank you Andrew, and good day everyone and welcome to the NTRA National Media teleconference previewing the 150th Preakness Stakes on Saturday, May 17, at Pimlico Racecourse in Baltimore. Joining us today will be trainers Steve Asmussen, Brendan Walsh and D. Wayne Lukas, of course, to speak about their horses for racing's, second jewel of the Triple Crown. This is the second of three Triple Crown national media teleconferences that the NTRA will be posting this year. Preview for the 157th Belmont Stakes is scheduled to be held on Thursday, May 29. I want to remind everyone that today's call is being recorded and a playback of the call will be available along with the transcript on ntra.com within the next 48 hours.

So without further ado, let's move along with our first guest, is Hall of Fame trainer Steve Asmussen, trainer of Clever Again for Winchell Thoroughbreds and the Coolmore Connections of Michael Tabor, Mrs. John Magnier and Derrick Smith. Steve has won the Preakness with Curlin in 2007 and with Rachel Alexandra in 2009, both of those horses earning the Horse of the Year honor in those seasons. Steve, welcome. How are you today?

STEVE ASMUSSEN

I'm doing great.

JIM GLUCKSON

Thank you for joining us, Steve. Clever Again will be making just his fourth start running in the Preakness, but he was extremely sharp in that one mile Hot Spring Stakes at Oaklawn on March 30th, earning a 101 buyer speed figure, one of the top speed figures of any of the horses in the Triple Crown Trail or competing in the in Triple Crown races this season. Let's begin by asking what he showed you that day as far as his maturity and overall?

STEVE ASMUSSEN

The horse is very manageable, very mature. You mentioned that he lightly raced, but he has shown a lot of talent obviously, but he is definitely mature beyond his racing.

JIM GLUCKSON

This is son of American Pharaoh out of the Galileo mare, Flattering. That was a terrific race in the Hot Springs. Now he breezed 5 furlongs at Churchill on Tuesday. Can you tell us what his workout plans are between now and the Preakness?

STEVE ASMUSSEN

Yes, the work on Tuesday was moved back a couple of days from all the heavy rains that was obvious in Louisville, KY over the weekend and came out of it in very good shape; went back to the racetrack well. We'll breeze again, work again on Monday and then head to Pimlico on Tuesday.

JIM GLUCKSON

Very good. Steve, I think we have some media on the line who may have questions for you. So Andrew, let's move into the question and answer portion of our call please, if we may.

OPERATOR

Thank you. Ladies and gentlemen, we will now begin the question and answer session. Should you have a question, please press the star followed by the number one on your touch tone phone. You'll hear a prompt that your hand has been raised. Should you wish to decline from the polling process, please press the star followed by the number two. If you are using a speakerphone, please lift the handset before pressing any keys. One moment please for your first question. Your first question is from Childs Walker from The Baltimore Banner. Please go ahead.

CHILDS WALKER

Yeah. Hi Steve, how are you? Thanks for doing this. As you alluded to earlier, I mean two of your all-time great victories were in the Preakness. This is supposed to be the last

Preakness run at Pimlico as we know it before it's rebuilt. And I'm curious if you could sort of speak to your affection for the place and what you sort of like about the character of Preakness?

STEVE ASMUSSEN

I think you touched on it exactly. Turning point in our the barn's trajectory was when Curlin beat Street Sense from the 2007 Preakness. It was our first classic victory. He finished that year off winning the Breeders' Cup Classic and was our first Horse of the Year. And then, how can you compare anything to Rachel's 2009 Preakness? The filly changed barns and 11 days later she beats the Derby winner in the Preakness. And that was such an experience for me. You know, obviously very fortunate to run horses on a high level, but I had never experienced when we walked out of the barn with Rachel for the 2009 Preakness, everybody was on her side. You go to the races and people have their favorites and who they're rooting for. But running Rachel was different than anything I had done previously or since.

CHILDS WALKER

You've brought a lot of horses to Pimlico. I mean, when you when you contrast the atmosphere of Preakness to the other Triple Crown races, what do you think sets it apart?

STEVE ASMUSSEN

I think the demeanor of the racetrack and the staff that that runs it there, welcoming and appreciative. And maybe it's just the tension of the Derby climaxed and then how, seems to be a little bit more oxygen in the air. It's two weeks following and it's a very enjoyable time and we've continuously run horses Preakness weekend as then and since.

CHILDS WALKER

All right. Thank you.

OPERATOR

Your next question is from Stephen Whyno from The Associated Press. Please go ahead.

STEPHEN WHYNO

Hey, Steve, thanks for doing this. Following up on what Childs was asking you, are you going to miss the old Pimlico? I know the barns and everything are so welcoming and all that, but just how historic the building itself and the venue is, are you going to miss that?

STEVE ASMUSSEN

Oh, very much so. Just the great memories from having there. And you know, yes, I'm not sure what's going to happen going forward. As it's been mentioned, this is obviously

a possibility of the last running at Pimlico and I very much look forward to it. But what a special place it is for me.

STEPHEN WHYNO

And you mentioned, Curlin wheeling back after the Derby in the Preakness. Those days of horses going from the Derby to the Preakness in two weeks. Would you like that to still be the case where you've got a rivalry like a Street Sense, a Curlin or some of these top horses now or is that just something that has sort of faded with time?

STEVE ASMUSSEN

We are definitely running on a very different environment than we were then. And I don't think that, got to do things wrong couple times before they can get a few things figured out. But it's worth a debate, that's for sure, as far as the timing of them are concerned. But I think Curlin's a great example of it. You know, there's what makes him so special is he's capable of it and it sure didn't. As you mentioned, he's 3rd and the Derby comes back and wins the Preakness two weeks later, won the Breeders' Cup Classic and the crowning Horse of the Year the next two years. So it obviously didn't curtail his career.

STEPHEN WHYNO

Thank you.

OPERATOR

Our next question is from Cameron Drummond from the Lexington Herald Leader.

Please go ahead.

CAMERON DRUMMOND

Hey there Steve, appreciate the time on the call today. Kind of piggybacking off that question that you were just asked, obviously, there's so much been discussed and debated with Sovereignty skipping out on the Preakness this year and the timing between the Triple Crown races. Just from your perspective as such an accomplished trainer, I guess, how do you kind of go about that short span, especially between the Derby and the Preakness? And do you think that length of time in terms of it being changed or lengthened to give horses more recovery time in the Triple Crown, is something that the horse racing needs to look at or explore for the viability of the Triple Crown going forward?

STEVE ASMUSSEN

Well, I think each horse is an individual and I believe, not only Curlin, he being so special, remember the horse, very solid horse. We had a few years back, Midnight Bourbon 6th in the Derby, didn't get away Well, came back, ran a ran a solid second in the Preakness. I think that how much you get out of the Derby, how you come out of it. But every one of them is an individual and in those instances with Curlin, a lot of traffic, Midnight Bourbon not away well. The opportunity to run them back in two weeks, they were

capable of moving forward and basically that the Derby ended up being in training exercise for them. And that is not something to where they overextended themselves. So I think that every horse is an individual. Every year is different and it's just very unique circumstances. I think that what comes into play is you take a horse like Sovereignty, he's unbelievable horse and extremely talented, but the races that are financial opportunities for older horses and overseas, there's no way that that doesn't play into it.

CAMERON DRUMMOND

Got it. And secondly, just to ask you a quick question about Clever Again, obviously super impressive at Oaklawn last time they ran, but adding the two 16ths of a mile, I know that Clever Again ran I think a mile and a 16th earlier in his career. Just any thoughts on the slightly added distance. Do you see that being a benefit for him or something for him to overcome coming up in a couple Saturdays?

STEVE ASMUSSEN

I expect it to be a benefit to him. He's out of, as mentioned, Flattering, a Galileo mare; winner at a mile-and a half. You know how far Americans are both his sire and dam are winners at a mile and a half and I think that he will relish the distance. It does appear to be more pace signed on for the Preakness than in any of his previous races. We did working off of company this week; for the possibility of him not being the pace setter in the Preakness and we're very pleased with how he handled and think that he should

handle well enough to get the distance.

CAMERON DRUMMOND

Thank you, Steve.

STEVE ASMUSSEN

Thank you.

OPERATOR

Your next question is from Byron King from BloodHorse. Please go ahead.

BYRON KING

Hi, Steve. Thanks for taking time for us. I wanted to ask you with Clever Again. I guess the big question for fans and handicappers is where he stacks up class wise with the jump into a Grade 1 classic. What indications does he give you that that he's up to this challenge?

STEVE ASMUSSEN

Time. I mean he's fast and that does come into play. He has already in his short career already beaten a Grade 1 winner and he just needs to beat several of them. But I think that there's obviously more pace signed on to it. I expect him to handle the

circumstances of a Classic crowd walk over pre-race very well. He's got a great temperament. Don't expect him to lose anything there. Jose Ortiz, who is riding, has great confidence in the horse; thought that he handled very well in his work the other day and that he's going to be versatile to do what he feels necessary to run his best race.

BYRON KING

And also wanted to follow up with you on your two Derby competitors Tiztastic and Publisher. Any chance we might see them in the in the Belmont or what might be in the cards for them looking forward?

STEVE ASMUSSEN

Well, it's a very good question. Publisher may end up back in a maiden race. Not a lot of Derby starters have that condition. And it might be time to teach him how to win. And then on Tiztastic, the question is do we continue on the dirt where he won the Louisiana Derby or go back to the turf with him where he's a two-time stakes winner? But we will give them a couple of weeks to sort out those decisions. Thank you.

OPERATOR

Your next question is from John Pricci from Horseraceinsider. Please go ahead.

JOHN PRICCI

Good afternoon, Steve. Thanks for doing this. You touched on it earlier with earlier questions. I would like to know if we took tradition off the table. Do you personally, as a horseman, would like to see the time lengthened between Triple Crown races?

STEVE ASMUSSEN

That is such a great question because it would depend on what horse I had for it. And then if you got it done, spaced out, would it mean as much as the previous ones before it? And I'm asked the question when you been so fortunate to have Gunrunner, Curlin, Rachel (Alexandra); how do they compare in the individuality and who they are is what makes them all-time greats? So it's a question that has more than one side to it. I mean, I love how hard it is to do, which makes it so special. And then would it be making it easier? Does it dilute it? I mean, that that's a great question. And I think that it'll continue to be debated. You see with Belmont being closed now, the Belmont being at Saratoga. So there are adjustments being made already that are out of our hands and if this is the last year at Pimlico, might be another opportunity to change the timing or the distance or something else.

JOHN PRICCI

Yes, and of course the Belmont isn't really the Test of the Champion for the next year or two. But I was asking you, more going forward, not looking back historically at the great runners you've had, but you as a trainer, would you like to see the time between the races lengthened, you personally?

STEVE ASMUSSEN

The reason that I look back is that it takes horses as good as those to win it and it should always take horses as good as those to win it. And they were capable of it. So I guess I would go with the side of tradition and the timing of them now. If they're not ready for it. Perfect example is as great as there is, is Bill Mott. I mean, he's as good as they are and he thinks that he [Sovereignty] needs more time. And I think that I would expect him to be right on his decision and that being their choice.

JOHN PRICCI

Thank you. Have a have a safe trip on Saturday, Steve.

STEVE ASMUSSEN

Thank you very much.

OPERATOR

Your final question is from David Grening from Daily Racing Form. Please go ahead.

DAVID GRENING

Steve, when you started this horse's [Clever Again] 3-year-old campaign, was this in the back of your mind that if you did these two races that he would be set up well for the

Preakness?

STEVE ASMUSSEN

Yes, he's a better workhorse than Tiztastic who he was training with. It's was at the Fair Grounds and Tiztastic was winning Louisiana Derby. It was you wanted to get in the mix, nominated to the Triple Crown, planning on getting into the mix and felt that these two, the two turn races he was in, the spacing of them, the timing of them gave him the best chance.

DAVID GRENING

Thank you.

OPERATOR

There are no further questions at this time. Please proceed.

JIM GLUCKSON

Alright, thank you, Steve. I appreciate you taking the time today to join us to answer questions about the Preakness and Clever Again. Good luck to you next week when you come to the Preakness for him and for all your horses. I much appreciate you being on today and best of luck to you.

STEVE ASMUSSEN

Thank you very much. Appreciate it.

JIM GLUCKSON

Thank you, Steve. All right, let's jump right away now into our next guest. He being Brendan Walsh, who is the trainer of Gosger, a homebred for Harvey A. Clark Racing Stables and the winner of the Stonestreet Lexington Stakes at Keeneland. Brendan, Jim Gluckson here. Thanks for joining us today.

BRENDAN WALSH

Thanks for having me on, Jim.

JIM GLUCKSON

Great. Gosger is the son of Kentucky Derby winner Nyquist and of course he broke his maiden in February at Gulfstream and then you entered him in the April 12 Lexington Stakes and this was his first race around two turns and he came home a 2-length winner. Can you comment on the progress that he showed in that race?

BRENDAN WALSH

I thought he made a lot of progress, Jim, you know, more probably than what I had expected, but he's progressed well over the winter and he's progressed very well since.

So, we're obviously very happy with him. Otherwise we wouldn't be taking a shot at the Preakness. But yeah, he seems ready to go.

JIM GLUCKSON

Do you have any specific plan for a workout this weekend and moving towards the Preakness? And have you named the rider for him yet?

BRENDAN WALSH

Yeah, we're going to work him on Saturday morning at Keeneland and ship him up to Baltimore on Monday night. He'll be in there Tuesday morning. Luis Saez is going to ride the horse.

JIM GLUCKSON

Very good. Luis Saez. Brendan, let's see if we have some questions from the media here to take us to the next portion of our program. So Andrew, can you activate that for us, please? Thank you.

OPERATOR

Ladies and gentlemen, we will now begin the question and answer session. The first question is from Byron King from BloodHorse. Please go ahead.

BYRON KING

Hi, Brendan. Thanks for taking time for us. I had two questions for you. First, I wanted to follow up about East Avenue, to get your thoughts on how he ran in the Derby and then for that matter with Sovereignty not going in the Preakness, whether the Preakness was considered for him to wheel back.

BRENDAN WALSH

We were pleased enough with how (East Avenue) ran the other day. He probably didn't handle the slop as well as we would have liked. You know, he looked down to down on the backside like he was, he wasn't very comfortable with it. His action was different than what it normally is. He's come out of the race very well. So there obviously wasn't anything wrong with him. And I think we had a short four weeks into the Derby off of the Bluegrass (Stakes). It was coming back quick enough for him anyway. So not after his run in the Derby. No, we're going to regroup with the horse. We'll find something for him. He's actually come out of the race really well. So I don't think it'll be a very long time before he's back running again. But do we have a race picked out yet? We don't. Not yet, no.

BYRON KING

Gotcha. And then also if you could reflect on Gosger's run in the Lexington. Obviously, he was competing against Grade 3 competition that day. But give me your impressions of his performance and whether he's ready for the next step in a major classic.

BRENDAN WALSH

Yeah, I think he's a horse that's improving rapidly. I thought he improved a lot. I asked the big question of the horse in the Lexington. I thought he'd beat two or three really nice horses that day and beat them. Well in the end he got up out very strong, so he's a horse that I expected to improve for us and he's showing us in his work since that he has improved from it. So you know, if he if he improves 3 to 5 lengths off of his Lexington run, which I think he may have, it should put him in with a very good chance in the Preakness.

BYRON KING

Thank you, Brendan.

OPERATOR

Your next question is from Cameron Drummond from the Lexington Herald-Leader.

Please go ahead.

CAMERON DRUMMOND

Hey there Brendan, thank you for the time on the call today. First, I wanted to ask a question related to Gosger. Obviously, he was a part of your winning your first training title at Keeneland this spring that you shared with Brad Cox. Your thoughts on being

able to win a training title at Keeneland and what that means for your career and accomplishment as a trainer to do that for the first time.

BRENDAN WALSH

It was fantastic. You know, it was really, really nice because we had a very good meet at Keeneland. And being a Kentucky-based trainer, Keeneland and then the Churchill meets are the two and, of course, Kentucky Downs now, too. But they're the main meets. Keeneland is good because the quality of racing there is top class. So for a Kentucky based trainer, it's fantastic to have any amount of winners at Keeneland, let alone to, to win a training title there. And, and it's nice and it's great. It's a great boost for my staff as well, and it's just a good boost all-around going into going into the year. Hopefully, it's a precedent for a good year to follow.

CAMERON DRUMMOND

Wonderful. Yeah. And to kind of ask a little bit more of a big picture question as well. Obviously, a lot around the sport right now is discussing Sovereignty and Bill Mott's decision to not run him [Sovereignty] in the Preakness. And that leads to discussion about the length between the Triple Crown races, if that needs to be lengthened to allow horses more recovery time between each of the Triple Crown events. So I wanted to ask you kind of your thoughts, obviously, as one of the leading trainers. Do you think that there needs to be kind of an additional week or two between the races in order to maximize the chance for a Triple Crown to kind of keep that alive? Or just kind of what's

your thoughts on the gap that currently exists between each of those Triple Crown events right now?

BRENDAN WALSH

I think it's a difficult question. You know, like Steve said before me, it's a very tough thing to do is to run three times in five weeks at the at the highest standard, varying distances. You know, the horses have hard races and the way things are right now with the breed and a bunch of other things, it's become a lot more difficult. Maybe the breed isn't as tough as they were back in the day. But I'm saying that we did have two recent Triple Crown winners at a time when people had pretty much given into the fact that we might ever have another one again. We had two in pretty quick succession. But yeah, it's a very tough thing to do. I guess it would make it a little easier if there was a bit more space between races. I mean, I can understand Bill Mott's thinking with Sovereignty. He doesn't want to run the horse. The horse obviously had a hard enough race last week as every horse in the Derby did. And it's a hard thing to do to wield them back in two weeks. But again, it is the Triple Crown and that's how it's been done in the past. And will it take the limelight off and, or the steam off? But it probably would if they spaced the races out further. I think times have changed and things change in various sports. And I can understand people's perspective on that, too. It's just a question of whether we're ever going to do it or not. I don't know if the calendar is going to allow us to do it and space to races out further. You probably end up having to space some other races out as well. But you know, they're starting against it and you

know, like Steve said earlier, who's better than Bill Mott? And you know, his opinion is his horse needs more time. And, and I think that has to be respected to whether it allows them to try to win a Triple Crown or not.

CAMERON DRUMMOND

Appreciate it. Thank you.

OPERATOR

Your last question is from John Pricci from Horseraceinsider. Please go ahead.

JOHN PRICCI

Good afternoon. Mr. Walsh, I had asked Steve this question. If we took tradition off the table, would you as a horseman going forward like to see the races spaced differently for the Triple Crown, allowing more time between races? And if you would also address the fact that perhaps by doing so, it might also help the integrity of the difficulty of the Triple Crown, since you'll be needing more horses at the top of their game. Whereas the two recent Triple Crown winners, they were superior individuals, but that's a rarity in this game, of course. And it would be good if in years like this where we have many very good 3 year olds, I think we're blessed with this crop. By getting them all together more often, wouldn't that be better for the sport? So I'm sorry for the long windedness, but it's a kind of a 2-ply question that I would like you to address, sir. Thank you.

BRENDAN WALSH

Yeah. No, I think that's a very good point. I think that's a very good point. I mean, if you were to take the Triple Crown, the fact of the Triple Crown out, none of us, but I won't say none of us, but most of us wouldn't want to run horses. I mean, you know, when you when you just leave it to a trainer as to how they want to manage their horses. You know, pretty much all of us are going to say you want to give them 4, 5, 6 weeks between races. So absolutely. I think if you took tradition out of it, then yes. To answer your question, I think a larger spacing between races would be more favorable to trainers. I think you would get better, better lineups in the individual races that that that is without a doubt.

JOHN PRICCI

Thank you, Sir. Have a good luck. Have good luck on Saturday. Have a safe trip, Sir.

BRENDAN WALSH

Thank you very much.

JIM GLUCKSON

Brendan, I really appreciate the time that you've taken with us this afternoon to answer the questions from the media on the line about Gosger and about the Preakness and we wish you good luck coming next week in the Preakness. And we thanks for joining us

again and have a great day.

BRENDAN WALSH

My pleasure. Thank you very much guys.

JIM GLUCKSON

All right, now let's move on to our 3rd guest today. He, of course, is Hall of Fame trainer D. Wayne Lukas, a 7-time winner of the Preakness Stakes and the defending champion trainer of this race. Having saddled Seize the Grey, going wire to wire last year to win. Wayne is planning to run Virginia's Derby winner American Promise, son of Triple Crown winner Justify for BC Stables. Wayne, welcome. How are you doing today?

D. WAYNE LUKAS

I'm good. You guys all recovered? I'm getting there. It takes a couple of days to get over that last one.

JIM GLUCKSON

Well, that's my first question about the last one. American Promise got bumped at the start of the Derby, but he settled in along the inside and then moved up to challenge the Baffert horses at the end of the far turn. But he could not squeeze through them and dropped back. So I want you to comment on his run in the Derby and how he's

rebounded coming out of it to merit a start in the Preakness.

D. WAYNE LUKAS

Well, I think it all went to hell in a handbasket right out of the gate. You know, when Citizen Bull, (came) over, we had the check and then we, Nik Juarez, did a beautiful job of checking and then getting back on the inside to come up the rail. He ended up running out of the one hole, as it turns out. But he's a great big horse. He's a long striding horse that gets in the rhythm and to start and stop and take a lot out of them. And Nick agreed that he had to use him pretty good to get down to the part, the first turn and be in position. And he may have had a good run up the backside, but I thought it took a little too much out of him, that first quarter. But anyhow, when he got where he was going to make his patented run, which he does, he tried to split those two horses and they shut him down. That was the end of it.

JIM GLUCKSON

The race is still obviously several days away, but knowing what his strengths are, would you expect that he would be forwardly placed again in the Preakness as far as his running style for the race?

D. WAYNE LUKAS

Well, I haven't heard who's going yet. , I think Bob's (Baffert) got Rodriguez pointed for it and so it'll be some speed in there. He doesn't have to have a lot of pace up front,

but it doesn't hurt that he has some because he can lay in touch with the race. He doesn't lose touch with the race when he's running his best. So I don't know who's going to all be in there yet. We won't worry about that until they draw it. But he's got good tactical speed and I think he's going to like the Pimlico track. I think he's going to like the shorter race then the Derby.

JIM GLUCKSON

Well, obviously coming out of the Derby, maybe (you have) a lighter training schedule. What are your plans for him over the next few days or really throughout the weekend into next week for him?

D. WAYNE LUKAS

Well, we won't do much. We're going to ship on Monday and we'll get him on the racetrack right away on Tuesday and maybe let him stretch his legs through the stretch on Wednesday or so. But I have had pretty good luck with the Preakness., I don't remember working too much or giving him too much between the Derby and the Preakness. I don't think we'll do a lot with him. He came out of the Derby in good order. He was really full of himself and trained very well this morning, looked good, eating well. So we'll just try to keep him happy and I may let him breeze a little, too. Training these horses is a day-to-day deal. I don't think you can plan too far ahead with one like that.

JIM GLUCKSON

Alright. Well, Wayne, let's check and see. We have some questions on the line from the media. So Andrew, can you take us through that portion of the show next? Thank you.

OPERATOR

Thank you. Ladies and gentlemen, we will now begin the question and answer session. Your first question is from Stephen Whyno from The Associated Press. Please go ahead.

STEPHEN WHYNO

Hey, thanks for doing this. You've accepted more --- than anyone in this good race. This might be the last--- difficult --- that people came up. I'm wondering. [Garbled connection, caller dropped]

OPERATOR

Steven if you could re-queue for your question, your line was muffled. The next question is from Byron King from BloodHorse. Please go ahead.

BYRON KING

Hi, Wayne. Thanks for taking time for us. I appreciate it, I'm sure.

D. WAYNE LUKAS

You got to have you got to have a college education to get through. After I heard that,

what has to happen before you can get through?

STEPHEN WHYNO

Well, I'm curious Wayne, you know you opted to skip the Lexington with your horse and giving six weeks of rest heading into the Derby after winning the Virginia Derby. Do you think that plays to his benefit now that he's dealing with a two week turn around?

D. WAYNE LUKAS

Well, that entered my mind. I thought that, two things. First of all, I thought if we ran in the Colonial race and didn't win it, we'd have the Lexington to back us up and get us enough [Kentucky Derby] points to get in. When we won the Colonial, then my thinking changed that, well, we'll win the Derby and be able to come back in two weeks in the Preakness if, given us that spacing. But it always has been that we look ahead a little bit and try to plan these races. It was interesting Byron, that, listening to the comments by other trainers here about the Triple Crown. It is not a three race series by any means. It is more like a five race series because if you don't get into one of these tough prep races or two of them, you are not going to be in the Derby anymore with its popularity and everything. So it's no longer a situation where you can just sit back and hope that you can get in the Derby and then run in the Preakness. It makes it you're usually looking at the third series. So I was glad to skip that one.

BYRON KING

Yeah. Thank you, Wayne.

OPERATOR

Your next question is from John Pricci from the Horseraceinsider. Please go ahead.

JOHN PRICCI

Good afternoon Coach. Thanks for doing this with us. I had asked the other two gentlemen earlier, taking tradition off the table. Do you, as a horseman, prefer that these races be spaced out in the future?

D. WAYNE LUKAS

Well, I've been pushing for a change in that tradition for 20 years, but then Bob Baffert drops up and wins it twice. So that silenced everybody pretty much. I thought that we could run the first Saturday in May and then run the Preakness on Memorial weekend and make it a holiday weekend when everybody's off work and so forth can go and then run the Belmont on the 4th of July. But in order to get that done, you got to have three race tracks agree. And that's really difficult. They have to adjust their schedules and there's a lot of things that go into it. But if you wanted to keep the fields together and see more of a pattern, of course, is moving forward. It almost has to be spaced out. If they don't space it out, it's going to be very, very difficult unless you get some exceptional horse like Justify to come along and get everybody involved. If it's spaced out, you might even get some fillies like Thorpedo Anna. You know, it's got a lot of

romance if you got that spacing. But to get everybody to come to the table and hold hands might be a little bit difficult.

JOHN PRICCI

Well, in that context, perhaps the Maryland Jockey Club, would force everyone's hand next year since it's being run at Laurel. In the future, if there are more Preakness's going to be run at Laurel, if Pimlico is not ready, the new Pimlico's not ready. Maybe if they move their race, NYRA would have to react because especially if we get back to Belmont in time and you give horsemen a choice between running a mile and it's three sixteenths and a mile and a half, most would opt for a mile and three sixteenths. And as far as the other tracks are concerned, it seems that only Monmouth Park would have to adjust the date of the Haskell. The Travers being at the end of August would seem unaffected by a July 4th Belmont. So if you just move the Haskell back a week or two, if the Triple Crown races are moved back a week or two, we'd have the schedule set. Does that make sense to you?

D. WAYNE LUKAS

The other thing is we're going to break tradition by moving over to Laurel and probably running even a different distance. I don't know. Yeah, I doubt if it'll be a mile and three sixteenths, but it might be. But and then we're going to break tradition again when we go to Saratoga and run a mile and a quarter instead of a mile and a half. Everybody seems OK with that. But then we have to resort back to the old tradition of a mile and a

quarter, a mile and three sixteenths in two weeks and everything that we have now.

JOHN PRICCI

Alright, well, thank you. Thanks very much Coach. And week from Saturday, have a better trip than you had in the Derby, sir.

D. WAYNE LUKAS

I hope. Thank you.

OPERATOR

Your next question is from Nick Hahn from Off to the Races. Please go ahead.

NICK HAHN

Yes, thank you Coach, for doing this call. I wanted to see about you speaking about the progression of Nik Juarez. You know, you've kind of grabbed on to him at a kind of critical point of his career. You have Gary Stevens, who rode for you, as his agent. Just kind of wanted to get some thoughts, post Derby and coming into a track he knows very well, Pimlico, of where he grew up. Maybe just talk about you know what's impressed you over the course of the last six months.

D. WAYNE LUKAS

Well, I love to give these young riders a chance. If there aren't any young ones, there won't be any older ones. But if you look back in the history book, I started Gary Stevens on a Derby horse and it changed his career and sent him right into the Hall of Fame when he won on Winning Colors. And then again on Thunder Gulch. But the thing about Nik is that Nik is a really good rider. He's a talented rider. He's the right size. I like the small guys. He doesn't have a weight problem and he's strong. And I like his attitude in general. He's a very positive person and he listens to what I want to do. I put him in the situation a couple times and some of these horses, including some of the others and he responded very well. When we went to Colonial he rode a picture perfect race and it would be criminal on my part to take him off of American Promise if I would have, after the Colonial race. He did everything he was to do and then some, and he actually did a hell of a job in the Kentucky Derby too, to at least give us a little bit of a thrill there at the top of the far turn.

NICK HAHN

Hey, thanks a lot and good luck in the Preakness, see you next week.

OPERATOR

The next question is from Stephen Whyno from The Associated Press. Please go ahead.

STEPHEN WHYNO

Hey Wayne, you've had a lot of horses in the Preakness. This might be the last one at

Old Pimlico. What do you love so much about Old Pimlico and what are you going to miss about it?

D. WAYNE LUKAS

I'm going to really miss it. It's the easiest one and Baffert and I talked time to time about this. The most fun, believe it or not, of all the three Triple Crown races, we had the most fun there all being in one locker room and sharing that stakes barn like we do. And Pimlico just makes it awful easy. They do a beautiful job of handling the seating arrangements for everybody, including yourself, and it just seems like it falls into place. I think there's a lot of the early tension that builds on Derby Week kind of disappears at the Preakness, that everybody kind of takes exhailes and decides that well, hell, you know, we'll all get together again because the camaraderie and everything is super there and they do a beautiful job of taking care of us top to bottom.

STEPHEN WHYNO

What's your--

D. WAYNE LUKAS

We're going to miss it. You're breaking up there? Yeah.

STEPHEN WHYNO

What is your favorite—[Connection lost; caller dropped]

D. WAYNE LUKAS

Nope, you're still.

OPERATOR

Please re-queue for questioning. Next question is from Childs Walker from the Baltimore Banner. Please go ahead.

CHILDS WALKER

Yeah. Hi, Wayne. Thanks for doing this. You've been, you've been coming to the Preakness for many, many decades now. When you look back, when you look back over all your ones at Pimlico, do you, do you have a favorite? Is there one that stands out the most and sort of speaks to what makes the Preakness special?

D. WAYNE LUKAS

Well, they all are special. When you've been to the Derby and you've been knocked around like the case this year and you get to the Preakness, you think, gee, maybe we can regroup. And then they all become really special and they're competitive just like any other these Triple Crown races. And I, I enjoy every one of them. I don't know if I'd pick out any one as special if. Last year was something else with 270 or 2740 owners

diving into the winner's circle. But when you can please that many people, I just want to please two this year. John Bellinger and Brian Coelho, my 2 clients. But to give them that opportunity and the Preakness becomes the now race, right? It steps up and it becomes the one you want to win next.

CHILDS WALKER

You talked about how you will miss Old Pimlico. At the same time, we've all heard, you know, the problems with the grandstand, with the facilities, you know how they've become rundown over the years. Do you also in a way look forward to being at a new Pimlico in a couple of years? I mean, is that in the big picture sort of a positive statement about where the sport might be headed, at least in Maryland?

D. WAYNE LUKAS

Well, I would love to see the tradition of Pimlico continue. I'm probably not going to have much to say about it. I'm going to be 90 in a couple of months. So if I can get to race when they do bring it back, it'll be something. But I don't, that's probably not realistic. But I love the place. They treat us great. It's the most fun of all, and I'm going to make the most of it this year.

CHILDS WALKER

All right. Thanks, Wayne.

OPERATOR

Your final question is from David Grening from Daily Racing Form. Excuse me, please go ahead.

DAVID GRENING

Wayne, I know you won this seven times, but was there one or two of these that didn't win that left thinking, man, that got away from us? We, we, we should have gotten that one.

D. WAYNE LUKAS

Every one of them. Yeah, I've always been, I've always felt real confident that with, with the horses I've brought in there and so forth. I'm not even sure, David, my memory is good enough that I can remember the second through the thirds. But I really think that the race changes so much that from the Derby to the Preakness that it's a whole different animal, you know, different not only the distance changes, but the surface and a lot of things coming back in two weeks. There's so many variables in going into the Preakness that it's not easy. It's not just another horse race. It takes some management and some thought, and the damn sure takes a good horse.

DAVID GRENING

When you ran against Justify you got beat a half-length with Bravazo and I was just

wondering if that--

D. WAYNE LUKAS

One, yeah, I was going to bring that up, but--

DAVID GRENING

Did you think that--

D. WAYNE LUKAS

Excuse me, I was going to say that one that David was he was way on the outside. Remember, it was a little bit hazy or foggy or whatever. And I don't think he wore blinkers. I don't think he ever saw Justify. I think that we had a chance to beat him. Probably the history books are glad we didn't because Justify goes on to win the Belmont and I was happy for Bob. He's always been a good friend. But Bravazo had a shot at him and it there was heart skip or two. Well, I thought we were going to get it. But if I think they've been head and head, I think we had a shot.

DAVID GRENING

Fair enough. Thank you.

OPERATOR

We have one more question from Cameron Drummond from the Lexington Herald Leader. Please go ahead.

CAMERON DRUMMOND

Hey there, Wayne, appreciate the time. Just wanted to ask you real quick, obviously you've won 7 Preakness Stakes in your storied career. What's the secret? Is there anything that you can kind of identify from those seven winners that all have a common thread or something that you know, kind of ties them together as horses that were able to win such a prestigious race?

D. WAYNE LUKAS

Well, there's a couple of things. In 1980, the first one I tried we won. So I got to thinking that maybe that was the way to go about it. And I had such grandiose ideas that we could win all three that I might have been a little bit soft on some of those early Derbies and trying to keep the horse fresh to get through the two-week interval and the three-week interval to the Belmont. But we trained our horses to get into the races. We very seldom have a horse that's coming from way out of it or even mid pack for that matter. And Baffert, Bob Baffert is playing very similar. He's won eight of them. So if there's a common thread between Bob and I, it's probably that we have horses that get into the race and take the race to the crowd and it might suit the Preakness. I doubt it the tracks that much faster anything but it, that style of horse made suit the Preakness better than a horse that needs to have a pace up front and come from 5th, 6th, 7th, 8th, whatever.

And then you throw in the smaller field of just fourteen horses and that really changes things. That 20-horse field at Churchill is really hard to overcome. It always will be. It's going to be a fly in the ointment for a long time, it looks like. But the 14-horse field that Preakness makes it a lot, probably, I don't want to say more fair, but it's more manageable for sure.

OPERATOR

There are no further questions at this time. Please proceed.

JIM GLUCKSON

All right, thank you. Thank you, Andrew. Wayne, excellent job today. Thanks so much for taking the time to answer the questions and good luck to American Promise in the Preakness and all your horses coming up Preakness Week, next week. Again, thanks again and best of luck to you.

D. WAYNE LUKAS

Looking forward to seeing you all, take care.

JIM GLUCKSON

Thanks, Wayne. Wayne Lukas, everyone. And that concludes our conference call today. We'd like to thank our guests, Steve Asmussen and Brendan Walsh and D. Wayne Lukas

for joining us today. A transcript of today's conference call and a recording will be available again on ntra.com in the next 48 hours. So everybody have a have a good day and thanks for joining us. Be well.

OPERATOR

Ladies and gentlemen, this concludes your conference call for today. We thank you for participating and ask that you please disconnect your lines.