



150th Longines Kentucky Oaks

Post-Race News Conference
Friday, May 3, 2024
Churchill Downs



JIM MULVIHILL: All right, welcome down to the media briefing room, everyone. The Longines Kentucky Oaks goes to Thorpedo Anna, and we are privileged right now to be joined by the winning connections. We've got trainer Kenny McPeek. We have got a few of the owners: Judy Hicks, who also bred the filly; as well as Mark Edwards and Jamie Wilson. And of course, winning rider Brian Hernandez Jr. Thank you all for joining us.

I would like to start with Brian, as is custom. If you can take us through the race from your perspective, everything from leaving the paddock to crossing the wire. Just tell us how it went.

BRIAN J. HERNANDEZ JR.: It was kind of -- it worked out the way I thought it was. Kenny [McPeek] and I have talked about the race a few times over the last few days. It looked like there was no speed to our inside. So we thought that if we let her run under the wire in the first time, she would get good position, which she did. From there, she is just such a naturally talented filly, she went quick through the half and the whole way around there, really. She was just doing it with her ears up and cruising along.

The good thing about her today, with all the people here in the crowd and everything else, over in Arkansas, she got a little nervous in the post-parade, I think that was from her not racing in a while. Today she got out there and she was just cool, calm, taking it all in. When I seen the way she was in the post-parade, I thought, man, it's going to take a really, really good horse to beat her today.

Like I said, it was a magical moment, because turning for home, she was so relaxed and cruising, I was able to enjoy the roar of the crowd for a few jumps. And then when I called on her, she responded and just ran away from them.

JIM MULVIHILL: Brian, you have had so much success here at Churchill Downs. You are a Breeder's Cup Classic winner, but this is your first Kentucky Oaks winner. Just tell us what it means to win one of the big ones here at Churchill.

BRIAN J. HERNANDEZ JR.: This is something special. This will be my 20th year here at Churchill Downs watching the Kentucky Oaks. I came here as an 18-year-old kid right out of high school. I will never forget coming here, being able to just watch the Oaks. To actually win one with my parents and my wife and kids in the audience, it's just a really special moment. It's something we are really going to enjoy.

I have to thank Kenny [McPeek] for sticking with me all these years. I have been fortunate enough to ride for him and he has given us some really good opportunities and we have been successful at it.



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JIM MULVIHILL: Kenny, I want to ask similar of you. Starting with the race itself, just tell us how you saw it unfold and what you enjoyed seeing through the race.

KENNY McPEEK: I was pretty calm through it all. When I saw she clicked off on her own, and she was basically just in hand under Brian [Hernandez]. I felt really confident, even the first half mile. She's just fast. Judy's bred a beautiful filly here, and she's got gear on top of gear. Really looking forward to her future, even beyond today.

JIM MULVIHILL: Those were some pretty quick fractions.

KENNY McPEEK: But she can do that. At Oaklawn, she was on the outside draw, and she jumped quick. She put him in position real easy. Good horses make our job easy. They're hard to find. But boy, when you get one, it's something special, isn't it?

JIM MULVIHILL: You have come to the Oaks with some good fillies before. You have finished second three times. How about you? How does this feel to finally get an Oaks win?

KENNY McPEEK: Pretty good. We work our tail off. And the seconds were a little frustrating. I'm really proud of the fact that we bought her. And a couple of the others we have run in the race, I bought at auction.

You just work at it, and you work at it, and you try to figure out what kind of formula it's going to take to come up with a horse that can win races like these. It's come together today.

And you can't take any of it for granted. You just keep at it.

JIM MULVIHILL: And she had a nice work previous to the race, and you were pretty relaxed all week. What gave you that sort of -- not just confidence, but ability to just chill and relax, despite being live in the Oaks?

KENNY McPEEK: Well, when you bring horses into these races, you're watching their feed tub, and you're watching how they are moving in the morning. And you're trying to pick up anything that you think might be a problem. There was no problem. No error.

She's a filly; they're going to take her back there tonight. They're going to bathe her, clean her up, and bed her down deep, and then they're going to throw her feed tub in it. And it'll be gone, and that's a big deal. When horses eat well, they run well. And she's a good doer and just a real healthy filly. Like I said, it makes our job easy.



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JIM MULVIHILL: Judy, congratulations to you. You have a homebred Oaks winner. What are you feeling right now?

JUDY HICKS: Emotionally can't really describe. She was always a tyrant at the farm. You went this the stall to try to catch her with her mother she would turn and fire at you with everything she had.

The gal that foaled her is sitting in the audience with us.

JIM MULVIHILL: Who is that?

JUDY HICKS: Lita Fannon (phonetic) . There she is. She has a whole lot to do with her temperament and just getting her to relax and do things we wanted it our way. She didn't always get it our way. She had it her way a lot of times, too. Very, very proud.

JIM MULVIHILL: What can you tell us about the mare [Sataves]?

JUDY HICKS: You need to read about her. She was premature; seven, eight weeks premature when she was born. She was 45 inches tall, weighed 60 pounds. Her hocks were crushed. And there wasn't much hope of any future for her.

So I volunteered to take her from the owners, Mr. Sanford Robertson and Kathryn Nikkel, who bred her. And Mr. Robertson graciously gave her to me when I volunteered to keep her. And I tried to do my magic and it worked.

JIM MULVIHILL: I would say so.

JUDY HICKS: She has now gone on to produce some pretty nice horses so far.

JIM MULVIHILL: Amazing. Mark and Jamie, if you can just tell us how this group came together and what you guys are feeling right now.

MARK EDWARDS: We came together because Kenny [McPeek] put us together. And I will say this about Kenny, I've had several horses with him. One of his exercise riders, a former jockey, says Kenny is a seven-second man. He looks at a horse for seven seconds, he can tell if it's a good one. So I give him all the credit.

JAMIE WILSON: I guess I'd add that we have a bit of a phrase at the race and we say "In Kenny We Trust" because he has that unerring knack of finding these horses really on the cheap side and turning them into superstars as he has with this one. It's been great here to be here with Mark



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[Edwards] and Judy [Hicks] today and would like to thank all of our entourage who have made us feel very welcome.

Obviously came over from the U.K. yesterday to be here. And brilliant ride from Brian [Hernandez] and great training performance from Kenny [McPeek] and thanks to everybody at Churchill Downs as well. It's been quite an experience.

JIM MULVIHILL: Maybe this is a good time to take some questions.

Q. Congrats, everyone. Kenny, she was on the front end, the challenges kept coming and she kept putting them away. What allowed her to do that?

KENNY McPEEK: On paper, it didn't look like there was any speed that was really going to eyeball her. There wasn't anything obvious. She has natural speed. We decided to take advantage of that. The 7 horse [Fiona's Magic], which was the one that was on her outside, was one that I told Brian [Hernandez], I said, Look this one is probably going to look at you for a little bit, but I don't think she's going to challenge you for long. And I think I looked at the board and the 7 was 37-1.

But 22 and change, 46 and change made me a little bit nervous but she was doing it within herself and a natural athlete. Obviously she got there.

Q. Kenny, as one of the few trainers who's won the Preakness with a filly [Swiss Skydiver], is that an option for this horse?

KENNY McPEEK: I have thought about it already. (laughter)

And you know, it would be like me to do something like that.

But we'll have to talk to the ownership. We'll have to talk. She wasn't nominated for the Triple Crown. I have said all week that I wasn't scared to even run her against colts. I mean, she's that good.

We would have to look at the numbers. I think it's a \$200,000 entry fee, which is pretty steep.

But then again, there aren't a lot of options for 3-year-old fillies beyond this. It don't make any sense to come into a Black-Eyed Susan. I will have to look at what's at Belmont week. Ultimately, I would like to get her to the Alabama. I would like to win another Alabama. And there's a couple of nice races in New York later on in the season for straight 3s.



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Q. Congratulations, everyone, on winning the 2024 Kentucky Oaks. Kenny, can you talk about the progression with this filly? She only had one prep before this race. Obviously, she was fantastic last year. Not only that, who does she remind you of, of some of the great horses you have trained?

KENNY McPEEK: She was relatively easy as a 2-year-old filly. She didn't come around until a little bit later in the season. And we trailed three races together pretty quick with her because she did it so easily. And then it was a matter of putting her on the shelf for a little bit and then bringing her back.

This past winter, we don't know exactly when, how it happened, but she walked out of her stall lame and behind. And it turned out -- we tried to walk her out of it. She wasn't coming out of it. We trucked her to Kentucky and had Dr. [Larry] Bramlage look at her. She had a bruise on her hip the size of -- just maybe under the size of a softball. It was very unusual.

He said it's no big deal. There's no fracture. It's just a deep bruise. We don't know if she hit it on a stall door or if she did it laying down, getting up. Hard to say.

But that actually set us back almost six weeks. And then when we started getting her ready at the fairgrounds for the race at Oaklawn, I actually had a series of races that I had chosen to bring her into her first race of the season. She was not quite ready for the Fair Grounds Oaks. I thought the Ashland was a good race. I think she could have won the Ashland, too. But the fantasy fell in order.

She won easy that day. It was okay, because I thought she was about 80% and she did it like she was 110.

Q. Does she remind you of anyone?

KENNY McPEEK: They are all apples and oranges. Take Charge Lady was a really special filly that I trained. Swiss Skydiver, obviously, we've already talked about.

She has a lot of Uncle Mo coming out of her. She physically looks like an Uncle Mo. Judy [Hicks] has done a magnificent job raising a filly from a mare [Sataves] that was basically, from what I understand, a reject. That's where the bloodlines come in.

When I go to auction, I look at horses, and I have got this gift -- actually, I don't like training slow horses. I prefer fast ones. And if I can find a fast one in the auction, then it makes all the difference.

But it's just a real honor to be around a good one like her.



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Q. You raised some eyebrows earlier this week with the grizzly bear comment. Why were you so confident?

KENNY McPEEK: You saw it, didn't you? (laughter)

For those who don't know, I had been quoted repeatedly all week: They better bring a bear because I have got a Grizzly. (laughter)

It wasn't Babe Ruth calling a shot -- but maybe. (laughter)

Q. Kenny, you have been a runner-up in the Derby, a runner-up three times in this race. Does that add to this moment for you? And was it hard to deal with those setbacks?

KENNY McPEEK: It does add to it, but setbacks are part of the game. There's an old saying: Win like you're used to it and lose like you like it. And so you have to deal with the losses, and you have to learn from the losses. All I have done is try to bring some good fillies into the race. I think I have a couple of thirds and fourths also.

So, we were kind of getting an idea of what kind of horses it took. But to punch it over the edge is really nice.

Q. Brian, you made a joke earlier about Kenny [McPeek] sticking with you all these years. Can you speak a bit more to y'all's relationship and the ability to ride a horse like this, and with him all this time?

BRIAN J. HERNANDEZ JR.: I have been very fortunate. Quite a few years ago -- it's probably been seven, eight years now -- Kenny started using me down in New Orleans. And we had success early on, and it's just been successful since.

The nice thing about riding for Kenny, him and the team do such a good job getting these horses ready and preparing them. And he brings over really good horses.

And in the same aspect, when it comes down to me having to ride him, he entrusted me and lets me kind of go out there and do things and not tie my hands to force horses to do things they might not like to do.

I think my riding style fits with his training style, as well, where we let the horses develop and let them take you around there and try to find the trip with them.



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It's just been a great relationship, and I have been fortunate enough to fall into a good spot.

Q. Kenny, you said before you were pretty calm throughout the race. Knowing you have been second in this race three times, and when she came to the head of the stretch and a champion's running at her, was there any thought of "here we go again," or were you that confident in your filly?

KENNY McPEEK: I was that confident. The last eighth of a mile, I was just like, Don't fall down. (laughter) You got this. Just get there.

No, it was nice. Like I said, pretty confident throughout the race, especially when I saw the way she was sitting underneath Brian [Hernandez]. He didn't have to hustle her to get her there. She took him there, and that's the kind of horse we all need.

JIM MULVIHILL: Kenny, can you take us back to last fall and her first two wins and what you thought of her back then? When did you start thinking, "Oh, this is my Oaks filly"?

KENNY McPEEK: She jumped through that really quickly. She had worked like that in the morning. I think we got 4-1 on her the first time out, which is a bit of a gift. I'm not particularly known for first time out. I tend to try to rate horses a little bit, let them learn some lessons. Brian [Hernandez] is exceptionally good at that part of what we do.

We don't ever send horses -- if you see these four-, five-furlong races, we don't participate in those too much. We are trying to get horses -- I believe the longer they run, the longer they run. And that the longer the distance you race them, the longer they last.

But early on, she was a rocketship.

JIM MULVIHILL: Judy, I want to ask you about the mating. How did you come up with Fast Anna?

JUDY HICKS: I like to match physicals with physicals. I don't go with all the bookwork. I always sort of said, Do the Kentucky basketball players' parents play basketball?

JIM MULVIHILL: That's fair.

JUDY HICKS: So, I didn't need a fancy, big-name stallion, because I knew what -- I wasn't sure what the mare was going to throw. However, her first foal by Tourist grew into a pretty big filly, and she won over \$100,000.



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But when I went and saw Fast Anna, there was no question. Everything about him physically was going to match -- was going to match an Uncle Mo, if the trait was there. And I thought: She has the body of Uncle Mo but the legs of a pony.

JIM MULVIHILL: Is she from Fast Anna's last crop?

JUDY HICKS: Yes.

Q. Looking ahead to tomorrow, Kenny and Brian, a little different running style, but what's the path to victory to pulling off an Oaks-Derby double?

KENNY McPEEK: Let me say this about Brian [Hernandez]. Brian is a consummate professional. He's a wonderful young man. No drama. If I say we are working at 5:00, 5:30, he's there 15 minutes early. He usually beats me there, to be honest with you.

Greg Geyer and him work together. Greg is an assistant of mine that's a fantastic guy. Deserves a lot of credit. One of those guys that I can leave and go to another division for a week, two weeks, a month -- no problem. Really proud of everybody.

You trudge along in this game and until you get a horse and you get more recognition, like we're getting today, it's making all that hard work really worth it.

I have lost my train of thought on the question.

JIM MULVIHILL: The question was: What has to happen for you to pull off the double tomorrow?

KENNY McPEEK: Well, so, listen, that horse [Mystik Dan] is doing really good. I have said he's an old soul, very quiet colt, nothing fancy about him. But he goes out there and does his work and he's very push-button.

I see a similar type of race out of him, although maybe not on the lead, because Dornoch sits in front of us. It looks like we are going to get a rail trip. And he's shown he can run from the inside, like he did at Oaklawn in the Southwest [Stakes].

In the Arkansas Derby, we were hung in the outside post. So, look, I think we can pull this thing off. That would be pretty awesome.

JIM MULVIHILL: Maybe we'll see you back here same time tomorrow.



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KENNY McPEEK: Count on it.

JIM MULVIHILL: Thank you, all. Congratulations to the connections of Thorpedo Anna, winner of the Longines Kentucky Oaks.