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An interview with:

**AHMED ZAYAT
JUSTIN ZAYAT
BOB BAFFERT
VICTOR ESPINOZA**

THE MODERATOR: The conditions being what they are, Mr. Zayat is a little soggy. Quite happy, but a little soggy. My name is Keith Mills from the Maryland Jockey Club. Mr. Zayat and his son, Justin, as you well know -- by the way, Justin just graduated from NYU earlier this week, and he is with us today, came down from Baltimore this morning, right?

JUSTIN ZAYAT: Yeah.

THE MODERATOR: So I will kick us off.

Q. Justin, Mr. Zayat, this is unprecedented. I've never been through anything like what you've been through. Talk about what it was like pre-race, into the race, with the storm, the wind and everything. Can you describe how you feel?

AHMED ZAYAT: It's an absolute elation. Not just happy for myself, and my family, and Bob Baffert, and Victor and his groom Edward and every single person, I was honestly happy for the sport. The sport without a star is not a sport, and today winning the historic Preakness at Pimlico, the oldest track in America, is just an unbelievable honor and thrill for us.

Now, God willing, he comes out of his race well, and we could be talking about history. For me, how could I be more happy than that? This is a dream come true.

JUSTIN ZAYAT: For me, it was unbelievable. It's a little different feeling than the Derby. We came in here with much added pressure being the Derby winner. So I felt good all

day, but I also was cautiously optimistic because I knew the competition we were facing.

We drew the 1 post which wasn't easy either. So we had our cards full, and we had to really get it. So I felt good the whole way. It's really special to have my family, my friends and everyone here. It's an unbelievable experience. We're flying high right now.

THE MODERATOR: Bob Baffert has joined us as well. The trainer of American Pharoah. Bob, congratulations, bud. Well done.

BOB BAFFERT: Thank you very much.

Q. Bob, you tracked for a long time. Have you ever been through something like that storm right before a race? What was going through your mind?

BOB BAFFERT: I've never been through anything like that. That was crazy. I thought I don't know what's going to happen with the thunder. These horses, I could tell they didn't like it when they get pelted like that, and I was worried about the cotton balls in his ears. What if they're getting soaking wet? How is he going to react? Maybe I should have taken them out. I was thinking of all these different things.

Then I saw a picture of the track with like a river running on the rail, and I thought he's got to run through that? All these things were going through my mind.

You just don't know how these horses are going to react to the Derby after they run two weeks later. That's why they came in here, both horses, he didn't show me anything, like he looked well. He came here, went over the track, and he floats over the track wherever he goes.

But once you got him around the first time -- I talked to Victor -- he had to get him in a good spot. Once he had him in the bit and he was turning down the backside, when I saw those ears go up, I thought, oh, yeah. Oh, yeah.

It was like then Victor slowed it down a little bit, and then when they came to him at the 3/8 pole, my wife Jill said, they're coming to him. And I

said no, he's waiting, he's waiting. He just let him out and he throws it into overdrive.

The thing is about him, he is the sweetest horse of this caliber that I've ever been around. I mean, you feed him carrots, and he's like a pet. But he's just so -- usually they're like athletes. They want to get it on. But he's just the sweetest horse. He's spoiled to death. It was a magical moment watching him come down that stretch.

Q. You've been in this spot before going into the Belmont with a chance to win the Triple Crown. Is this as talented a horse as you've had?

BOB BAFFERT: Well, I've never won this race as easily and handily. The other horse, Silver Charm, it was a dog fight. War Emblem was a tough race; and Real Quiet, him and Victor, he galloped.

I really don't think about the third leg yet. I'll see how he comes back. It's going to be tough. I've always said this is the easiest of the three legs, and the next race is going to be -- I know everybody right now is sharpening their knives getting ready.

AHMED ZAYAT: Bring it on (laughing).

BOB BAFFERT: You know, the other horses that were in the race today, the way the track was, they might not have gotten a chance to run. You have to take that into consideration.

But for right now, I think what he showed us today, this is the only horse I've never had to try to talk people into knowing how good he is. I sort of keep it low key because I didn't want to jinx myself. But he's doing all the talking.

It's fun watching this because it was fun watching Art Sherman going through with California Chrome. It's just exciting. It's so good for racing with a horse like this. Everybody has been really great. The media has been fantastic about everything.

Really getting on horse racing, you know, horse racing, we needed a little lift. Whether he wins the next one or not, what he's brought to the table, there are a lot of people here today that came to see him run. Me, as a fan and a trainer, I really enjoy watching what he does. What he does in the mornings, I keep watching it.

Jimmy Barnes, my assistant, Georgie and Dana Barnes, everybody that has worked so hard, my staff, you know, to keep these horses at that peak level. I am surrounded by really great people, and it makes me look so much better.

Q. Bob, when will you go up to New York? What are your travel plans?

BOB BAFFERT: I don't know yet. I have until Monday. He'll be here tomorrow. There is a plane Monday. We sort of were waiting to see how the horse ran and how he came out of it. So we're just, Jimmy and I, are going to sit down. I sort of had sort of a game plan, but I just wanted to see what he did today.

We had a plan A, B, and C. Plan C was take him back to California in case things didn't go too well, so C is out of the way. So we're going with A or B.

Q. Mr. Zayat, up until two weeks ago, you didn't have a Derby winner, now you have a Derby and Preakness winner with a chance to win the Triple Crown. Can you sum up how you're feeling about that?

AHMED ZAYAT: It's so funny how people look at this. First of all, we're extremely thrilled. It still hasn't sunk in that we won the Derby, let alone now the Preakness. But before people were looking at us and saying, hey, you've run three times second in the Kentucky Derby. And incidentally, we had another horse, Eskendereya, who was presumably the favorite who got scratched that week.

Now, actually, our record in hindsight would look like, wow, you almost owned the Derby, because of six starts, we've won it once, we've run three times second, and another favorite of us was scratched. So I don't think that Justin and I or any of my trainers would actually think that record at all. It was an unbelievable experience. It does reflect the highs and lows of this game. You count your blessings, you enjoy every moment.

And these are athletes, they are special athletes, things happen. But you take care of them. And in our philosophy, horse comes first. But it's been an unbelievable ride, and as a fan, as a horse lover, I'm just thrilled that we have a shot at history going forward.

Again, we will wait to see how the horse will come out of it, and then we'll map it out.

THE MODERATOR: Victor Espinoza has joined the party. The winning rider of back-to-back Preaknesses for him as well, with California Chrome and now American Pharoah. Any other questions?

Q. As the rain started to come down,

how did that affect the way you were thinking about the race unfolding and then the gates opened? What was your strategy?

VICTOR ESPINOZA: Oh, man, first thing I think about is so much water in my boots. I was flooded in them.

You know, coming to these big races, sometimes we have a plan, but a lot of things will change. With the weather change and everything, I was just freezing. I just wanted to get it over with. But it definitely changed a lot.

Sometimes you do the right decisions for the best of the horse. Just trying to balance out there and go for the lead, and it worked out well.

Q. You said before the Derby that you still didn't know what the limit of this horse was. Does he keep surprising you?

VICTOR ESPINOZA: Yes, definitely. Each race I learn something new, and it surprised me the way he runs.

Today was an amazing race for him. I can't really see how far I was in front because there was so much water in my eyes that I can't really see. I wasn't really worried about it. I was so focused with American Pharoah to see how he is traveling on the messy track.

Q. There was a comment from Bob that you had a stream of water in front of you that you had to pass through like a lake. Did you have to run through that?

VICTOR ESPINOZA: Yes, but American Pharoah, he handled it well, so I was not worried about him.

AHMED ZAYAT: I made a conscious decision that during this campaign that we were not going to hype the horse. The horse was doing the talking for us.

A lot of people before the Derby, when he worked lights out and impressed a lot of people, they were saying his dad is this, and I was totally against this kind of talk because I have respect for the history of the equine, and I wanted the horse to do the talking.

But the sign of a good horse is whatever is thrown in his face, he finds a way to win. And I honestly unbelievably felt so good about him winning the Derby. I don't care if it was going to be an inch or a photo finish him winning the Derby. But I also felt, in fairness to this horse that, everything went against him, but still because of his heart and his brilliance, he still won it. Meaning

he was wide, he was floating wide. He had to dig hard for it.

Honestly, he didn't like the track that day. The track was very tiring, was deep. That is not the kind of track that these kind of athletes excel on. In spite of all of this, he won it, and he won it comfortably. He didn't have the wow effect that he had been doing, like demolishing his competition through all the races he'd run as a 3-year-old, and even as a 2-year-old.

But when they were asking me all day today, in the morning and yesterday how do you feel, I feel very confident. Not out of arrogance. The horse is giving me that confidence. And I tweeted a couple days ago the real Pharoah will show up, and, indeed, he put a show today. I mean, no one could come close to him.

BOB BAFFERT: I thought you weren't going to hype the horse?

AHMED ZAYAT: No, I'm not. I'm stating facts. Facts are not hype. Facts are not hype.

BOB BAFFERT: Touche'.

Q. Could the rain be an equalizer in a race like this? And if so, how does that even the playing field and how impressive was what your horse did?

BOB BAFFERT: I think the rain can really change the whole dynamics of the race. That's when long shots can come and get you and weird things can happen.

But he ran on a really muddy, horrible track that day. I mean, it rained at Oaklawn Park, and he skips through anything. He's that kind of horse, wet track, dry track. This track is a soft, safe track, and when he got on it the first time here he loved it.

So these horses, we can make excuses for them. But if they're ready to run, I told Victor, look, if he fires, you'll win. If he doesn't, then we just go back and blame it on the rain or whatever. But the bottom line is these horses, if they're going to fire their race, if they bring their A-game, and he brought it today.

At Churchill Downs he really didn't bring his A-game that day. He struggled a little bit because he used himself up.

Today he was so quiet. He came up to the paddock. He was good. The crowd didn't set him off. He's a very smart horse, a very intelligent horse. He's just all class, and everything with the rain and all, I'm sure when he had his ears up

cruising along like that, he moves. He's just a really -- I mean, he bred him. I'm so glad that they gave him to me to train. I think Bode could train this horse. He's just a great horse.

Q. Victor, it looks like he actually didn't break super sharply and you had to hustle him a little bit and you wound up going 22-something, I think it was the first quarter. What happened there?

VICTOR ESPINOZA: Well, it's tough to get in the 1 hole. The 1 hole is always tough because they're the first ones to load in the gate and they stay too long in the gate, and the other horses started moving back and forth. So for that it's tough. But it was a fast pace, but I had no choice just to let him run the messy and wet track.

AHMED ZAYAT: I have a question for you guys. Do you know what the official margin he was winning by? Does anybody know? Here we go.

BOB BAFFERT: He was so worried about that.

THE MODERATOR: Upstairs, someone said it was seven lengths, and I'm going to go with that.

Q. What does Jimmy Barnes and Martin mean to the program?

BOB BAFFERT: They're a big part of it. Martin is a big part of our program. He works these horses for me. He gets to ride them. For some reason he was already taken and he picked up the mount at the draw, so things like that happen. But I believe in fate. It was supposed to happen. We have a great relationship, working relationship.

Jimmy Barnes, he's been with me, him and Dana for years. We've won all these big races. I love Jimmy. He loves to compete at the top level. He is so competitive. He likes showing up on the big days. I had an owner tell me one day that I think Jimmy Barnes is in more win pictures than anybody else because he's on the road, winning on the road. He loves it. He knows what to do.

We get there and we have a system and it works. We try not to get off the system, and we work with each other. I'll ask Jimmy, what do you think? What do you think of my idea? And he'll go, like, oh, I don't know. You know, but we have a great relationship. He's family to me. I'm so thankful that he's with me.

AHMED ZAYAT: I want to add to that. I actually cannot thank enough the Bob Baffert team. You're talking about an owner who has

dealt with these people firsthand. They are class 1. They are absolutely the best. Bob has a team that the camaraderie, the respect, their competition, their attitude, win or lose, through tough times and good times, they stick together.

These guys go to their barn at 3 o'clock in the morning. None of them know what time they're going to go home. They're going to go home when it's needed. To do that every day, day-in and day-out, seven days a week. Horses have to be trained and get fed. This is an unbelievable community of people.

Listen, I come from the business world where we're very competitive. We work hard. I haven't seen this kind of commitment and passion. You have to love it. You have to love the animals, and you have to work together, and it takes a lot of team to come to where we are today. Every little step, it looks easy coming here, but believe me, it's not.

As an owner who has had the fortune and misfortune of having good horses, it's so admirable seeing. Besides Bob thanking Martin Garcia, who rode Dortmund in the race, it tells you what kind of teamwork it is. Everybody pays their dues and chips in.

BOB BAFFERT: I want to add something to that. When I was having my heart attack in Dubai, I told Jill first one, text Ahmed. Tell him I'm having a little heart attack. But Bodemeister is okay. Don't worry. We're on it. Don't worry. I never quit training from that bed. In this game, if you want to compete at this level -- I still owe my wife a honeymoon. It's seven days a week. You have to stay on top of it. This is our vacation. This is how we spend it with Bode.

Just to go through all of this with my boys and my little girl didn't make the Derby. I told her, hey, if we make it to the Belmont, you'll be there. It's a family thing. I've known the Zayats, they're just like family. He's a great family man. He loves his family. They're so close, and to see that, really -- we've been through the peaks and valleys.

In the Belmont, I've seen good horses that you don't see it until two weeks later. That's when it starts showing up on these horses. I've been through it. About two weeks out, you'll start seeing if it's getting to them a little bit, and that's why it's so difficult. Those horses that won it, it's totally different now. Now it's about it's like everybody wants to be part of it, and full gate or whatever. But it's still so exciting. When that horse came

down the track today I went oh, oh, here we go.

Q. What were the track conditions really like, and the conditions with the wind and the rain? What was it really like to ride on the track conditions?

VICTOR ESPINOZA: I didn't even worry about the track conditions. I just worried about American Pharoah, the way he was traveling. It's amazing. So much rain we had and so much water, it's insane. American Pharoah was traveling super in there. It's all about confidence. I have all the confidence in American Pharoah and Bob Baffert, the way he trains it, then it's all it takes.

Q. Is this just about the best graduation present you can have?

JUSTIN ZAYAT: It's a dream come true. You can't script this story right now. I took my last final Thursday after having the craziest week of the upcoming Preakness, the drawing and everything. Took my final literally left right after. Handed in my test, came right down to Baltimore, and it's show time. To have the Derby, and then the Preakness and graduation, it's unbelievable.

Q. You guys said the plan changed because of the weather. What was the other plan? And did because of what happened and the fact that you ran so well at Oaklawn in the slop, did that have something to do with changing the plans?

BOB BAFFERT: No, there really wasn't a change in the plan. They had to break well. Both my horses when I drew the inside, the break, the last thing I wanted to do, you know, there is a target on your back, is be swarmed by the outside horses.

Being in this game, just from experience, I know every jockey, the horses, I know every horse that was in the race. I've seen the races. You do your homework. We did a little this is what's going to happen, this could happen, whatever. And I thought Mr. Z was going to be the horse that we had to deal with early that would be the horse that once he was in there, I knew he was going to be difficult to shake off. And I told Victor, you know what, just let him roll and see what happens. If he's good enough, he'll do it. If not, don't worry about it. It just wasn't our day. So sometimes when you feel you have the best horse, just let him run.

Q. Looks like you sold the right horse?



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AHMED ZAYAT: For me it wasn't about selling the right horse or buying the right horse. Mr. Z is a horse that I absolutely love. I love the fact that my kids named him after me. I've never named a horse after myself. I think it's kind of arrogant. I've always named my horses after my kids. My first Grade 1 winner was Point Ashley after Ashley.

BOB BAFFERT: Who rode that horse?

AHMED ZAYAT: Of course, Victor.

BOB BAFFERT: Who trained it?

AHMED ZAYAT: So I've never named after myself. But my kids know on the farm that I loved that horse, so they named him behind my back, submitted to The Jockey Club and it was approved so nothing could be done.

So talking about Mr. Z, I've always loved him. I felt he ran 13 times. My son and I had a disagreement if we should run him again or not, even in the Kentucky Derby, frankly speaking. I have tremendous respect to the legacy of D. Wayne Lukas. He's a trainer, and Bob will tell you, I don't micromanage my trainers. They are with the horses 24/7. They are their babies. They do that for a living, so I didn't want to. But running 13 times for me, I felt that, no, we have no reason to run in two weeks. My problem was running in two weeks. We didn't finish first, second or even third. So why run him?

But out of respect to D. Wayne, I said to him I'm against it and I'm not going to run. And literally at the 11th hour, a couple of hours before the entry, we got an unsolicited call from Calumet, and Lukas told me would you sell him? And I said, no, I'm not running the horse. He said, I figured as much, he's dear to you. And he said, they really want him. I said, who is they? And knowing who the owners were and knowing that Lukas really felt that he's priming him for the Preakness, and he needed that one more shot.

You know, the man is 80 years old. I don't know how many Derbies he has -- I'm being very transparent -- or how many Triple Crowns, so I didn't want to deprive him. I want to be a sportsman. It's all about competition.

So I said, you know what? Maybe there is a bigger plan here. Maybe it's meant to be. So Justin and I spoke about it, and I said maybe I'm just going to give him a price, like a crazy price, and they came to my price. I felt, you know what? Let the best horse win.

If he's going to be what we think he is, and

he's the real deal, then he should beat them. Same thing when everybody asked me about how do you feel about running Dortmund? Is it going to spoil him? He's a great horse. They have to run the race but have other owners. I respect that. I'm a competitive guy. If I have another horse with Bob and Bob wants to run him, and he has another horse in his barn, I wouldn't expect Bob not to run him. I mean, let them run the race and let them win. So that is exactly the story.

BOB BAFFERT: And if you don't sell horses in this business, you're not going to be in it very long.

Q. Bob, what time will you gather tomorrow to meet the media? Your favorite question of the day. What time will you be available tomorrow morning?

BOB BAFFERT: I'll be there at 8:00 o'clock. I'll be there unless you want me there earlier.

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