

DONNA BARTON BROTHERS TALKIN' HORSES QUESTIONS

QUESTIONS

From KT:

Q: Ask your mom if she remembers Cap Cunningham in Barn B at Waterford Park.

DB: Yes, she remembers Cap Cunningham and she says Hello!

From James Robison:

Q: I'd like to remind Donna that her on the track/spot comment following Zenyatta's last public workout before the Breeder's Cup was "she never did get by that horse she worked with". Does she remember that and was she surprised that Zenyatta never did get by Blame in the actual running of the Classic? Keep up the good work, I think you're the most insightful commentator out there today.

DBB: How kind! Yes, James, I do remember her pre-race workout and my comments. All the same, I was rooting for her to retire with a perfect 20:20 record and she came so close!

From Ernie Belmonte:

I have 3 questions:

Q: What are your handicapping strategies when you ever handicap a race?

DBB: Everybody can read PAST performances. I do what I can to assess current conditioning, meaning hair coat, energy level, fitness and how the race track's conditions will help or hurt and particular horse's running style.

Q: How often do you bet?

DBB: Anytime I see an opportunity that I cannot pass up.

Q: How often are you on TVG?

DBB: I cover Keeneland's fall and spring meets for TVG and I will cover 3 days of racing for them this coming summer in August during Del Mar's meeting only because I'll be in town and have the opportunity to cover the races for them while I'm there.

From Mike G. Rutherford:

Q: MRS Donna, where did you get that goofy husband? I tried to send him to school but he chewed up his books! best wishes! Mgr

DBB: Very funny, Mike. You know my husband thinks the world of you!

From Joan Gambino:

Q1: What three things does the industry need to do to bring new owners and bettors to the tracks?

DBB: Bringing new owners and new bettors are two different strategies but both would require Horse Racing education and that's why I wrote my book. Also, I do believe that both groups need to have a greater sense of confidence in the sport in the regard that

it is on the level. By this I am referring to race day medications. With all of the hubbub lately over “drugs in racing” I think we lose sight of the fact that horse racing in the United States has the most the most stringent drug testing procedures of ANY other sport and in ANY other country. Drug abuse is rare but we sure do talk about it a lot.

The third point is where we divide bettors and owners. For bettors we need more bettor education and we need to encourage newcomers to NOT bet with the house until they get a better sense of good betting opportunities. Bet with your friends-- horse for horse--and bet a beer, dinner, designated-driver-status, but don't donate money to the track it just discourages a return visit.

To bring more owners into the business the current owners acting as “hosts” could be very helpful. For instance, just using an example with names you're likely to recognize, I'm sure that Bill and Susan Casner meet people all the time who say, “How exciting that you won the Derby! I'd love to go to the track, it's looks so fun, but I wouldn't even know where to begin. I don't know how to bet... yada yada yada” This would be a great opportunity for Mr. and Mrs. Casner to say, “We have a horse in Saturday, why don't you join us? We'd love to have you as our guests.” Now using Mr. and Mrs. Casner as an example here may not have been the best choice because no one does more to promote horse racing and generate interest in horse racing than WinStar Farm and the Casners but you get my point.

Q2: What incentives need to be offered to keep top level horses in training beyond their third year?

DBB: Not sure it can be done. One, there is not a racing authority that has the power to create and then enforce such a paradigm and two, the money that a "hot" 2 or 3 year old can earn as a freshman sire can often be so much more than they can earn if they continue to race that's it's hard to get past that for the people who own them.

This is something that the breeders would have to get in collusion on and it's not out of the question, after all, they worked together with the leadership John Gaines to form the Breeders' Cup races and since their inception in 1984 they've been a huge hit. The Breeders would have to decide that this would be in the best, overall, of the sport and, ultimately, the breeding industry, and then they'd have to implement the program.

I should add that the money that these “hot” sires generate versus the money it costs to keep them in training (and I am figuring in the high cost of insuring these “hot” horses) is astronomical. And then you have to keep in mind that some of them truly are injured at 2 or 3 and **cannot** race anymore. A horse like Eskendereya comes to mind. So you ask the owner to just put them away for a year, let the pizzaz wear off, and breed next year? It's a lot to ask from a guy whose already poured millions into the game.

From Rachel:

Q: A couple of years ago I think I read something you wrote about "Where are all the horse crazy little girls?" you talked how they loved horse racing as little girls but that love got destroyed by the abuses in the industry e.g. whip abuse, lack of good homes after racing, things like that. The article was spot on. If you did indeed write about this,

could you expound a little on why the thousands and thousands who start out loving racing leave it, not hors activities, just racing and how what you think the industry needs to offer to keep these young fans?

DBB: Deep subject, I could go on for hours. But we do need to refine our whip rules, aftercare programs and fan education. I've read about studies where people state that their **least** favorite part of watching a race is the last 1/8th of a mile. Surprising? It was to me. Their answer for that was that the horses get whipped the most in the last 1/8th of a mile and they don't like watching it. As a former jockey and horse lover, I can honestly say that I do not believe that the whip hurts them when they're running. Too much adrenaline flowing for them to really notice it. That said, if they're not really feeling it **and** it gives newcomers an uneasy feeling about our "sport", should we really still be doing this?

I do believe, however, that jockeys should carry a whip, just as parents should reserve the right to discipline (or threaten to discipline) their children in public. Horses are a lot like children and even when they know the rules they will challenge them. Seeing the whip reminds them of what is expected (like staying between the fences!). But we need to see much less of the whip when watching a race. As for after care, lots of people working together on this right now and I think we'll work it out. Fan education? Hate to keep sending readers back to my book but that is precisely why I wrote it.

From Anne Castle:

Q: Since you were actually in the trenches of racing on every angle being a jockey, how do you keep your personal feelings out of your comments? You know more of the everyday comings and goings, behind the scenes etc. than most.

DBB: Good question, Anne. Some if comes down to the fact that much of what I know is too "inside baseball" and not interesting to most casual viewers. Additionally, it's impossible not to be happy for a person who is genuinely happy, no matter your personal history with or feelings for that person. The Eight Belles tragedy was tough. I saw her crumble to the ground and looked away as soon as I knew what had happened. I saw more through my peripheral vision than I cared to see and, in order to offer and valid and fact-based report on TV I had to remain emotionally unattached--at least until we were off the air.

From Diego Garcia:

Q: I think you should be a poster girl for the industry because you are a are a very attractive woman!

DBB: I love you, Diego.

From Wayne Williams:

Q: Why are there so many young horses with published works (15 to 20)over an extended time (6 months and more) by some of the leading trainers? Then they are finally entered and race once every 2 months or so.

DBB: Trainer percentages is one answer. Trainers used to run a horse when they were ready to run without hurting themselves even though they weren't quite fit enough to win. They're more inclined to work them not until they're ready to come with their best effort because they want to keep their win percentages up. Who can blame them? The bettors and owners place a lot of emphasis on this statistic that, 20 years ago, was barely available. Distance and/or surface limitations is another. A trainer may recognize early on that their steed will need a route of ground or the turf to do their best but those races are not available until Saratoga even though they receive this horse "ready to run" (fit) in April.

Another problem is that sometimes the Daily Racing Form and Equibase will publish works from a year ago--and maybe several works--while the horse shows only ONE work in recent months and no races for 6 months! I HATE this!

From Susan Carothers:

Q: Love your work! Enjoyed your talk with your mom!

DBB: Thank you, Susan!

From ASL:

Q: What are your thoughts on eliminating raceday medications?

DBB: ASL, this is a good question but I think this a question that needs to be directed more towards to the trainers whose job it is to care for the horses. I know many of them are against eliminating Lasix and I respect their opinions. Having said that, it may be time to give this approach a try. You know how the eye doctors recommend against daily use of Visine because your eyes begin to release this job as their own? I wonder if Lasix works the same way? It's just a shame that the horses have to be the guinea pigs for this experiment.

From Randy:

Q: Do you feel that a female rider will win the Kentucky Derby in the next 25 years, and if so, who are the three ladies that you feel have the best shot at doing that?

DBB: My mother was one of the first half-dozen women to be licensed as a jockey in the United States and that was back in 1969. If you would've asked her this question in 1970 I think her answer would've been an emphatic "Yes!" and she would've been wrong. If you would've asked me this in 1987, the year I rode my first race, I too would've answered "Yes"... If a woman wins the Derby next year I'll have been validated. Who do I think could do it? Anyone of the top half-dozen women in the United States and Canada who ends up with the fastest horse.

From Vicky:

Q: Do you have a favorite or most memorable "After the finish line" horseback interview among the many great ones you've done? If so, with whom?

DBB: Well Jose Valdivia was pretty fun this year after he won the Belmont Stakes. One question and a full three minutes of an answer that, not only walked us through every important step of the race, but also included his emotions and feelings at each juncture. Before that I would say Calvin Borel winning his first Derby on Street Sense. The whole world fell in love with him and, in the aftermath, he was invited to the White House to join President George Bush and the Queen of England for dinner. What a pleasure to assist in being the vehicle upon which his beautiful heart was laid bare for the world to see.

From Lowwood:

Q: How important is a jockey to horses winning races?

DBB: **Winning** a race? 10%. **Losing** a race? 90%. At least that's how the owners, trainers and bettors seem to see it. Personally, I believe it depends upon the horse.

From Ralph Rubin:

Q: Would dressage training (lateral movements) help race horses? Being able to straighten them out much easier when their haunches become displaced around turns and on the straight away, as in the stretch.

DBB: Great question, Ralph! I believe that it would help horses a great deal if we trained clock-wise one day, counter clock-wise the next. Our U.S. Thoroughbreds are relegated to turning left only and I do not think that's good for their longterm soundness. It's likely that dressage training would help alleviate some of the problems that arise from always training and running counter clock-wise but, to be honest, stables simply do not have the time or man power to do this. Currently the average day rate at upper level race tracks is around \$90 per day. At this rate they receive the best care that money can buy and the trainer is not making money on the day rate--there's no money left over, it's all spent on their daily care. (Trainers make money on horses performing well and then on the 10-15% fee they receive of the purse money). Incorporating dressage into their daily routine would be cost prohibitive and unlikely to be made up on the earnings end.

From Libbie Johnson:

Q: I'm a big fan of Donna Brothers. I'm thrilled she has a book coming out in August. There have been quite a few books on this subject. Why and how is your perspective different? BTW, I can't wait to get a copy!

DBB: You're right, Libbie... And maybe not right. My book is about 100 pages so it's, by no means, comprehensive. It's designed to be read quickly to get to the subject matter that interests you most and it's laminated paperback so that readers can stick in their pocket or purse and take it with them to the track. It's really just an introduction to horse racing and intended to bridge the gap between the people who are **passionate** about the sport and their loved ones who simply don't get it. I think you'll find it's different from what's out there and I wrote this book because I felt like it was a book that **needed** to be written. I hope you enjoy it and I'd really appreciate your feedback once you get it! If I don't see you in South Carolina, please, drop me an email to relay your thoughts.

From Sheillah Dare:

Q: Who do you think is the best 3-year-old filly this year?

DBB: Well it depends on the distance and, I suppose, surface. Sticking with the dirt I think Royal Delta may be the best 3 year old filly but, of course, the CCA on Saturday from Saratoga will tell us more there. Sprinting, it's pretty hard to beat Hilda's Passion.

From Leigh Callahan:

Q: I am concerned that in reviewing the 3-year-old contenders of 2011, many are out of the picture with injuries and other difficulties. Do you think the industry will ever reform so that horses will not be allowed to race until their bones are more developed? This year seems to have been more disappointing than most in this regard.

DBB: Leigh, the scientific studies show that racing at two actually produces horses with stronger bones and a longer career than horses who did not race at two. Of course, this is most likely due to the fact that horses who did not race at two were simply not sound enough to race just yet and never did develop into structurally sound individuals. I think it gets back to judging each individual. There is no "rule" that will safeguard against unsoundness.

From Steven Poole:

Q: Before I ask my question, I wanted to let you know that I really enjoy your commentary on the Sport of Kings. You're certainly one of my favorites. Of all the horses you rode during your career, which was your favorite? Secondly, if I may ask an additional but related question; which of the famous horses from thoroughbred history would you most like to have ridden?

DBB: Favorite horse *I've* ridden? Cannot narrow down to one but my top 5, in no particular order, were: Lost Pan, Hennessey, Hoist Her Flag, Serena's Song and Lord Carson. Horse from history I *wish* I could've ridden? Secretariat.

From Jacquelyn Getz:

Q: I've always enjoyed your coverage of racing events on TV and often wondered how you were "discovered" and subsequently selected by the networks to fill such a unique position. You are a perfect fit and ought to be very proud of your achievements in broadcasting as well as in racing. Because of your unique background, I find your insight and input to always be very interesting.!

DBB: Thank you, Jacquelyn, you're very kind. How I was "discovered", you ask? When I retired from riding races in 1998 the owner of the Fairgrounds, Brian Krantz, asked if I would be willing to do interviews for them. It was a good place to begin on this side of the Q & A because I was assigned the task of interviewing the winning connections of the stakes races which were weekends only and the feed was carried only "in-house". Good thing, 'cause I wasn't so "articulate" on this side of the microphone at first!

When I came back to Churchill Downs in the spring John Asher had been promoted to Vice President at Churchill Downs and could no longer do the daily handicapping shows. He asked if I'd be interested in doing the daily handicapping segments, race-by-race, with Mike Battaglia. I was flattered at the offer and, of course, took the job. That's what I was doing in 2000 when NBC came to Churchill Downs to "survey" for the 2001 Kentucky Derby. ABC still had the Derby in 2000 but NBC's contract had them

picking it up in 2001. That's when the higher powers from NBC first saw me on camera and I was very fortunate that they asked me to join their horse racing staff effective fairly immediately. I joined their broadcast team for the 2000 Breeders' Cup and have been working with NBC Sports ever since.

From Stacie Benes:

Q: There seems to be so much contention between so many parties in horse racing today. How can we get on the same page, the same path and keep the industry we love from extinction?

DBB: Oh, Stacie, if I knew the answer to that question I'd be the goose that laid the Golden Egg! We probably need a Commissioner like they have in the NFL but there are so many VIPs in horse racing and, oftentimes, they have disparate issues, that I cannot see it happening. I do **not** want Government intervention and I hope it doesn't ever come to that but it might. I just don't think that's the answer. The answer is that we have to put the horse and horse racing before any personal agendas and I don't see that happening either.

From Liane Hart from Cedar Brick Farm:

Q: What are the top three things would you change about any part of the racing industry, if you had the power to make those changes or the chance to make a difference?

DBB: 1. We need to take a hard look at our whipping rules. 2. We're trying to get people to the races to gamble when we need to get them there because watching horses race is exciting! The gambling will follow. But if people gamble before they love the game they will lose money and they will not become racing regulars. 3. Family friendly.

From Anne Castle:

Q: Since you were actually in the trenches of racing on every angle being a jockey, how do you keep your personal feelings out of your comments? You know more of the everyday comings and goings, behind the scenes etc. than most.

DBB: Good question, Anne. Some of it comes down to the fact that much of what I know is too "inside baseball" and not interesting to most casual viewers. Additionally, it's impossible not to be happy for a person who is genuinely happy, no matter your personal history with or feelings for that person. The Eight Belles tragedy was tough. I saw her crumble to the ground and looked away as soon as I knew what had happened. I saw more through my peripheral vision than I cared to see and, in order to offer a valid and fact-based report on TV I had to remain emotionally unattached--at least until we were off the air.

From Kendra Casselman:

Q: I know you are on the broadcast team for the Hambletonian & I know you came to the Red Mile to watch Julie Krone ride Moni Maker under saddle; but, how familiar are you with harness racing and do you enjoy it--ever attend harness racing when not for work?

DBB: Hi Kendra, I'm impressed that you are so knowledgeable about my Harness Racing and Trotting Horse exploits! I do like Harness Racing I love the individuals I've met while covering the Hambletonian. I've also had an opportunity to drive (and ride!) a couple of the harness horses and I love how competitive YET relatively docile they are. I do not attend Harness Racing outside of work but only because I don't have the opportunity. I live in Louisville, KY where we have no harness racing and when I'm in Saratoga in the summer I'm pretty tied up with the wonderful Thoroughbred racing that's taking place at the Spa. That said, I follow it as much as I can on TVG.

From Tina:

Q: Tell me about your book--sounds like a fun venture and you should have some great insight into handicapping, look forward to it being published.

DBB: In Thoroughbred racing I noticed that there are many fans and owners who are **passionate** about the sport of racing but they felt somewhat alienated from family and/or friends because these people did not share their passion. In getting to know said "family and/or friends" I realized that it wasn't that their family and friends understood horse racing and just didn't like it, it was more like they just didn't get what it was all about. It's a bit like being invited to a party with a group of people you do not know at a venue you've never been to and the invitation does not state an appropriate "attire". You don't even know where to begin! That's why Chapter 1 begins with "What to Wear to the Races". People need a place to start.

From Marian Robinson:

Q: John Velazquez said that during his stretch run with Animal Kingdom in the Kentucky Derby he was enveloped in silence. He was alone with his horse in those final moments. Have you experienced something similar in any of your races? If so, how would you describe the sensations you felt, the thoughts you had, and the way you and your horse were communicating?

DBB: I would say that sensation happens fairly frequently, Marian. In the throes of a race everything, aside from that which is *right* in front of you, is shrouded in a fog. The focus it takes to ride a race is intense. A flicker of your horse's right ear tells you that a horse is making a move on the outside. A swap from the right lead to the left through the stretch tells you that your horse has either reached the bottom of his well or there's something to his right that has startled him. A horse that is closing with a powerful stride that suddenly falters can indicate any number of things: they are bleeding, they are about to jump a shadow, they are spooking from something, they feel pain somewhere, or they have lost interest. It's a jockey's job to **quickly** assess the cause and try to remedy it if possible. With this intense focus on the task at hand the superfluous gets lost.

From Donna Melendez of Grayslake, IL:

Q: Hi Donna! Do you own pleasure horses? any thoroughbreds? Who was your favorite horse that you rode as a jockey?

DBB: I do not own pleasure horses. "Pleasure" horses require time and I have very little of that. I live in a condo and I have a dog. We run trails together. That's the closest I get to trail "riding". Favorite horses I've ridden? Cannot narrow down to one but my top 5, in no particular order, were: Lost Pan, Hennessey, Hoist Her Flag, Serena's Song and Lord Carson.

From Jarrod Goldberg:

Q: First of all, thank you for your contributions to the sport. How did you get involved in covering the PBR? Can you speak about the similarities of bull riders and jockeys as athletes.

DBB: My Mother, Father and Brother were all bull riders at some point so when NBC needed someone to cover the PBR it was a pretty natural fit. Bull riders and jockeys are both adrenaline junkies and I mean this in the most affectionate way. They are both athletic and strong as well.

From Linda Marie Fiore:

Q: I recently saw you interviewed in the documentary "Thoroughbreds: Born to Run." You talked about "talking" to the horse when you ride. I would love to hear more about "talking to the horse."

DBB: I think anyone who works with horses day in and day out "talks" to them. Maybe "talk" is not a great word, maybe "communicates" with them would be better. Horses talk through their actions: a flick of their ear, a swish of their tail, a hesitation, etc. We listen through paying attention to their language and we "talk" to them by responding with a sign of understanding. Before you know it, a conversation is taking place.

From Kris K.

Q: How have pre-race interviews with jockeys changed because of the Life at Ten debacle?

DBB: They haven't changed at all for those of us at NBC. We've never conducted pre-race interviews in the post parade and we never will. What we *will* do is ask a question **off** camera, such as, "Is he always that worked up before a race?", and then we'll report the answer back to the viewers. The Life at Ten debacle happened on ESPN and I'm not sure if the situation has changed their pre-race interviews or not.

From Jozy DeFord:

Q: Hi Donna! Who was your favorite horse as a jockey and as a fan? Also what was the most moving experience you've had in your career at the track?

DBB: Hi Jozy, I cannot narrow it down to one but my top 5 horses (as a jockey), in no particular order, were: Lost Pan, Hennessey, Hoist Her Flag, Serena's Song and Lord Carson. As a fan? Zenyatta and Rachel Alexandra would be at the top. Most moving experience? Jozy, we can be moved in so many different directions. I've been moved to great sorrow and moved to unexpected joy. It is one of the things I love about this sport. The trick is not to let the highs go to your head or the lows get to your heart.