

Back in the Saddle

INTERVIEWED BY LENNY SHULMAN

Steve Cauthen and Jorge Velasquez examine Affirmed and Alydar's Triple Crown duel 30 years later

The two old warriors couldn't be more delighted to see each other for the first time in five years. They share a warm embrace, and each inquires after the other's wife and family. One explains his current daily routine, shoveling manure on his Kentucky farm just like he'd done 40 years ago as a child. The other offers up a taste of life in New York as a grandparent and a mentor to a new generation of jockeys. They refer to each other as "Georgie" and "Stevie."

It is hard to imagine, from this heartfelt reunion at Turfway Park on an early April morning, that this pair of Hall of Fame jockeys, 30 springs ago, fiercely fought one another for every inch of ground over the famous racing strips of Louisville, Baltimore, and New York, contesting the hardest-fought Triple Crown rivalry of the modern era.

What few realized in 1978, or since, is that Steve Cauthen, already a sensation at 18, and Jorge Velasquez, at the time a veteran 31-year-old star, were fast friends when Affirmed and Alydar flashed before our eyes in their magical dashes through the Kentucky Derby,

Preakness, and Belmont Stakes. The riders were thus eminently equipped to help set the tone of class and sportsmanship that pervaded the last successful Triple Crown campaign to date.

The good vibes persist to this day, as do their vivid memories of that amazing season, when two superstars tested one another through five weeks of undiluted bliss for racing fans around the globe. The races were of perfect synchronicity, each one closer than the last, until a matter of inches separated this pair of horses who pushed each other to the grandest heights of sport.

The Blood-Horse brought Velasquez and Cauthen together to watch replays of those three races in order to have them relive the key moments therein, but the tapes we brought along seemed superfluous. Each moment of each race is burned into their heads, no visual aids needed.

But their thoughts and insight will prove, we think, fascinating for new generations of racing fans, and older ones who will no doubt appreciate the re-telling of some of the moments that make this sport, at its best, so special.

Prompted by *The Blood-Horse* features editor Lenny Shulman, and documented by video director Russell Johnson and chief photographer Anne Eberhardt, Steve Cauthen and Jorge Velasquez once again put on a show for the ages. >>

View Cauthen and Velasquez in four installments online: *Pre-Triple Crown, the Kentucky Derby, the Preakness, and the Belmont*

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Jorge Velasquez and Steve Cauthen reunite to view the magical 1978 Triple Crown races with *The Blood-Horse's* Lenny Shulman



Velasquez and Cauthen were already fast friends when Affirmed battled Alydar

ANNE M. EBERHARDT

JORGE VELASQUEZ

Jorge Velasquez, 61

Family: Wife, Margarita; three children; three grandchildren

The fame Jorge Velasquez achieved in riding Alydar somewhat obscured his many other impressive accomplishments in the saddle. The native of Panama enjoyed a 34-year career first in his native land, and later in North America after being brought to the U.S., along with countryman Braulio Baeza, in 1965 by Fred Hooper.

Riding mostly in New York, Velasquez' 438 victories led all jockeys in 1967. Two years later, he topped the money list with earnings of more than \$2.5 million. In 1974, he captured the first of his two New York Filly Triple Crowns, winning the Acorn, Mother Goose, and Coaching Club American Oaks with champion Chris Evert. Five years later, he repeated the accomplishment aboard champion Davona Dale.

After running second with Alydar in all three Triple Crown races in 1978, he nearly captured his own Triple Crown three years later, winning the Kentucky Derby and Preakness, and finishing third in the Belmont Stakes, with Pleasant Colony.

In 1985, he rode to 57 stakes wins, a record at the time for riders. Included in those triumphs were victories aboard Proud Truth in the Breeders' Cup Classic and Twilight Ridge in the Breeders' Cup Juvenile Fillies.

Still, he calls Alydar "the best horse I ever rode."

With 6,795 wins, Velasquez retired in 1997, seven years after he was elected to the Hall of Fame. He lives in New York, where he is a jockey agent.



STEVE CAUTHEN

Steve Cauthen, 48

Family: Wife, Amy; three children

Steve Cauthen was already a sensation by the time Affirmed and Alydar hooked up in the 1978 Triple Crown races. One year earlier, in just his second year of riding professionally, Cauthen made a brand new start of it in old New York, winning everything in sight on the prestigious circuit. His record 487 victories in 1977, as a 17-year-old, landed him Eclipse Awards for jockey and apprentice, as well as Sportsman of the Year honors from *Sports Illustrated*. His \$6.15 million in purse winnings that season set a new standard. Because of his tender years and baby face, Cauthen became known as "The Kid."

Cauthen, the son of a blacksmith, grew up with horses on his family's farm in Northern Kentucky. By all accounts, he handled the fame heaped upon him with modesty and poise. What he could not handle so well was his weight, which forced him, just one year after Affirmed's Triple Crown, to move his tack to Europe, which had a more generous scale for riders.

Once there, he continued his success, riding to victory in the Irish, Italian, Epsom, and French Derbys. In the mid-'80s, he was the leading rider in England for three seasons.

Cauthen retired at the end of 1992. "Let me show you why I retired," he said recently at Turfway Park, near his 360-acre Kentucky farm. He then climbed up on the trackside scale, which registered 150 pounds.

Besides Affirmed, Cauthen rode such standouts as Pebbles, Oh So Sharp, Reference Point, Slip Anchor, and Triptych. He was inducted into the Hall of Fame in 1994.



The Blood-Horse: Talk about your friendship with one another.

Steve Cauthen: I came to New York as a 16-year-old kid who weighed about 90 pounds. In the jockeys' room, Georgie was in the corner opposite the valet I ended up with. I had Sully, and he had Reno. Georgie took me under his wing right from the beginning. He was always very friendly. I felt a friendship right away. There's a camaraderie in the room among pretty much everybody, but there's guys you feel drawn to, and I felt a friendship and closeness with Georgie because he was nice to me. I felt accepted right from day one.

Our escapades in the Triple Crown with Alydar and Affirmed tightened our friendship. I know Georgie wanted to win those races every bit as badly as I did, and yet win, lose, or draw, he congratulated me and was happy for me. I know it was tough for him not to win those races, but he didn't have any hard feelings toward me and was genuinely happy for me.

Jorge Velasquez: It was amazing how he handled himself as a kid coming to New York and breaking all kinds of records. And yet he was a humble kid. So many young guys come in and they don't want to listen. They have big heads already and think they know everything. How can you deny a guy like Steve? You've got to take him under your wing, and I was thrilled to have him in the room because soon all the cameras and everyone were following him instead of following me all the time.

I remember one day we were coming back after a race and Allen Jerkens was there in the paddock and he asked me, 'Who won this race?' And I said, 'Steve Cauthen.' And he kicked a pail and said, 'What the hell is wrong with you guys? You let this little kid come to town and win all the races.'

Those days were great for Steve. I was in my prime; I can't complain. He was just good for racing.

BH: So there was no tension during that Triple Crown?

JV: Not in the friendship, but the tension is always there. When you're riding a horse you think has a good chance to win those kind of races, you want everything to go perfect. And that's where the tension comes from.

SC: Before and after the race you're still friends, but during the race you're out there for you and your team—the owners, trainers, everybody. We're both out there competing tooth and nail in every one of those



Velasquez had a special attachment to Alydar

races. Whoever won...after the Champagne, I was congratulating Georgie.

Georgie was tearing it up, too. He was riding great horses and winning big races all the time. We were going out in the arena—gladiators doing our thing—but after we came back, we stuck our swords in the ground and had a beer.

BH: Jorge, you worked Alydar before he raced as a 2-year-old. What did you think of him?

JV: Mr. John Veitch (Alydar's trainer) called my agent and asked him to get me out there early one morning to work Alydar because he already thought this was his Derby horse—as a 2-year-old. He wanted to get my opinion. So I went out there and worked him three-eighths. He worked with three other colts, starting behind them. Turning for home, he flew right by them, doing it easy. So I came back and told Mr. Veitch, 'This is our Derby horse. I like him very much.'

I started getting on him every morning. We developed a nice, close relationship. Before he went out on the track I'd let him stop and look around and watch the horses going by galloping and working. And when he was ready, he'd turn his head, open his mouth, and I'd drop a sugar in his mouth. Then he'd drop his head and we'd go and work. After he worked, we'd come back, he'd stop, look at other horses, open his mouth, and I'd drop the sugar in, and we'd come back home.

I brought my wife out one morning to see this horse Alydar. I told her he was crazy about me. We got out of the car, and they had these big trees in front of the barn. I started calling to him, 'Hey, Champ.' I called him 'Champ' before he'd ever done anything. And he started looking for me, but I was hiding behind a tree. And he started bucking and kicking, and finally John Veitch said I'd better come out of there before he hurt himself.

Every time when he was being cooled off in the shedrow, and I was coming back from working other horses and he heard my voice, he would drag the hotwalker around to where I was, looking for a sugar.

The only horse, I would say, in my 34-year career, that I ever got close to like that was Alydar.

Right before the Florida Derby, he didn't want to go in the gate. The starters tried grabbing his ear and his tail and pushing, so I told them to leave him alone and I would handle it. I leaned over his shoulder and talked to him. 'Hey, Champ, you see

all these people here? They come to see you perform. Don't be doing this here in front of everybody. You got to get in the gate.' And I grabbed his chin strap and he walked right in the gate. That's the type of relationship we had developed.

I got hurt right before he was going to start for the first time, and Eddie Maple picked up the mount and rode him the first seven times. When I came back, I got the mount.

BH: Steve, how did you first get the mount on Affirmed, which was for the Sanford at Saratoga?

SC: Well, I was lucky. Angel (Cordero) had won a stakes on the horse. Then he was second to Alydar in another stakes, and then the horse went to California and Laffit (Pincay) won on him by seven lengths. The horse came back to Saratoga, and I was coming off an injury as well. The first horse I rode back was a horse named Little Miracle, who happened to

be a half-brother to Affirmed.

Angel had the first chance to get the mount, but he had just found what he thought was a better horse, named Tilt Up, who was a very fast horse. The Sanford was only a \$35,000 stakes and Laffit didn't want to come cross-country. Plus, he probably thought he could get back on him when he wanted, anyway (laughs).

So I won on him in the Sanford. I'd gone and worked him beforehand, and he never was much of a big workhorse, but he felt OK. In the race, for some reason he wanted to hang out. He won, but I wasn't thinking, 'This is the next superstar.'

But I stayed on him, and the next race was the Hopeful. And that was the day I knew he was a real serious horse—that they both were. We flew down the stretch that day, and Affirmed beat Alydar (Maple up) by a half-length. I knew right then I did not want to let go of this horse.

BH: *In the pair of 2-year-old races you did ride against each other, the Champagne and Laurel Futurity, what did you learn about your horse, and the other guy's horse?*

JV: In the Champagne, Affirmed was entertained by Darby Creek Road, and that was the first time I was riding Alydar. So I took my time and let the speed go, and at the three-eighths pole I started asking my horse to run, and he flew. Whoosh. With Affirmed being entertained by the other horse, he didn't see my horse coming. So I went by him, opened up about three or four lengths, and at the end Affirmed saw us and was coming back at me, and my horse beat him by a length and a quarter.

After that, we kept getting beat by Affirmed, and I'm thinking, 'What am I doing

wrong?' He's breaking OK—not as sharp as Affirmed—but he breaks good. I'm getting him in good position. Finally I realized in the Champagne, when Affirmed saw us go by, he left the other horse alone and closed ground. That's when I realized Affirmed was a really good horse who was able to do what he had to do. To ride Alydar the way he wanted to be ridden, which was not to be rushed, I needed another horse to keep Affirmed entertained.

SC: Affirmed was never worried about doing much more than he had to do. He was always ready for a challenge and a fight. Affirmed needed Alydar to push him. He was only going to beat Radar Ahead or whoever it was by as far as he had to. It was only Alydar who was capable of making him stretch away from the rest of the field. Alydar and Affirmed were six or seven lengths better than the rest of their generation. Simple as that. Alydar would run away from his fields, but Affirmed would only do it when Alydar was there to make him do it.

JV: Alydar was a good horse; let me tell you that. He won a bunch of big races. People don't remember that. He won the Blue Grass, the Florida Derby, the Champagne, the Arlington Classic, and then the Whitney against older horses by 10 lengths.

SC: To be honest, I had a big advantage. With Affirmed, I had options. Alydar broke OK, but also a little slow. He had his own style, which was the best way for him to run. But pace makes the race, so when there wasn't a lot of pace, it suited me. I could be on the lead; I could be sitting second or third, wherever I wanted. Alydar needed to level off and settle and then get ready to make his run, and sometimes he was forced to make his run sooner than

he wanted in order to push me. Georgie always had the tougher deal riding Alydar.

BH: *You knew going into the Kentucky Derby the other one was going to be the main competition?*

SC: There were other good horses. Believe it was a really nice horse. Darby Creek Road was a pretty nice horse. And then Sensitive Prince was a new horse who was unbeaten going into the Derby. Very fast, like Big Brown is today. You don't know how good he could be. But deep down we knew that mainly, if I didn't beat Alydar, we weren't going to win, and same for their side.

BH: *How were your emotions for your first Derby?*

SC: It was exciting, but I was trying to keep my emotions in check. I was trying to treat it like just another race. I knew what I had to do, and we had a game plan.

JV: After you've ridden the Derby a few times, like I had, how nervous you get depends on what kind of chance you think you've got. If you feel you're really going to be in the race, you get more excited. Of course, every one you ride in is very special. It is *the* race. The one that makes you shake. The one you can't sleep well the night before.

BH: *What did your trainers tell you going into the Derby as far as strategy?*

SC: Laz (Barrera) never tied me down to any orders. We were pretty confident Raymond Earl and Sensitive Prince were going to be out there early, so the pace would be hot.

JV: John (Veitch) never told me what to do. He just wished me luck and told me to stay out of trouble. And most of the time, Affirmed wasn't in the races, so I didn't have to worry about him. But wherever Alydar wanted to be was all right. He was better than those other horses in there.

BH: *Let's play a tape of the Derby, which begins with Raymond Earl going to the lead, Affirmed breaking alertly in second, and Alydar lagging behind early.*

SC: Affirmed broke out of the gate great, but was still relaxed. When I saw Sensitive Prince go by up to the lead with Raymond Earl into the first turn, I said, 'OK, great.' I was able to ease Affirmed off his heels into the turn and to the outside, three or four lengths off the leaders in the perfect position I wanted to be in. I had to let Affirmed know we didn't want to go up there on the inside with them. He was relaxed and happy. The horse understood we were in the right spot. From that point on, all I was wanting to do was keep myself out of trouble. Then I just...

JV: Waited for me.



MYRA/BOB COGLIANESE

Alydar gets the best of Affirmed in the 1977 Champagne



BH: Did you both work your horses between the Derby and Preakness?

SC: I never got on Affirmed. Once we got to his 3-year-old season, Toto was the kid who rode him in the morning. I'd go out and watch him, but he knew him fine.

JV: I got on Alydar all the time.

SC: Before the Preakness they woke Alydar up with a sharp work. I figured he'd get into the race sooner and start pushing me sooner.

JV: John (Veitch) just told me, 'You know your horse. Ride your race, get position, and come charging.'

SC: We figured Alydar maybe didn't like the track in the Derby. No matter what happened, I never lost respect for Alydar. Ever. He was a heck of a horse and I knew he was going to be a tough horse to beat in any race, at any distance, at any track. We went into the Preakness with a smaller field—Alydar, Affirmed, Believe It, and the rest were pretty much pretenders. I knew there probably wouldn't be much pace, so there was a good chance I'd end up on the lead.

BH: Both Affirmed and Alydar broke well from the Preakness gate, with Affirmed going to the lead, pushed into the first turn by Track Reward, and Alydar settling in behind closer than he did in the Derby.

JV: Alydar broke good and sharp. He was a horse who could work in :58 or :59 in the morning. He showed a lot of speed, but in the afternoon, he wouldn't show that kind of speed. He takes himself back after the break.

SC: He liked to find his legs before making his move.

JV: Right.

SC: Here comes Track Reward up with me on the first turn. Albert Barrera, Laz' son, trained that horse. There was a little father/son thing going on there. Laz wasn't too happy about it, but Albert had an owner who wanted to run in the Preakness. He wasn't good enough to push me; he was more of an annoyance, like a fly that you swat to get off. But it really aggravated Laz that his son was running the horse in that race.

I was thinking, 'Fine, either go by me and get the lead, or I'll go by and get the lead.' Halfway around the turn I'm thinking, 'What the hell are you doing?' Track Reward was still alongside me. Then, around the turn we got rid of him. It wasn't like Affirmed was pushing. We only went :23 and change the first quarter. I just didn't want my horse to get in an annoying situation. It doesn't matter how slow you're going if your horse is being aggravated by another horse.



ANNE M. EBERHARDT

At the wire of the Preakness, then, below; and now, above



JERRY FRITKOF

Halfway around the turn we scooted by him, and Affirmed relaxed as soon as he got to the front, which is the kind of horse he was. He'd switch on and off when you wanted.

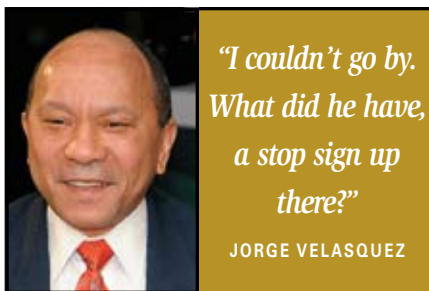
JV: On the backstretch here, I'm working on Alydar, and Stevie is just sitting there waiting for me. I didn't care about the pace being slow. I just wanted to get my horse going, and he was responding.

SC: I think earlier that day some claimers ran three-quarters faster than we did in the Preakness. We went in :11. I knew Alydar was going to be there sooner than in the Derby. Halfway around the turn I was aware that he was there, and he was close enough to beat me if he could get by me.

JV: I knew Stevie was taking it easy on Affirmed, but my horse was really running fast on the outside. I said, 'Well, I got a chance to win.' Near the quarter pole I got to Stevie's horse, but Affirmed took off again. As a matter of fact, turning for home, they opened up on me. I was disappointed when his horse changed leads and kind of left me there. So then I'm working on my horse again and he kept coming and kept coming and kept coming.

SC: On the turn, I'm starting to feel Alydar there. I think this one time I snuck a quick look. You can see Affirmed's right ear go straight out. The antenna. He was waiting for a challenge. He was primed and ready for action when the challenge came. And it came. Affirmed, I thought, had plenty left. He came into the stretch pricking his ears, and we flew home. I think it was the fastest last three-eighths of any Preakness ever run. You could really feel the two horses just shhhhooooo. We were running down the stretch amazingly fast.

JV: I got busy with a left-handed stick trying to make him change strides (leads). I figured I'd surprise him by going left-handed and maybe he would change leads. But he didn't want to switch over. He just wouldn't do it in his races. His exercise rider, Charlie Rose, was one of the best, and he taught him how to change, and in

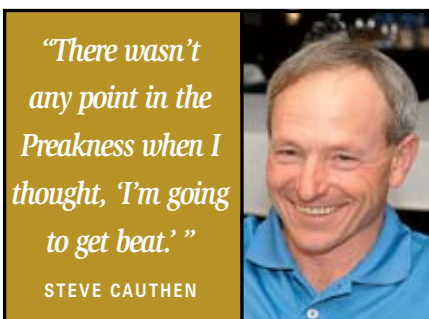


"I couldn't go by. What did he have, a stop sign up there?"

JORGE VELASQUEZ

the workouts he would change, but not in the races. Until the Whitney—he changed strides and blew by older horses. I don't know, maybe he was a lefty (laughs).

Anyway, I got back to, what, a neck off Stevie, but Affirmed carried that neck all the way to the wire. Unbelievable. I got to him, but I couldn't go by. What did he have, a stop sign up there or something?



"There wasn't any point in the Preakness when I thought, I'm going to get beat."

STEVE CAUTHEN

SC: I always felt like I had him. I was reaching back and hitting Affirmed, but I just felt I had him. There wasn't any point in the race when I thought, 'I'm going to get beat.' I felt like, 'I got him, I got him, I got him; he's there, but I got him.' And then we got to the wire and we held on by a neck. It was a great finish. We were flying. I never felt like I did in the Belmont, like, 'Oh, s____. This is trouble. We'd better find something else.' He always saved himself as much as he could, and that's probably what helped him win the Triple Crown. He was looking after himself.

JV: These two horses were like Muhammad Ali and Joe Frazier. They always brought the best out in each other.

BH: Was the time between the Preakness and the Belmont fun, pressure-packed, or both? Was it tough concentrating on the races you were riding in between?

SC: It was exciting. Nobody knows going into the Belmont if their horse is going to stay a mile and a half. With the way Alydar ran, you'd have to think that was what he wanted. Affirmed's pedigree wasn't necessarily saying he wanted that distance, but with great horses, they do what they have to do.

I had plenty of reservations, but I knew heart wasn't going to be an issue with Affirmed. We'd won the Derby comfortably enough, and the Preakness, so you go into the Belmont with as much confidence as possible, given the distance is unknown territory.

JV: Alydar was well trained by Mr. John Veitch. He had worked a mile and a half plus two other works going into the Belmont, and he was ready. My only concern was about making him change leads. Stevie and I both know that if a horse turning for home changes to his right lead, he gives you a little extra. Alydar never did. That little extra that I needed, he didn't give it to me. Heart-wise, yes, he had the heart. He was trying his best. But the little things, like changing leads, that might have cost me the race.

As far as concentrating on the other races, you study the Bible—the *Racing Form*—before every race, and you know what to do. You're getting paid to ride each race, and you concentrate on the race you are riding at the moment.

SC: The other races actually help you relax a little bit. They keep your focus off the next big race. In the back of your mind, it's always there, but it's a rest from thinking about what's coming up.

The longest three weeks of my life was the time between the Preakness and the Belmont. Sure, there was pressure. I was being interviewed by Australia and Japan; people were following me into the

Affirmed

ch. c. 1975, by Exclusive Native (Raise a Native)—Won't Tell You, by Crafty Admiral

Lifetime record: 29 22 5 1 \$2,393,818

Own.—Harbor View Farm
Br.—Harbor View Farm (Fla)
Tr.—Lazaro S. Barrera

10Jun78- 8Bel	fst 1½	:50	1:14	2:01½	2:26¼	Belmont-G1
20May78- 8Pim	fst 1¾	:47¾	1:11¼	1:36½	1:54½	Preakness-G1
6May78- 8CD	fst 1¼	:45¾	1:10¼	1:35¼	2:01½	Ky Derby-G1

3	1	11	1 ^{hd}	1 ^{hd}	1 ^{hd}	Cauthen S	126	*.60	86-11	Affirmed126 ^{hd} Alydar126 ^{13D} Darby Creek Road1267¾	Driving 5
6	2	11	11	1½	1nk	Cauthen S	126	*.50	98-12	Affirmed126 ^{nk} Alydar1267¾Believe It126¾	Brisk handling 7
2	2	3½	2 ^{hd}	12	1½	Cauthen S	126	1.80	91-12	Affirmed126½Alydar126½Believe It126¾	Fully extended 11

Alydar

ch. c. 1975, by Raise a Native (Native Dancer)—Sweet Tooth, by On-and-On

Lifetime record: 26 14 9 1 \$957,195

Own.—Calumet Farm
Br.—Calumet Farm (Ky)
Tr.—John M. Veitch

10Jun78- 8Bel	fst 1½	:50	1:14	2:01½	2:26¼	Belmont-G1
20May78- 8Pim	fst 1¾	:47¾	1:11¼	1:36½	1:54½	Preakness-G1
6May78- 8CD	fst 1¼	:45¾	1:10¼	1:35¼	2:01½	Ky Derby-G1

2	3	21	2 ^{hd}	2 ^{hd}	2 ^{hd}	Velasquez J	126	1.10	86-11	Affirmed126 ^{hd} Alydar126 ^{13D} Darby Creek Road1267¾	Game try 5
3	6	6½	42	2½	2nk	Velasquez J	126	b 1.80	98-12	Affirmed126 ^{nk} Alydar1267¾Believe It126¾	Game effort 7
10	9	17	4¾	3¼	2½	Velasquez J	126	b *1.20	89-12	Affirmed126½Alydar126½Believe It126¾	Closed fast 11

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NYRA/BOB COGLIANESE

Affirmed and Alydar's Belmont Stakes—one of the greatest races of all time

restroom. And it was the same for Georgie. People talking about what happened in the Derby and what happened in the Preakness, and how are you going to change it. It starts to wear on you.

BH: And being that young...

SC: Sometimes I wonder if maybe I was so young and dumb that I didn't know the difference. It might have been a blessing. It was exciting, yet pressure-filled leading up to that race. There wasn't a lot between those two horses. One small mistake, one little thing, can switch it either way.

BH: Veitch took the blinkers off Alydar before the Belmont.

JV: Because it was a mile and a half, Mr. Veitch wanted Alydar to relax. He was looking for something to make him do better. He didn't want him so sharp at that distance that he was going to run away from us at the beginning. I don't think it made much difference. He tried with the blinkers or without the blinkers. He was just a nice horse.

BH: As the Belmont begins, Affirmed breaks in front from the outside, but going into the first turn Alydar is right up inside him.

SC: It was a five-horse field, and Darby Creek Road was the only other contender in there. The other two were just filling the gate. Alydar was drawn inside me. I knew my horse was going to break good, and I knew I'd be able to sit well off the fence, which tends to relax a horse. They think, 'Are we going for a gallop, or are we racing?' And I knew Alydar wasn't in love with the inside, anyway.

JV: You were setting a trap for me, huh?

SC: No, but if you wanted to go up in there, fine.

JV: See right there going to the turn? They left a little hole for me, but I don't want to go there. I don't want to be in a position where Affirmed can put me in a trap. It's only a five-horse field, and that would be ridiculous if he'd gotten me in a trap all the way.

SC: That's intimidating for a horse. In a small field, where there's no pace and they're all bunched, it can stay that way, and you can stay trapped long enough where it can cost you the race. I knew he was down there, and I've ridden against Alydar enough to know he doesn't really want to come up on the inside. That's not his happy place. Plus I wanted to keep Affirmed outside and relaxed, like we were out for a gallop, and switched off as long

as I could.

JV: That's true; Alydar didn't much like being down inside. He was a big horse and preferred the outside. So I let Affirmed go by and I got to the outside so that I could be clear.

BH: And the early pace was slow.

JV: After the first quarter in :25, I'm thinking, 'C'mon, Stevie, how can you go so slow there?'

SC: I was able to go the first quarter and the first half slow, and then eventually Georgie got Alydar where he wanted to be and began pushing the pace.

JV: Watch Stevie's hands. See how comfortable he's going? We're going so slow—a half in :50—I figured I'd better go put a little pressure on. Look at my hands. I'm trying to get to you.

SC: We're going so slow, it didn't surprise me when they came up alongside seven furlongs from the finish. The other things didn't work in the other two races, so you try something else, like 'we'll run him into the ground.'

JV: My opinion was, 'He's the horse to beat, he's in front of me, and we gotta go get him. So let me put the pressure on. This is a mile and a half, and let's see who's who in America.'

SC: But again, the great blessing I had with Affirmed is when Alydar came to me, it wasn't like I had to go. Affirmed was still relaxed. I thought, 'OK, let's look at each other for a while. I'm not going to let you push me too much.' I didn't want to go yet.

JV: I was happy to come up to him and get on the pace. I just want to sit alongside him and give him competition and make him run for his money.

SC: We settled down the backside next to each other. Eventually, the race has to start taking place.

began quickening and quickening and quickening. Around the turn he's still there. And at the top of the stretch it reached the point where I could feel a little bit of fatigue with Affirmed. He didn't have a lot left. It wasn't like I felt at the Preakness. I knew we were going to have to dig deep. I was wondering if we could do it, because Alydar was looking strong.

JV: At the quarter pole I was coming on, but I still have to save a little horse for the end. I couldn't just ask my horse for everything yet. I was ahead right there, at the

ing down to the wire, I'm thinking, 'I'm in trouble. He's going to beat me again.' I'm working on Alydar, whipping and driving and everything else, and Stevie hit Affirmed left-handed and I can see his horse responding, kind of waking up, and not letting us go by. And he beat me a by a big nose (officially, a head), but he did beat me. And I was, 'Ooooooh, noooo, again.'

SC: I was one relieved puppy when we hit the wire. Two strides afterward, Georgie congratulated me.

JV: I knew he beat me, so I said, 'Congratulations, Stevie.'

SC: He was very classy.

JV: I wasn't too happy about it (laughs). Deep down inside, I was bleeding. But he rode a great race. And he won the Triple Crown. Hey, any rider would love to be in that position. I didn't think I did anything wrong. It may not have been my best ride ever, but I did everything possible to win that race.

BH: *Jorge, do you think you are more famous for these three races than for winning the Kentucky Derby and Preakness and all the other big races?*

JV: People, even young kids, the first question they ask when they find out you're a rider is, 'Have you ever won the Derby?' So, I think the Derby is more important to win than any other race. If you don't win the Derby...It's like A-Rod. He's probably the greatest baseball player there is right now, but he hasn't gotten the ring. You have to win the Derby to have the ring.

BH: *Was it the rivalry that made the Triple Crown of 1978 so special?*

SC: The best thing about it was that it was a great thing for racing. You had two great teams—the Calumet camp for Alydar, and Harbor View; great trainers for both sides; top jockeys. And nobody was fighting. The real sportsmanship was there. And they were all great races. The Derby was a great race that left a lot of people wondering, 'Can Alydar do it next time?' The Preakness, the same thing.

And finally with the mile and a half of the Belmont, 'What's gonna happen this time?' And the horses came back every time and gave their best. They were always there. They were thrilling races. The buildup to the Belmont was unbelievable, and yet the race was not anti-climactic. The race was greater than you could ever imagine.

At the end of it all, what I was most proud of was how great this was for racing. It attracted millions of fans around the world to the sport. Everybody conducted themselves in a very positive way in victory and defeat. It was a win-win for everybody; there was no loser. 🐾



"I should have said, 'Stevie, the girls are looking at you.'"

ANNE M. EBERHARDT

BH: *Did you guys ever talk to each other during any of these three races?*

JV: No, never.

SC: What do you say at that point?

JV: I should have said something like, 'Hey, Stevie, the girls are here looking at you (laughs).'

SC: (Track announcer) Chic Anderson made a heck of a call in this race.

BH: *Although he did say, 'A speed duel is developing,' and then came back with, 'The pace is still slow.'*

SC: It looked like a speed duel.

JV: That's because I made a move to him.

SC: I was happy to sit there with him, but if he tried to push me any harder, I was going to say, 'Go ahead.' I didn't think Alydar wanted to go to the front seven furlongs from home. The race is eventually going to start, but I wanted to wait a little longer. There was a little bit of cat and mouse up the backside. We were both trying to figure out when we were going to actually push the button.

It stayed slow until the half-mile pole. Then we started to really pick it up. We

three-sixteenths pole.

SC: Alydar kept digging in and fighting, and I think maybe for a second he did get his head in front. Georgie was pressing me, exactly as he should have been doing. He got in real tight on me from the outside.

JV: When a horse is running on the wrong lead, like Alydar was, it's kind of hard to go real close to another horse. But because they have a tendency to drift out on the wrong lead, I tried to pull him inside, but I wanted to make sure I didn't bother Affirmed. I did get in tight to him on purpose, but at the same time I didn't want to get disqualified.

SC: I slapped Affirmed on the shoulder a couple times, but I knew this day we were really going to have to fight it out. There was no room to continue right-handed. That was the first time I hit him left-handed. I never had to before. And I wasn't that great with my left hand. I never chose to use it unless I had to. But I felt he did respond when I did. Affirmed just got his head back in front, and at that point it felt like he just wasn't going to let him by.

JV: It's hard to believe we couldn't get by. I thought we were going to beat him in the Preakness and Belmont. Right here, com-