

Transcription of interview with Ron Burke

Date: September 18, 2018

Interviewer: Rich Johnston, USTA

Location: Log Cabin on Delaware County Fairgrounds

Q: Growing up in Western Pennsylvania, immersed in horses, your father was a trainer. How old were you when you first experienced the Little Brown Jug and do you recall your first impressions?

A: I don't know the year but I know the race. It was when Life Sign won. [The year was 1993] The best Jug was my first Jug. That's when I understood why so many people came here and what a great race it was and how thrilling it was.

Q: Were there any other career paths that you considered other than being a trainer?

A: Yeah. I have a degree in pre-law and until I was thirty I was "be a mayor, be a trainer." I'd have to take a pay cut. I'll stick to this.

Q: In 2014, you won the Jug for the first time with Limelight Beach. What are your memories of that race?

A: I was shocked at how emotional I was and how happy I was. I'm usually pretty stoic when it comes to wins. That one I was, like, really excited and such a cool thing. I'm a big fan of heat racing which puts me, you know, against the crowd. But for as far as me, it's the best racing.

Q: You have had an incredible career winning over 5,000 races and more than \$100 million. You have participated in races all over Canada and the US. What do you think makes the Little Brown Jug so special?

A: That's 9,000 races and \$200 million. But who's counting? (Laughs). You know, I think it's the heat racing and the fact they get 50,000 people to show up for a fair race. It's really cool. It's the one place every year you know that you're going to race in front of a crowd that understands the business and loves the business.

Q: Sweet Lou has certainly been sweet. In 2014, Sweet Lou won ten times in a row and set a world record. How would you describe that with Sweet Lou?

A: To me, he gave us some of our highest thrills and some of our lowest lows. Like every time he lost I took it personally and I blamed myself. He was a great horse and has become a great sire so for us it's been a different thing we never had. We had never had the top sire and it looks like he's going to be one.

Q: What are some of the most entertaining or funny moments you can recall from your time at the Jug?

A: There are so many. Like this is a great time. When you were kids growing up and coming here. The parties at night and staying up all night and racing in the day. We've calmed down now. We try to stay away from the grounds and more because I found I don't concentrate as well if I'm on the grounds as if I'm off the grounds.

Q: What traditions connected to the race are the ones you think should never be changed?

A: Well, for sure, the heat racing. I'm the one who thinks we should always go two heats. I wasn't even against it when we had to go three heats. So that's it. You can't... It's gotta be on Thursday. None of this race on Sunday, then race back on Thursday. I know that's been bantered around. It would take one day of great racing and make two good days out of it. So to one, the big thing: let's go racing on Thursday, let's go heats.

Q: What are the most significant changes that you have seen at the Jug over the years and how would you assess the impact of those changes?

A: I think honestly it is the Jug Barn and the Juliette Barn and the security that goes with them. I think it's made it the most level playing field and they're pushing to even take it to a higher level. That's great. It makes it for a chance for people to see the horses and it gives the horses a chance to be the best horse wins.

Q: Harness racing is not what it used to be. How do you think the Jug can be sustained and advanced into the future?

A: It all comes down to marketing. I am on the board...I get what Jeff says (unintelligible) that we need to market the sport. Anything else that's successful markets. We think we're just going to show up and people are going to show up. No. We gotta let people know what's out there and get them to see our product. Once people come they love our sport. You just gotta get 'em here to see it.

Q: What would you say would be the most memorable Jug, outside of the ones you've won?

A: To me, it's the Life Sign Jug. The Life Sign Jug. It was my first one and then a close second was, we were third when Wiggle It Jiggleit won. And I thought that was a great performance. You know, George Teague, we always kind of... They're a family operation, we're a family operation. So I see a lot of similarities in our barn and their barn. So we were really happy for them. It was a great race.