

Transcription of the interview with John Campbell

Date: September 17, 2018

Interviewer: Michael Carter, United States Trotting Association

Location: Log Cabin on the Delaware County Fairgrounds

Carter: Obviously growing up in Ontario, your family was immersed in the business. How old were you when you first experienced the Little Brown Jug and do you recall what your first impressions were?

Campbell: I first came to the Jug in 1976. It was the first year I got married, Paula and I came down with some friends and I was just intrigued. I couldn't believe there was something like this going on in harness racing. We had such a great time. That was the year Governor Skipper, the year he won it. I was really impressed. I fell in love with the atmosphere and I've only missed one. I missed 1977. I was in California and couldn't get back and that's the only one I've missed since then.

Carter: Was there any other career path that you considered rather than being a driver?

Campbell: No, my family, my grandfather, my father were farmers and fooled with race horses on the side and raced horses. When I came along, I didn't care for the farming at all. I gravitated to the horses. I fell in love with them at an early age and I knew as soon as I hit eleven or twelve years old that I was going to do something with horses in my adult life.

Carter: You were twenty-six with your first Jug with Armbro Wolf, if you can remember back that far. What were your memories of that race?

Campbell: Well, I went into the race, obviously since it was my first Jug, I was so excited. I had actually been coming off an injury where I had hurt my back and I remember scoring down and it was the best I felt since the accident. It just took a little while to get over it. We got into an accident going down the backstretch and I got pounded and beat up again. So, that was my first experience in the Jug. That year, there were two different accidents. It was kind of ironic, the year before, Shelly Goudreau, Eddie Lohmeyer and I tried to get to see Niatross race. We weren't in the race. We had trouble with connections and we ended up chartering a small plane from Cincinnati just to get here to watch Niatross. All three of us – you could get on the barns at that time, the top of the barn watching. All three of us got in the Jug the next year and all three of us fell down. So, it wasn't a very good beginning to my Jug career, but it certainly got better the next year.

Carter: That actually gets to my next point. The next year you had to be happy, but you were parked the whole mile with Merger, so you had to do some work with Merger. Can you tell us about that race?

Campbell: This track was made for Merger. He had been very disappointing for us most of the year. His feet bothered him a little bit. I came out and trained him before (the Jug) and I knew he was going to get around this track good. There was another factor – Cam Fella wasn't eligible – so that one was certainly

in our favor as well. We tried to beat him all year and couldn't do it. I knew going into the race that he was going to race well that day. The track just suited him. That was the best he ever was in his life racing here at Delaware in the Jug.

Carter: You have participated in harness racing events all over Canada and the United States. What do you think makes the Little Brown Jug so special?

Campbell: I think the atmosphere. The closeness the fans have to the horses, the drivers, and even the trainers warming-up. They are right on top of the track all the way around the track. I think just that intimate relationship between the fans, the horses, the drivers and trainers is what makes it special. It is such an exciting race. With the half-mile track everybody's aggressive so there's very few passive Jug races, so they are entertaining to watch as well.

Carter: Speaking of exciting, you won with Life Sign in '93 and some say the second heat was the greatest race in Jug history. Talk to us a little about that.

Campbell: It was certainly one of the greatest efforts in Jug history. Life Sign just raced tremendously. I drove him absolutely horribly and he overcame that. I thought, at the half when I was parked that far, I was just hoping that Presidential Ball would win rather than Riyadh, so we would have another chance in the third heat. I didn't think we could do it. Going down the backstretch, he still had a hold of the bit. Going into the last turn, Jim Morrill put the whip on his tail and he did not respond. I go, 'oh boy, we're still in this' and he just gutted it out.

Carter: What are some entertaining or maybe funny moments that you remember about the Jug's you've been at?

Campbell: I guess going into the Jug with Cam's Card Shark as the big favorite and having to scratch him was certainly one of my disappointing Jug experiences. He was such a game horse, but he had fought lameness all year, but it just got to the point where I didn't feel that he could overcome it. He had such a heart, I would have felt terrible if we raced him and something bad happened to him in the race. It was certainly one of my biggest disappointing moments. Although, to this day I believe I made the right decision.

Carter: You were inducted into the Little Brown Jug Wall of Fame in 1996. Tell me about that honor and what it meant to you.

Campbell: I was totally shocked when they informed me that I was being honored. I just couldn't believe that. You know, the way they treat you that whole week at Delaware, it's like you're royalty for a week. My whole family, everybody, it was an exciting day. As I said in my acceptance speech, I said, 'this is really great, you come to Delaware, race horses and have fun and they honor you.' It can't be any better than that [chuckles].

Carter: What traditions connected to the race are one's you think should never be changed?

Campbell: Well, the county fair atmosphere, obviously. The race conditions? I think the Jug Society has to be fluid with that, so I am not going to go out on a limb and say anything about the format at this point. You don't know how things are going to play out in the future. I think the county fair atmosphere, those people on top of the track...just the excitement of the event and the intimacy of fans. I don't think you'll ever lose that.

Carter: What are some of the more significant changes that you've seen at the Jug over the past 30-plus years and how would you assess the impact of those changes?

Campbell: Well, we've had to adjust our heats. The philosophy of heats has changed within the racing community. The horses have changed dramatically since the Jug started. So, we have had to do that. I think that's the biggest change, eliminating the third heat for the colts this year. The fillies are just going a single heat. I think all that is positive and well-received within the racing community. I think those are the biggest changes. That's more of a change that the horse has really changed dramatically since the Jug was started they are just not built to go three heats anymore, we go too fast.

Carter: How do you think the Jug can be sustained and advanced in the future?

Campbell. Well, the most important thing is the purse. The purse has to keep increasing because we need the best three-year-old pacers here. That is what the fans have come to expect of the Little Brown Jug. That the top three-year-old pacing colts will be here. So have to make that purse so high that they can't miss being here.