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01/12/2012 2:27PM

Q&A: Jeannine Edwards

By Jay Privman

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A reporter for ESPN since 1995, she has been part of three broadcast teams that have won Eclipse Awards for horse racing coverage. She will host the 41st annual Eclipse Awards dinner Monday night in Beverly Hills, Calif.

Birthdate: March 12, 1964, in Tenafly, N.J.

Family: divorced

Got into racing because . . . I always grew up loving horses, from the age of 3. My parents would sort of humor my little sister Carrie and I with riding lessons, or we'd go away on vacation for riding. But I distinctly remember Steve Cauthen winning the Triple Crown with Affirmed. That captivated me, and I became obsessed – I mean obsessed – with racing. My bedroom walls were filled with photos, I subscribed to Blood-Horse, I

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Pyrite Storm

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Mike Welsch

PYRITE STORM couldn't stave off BRINCA in that last one at Tampa but she held gamely until the late stages and she'll be a handful here if she's able to lay down some slower fractions on the front end; big price looms but she can steal it if she's able to get clear from this wide post. WILD BOUT TIFFANY benefited from a clean trip behind a quick pace in that last one but she could prove tough in the lane here given a similar situation; she can also stay close if need be, which should help her work out a trip.

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bugging my parents that I wanted to work at the track. Of course they were mortified. Only because my uncle lives in Stewart Manor, near Belmont Park, did my parents appease me by letting me hotwalk during the summer when I was 16 because I stayed with my uncle. I was working with LeRoy Jolley. That was the year he won the Kentucky Derby with Genuine Risk.

Have you received any advice from previous Eclipse Awards hosts, like your ESPN colleague Kenny Mayne? I watched the DVD from last year with Kenny Rice and got a real feel for how to handle it. It's like being a traffic cop. You give your opening spiel and then get from one thing to the next.

Have you done anything like this before? I've been the emcee for the Florida

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Thoroughbred Breeders and Owners Association yearly awards ceremony several times. It's not as grand a scale, but they get a pretty decent turnout. I've also hosted a few other events, charity events, in Kentucky or Saratoga.

You have attended several Eclipse Award dinners in the past. What is your favorite part of the evening? Definitely the Horse of the Year presentation, especially when there's some intrigue, like this year, and last year as well. And the after party is always fun. The one last year at the Fontainebleau, that was awesome.

Any special memories that stand out over the years? Zenyatta winning Horse of the Year last year was a great moment for the sport. I mean no disrespect to Blame and his connections, because he certainly had a great year as well. But considering the big picture – what she did for the sport, how she brought so much mainstream interest to her journey, and racing itself – it was a great, culminating moment, a great way to send her off to her second career. It was very satisfying.

You started as a racing reporter on ESPN but have branched out to other sports, such as college football and college basketball. Where does racing rank with you? It's got to be number one, even though I'm doing less and less of it. The comfort level will never be matched, just because I don't have the background in those other sports. And I've built up so many contacts and friends in racing, which will never be duplicated.

What would be next after racing, and why? College football. The atmosphere at a college football game is just breathtaking, it really is. You can go to an NFL game, but the crowd and the energy is not the same. Week after week, you're doing these college football games, and the stadium is completely sold out – with 80,000, 90,000, 100,000 people – and they are going wild. The enthusiasm is contagious. I've worked some unbelievable games, and being on the sideline and being a part of that is almost as thrilling as watching Zenyatta and Blame come down to the wire in the Classic.

What do you find the most rewarding thing about covering racing? Going back to all the friends and contacts I mentioned before, it's enjoyable seeing people you know and admire do well. Also, for me, having a background in the barns, the fact you can go in the barn area and spend time with the horses, get up close and personal, that's a nice touch that you don't get at other events.

What do you think are the things viewers fail to realize about a television production? I don't think people realize all the people behind the scenes and how long and hard they work to put a telecast together. I had tweeted a picture at the Breeders' Cup from inside our videotape truck – we had one whole TV production truck that was nothing but videotape elements – and there were probably 12 or 14 people in that truck. I would like the people behind the scenes to get credit. Building graphics and putting together all the beautiful footage the camera guys shoot and editing it – there's a lot of long hours and a lot of devotion and attention to detail from people who really take a lot of pride in their jobs.

You received well-deserved accolades for your coverage of Barbaro over many months following his injury. How hard was that story to do? It was such a great story initially when he was doing well after the surgery, then he got through the initial laminitis, but it was so terribly tragic when the end came. I cannot even describe the atmosphere in New Bolton Center that day. It was just surreal. It was one of the hardest things I've ever had to report on, to stay objective. I was literally on the verge of tears. One of the hardest things was seeing how painful it was for the Jacksons and Dr. Richardson to tell the world that it was over. It was hard to see the anguish on their faces.

Who is the best horse you've been on? I galloped Precisionist when he was on the farm, when working for Mr. Hooper. He was one of the 2-year-olds that we broke in Ocala. He was an unbelievable baby. I remember breezing him, it was like sitting on a rocket, it was like you were going to lift off into space. He was so powerful.

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You still ride recreationally. How is Ashkal Way, the 2006 Citation Handicap winner who became your riding horse when he retired from racing? Our dressage training was interrupted by my football schedule, so he hasn't done a whole lot in the last few months. But we're going to get back in the swing here pretty soon. He's a gelding, but for some reason he thinks he's a stallion. He's turned out in a 10-acre field with five other horses, and he thinks he's king of the mountain. All he does is look at them, and they scatter.

Best horse seen? Maybe Seattle Slew. Zenyatta is up there. There have been so many good ones. But those two are the best.

Future ambitions? For right now, I'm pretty happy with what I'm doing. I would like to keep honing my skills and getting better at what I do and continue to earn the respect of the viewers and the people who pay me. That's all that matters. I don't have any grand ambitions of doing anything crazy.



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