

## **SPEECHIFY IMPRESSIVE 3<sup>3</sup>/<sub>4</sub>-LENGTH VICTOR OF \$75,000 KENNY NOE STAKES BARRY IRWIN-BOUGHT KEENELAND YEARLING IS TRAINED BY RALPH NICKS HARLAN'S HOLIDAY 4YO HAS LOST ONLY ONE MAIN-TRACK SPRINT TO DATE**



Speechify is an amazingly talented horse that had been unable to show his true ability until Sunday when he put it all together at Gulfstream Park West in the \$75,000 Kenny Noe Jr. Stakes. Drawn outside, which seems to be his lot in life, the 4yo gelding broke running, alternated on the lead down the backstretch, put away his only serious rival turning for home and simply strode down the length of the stretch without any sort of challenge whatsoever. The winning 3<sup>3</sup>/<sub>4</sub>-length margin could have been doubled had Paco Lopez as much as moved a muscle.

In 7 career outings, Speechify has 4 wins and his only main-track sprint loss came to \$505,000 earner and

Grade 3 winner Happy My Way.

Barry Irwin bought him for \$80,000 after he failed to reach his reserve at Keeneland. He was syndicated for \$100,000. "He is unique among horses that have carried the green and red. He has overcome more adversity to become a stakes winner than any horse I've heard of, in or out of the stable," Irwin said.

Speechify has broken both front legs and undergone condylar repair surgery twice. But even a greater achievement than that has been his ability to overcome a congenital stricture (lesion) on his esophagus that nearly cost him his life twice as a youngster because of choking.

Ocala yearling breaker and trainer Tony Everard was able to devise a diet for him that consisted of a soup-like mixture that he fed him several times a day. The horse was gelded to keep as much weight off of his immense body (he is as muscular as a steroid-hooked weightlifter at the beach) as possible. Any sort of straw or hay is kept away from him, lest he choke again.

Nicks has actually successfully tinkered with his diet and improved it. But it is amazing how powerful the gelding looks while on such a restricted diet.

Irwin said "He looked like a Champion juvenile in the making until his stricture came into the picture. When he broke his maiden he ran a 1 <sup>3</sup>/<sub>4</sub> on ThoroGraph, which is practically unheard of. He has all the ability in the world and plenty of moxie to go with it. I am so thrilled for his partners and the horse himself that he has finally been able to show it."

Speechify earned a new Beyer top figure of 95, 3 points better than when runner-up to Happy My Way. "I don't buy that number at all" Irwin said, "because it would mean that both the second and third horses ran their worst race in some time, which makes no sense at all. I give it a 101 to 102."

*From The Blood-Horse comes the following:*

## **Soup Powers Speechify to Kenny Noe Triumph**

Speechify may not eat like other horses, but he proved he can run with them with a romping victory his dirt stakes debut Nov. 16 at Gulfstream Park West in the \$75,000 Kenny Noe Jr.

Afflicted with a restriction in his esophagus that necessitates trainer Ralph Nicks to limit his diet to "soup," Speechify won the six-furlong main track race by 3 3/4 lengths while timed in 1:10.52 at the former Calder Race Course. Team Valor International's 4-year-old colt has also overcome injuries sustained in both of his front legs.

"It's hard to believe," Team Valor CEO Barry Irwin said. "He's an amazing horse. Even though he doesn't eat like normal horses. He's an amazing looking horse health-wise. So this a real thrill. Ralph, obviously, has done an amazing job with this horse."

*Speechify being led in by co-partner Ruth Engel. Stacy Nicks photo*



Speechify broke sharply from the gate under jockey Paco Lopez to closely stalk the pace set by Mongolian Saturday along the backstretch. The son of Harlan's Holiday moved to the lead midway on the far turn and showed the way into the homestretch. After fighting off a challenge by 2-1 favorite Risk Factor in upper stretch, Speechify drew off to a clear victory ahead of a late-running Grande Shores and jockey Edgard Zayas.

Mongolian Saturday held on for third money under Carlos Marquez Jr., a length behind Grande Shores. Risk Factor, who experienced early trouble under Edgar Prado, tired to fourth.

"Ralph told me to place him where I wanted. He broke fast and I had a lot of horse all the way," said Lopez, whose mount was sent to the starting gate as the 3-1 second choice in a field of eight.

Speechify won three of his first five starts before going on the shelf in late January. The Kentucky-bred colt returned to action Oct. 25 in the Gin Rummy Champ Stakes, his turf debut in the five-furlong dash at Gulfstream Park West. He dropped back to last before making a belated run to finish eighth, just 2 1/4 lengths behind the victorious Mellow Fellow.



*Ralph Nicks, developer of Speechify.*

Speechify came back in the Noe off a three-week break, which was not the original plan.

"It was by design for this race only because he didn't do much in his last race," Nicks said. "I think he was just a little confused the first start off the layoff. I'm not saying he won't run on turf again, because he's breezed good on it and he would have won the other day in four or five more jumps anyway."

Speechify will be pointed to stakes races during the upcoming Gulfstream Park meet.

"He's awesome. It's a shame he has the restriction in his throat, because he could be something special," Nicks said.

*From Daily Racing Form comes the following:*

## **Speechify collects first stakes win in Kenny Noe**

By Mike Welsch

What he lacked in experience, Speechify made up for in talent and perseverance, becoming a stakes winner for the first time with a convincing 3 3/4-length decision over Grande Shores in Sunday's \$90,000 Kenny Noe Jr. Stakes at Gulfstream Park West.

With only six previous starts under his belt, and only one since Jan. 23, Speechify gave away a lot of seasoning to his seven rivals in the six-furlong Kenny Noe. But with jockey Paco Lopez taking advantage of the speed-favoring racetrack, Speechify was able to stalk the early pace of Mongolian Saturday, readily gained the lead on the final turn, and then asserted his dominance through the stretch.

Grande Shores, who trailed after the opening quarter-mile, did well to rally between horses near the inside to finish second against the grain of a fast main track that favored speed throughout the card. Mongolian Saturday held on to finish third.

Risk Factor, the 2-1 favorite, surprisingly dropped off the early pace when steadied in traffic after the opening furlong. He made a mild run at the winner entering the stretch but could not sustain his bid, ultimately fading to finish fourth, six lengths behind Speechify.

The victory was the fourth in just seven career starts for Speechify, a son of Harlan's Holiday who is owned by Team Valor International. Speechify has to be delicately handled by trainer Ralph Nicks due to a restriction in his esophagus which limits his diet on a daily basis.

Speechify completed the distance in 1:10.52 and paid \$8.80.

"He's awesome," said Nicks. "It's a shame he has the restriction in his throat because he could be something special."



*Barry and Kathleen Irwin and trainer Ralph Nicks, right, convene in the winner's circle at Gulfstream Park West. Photo courtesy of Stacy Nicks.*