

## TEAM VALOR'S ARON WELLMAN PROFILED IN RANCHO SANTA FE REVIEW, VICTORY IN BREEDERS' CUP AND OTHER RACING SUCCESSES HIGHLIGHTED



### Rancho Santa Fe resident enjoys global success at races through Team Valor International

By Karen Billing, Staff Writer

Aron Wellman has gone from mucking stalls at the Del Mar Racetrack to having a horse win a Breeders' Cup race. The Rancho Santa Fe resident, vice president of Team Valor International, watched on Nov. 6 as the racing stable's 2-year-old horse Pluck won the \$1 million Juvenile Turf Race.



Aron Wellman

Pluck's win at Churchill Downs was "mindblowing" and, well, showed a lot of pluck.

He drew the most outside position on the racetrack and stumbled significantly on the start, almost touching his nose to the grass. Adding to these two major disadvantages, a horse in front of Pluck fell and the jockey was thrown right into Pluck's path. Thanks to rider Garrett Gomez's skill, Pluck swerved and was able to avoid the jockey—he was then at least 15 lengths behind the field.

Wellman said at this point he was just hoping Pluck could finish safely, but Pluck hit a new gear in the straightaway and weaved through traffic to find daylight. "He went from hopelessly last to inhaling the competition within one eighth of a mile," Wellman said. "It's still hard for me to this day to wrap my head around the feat he accomplished."



Team Valor's Pluck won the \$1 Million Breeders' Cup Juvenile Turf

Of Pluck's owners in the partnership, 10 of them had never owned a horse before. In the winner's circle, people were in shock, crying, high-fiving, hugging and soaking up the moment.

"It really gets to the root of all that's good about our game," said Wellman, 33. "It has been a really great experience for the whole company to go through the process with these newcomers and show them the thrill of owning a top caliber horse and winning a race on the world stage. It doesn't get any bigger than that. Most spend a lifetime trying to get where they got right off the bat."

The racing industry came calling for Wellman at an early age, his horse-breeding parents bought racehorses for each other as wedding gifts and uprooted from their Los Angeles home to spend summers at the racetrack in Del Mar.

His parents mixed with jockeys such as Bill Shoemaker and Eddie Delahoussaye. and a framed photo of a young Wellman with the “biggest legend in thoroughbred racing” Shoemaker sits on his trophy shelf in his home office. “I was exposed to very influential people at a very young age,” said Wellman. “I was infatuated with horses and racing from the time I could remember.”

When he was 8 years old, he asked trainer Jude Feld if he could work for him at the racetrack. “He told me, ‘If you’re up and at my door at 4:30 a.m. I’ll take you to the track,’” said Wellman who, sure enough, showed up at Feld’s door before sunrise the next morning. “Every summer from the time I was 8 until I graduated law school I was up at 4:30 a.m. working on the backside at the Del Mar racetrack.”

He started mucking stalls, “walking hots” (cooling horses off from a race), grooming horses and eventually becoming a quasi-assistant trainer every summer.

He said the hands-on experience gave him a unique perspective on the business. “Rubbing legs every summer gives you an idea of what these athletes go through,” Wellman said.



Grade 2 stakes winner, Three Degrees

Wellman graduated from UC Santa Barbara and attended law school at Southwestern University in LA. He had always promised himself that whenever he got his first real job he would buy a race horse. After getting that first real job as a litigator at a mid-size law firm, he got some friends together to claim a horse. The horse had immediate success and more and more friends wanted to get in to “make a few bucks,” so Wellman started LGL (Let’s Get Lucky) Racing partnership.

Once LGL started making more money, Wellman decided to increase the quality of their stock, importing European horses. The first horse he brought over from England, Three Degrees, became a graded stakes winner and one of the top turf fillies of her generation, he said. The second, Valbenny, became a multiple graded stakes winner and also a top grass filly.

It was Valbenny that prompted a re-introduction to Team Valor founder and CEO Barry Irwin, who had known Wellman’s parents in California. Irwin had followed Wellman’s success and eventually asked him to join Team Valor with the idea of taking over the company someday.

“It was almost a dream,” Wellman said. “I never thought at such an early stage in my career, at age 30, I’d be able to make a living in the horse racing industry and play such a big role in the day-to-day operations of such a well-respected, high-quality stable.”

Wellman said that since coming aboard three years ago, Team Valor has been very fortunate with 51 stakes wins and more than \$9 million in earnings.

This year alone they have had 15 stakes winners, including nine graded stakes winners.

Of Team Valor’s 100 horses worldwide, Wellman’s biggest thrill is Gitano Hernando. Imported from Europe, Wellman has traveled the world with Gitano—he will next race in a \$10 million Dubai World Cup in March 2011.

Their horse Gypsy's Warning will race the Grade 1 \$250,000 Matriarch race at Hollywood Park this Friday, Nov. 26.

At Team Valor it is a never-ending mission to prospect, acquire or breed horses capable of winning at the highest level, Wellman said. They are in the process of acquiring a 40-stall barn in Maryland to train horses off-track. Most horses are trained on track, which Wellman said can be a very stressful environment. It is Wellman and Team Valor's hope that the new barn will be the main hub for all of their horses to train under one roof.



**Grade 1 winner Gitano Hernando**

As for Pluck, he is being pointed to the Irish 2000 Guineas in May 2011, the equivalent of the Kentucky Derby in Ireland. "We want to make history with Pluck," Wellness said, "Only once before has an American horse gone overseas (to the Guineas) and won." For more information, visit: [www.teamvalor.com](http://www.teamvalor.com) .