

By Bob Ehalt, November 13, 2019

Team Valor to Focus on Racing in Europe

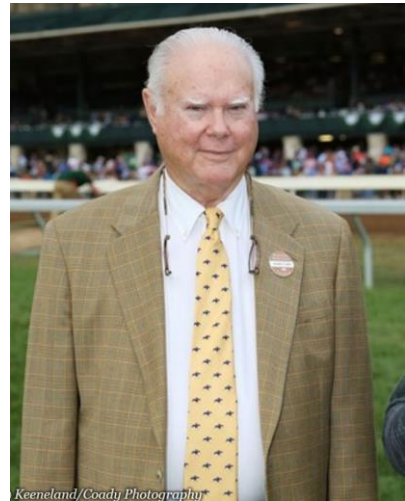
“Virtually all of the partnership's new purchases will be bought and raced overseas.”

When Barry Irwin looks into the future, he sees distant shores.

The founder and CEO of Team Valor International said one of the industry's oldest and most successful partnerships is phasing out its stable in the United States and will focus on racing in Europe.

While the roughly 30 horses that now race in the U.S. under the Team Valor International banner will be kept in training, virtually all of the group's future acquisitions will be horses with racing experience that will be bought overseas and continue their careers there.

"I just think for me and my people and with my talents, we can do better and have more fun in Europe," Irwin said. "With what's going on in America right now, I am not enjoying racing here as much. So I'd rather go to Europe where I can enjoy it."



Irwin launched his original partnership in 1987 under the name of Clover Racing Stables and then formed Team Valor in 1992. Since 1987, the partnership has amassed 321 stakes wins with 29 grade 1 stakes winners. Team Valor's best horse was the homebred **Animal Kingdom**, a Kentucky-bred son of Leroidesanimaux, who won the 2011 Kentucky Derby Presented by Yum! Brands (G1) and the 2013 Dubai World Cup Sponsored by Emirates Airline (G1) while earning \$8,387,500. After standing at Darley this year, he was sold to Japanese interests last month.

Team Valor also purchased **Belvoir Bay** along with Gary Barber from European connections and brought her to the U.S. in 2015. They sold their share to Barber at the end of 2018 and in that time she became a grade 2 winner with seven stakes victories. Racing for Barber this year, the 6-year-old Equiano (FR) mare won the Breeders' Cup Turf Sprint (G1T) to bring her earnings to \$1,699,787. She was part of the Bluewater Sales consignment at the Fasig-Tipton Kentucky Mixed Sale and sold for \$1,500,000 to Mike Shannon, agent, last week.

European racing is hardly a new venture for Team Valor and Irwin, who has built his business over the last three decades by purchasing promising European runners with a race or two of experience. He brought most of them to the United States and kept a handful in Europe and other foreign locales.

Team Valor has been particularly successful in Europe this year. Its contingent of about 10 runners includes group 3 winner **Spanish Mission**, a 3-year-old son of Noble Mission who shipped to Belmont Park in September and won the \$1 million Jockey Club Derby Invitational Stakes, and **Technician**, a son of Mastercraftsman who captured the Prix Royal-Oak (G1) Oct. 27 at ParisLongchamp.



That number of European runners figures to grow appreciably in the coming months.

"If we buy a dozen horses next year, maybe one will race in the United States," Irwin said. "The only time we might buy a horse to race in the United States is if we feel it's a legitimate Triple Crown candidate. Other than that, everything will be in Europe."

Team Valor recently purchased a 2-year-old who will be kept in the United States in **Will Sing for Wine**, a son of Will Take Charge, who was purchased privately after finishing third at 56-1 odds in an Oct. 26 maiden special weight race at Belmont Park. He has been turned over to Hall of Fame trainer Bill Mott.



Team Valor also has a Triple Crown candidate in **Gouverneur Morris**, a 2-year-old with trainer Todd Pletcher who won his debut at Saratoga Race Course by nine lengths and was then second in the Claiborne Breeders' Futurity (G1) at Keeneland. Team Valor bought the son of freshman sire Constitution for \$600,000 from the Eddie Woods consignment at The Gulfstream Sale, Fasig-Tipton's select 2-year-olds in training sale, and now races the colt in a partnership with WinStar Farm.

Irwin added that Team Valor's business philosophy will also change in the coming months, placing more of an emphasis on developing its horses and then selling parts or all of them in hopes of turning a profit.

"To this point we have told people it wasn't an investment. It's a fun thing. It's a vehicle to get involved in the sport. Hopefully we can have some good horses and you can make money, but we're not doing it to make money. I've enjoyed it and I've done for it for 30 some years but it's reached a point where I'd like my people and me to be in the business as full-time professionals. So the idea is to buy a horse after a start or two, which we have been doing, develop them, and

then either sell half of them or all of them for a profit. The fun will come from developing a good horse, and in time people will get used to this way of doing things. Right now it's hard for us to sell a horse because people bought in to get a good horse, and if they get one, they don't want to sell it," Irwin said. "I've now told people up front that going forward if you want to participate in these partnerships with me that our goal is to sell them and make money. It's better to be a seller than a buyer right now. That's the bottom line."



Irwin pointed to the recent sale of **Talk Veuve to Me** as example of how Team Valor will strive to operate in the future.

Team Valor bought a share of the Violence filly last year from trainer Rodolphe Brisset and Stephen McKay after she broke her maiden at 3 in her second start. She went on to win the Indiana Oaks (G3) and place in the Acorn Stakes (G1) while earning \$506,967 to date.

She was sold last week for \$1.3 million from the WinStar Racing consignment to Stonestreet Stables at the Keeneland November Breeding Stock Sale.

"Talk Veuve to Me still has a lot of racing in her," Irwin said, "but we had some fun with her, made some money and it was time to sell her so we can do it again with another horse."

Irwin announced the new structure to his partners in early October, and said the response has been favorable for the most part.

"Some people are disappointed and are worried if they can afford to race over there. I understand that. But most of them, including the people who have been with me the longest time, like it," the 76-year-old Irwin said. "We have about 250 people who have at least one interest with us and a hard core group of about 65 that buy multiple horses every year and most of them will continue with this new plan."

Irwin said the increased availability of European racing either on television or online has been a selling point to his partners, and he also plans to organize a two-week cruise to Europe in the spring to introduce his backers to international racing.

"As racing gets more polarized between the haves and the have-nots," he said, "you have to be pretty clever to stay afloat in this day and age."