

In Sharper Focus: Gouverneur Morris

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By *Steve Sherack*

If \$600,000 Fasig-Tipton Florida graduate and **‘TDN Rising Star’** Gouverneur Morris (Constitution)’s runaway debut win in the Saratoga slop Sept. 2 was any indication, Team Valor International’s Barry Irwin may have a difficult time staying away from the 2-year-old in training sales for such a long time again.

Co-owned by WinStar Farm LLC and trained by Todd Pletcher, the flashy gray is currently being aimed at the GI Claiborne Breeders’ Futurity at Keeneland Oct. 5.

“I don’t like the 2-year-old sales,” Irwin dead-panned. “I don’t like how they treat the horses. The number of people that I have personally encountered that do the right thing are few and far between. It’s just too much heartbreak, so I stopped going. I think the last 2-year-old colt that I bought in America was a minimum of a dozen years ago.”

So what lured Irwin back to the ring? Enter recent Team Valor hire Jessica Berry, a graduate of the Godolphin Flying Start program.

“She wanted me to take her to a 2-year-old sale for a learning experience—just to look at some horses and basically give her my opinion on things,” Irwin said. “I went out there with no intention of buying the horse or bidding on anything.”



Gouverneur Morris | Sarah Andrew

Gouverneur Morris's move in :10 1/5 was one of only a couple of breezes at the under-tack show to pique Irwin's interest. While taking a closer look at [Hip 174](#) at the Eddie Woods consignment at Barn 24, Irwin ran into Pletcher, who also trained the colt's freshman sire to wins in the 2014 GI Besilu Florida Derby and 2015 GI Donn H.

"I saw Pletcher standing out there and I said, 'Did you look at this horse?,'" Irwin said. "He goes, 'Yeah, he looks just like Constitution did at that same age.'"

A well-timed, single bid of \$600,000 by Berry and Gouverneur Morris was Team Valor's. WinStar came in for a quarter interest shortly thereafter, per Irwin. Gouverneur Morris was the most expensive of 41 juveniles to switch hands by Constitution in 2019.

Previously a \$200,000 KEESEP yearling graduate, Gouverneur Morris was bred in Kentucky by Machmer Hall, Carrie and Craig Brogden and James F. Miller. One of a leading 15 winners for his first-crop sire, he is out of the stakes-placed Unbridled's Song mare Addison Run. The Feb. 23 foal hails from the extended female family of champion Midshipman (Unbridled's Song) and MGISW Frosted (Tapit).

You don't need a master's degree in history to appreciate the story behind this horse's name.

The two-legged Gouverneur Morris, of course, was a founder and writer of the Preamble to the U.S. Constitution. Team Valor partner Ed Barker, who also owns 25% of Centennial Farms' GI Woodward S. winner and GI Jockey Club Gold Cup entrant Preservationist (Arch), gets all the credit, Irwin said.

"As soon as I bought the horse, I sent out an email and he was the first guy to call and asked if he could name him if he bought in," Irwin said. "I said, 'Buy 10% and I'll let you name him.' He's a real history buff and he sent me a whole bunch of stuff on who he was and what he did. Oddly enough, he used to go to the races in France, too."

Gouverneur Morris has posted two workouts since his ultra-impressive unveiling, which earned him a very solid 83 Beyer Speed Figure. He shared the bullet for five furlongs in 1:00.88 (1/12) at Belmont Park Sept. 20 with fellow Pletcher '[Rising Star](#)' Alpha Sixty Six (Liam's Map).

"Pletcher decided that the two-turn experience of the Futurity was worth going there for," Irwin concluded. "I've had horses with Todd for many years and I've never heard him carry on to the extent that he has on this horse."