

CHRIS MCCARRON DIVES INTO NEW ROLE WITH TEAM VALOR RIDING LEGEND HAS ALREADY BEEN A HIT AT THE RACES WITH PARTNERS HIS ADDITION ALSO HAS COINCIDED WITH A (PREDICTABLE) HOT STREAK

Barry Irwin is not much into superstitions or omens, but he has noticed something he can pretty much count on every time he makes a major change to his racing partnership. Immediately, as if the horses have just been waiting for their cue, a hot streak will develop.

The addition of Hall of Fame jockey Chris McCarron to the leadership of Team Valor has been a new chapter in that history, as since McCarron came aboard at Churchill Downs during Kentucky Derby week, horses near and far have been running lights out for the stable, piling up nine wins from 25 runners.

Chris McCarron and Barry Irwin in the winner's circle at Churchill Downs on May 3 after La Sardane scored in McCarron's first day at the races with Team Valor.



McCarron himself has been to the winner's circle both times he has attended races in his new capacity, witnessing wins by La Sardane and First Premio at Churchill in recent weeks, and here's hoping he will extend that streak this week at Belmont Park when he will be on hand to see Gauguin, La Sardane and Talk Veuve to Me run during the Belmont festival.

Irwin got to see McCarron interact with Team Valor's partners at Churchill during those two racedays and came away wishing every member of the "Team" had been there to experience it.

"Chris stepped right in and added to the experience of our partners at the racetrack," Irwin said.

McCarron has long sought opportunities to give people a more in-depth vantage point of the inner workings of a day at the races.

In that vein, McCarron took a group of Team Valor partners to the jockey quarters at Churchill a few weeks back and showed them the process of weighing in, getting ready for races throughout the day and dealing with equipment.



Chris McCarron next to Briana Mott and Kathleen Irwin in the winner's circle with La Sardane at Churchill Downs.

McCarron also can take owners through a jockey's thought process like few others, and he is a shrewd handicapper. He is a terrific asset in talking to the jockey after a race and communicating to him or her and to the rest of the connections.

Outside of the races, McCarron has been diving into his role as an ambassador and promoter for Team Valor. He has appeared on numerous radio shows during the Triple Crown to share his perspective from winning each of the three legs twice and to talk about how to get involved with Team Valor.

"My job is to recruit new owners, and I really enjoy that," McCarron said. "We had a couple newcomers at Churchill for Rocking the Boat's race who had just joined and getting to know them and see them experience that first race was really neat.

"Barry is rocking and rolling. He has been doing this for 40 years, and it has amazed me how involved he is across the whole operation. He doesn't miss anything, and it's been interesting for me to see him at work. This is a new perspective for me."

McCarron has been a firm believer in Justify all through the spring and will have an up close view of the final jewel on Saturday (he expects the colt to complete the sweep). He will sit in the Garden Terrace restaurant and move around the room, spreading the word about Team Valor, as he can do with a unique flare, as racing fans almost universally recognize him and are drawn to him in a social setting where they soon find that he is an all-star story teller, in addition to a Hall of Fame jockey and lifelong horseman. The same will apply for partners over the next few months as they rub shoulders with McCarron at the races. The more, the merrier.



Chris McCarron with partner Jonathan Hensley, Barry and Kathleen Irwin and Briana Mott at Churchill.