



Bloodlines Presented By Walmac Farm: A Theory Comes Together With U.S.S. Valor

A pedigree theory executed by Barry and Kathleen Irwin of Team Valor resulted in G1 Champagne Stakes winner U.S.S. Valor
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By [Frank Mitchell](#)

Did you notice U.S.S. Valor (by War of Will) flicking his ears forward as he raced under the wire to victory in the Grade 1 Champagne Stakes? Is this colt really that cheeky? Really?

Yes, and he has reason to be. U.S.S. Valor ran the mile in 1:34.84, very quick time for a juvenile going a mile, and the colt stretched away from his competition to win by 6 ½ lengths.

A bay colt bred in Kentucky by Team Valor International and racing for the breeder, U.S.S. Valor is the first G1 winner for his sire, 2019 Preakness Stakes winner War of Will (War Front). To date, the Champagne winner is the fifth stakes winner for War of Will, and that is two percent of the stallion's 266-head first three crops.

U.S.S. Valor was one of 62 foals from War of Will's third crop, which is an indication that the striking and leggy bay stallion was decreasing in popularity among breeders. This is not a new phenomenon; most stallions decline in popularity each year from the first, and if they don't get a champion right away, they continue to decrease in breeder support and are sold on to a stallion operation outside the Bluegrass.

This has happened to classic winners, champions, and even Horses of the Year. There is no more competitive position among Thoroughbreds than being the sire of racehorses. If a stallion is one of the

genetic marvels who sires speed, athleticism, and determination with consistency, he has a chance to remain at or near the top of the breeding hierarchy.

The fact that War of Will has gotten his first colt of championship quality in his third crop indicates that he is now resident elsewhere, in this case Rockridge Stud in New York, where the stallion was moved for the 2026 breeding season and stood for a fee of \$5,000 live foal.

The syndicate that owns the stallion is significantly the same as the one which had stood him in Kentucky at Claiborne Farm, and owner Gary Barber, who raced War of Will, is strongly supporting the horse as a New York resident stallion.

U.S.S. Valor is the fifth winner and first stakes winner out of the Tiz Wonderful mare Spangled Banner. The mare was purchased by Barry and Kathleen Irwin of Team Valor at the 2022 Fasig-Tipton August digital sale.

Barry Irwin recalled that “we bought her at the sale because she went through as an RNA, then we bought her shortly afterward.”

That War of Will wasn’t the most commercial stallion didn’t bother Irwin because “my wife and I aren’t commercial breeders. We breed to race,” he concluded.

And the reason they purchased Spangled Banner to breed from is that her 2019 foal by Liam’s Map (Unbridled’s Song) had won his debut as a 3-year-old on Aug. 13, about two weeks before the sale. In that seven-furlong race at Saratoga, Expressman had rung up an eye-catching Beyer speed figure of 107. Subsequently, Expressman won an allowance and ran third in the G1 Carter but did not scale the heights the Irwins had hoped for.

In breeding their new mare in 2023 for the mating that produced U.S.S. Valor, Irwin said that his wife “had a theory on how to mate her.”

When choosing War of Will for Spangled Banner, Kathleen Irwin was seeking a sex-balanced mating because “I noticed in her pedigree a daughter each of Mr. Prospector, Northern Dancer, and Raise a Native, and looked for a stallion with a son of those three, and that worked out” with U.S.S. Valor.

“Barry approved the stallion on the physical mating,” she said, and the next step was getting a good foal.

The well-known Kentucky horseman Mike Owens was handling the Irwins’ mares at Cobra Farm at the time, and he recalled that U.S.S. Valor “was the first foal I had that year. From the day he was foaled, he was always nice, always looked the part. He was one of the easy ones to be around.”

Strongly built and with the size and scope of his dam, U.S.S. Valor is a thoroughly intriguing prospect for next year, and the Irwins have put their star mare in the Keeneland November sale. Spangled Banner is in foal to classic winner and champion Tiz the Law (Constitution), whose daughter Fully Subscribed won the G1 Spinster Stakes at Keeneland on Oct. 4, the day after the Champagne.

The 2026 Champagne Stakes winner is the third winner of that race who was bred and raised on the same property. The trio began with 1976 Champagne Stakes winner Seattle Slew (Bold Reasoning),

who set a new stakes record in winning the race in 1:34 2/5. Slew was elected champion of his division that season, when he was undefeated in three very impressive races, then went on the following season to win the 1977 Triple Crown. Ben Castleman bred Seattle Slew at his White Horse Acres, and later sold the farm, which was renamed Due Process.

The second Champagne winner off the farm was Dehere, who won the race in 1993 and was champion of his division that season, despite having the only poor race of his career in the Breeders' Cup Juvenile (eighth). And the third is U.S.S. Valor. Could he be another champion in the making?

About the author



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Frank Mitchell is author of Racehorse Breeding Theories as well as Great Breeders and Their Methods: The Hancocks. He's written on pedigrees and bloodstock for numerous publications, is co-owner of Metrics Equine LLC and is hands-on with his own broodmares and foals. Check out his Bloodstock in the Bluegrass blog.