

'Rising Star' U. S. S. Valor the Toast of the Town in the Champagne

Saturday, October 3, 2026 at 4:25 pm | [Back to: Top News](#)

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By Steve Sherack

Team Valor International homebred **U. S. S. Valor** (War of Will) stamped himself as the clear-cut horse to beat in the GI Breeders' Cup Juvenile at Keeneland – if his connections do, in fact, decide to go that route – with a jaw-dropping victory following a less-than-ideal trip in Saturday's 'Win and You're In' GI Champagne S. at Belmont Park.

“It's exciting,” said winning Hall of Fame trainer Shug McGaughey, who also

celebrated consecutive Champagne victories with Easy Goer and Adjudicating back in 1988-89.

“You never really know how good they are until they step up, and he stepped up today. It's going to be exciting for us, as long as everything stays the same, to go through the winter and see where it takes us.”

The 1-4 choice, named a 'TDN Rising Star, presented by Hagyard' following a daylight maiden win with a division-leading 105 Beyer Speed Figure at second asking going seven furlongs at Saratoga Sept. 5, wasn't off to the sharpest of beginnings beneath Manny Franco and immediately raced in traffic in the bunched-up field of six.



U. S. S. VALOR | Sarah Andrew

Hard held and racing in fifth through a half mile in :46.08, he awaited racing room at the top of the stretch. Franco could wait no longer and bulled him out leaving the quarter pole, bumping with the tiring Earth Song (Justify).

It was all clear sailing from there, however, as U. S. S. Valor took off with beautiful strides down the lane and put on a show, reporting home as a much-the-best, 6 1/2-length winner over key race maiden winner Gaudreau (Nyquist). 'Rising Star' Club Reign (Core Beliefs) was third.

“Manny (Franco) is a great rider, and he got him where he wanted him to be—got in a little trouble at the head of the stretch, but he was able to (overcome) that,” McGaughey said. “I think when they get an education like he got in his first race, it helps down the line. The second race was perfect, but Manny and I talked in the paddock and I (thought) for him to learn and to be a good horse, he's going to need a target, and he got one today.”

Winning owner/breeder Barry Irwin of Team Valor added, “I've never had a horse anywhere near this quality before, and I've had some good horses. He is just beyond words. I can't believe I bred him, I can't believe I own him.”

As for the Breeders' Cup Juvenile, Irwin added, “I'm going to not say anything for a while and just savor this. Then, I'll open my mouth.”

U. S. S. Valor was highlighted in our 'Second Chances' series following an eventful debut third, finishing three-quarters of a length behind the aforementioned Gaudreau at the Spa Aug. 8.

Pedigree Notes:

U. S. S. Valor becomes the fourth graded winner and first Grade I winner for 2019 GI Preakness Stakes winner War of Will. He was produced by the winning Tiz Wonderful mare Spangled Banner and hails from the family of MGISW Curalina (Curlin). This is the third Grade I winner for Tiz Wonderful as a broodmare sire.

The 15-year-old broodmare, also responsible for the GISP Expressman (Liam's Map) and a Mitole colt of this year, was acquired by Irwin's operation for \$225,000 at the 2022 Fasig-Tipton August Digital Sale. Bred to Tiz the Law for 2027, she has been entered in this fall's Keeneland November sale.

CHAMPAGNE S.-GI, \$500,000, Belmont, 10-3, 2yo, 1m, 1:34.84, ft.

1—U. S. S. VALOR, 122, c, 2, by War of Will

1st Dam: Spangled Banner, by Tiz Wonderful

2nd Dam: Eastern Ruckus, by Eastern Echo

3rd Dam: Andrea Ruckus, by Bold Ruckus

1ST BLACK TYPE WIN, 1ST GRADED STAKES WIN, 1ST GRADE I

WIN. 'TDN Rising Star, presented by Hagyard' O/B-Team Valor

International (KY); T-Claude R. McGaughey III; J-Manuel

Franco. \$275,000. Lifetime Record: 3-2-0-1, \$352,050. *1/2 to Expressman (**Liam's Map**), GISP, \$176,310. **Werk Nick Rating: A++.**

2–**Gaudreau**, 122, c, 2, **Nyquist**–Free Cover, by Congrats.

1ST BLACK TYPE, 1ST GRADED BLACK TYPE, 1ST G1 BLACK TYPE. (\$220,000 Ylg '25 FTKOCT). O-Tanglewood Thoroughbreds LLC, Thirty Year Racing, Bradley Thoroughbreds, Rodeo Creek Racing LLC, Laura Leigh Stable and Swift Thoroughbreds, Inc.; B-Coteau Grove Farms, LLC (LA); T-Chad C. Brown. \$100,000.

3–**Club Reign**, 122, c, 2, Core Beliefs–Bag of Tricks, by Bernardini. **1ST BLACK TYPE, 1ST GRADED BLACK TYPE, 1ST G1 BLACK TYPE.** (\$475,000 2yo '26 OBSAPR). 'TDN Rising Star, presented by Hagyard' O-Ribble Farms, Three Brand Racing LLC and Walmac Farm; B-Gary Broad – Walmac Farm, LLC (KY); T-D. Whitworth Beckman. \$60,000.

Margins: 6HF, 2, 1. Odds: 0.37, 2.82, 12.77.

Also Ran: Earth Song, Johnny Hockey, Raku.