

September 5, 2026

By J.N. Campbell

Saratoga Maidens, Presented By Keeneland

With the 2023 mating season approaching, Barry Irwin and his wife Kathleen drew up a plan for their mare Spangled Banner (Tiz Wonderful), who they had acquired for \$225,000 in the Fasig-Tipton Digital Sale the previous August.

The results from that nicking on Saturday were a bottle christening, as second-time starter **U. S. S. Valor** (War of Will) launched then steamed home to win by more than 13 lengths. The effort earned him a 'TDN Rising Star, presented by Hagyard' medal.



U. S. S. Valor | Sarah Andrew

The Team Valor homebred put in solid drills for Hall of Fame trainer Shug McGaughey coming into his first start at the Spa Aug. 8. Finishing a **respectable third** behind Gaudreau (**Nyquist**) was only half the story, but the real eye-catcher was the 88 Beyer figure that U. S. S. Valor posted.

That display prompted *TDN* Senior Racing Editor Steve Sherack to **spotlight the bay** in his '**Second Chances**' series.

Ready to visit the winner's circle here, the 4-5 favorite came through to press a longshot up the backstretch. U. S. S. Valor had a firm grip on the wheel and he showed it by making the lead at the half-mile marker.

The word was 'all ahead full' by the quarter pole and that is when the romp ensued. U. S. S. Valor won by 13 1/4 lengths. Tap Our Way (**Tapit**) was the runner-up.

"My wildest expectations were something like six lengths and maybe running a 1:23," Team Valor International Founder/Chief Executive Officer, Barry Irwin told *TDN* after the race. "He doubled that and ran a 1:22. I'm calling him my bar mitzvah horse since he won by 13.



Barry Irwin, Manny Franco and Shug McGaughey | Sarah Andrew

"We are still planning on keeping her [Spangled Banner] in the [Keeneland] November sale," he said. "I'm 83-years-old and I've been doing this many, many years and I would like to cash in a little bit. We own a hundred percent of the mare and 25% of this horse [U. S. S. Valor]. We're interested in selling some of our stock and not having as many horses as we used to."

About the choice to send Spangled Banner to War of Will, Kathleen Irwin told *TDN*, "I am a big fan of gender balanced in-breeding, especially when you see a son of Northern Dancer in one part of the pedigree and a daughter of Northern Dancer in the other part.

“What I like about this particular mare and this cross was that War of Will in his pedigree has some very good standard things, like a son of Mr. Prospector, a son of Northern Dancer, a son of Raise a Native. But this broodmare has a daughter of Mr. Prospector, a daughter of Northern Dancer and a daughter of Raise a Native in her pedigree. To me that's a super link and brings out the strength of the individual you are breeding to.”

Trainer Shug McGaughey said to Acacia Clement on the FOX Sports 'Saratoga Live' show about U. S. S. Valor's win, “It kind of opens the doors now for some other things, if he's that kind of horse. We knew all summer he has trained that way back at Belmont. We'll see what happens this weekend and it's a nice thing to think about.”

The winner is a half-brother to Expressman (**Liam's Map**), GISP, \$176,310. Spangled Banner was sent to Mitole and the result was a colt last spring. She was bred to **Tiz the Law** for 2027. U. S. S. Valor's extended female family includes his dam's half-sister MSW Ladyecho (Alphabet Soup), MGISW Curalina (**Curlin**) and Canadian Horse of the Year Uncaptured (Lion Heart).

U. S. S. Valor is the first 'TDN Rising Star, presented by Hagyard,' for War of Will (by War Front).

1st-Saratoga, \$115,000, Msw, 9-5, 2yo, 7f, 1:22.04, ft, 13 1/4 lengths.

U. S. S. VALOR, c, 2, War of Will

1st Dam: Spangled Banner, by Tiz Wonderful

2nd Dam: Eastern Ruckus, by Eastern Echo

3rd Dam: Andrea Ruckus, by Bold Ruckus

Lifetime Record: 2-1-0-1, \$77,050. **Click for the [Equibase.com chart](#) or VIDEO, sponsored by FanDuel Racing. Click for the free [Equineline.com catalog-style pedigree](#).**

O/B-Team Valor International (KY); T-Claude R. McGaughey III.

[VIDEO LINK](#)