

FIRST CAPTAIN RALLIES TO WIN PIMLICO SPECIAL

By Bob Ehalt

[@BobEhalt](#)

It is days like May 20 at Pimlico Race Course that highlight why West Point Thoroughbreds will chase million-dollar yearlings at sales

As much as West Point CEO and president Terry Finley would like to bring home the Woodlawn Vase after next year's Preakness Stakes (G1), he was quite content on this day to gaze over at the giant-sized trophy that First Captain had just secured for winning the \$300,000 Pimlico Special Stakes (G3).

"You have people so pumped up about this. We (as an industry) spend \$2 billion (at the sales) to chase \$1 billion (in purses). We spend a lot of money chasing far smaller pots of money, so you have to have these kinds of days," Finley said.

First Captain is indeed one of those coveted seven-figure yearlings who wound up costing \$1.5 million when he was purchased at The Saratoga Sale, Fasig-Tipton's New York Select Yearling Sale from the Stone Farm consignment. A son of Curlin bred by famed chef Bobby Flay, the Pimlico Special accounted for his



First Captain wins the Pimlico Special at Pimlico Race Course

second grade 3 win for trainer Shug McGaughey and the ownership group of West Point, Siena Farm, Woodford Racing, and Flay while cutting into his purchase price by increasing his career earnings to \$470,100.

"We like to show off on big days and I think over the years as we've gotten better quality horses you just try to be in contention in races like this," Finley said. "Over the years we've gotten better and better and won some big races but this is a special race. I looked at the list of winners in the program and there are some very good horses."

For the connections, life with the 4-year-old First

Captain has been akin to a rollercoaster ride at Coney Island. He won his first three starts, capped by the Dwyer Stakes (G3). But after a third in the July 30 Curlin Stakes at Saratoga Race Course, McGaughey did not like what he saw during morning training and he sidelined the chestnut colt until late February.

First Captain returned with a sharp allowance optional claiming win but then failed to fire in the Carter Handicap (G1) when he finished seventh and last, nearly 20 lengths behind.



The connections of First Captain in the winner's circle after the Pimlico Special Stakes

(continued on page 23)

FIRST CAPTAIN RALLIES TO WIN PIMLICO SPECIAL

(continued from page 22)

The addition of blinkers for the Pimlico Special brought First Captain back to the top as he rallied from sixth in the field of 10 to win by a head over Grandview Equine, Cheyenne Stable, and LNJ Foxwoods' Vindictive, the even-money favorite for trainer Todd Pletcher.

"The first time (First Captain) worked in blinkers I got a text from Shug and he said, 'Very good work,' and coming from Shug that's like over the mountain top because he's very short and sweet and succinct," Finley said.

An equal amount of confidence had Finley tabbing the Aug. 6 \$1 million Whitney Stakes (G1) for First Captain's next start.

"The spacing for the Whitney is very good," he said.

Team Valor International's Untreated, Pletcher's second starter in the race, set the pace in the 1 3/16-mile Pimlico Special, leading by 1 1/2 lengths after a half-mile in a comfortable :49.80. Vindictive took first run at the son of Nyquist and nudged a head in front at the eighth pole under Irad Ortiz Jr. But as one Pletcher runner edged away from the other, First Captain and jockey Luis Saez charged up outside of Vindictive and wore down the Uncle Mo 4-year-old in the final strides.

Untreated was 1 1/4 lengths back in third.

First Captain, sent off at 5-1, paid \$12 to win and covered the distance in 1:56.24.

"When he gave me that turn of foot, he was coming," Saez said after riding the winner for the first time. "Today he proved he's a pretty nice horse."

First Captain is the only one of five foals out of his dam, America, to race. The daughter of A.P. Indy's most recent foals are a yearling Curlin filly and an Uncle Mo colt born March 19. **BH**

 [Share this story](#)



A GREAT HONOR

"The TIEAs are a great honor – everyone at the farm was really happy that Stonestreet was a part of it. I met so many interesting, deserving people from all areas of our business and I urge anyone who knows that special someone to nominate them now."



Robert Turner
TIEA Leadership Award
2021 winner

Nominations now open.
Visit www.tiea.org for details.