

FIRST PREMIO WINS \$120,000 FAIR GROUND STAKES OFF 6-MONTH RESPITE TEAM VALOR HORSE ROMPS BY 3¼ LENGTHS TO EARN \$75,000 FIRST PRIZE BRIAN HERNANDEZ RIDES TURF WINNER FOR SUPER HOT TRAINER M CASSE

Team Valor International's 5-year-old First Premio, making his first start in 6 months, roared down the Fair Grounds homestretch to score an emphatic 3¼-length triumph while being eased in the final 110 yards to win Saturday's \$120,000 E. R. Bradley Stakes going 1 1/16 miles on the grass.

With 4 of the original 9 entrants scratching because of the ominous presence of the odds-on favorite Great Wide Open, 5 horses went into the gate. The 3 to 5 choice set a fast pace slightly in advance of 5 to 1 Pioneer Spirit, with First Premio tucked neatly by Brian Hernandez inside of them in the catbird seat. The quarter went in an unusually fast :23 2/5 over the Fair Grounds turf course and the half went in :47-flat.

When the field swung off the turn, Hernandez bulled his way through an opening, bumping and perhaps even slightly displacing eventual runner-up Sir Dudley Digges. At the top of the lane there were 4 horses virtually in a line.



First Premio proved much the best in his first start following more than a 6-month layoff in Saturday's \$120,000 Col. E. R. Bradley H.

It soon became apparent that First Premio had upgraded himself from the catbird to the driver's seat, as his powerful action allowed the hulking chestnut to assume command at the furlong grounds, open up a commanding lead and be eased in the run to the wire. He reached the line in 1:42-flat. Great Wide Open finished third, about 3½ lengths behind the winner.

First Premio was purchased by Team Valor after he broke his maiden second time out in the fall of his juvenile season in Ireland. The Pure Prize colt had been bred and sold in Kentucky at public auction by trainer Kenny McPeek's father Ron.

Mark Casse developed the colt in the fall of his 3-year-old campaign in Canada and ran him twice last season at Fair Grounds, where he was third in the grassy Woodchopper and a good fourth on dirt in the Grade 3 Mineshaft. First Premio came into his own in the spring at Churchill Downs, running second in the Opening Verse Stakes and winning an allowance race impressively.

Barry Irwin, CEO of Team Valor, said "He fell apart on us after a dull effort in a Graded race in Canada, when he became deathly ill. Mark did a great job nursing him through that episode and then his staff got him over a chronic case of kissing-spine syndrome. Right now he is super healthy for the first time in more than half a year. We still have big hopes for this guy."

In 11 starts, First Premio has 5 wins and 3 seconds and earnings of more than \$230,000.