

PAULICK REPORT

THE BREEDERS' CUP FORUM: RAISING A 'KINGDOM'

by [Ray Paulick](#) | 06.12.2013 | 12:24pm



Animal Kingdom wins the Grade 1 \$10-Million Dubai World Cup.

Craig and Holly Bandoroff have been on the Animal Kingdom bandwagon from day one, when the son of Leroidesanimaux foaled at their Denali Stud near Paris, Ky., on March 20, 2008. They raised the colt for Barry Irwin's Team Valor and entered him in the 2009 Keeneland September yearling sale, where he was bought back by Team Valor International to dissolve the breeding partnership and create a new one that intended to race him.

Their involvement didn't stop there, as the Bandoroffs bought into the Team Valor racing partnership and have been on the journey from the 2011 Kentucky Derby victory to the 2012

Breeders' Cup Mile runner-up effort to the 2013 Dubai World Cup win. Animal Kingdom is a week away from making his final start at Royal Ascot in England before embarking on a career as a stallion that begins during the 2013 Southern Hemisphere breeding season at John Messara's Arrowfield Stud in Australia. He'll stand the Northern Hemisphere season at Darley in Kentucky.

A professional jockey in high school who suffered a severe injury to his right arm during a race, Bandoroff reinvented himself after graduating from the University of Kentucky, establishing Denali Stud in 1990 and developing the boarding and sales operation into one of the most successful and respected farms in Central Kentucky.

What has been the best part for you and Holly to be part of the Animal Kingdom story, having foaled and raised him at Denali, having him in your yearling consignment, and then staying on as a Team Valor partner?

There are several wonderful aspects to the experience on different levels. It has been a wonderful thing to share as a family. All of us were together at the Derby and then my son and I being in Dubai are things dreams are made of. The Lord doesn't give you many days like that in life. I feel blessed to have had them.

Remaining a partner in him has been a dream come true. I kid that if I had sold out my interest it wouldn't have mattered because I'd have committed suicide by now! Of course it has been significant financially for us but to have the connection to a horse who is successful at the highest level of the sport has given me an understanding of why people participate in our sport.

But I think the best part of all has been to have played a role in raising a race horse of his calibre and seen him garner the respect of the international community. It is a great source of pride to me for our farm, our organization, and our land. I'm not sure how much credit we deserve but I guess we didn't screw him up when we had him!

This is a very unique horse, considering what he has done on dirt, winning the Kentucky Derby, on the synthetic track in Dubai, winning the World Cup, and on turf in the Breeders' Cup Mile when second to Horse of the Year Wise Dan. Why do we rarely see horses that perform so well on these different types of surfaces?



Holly and Craig Bendoroff

It's rare because horses like him are rare. True champions, horses that don't need their surface and run on anything have always been rare. I don't think it's a case of they don't make them like they used to. I think it's a case of they just don't make them like this very often. And he has been given the opportunity. Without Barry Irwin and Graham Motion none of this ever happens. Barry is a brilliant master of the game and a risk taker. He believed in AK and designed a game plan few would have dared or contemplated. The moment he got hurt after the race at Gulfstream last year Barry said the goal was to run in the

Dubai World Cup this year. Graham is one of the elite trainers in the world that can take the raw talent that a horse like Animal Kingdom has and tune it like a fine instrument. His training accomplishment has been one for the ages.

Why didn't this horse exceed his reserve price at the sale?

He did exceed it. There were several partners in him as a yearling that wanted out or needed to come out. Barry bought him and re-syndicated him after the sale. I thought at the time it was a good price for him. He was by an unproven sire out of a mare with an unconventional pedigree for the market place. His price reflected his physical quality.

As a breeder and sales agent, can you explain why Team Valor's Barry Irwin decided to do a stallion deal with John Messara's Arrowfield in Australia rather than in the United States?

Mr. Messara made an offer after the Breeders' Cup that far exceeded anything offered by any Kentucky stallion operator. It's looking like a very good buy now. Unfortunately the interest from Kentucky was nominal at that time.

It wasn't that long ago that European champions like Nijinsky II and Blushing Groom (Animal Kingdom's great grandsire) were popular stallions here in the U.S. Why does that no longer hold true?

It was a different industry in several ways then. First, people like Bull Hancock and John Gaines had a group of people that believed in them and supported what they did regardless whether it was conventional or not. They didn't have to be out on their purchase in "x" number of years. I don't think we have dynamic stallion managers that garner that kind of support today. Today the purchase has to cash flow and unconventional horses won't because the commercial breeder won't support them because the American buyer won't buy the yearlings by that stallion. We have become very provincial and it is one of the reasons why we are suffering internationally. Secondly the market in Europe wasn't as strong as it is today. Today you couldn't buy the caliber horse you mentioned because the Europeans wouldn't sell him. Their business is much healthier and they won't let these kind go.

Your background is unique. Injured as a young jockey in New Jersey, then went to college but wound up back in the horse business in Kentucky. What has made you succeed in this business where others may have failed?

Opportunity, the willingness to work hard, passion for the horse, and the good fortune to attract and assemble a great team. So many clients over the years gave us an opportunity to deal with high-quality horses. We were given an opportunity and we performed. But without the former it doesn't happen. Without the latter it isn't sustainable.

My parents instilled in me a work ethic that has been an integral part of my success. Lord knows I'm not the brightest bulb in the fixture so I needed to work hard! We all tell our children the key to success is find something you are passionate about and work hard. It's not rocket science and it works.

When you attract high-caliber people to join you it makes people like me look smart. Gary Bush, Donnie Snellings, Theresa Rhodus are the managers in the background that make us what we are. They are joined by others who excel in their areas of responsibility. Finally a passion for the horse is a key for me. On my evening walks on the farm I realize that love for the animal is still with me today.

When you look back at your last 20-plus years operating Denali, what are some of the milestones that are most significant to you?

This horse would top the list. I told my son after Dubai we have been to the top of the mountain. I think after all these years I can finally look out at our land and farms and be very proud and grateful. It has been a labor of love that is a result of so many people who are dedicated horsemen and women who take great pride in their work. Then clients like Bob and Beverly Lewis, R.D. Hubbard, Barry Weisbord, Barry Irwin, Bobby Flay, Dede Snowden, Marlene Brody, Vivien Malloy, to name a few. Horses like Serena's

Song, Uncle Mo, David Jr, Real Quiet, Stravinsky, Mushka, King's Best. I'm proud that we have stood the test of time. That is the greatest accomplishment for anyone and any business.

You've been operating your own business through some ups and downs in the market. What do you think is the current state of the breeding industry in Kentucky?

I'd call it stabilized. I believe we are seeing a level of supply that is meeting demand. That has created a healthier environment. I also think that people involved in breeding today recognize Kentucky for its high quality and standard. The quality of our farms and our support services, and our horsemen, blacksmiths and veterinarians is the reason people are attracted to Kentucky and keep their best horses here. They understand that doesn't exist other places anywhere close to the way it does in Kentucky. It's a case of build it and they will come and maintain it and they will stay. I still think we are vulnerable because of the lack of support we get from our legislature and that concerns me.