

From Brian Zipse of *HorseRacingNation.com* comes the following:

Animal Kingdom Is the People's Choice

The fans have spoken. Animal Kingdom is the people's choice. When I asked which current older horse they most anticipated coming back in 2013, I expected to see a fair amount of support for several horses. After all, with a list that included Wise Dan, Fort Larned, Mucho Macho Man, Royal Delta, Groupie Doll, Game On Dude, Point of Entry, and Little Mike, there seemed to be plenty of outstanding choices. What I got instead, was nothing short of a resounding vote of confidence in one horse above all else. With more than seven times as many votes as his nearest competition, at the time of writing, it is clear that Animal Kingdom has captured the imagination of more race fans than anyone else in training. His electrifying two starts this year was not nearly enough to satisfy hungry supporters of the 2011 three-year-old champion.



A big part of this yearning to see more is a direct result of his eye-popping rally in the Breeders' Cup Mile. His awesome burst of speed to finish second to Wise Dan, left fans everywhere amazed. No matter how much you believed in the powerful son Leroidesanimaux, you had no way of knowing for sure if he could compete in earnest with many of the finest middle distance horses in the world considering the circumstances. Keep in mind, even making it to the 2012 Breeders' Cup was a feat in and of itself.

Under the expert training and watchful eye of Graham Motion, the Team Valor four-year-old star ran a stunning race in the World Championships. It was a performance to be truly excited about. Having been trapped down on the rail behind horses for most of the way, Animal Kingdom, with plenty of horse, but no room to run, was steadied sharply on the backstretch, falling even farther back and in danger of being an also-ran in the one-mile test. As heavily favored Wise Dan sat a perfect stalking trip behind the early speed of Obviously, Animal Kingdom, under Rafael Bejarano, was able to regain striking distance, but once again, was stuck behind a wall of horses down on the inside.

When the Mile field came spinning out of the turn, it appeared that Animal Kingdom was not going to make much noise. As Wise Dan swept to the lead, Animal Kingdom could do little but wait. Still full of horse, but with nowhere to go, the hole came far too late for the big horse in the green and red silks to have any chance to catch the talented leader. When an opening finally did materialize, Animal Kingdom used a rare combination of explosive turn of foot and giant strides to gobble up the Santa Anita turf. Blitzing from sixth to second in a heartbeat, Animal Kingdom was as much the talk after the race as was the winner who both broke a track record, and likely clinched a Horse of the Year title in so doing. An extrapolation of the final furlong time for the runner-up reveals a sub-eleven second finish, despite not having clear running room for a big chunk of that final eighth of a mile.

Not bad for a horse that had not raced in 8 ½ months, and that race at Gulfstream, was his only start in the past 17 months. It would seem that the horse that won the Kentucky Derby impressively, and finished a fast closing second in the Preakness, before being completely wiped out in the early stages of the Belmont Stakes, back in 2011, may be even better now as an older, more mature horse. When I saw Animal Kingdom the morning after arriving at Santa Anita, he cast a physical presence that rivaled anything I've ever seen. On this vote, I am with the people. I cannot wait to see what Animal Kingdom does next.