

February 18, 2012

**ANIMAL KINGDOM RETURNS IMPRESSIVELY ON SATURDAY AT GULFSTREAM PARK  
CHAMPION RUMBLES TO GRASS ALLOWANCE WIN, ZEROES IN ON DUBAI WORLD CUP  
FIRST VICTORY SINCE KENTUCKY DERBY CAPPED WITH A FINAL SIXTEENTH IN :5 3/5**

From *BrisNet.com*

Kentucky Derby-winning champion Animal Kingdom, who had not raced since sustaining an injury in the Belmont Stakes last June, returned to action with a stylish display as the 3-5 favorite in Saturday's 5TH race at Gulfstream Park. With this turf prep under his belt, the Team Valor International homebred promises to be a major player in the Group 1 Dubai World Cup at Meydan on March 31.



*Animal Kingdom is the first Kentucky Derby hero to win a race after his 3-year-old season since Giacomo, who scored in the 2005 Run for the Roses and then prevailed in the 2006 San Diego Handicap.*

exercise.

Monument Hill was himself two lengths up on Bell by the Ridge. Royal Hill faded to fourth, trailed by Tannersville and Midnight Mischief. Bell by the Ridge and Tannersville were entered for the \$80,000 tag.

"They went slow enough where he just pulled me into contention all on his own," Velazquez said. "I let him do what he wanted as opposed to wrangling him back behind horses.

"The second I started kissing at him in the stretch, he picked it right up and took off. It was a great feeling today and great to have him back. He felt as good as ever."

Animal Kingdom was warmly greeted by the Gulfstream fans, both in the walking ring and especially as he returned to the winner's circle.

The Graham Motion trainee was last of the six-horse field early, but never more than 3 1/2 lengths off the pace for John Velazquez. After Royal Hill carved out splits of :24 2/5 and :49 2/5 on the firm turf, Animal Kingdom showed tactical adaptability by advancing into third on the backstretch. He was just a length back through six furlongs in 1:13, and commenced another move to put his head in front turning for home.

Animal Kingdom appeared to have a challenger in Monument Hill, the 2-1 second choice, who closed smartly on the outside. But as soon as Monument Hill came within earshot, Animal Kingdom kicked away to win in hand by two lengths. The odds-on favorite zipped 1 1/16 miles in 1:41 3/5, including a final sixteenth in a snappy :5 3/5, and paid \$3.20, \$2.20 and \$2.10 for his afternoon

"I think when you have a Derby winner," Motion said, "everybody owns a little piece of him. It may sound a little corny, but when you have a Derby winner, he's a little bit the people's horse and you have a responsibility. I think the reception he got was neat, and I'm glad we got to run him here.

"Obviously, I would have been disappointed if he hadn't won today, when you've have a race that's set up for you. But this was the best thing for us. He still had to go out there and do it. He needed a race and still has six weeks to regroup to get him to Dubai in the right way."

Animal Kingdom improved his career record to 8-4-3-0, \$1,965,500. Originally trained by Wayne Catalano, the Leroidesanimaux colt began his career on Polytrack. He was a mightily-troubled runner-up to eventual Grade 2 hero Willcox Inn on his debut at Arlington Park, but broke through next time with a 3 1/4-length demolition job at Keeneland.



Transferred to Motion along with Team Valor's other North American runners, Animal Kingdom made his sophomore bow on the Gulfstream turf and finished a near-miss second. He reverted to Polytrack for Turfway's Grade 3 Spiral, where he rolled by 2 3/4 lengths and punched his ticket to the Kentucky Derby, his dirt debut.

Animal Kingdom turned out to be just as convincing on the dirt, driving to a 2 3/4-length decision beneath the Twin Spires. His Triple Crown dreams were shattered by a slow start and wide trip in the Preakness, and he fell a half-length short of beating a stubborn Shackleford.

His classic experience became a nightmare in the Belmont Stakes. Badly hampered and clipping heels in the opening strides, Animal Kingdom recovered to finish sixth. Unfortunately, he exited the third jewel of the Triple Crown with a slab fracture to his left hind leg. He underwent surgery for his season-ending injury, and wasn't ready to return to the worktab until Christmas Eve.

Despite his time on the sidelines, Animal Kingdom had done enough to earn an Eclipse Award in an unclear three-year-old division, and prevailed by a 114-111 vote over Breeders' Cup Dirt Mile winner Caleb's Posse. Judging by Saturday's impressive comeback, Animal Kingdom is determined to flex his champion credentials in the older male division.

"It's a question of exhaling," Motion said. "This horse has come a long way since October. Nothing was more heartbreaking than to see this horse stuck in a stall a week after the Belmont. He went from being the fittest horse in the country to not being able to get out of his stall. That was tough. To see him today, back to himself, obviously I'm elated.

"He's a very special horse, and I really wanted him to come back and prove it."

"All we were worried about was having him run too big," said Barry Irwin, the founder and CEO of Team Valor International. "We didn't want to see a big race and have him leave it on the track. We did not need a big race here. All we wanted was a nice quiet race and we got it.

"He's much better than he was last year. This race is not going to prove that, but we can tell by the way he trains and the way he looks, he's a much better horse this year."