

**DAILY RACING FORM: ANIMAL KINGDOM LOOKS AS GOOD AS EVER IN HIS COMEBACK  
TWO BREEZES AT PALM MEADOWS ON TAP BEFORE TRIP FOR WORLD'S RICHEST RACE**

The first word out of trainer Graham Motion's mouth after his Kentucky Derby winner Animal Kingdom cruised to an easy win launching his comeback in Saturday's fifth race at Gulfstream Park was "exhale." For the rest of us, it was "Wow!"

Animal Kingdom, ridden by John Velazquez, wins his first start in eight months by two lengths and will move on to the March 31 Dubai World Cup.

Making his first start since his eventful trip eight months earlier in the Belmont Stakes, Animal Kingdom turned in a powerful and very professional performance rallying from last before surging away from Monument Hill through the final furlong to register a two-length victory under jockey John Velazquez. Motion was using the high-priced optional claiming race on the turf as a stepping-stone for Animal Kingdom's next start in the \$10 million Dubai World Cup on March 31.



Animal Kingdom was taken in hand by Velazquez and rated at the rear of the six-horse field while kept well off the inner rail. The Derby winner eased closer while under a tight hold midway down the backstretch, readily circled the leaders to take control into the stretch, then re-broke when challenged by Monument Hill nearing midstretch to win with complete authority.

Animal Kingdom raced with front wraps in his return. Motion said he put them on for precautionary reasons to protect a splint Animal Kingdom popped when first put into serious training early this winter.

"He trains in polos every day and I ran him in wraps just to keep him from hitting himself on that splint," said Motion.

"I would have been disappointed if he didn't win today," said Motion, who admitted to being extremely nervous going into the race. "This was the best thing for us. He needed a race, now we have six weeks to take a breath and re-group. Now we can take our time and get him to Dubai the right way. He's come a long way since October when he went back into training. Nothing was more heartbreaking than to see this horse stuck in his 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. To see him today, back to himself, obviously I'm elated."

Motion said Animal Kingdom would likely have two works prior to leaving for Dubai. "I'd like to complete all his major work for the World Cup right here at Palm Meadows before he departs for Dubai," said Motion.