

ANIMAL KINGDOM RETURNING SATURDAY IN GULFSTREAM ALLOWANCE MOTION OPTS FOR PREP WITH 6-WEEK SPACING FOR DUBAI WORLD CUP CHAMP WILL GO 1 1/16 MILES ON THE TURF, SIMILAR TO 1ST START OF 2011

Animal Kingdom will begin his 4-year-old season much like the launch to his Kentucky Derby triumph last year, as Graham Motion decided this morning to bring Team Valor International's champion back in a turf allowance race at Gulfstream Park on Saturday instead of waiting a week for the Grade 3 Tampa Bay Stakes.



Animal Kingdom galloped on the dirt at Palm Meadows on Monday.

conditions for this Saturday, which was always their preferred date. Animal Kingdom turned in a serious 6-furlong workout in company with Graded stakes winner Smart Bid yesterday that gave Motion some flexibility.

When Motion and Barry Irwin spoke this morning, the trainer was still mulling his options. Irwin left the decision up to Motion, but he encouraged the mild-mannered Englishman to give Gulfstream an ultimatum to make the allowance race happen for Saturday or forget about it. With that motivation, the track brought together a 6-horse field within an hour, and Motion finalized his plan.

“He would have worked the horse 7 furlongs next Monday to get him ready for the Tampa race, but for this kind of allowance race, I think the horse will be fine on Saturday,” Barry Irwin said. “He’s doing super, but we don’t want him to be too primed for a big race first time back. We want him to get something out of the race, not leave his Dubai World Cup race on the course.

Irwin listed 5 other factors in an email to the *Blood-Horse’s* Steve Haskin, who inquired about the change of plans for a story.

Animal Kingdom finished a late-running second in a mile allowance race on the Gulfstream grass last March in his 3-year-old debut. This winter, Gulfstream officials encouraged Motion to consider racing the colt at their track. The Grade 1 Gulfstream Park Turf Handicap was never really a viable option, so Motion informed the racing secretary what kind of race he would consider if Animal Kingdom’s training schedule matched up. The alternative was the Grade 3 Tampa Bay Stakes on February 25, but Motion never completely made up his mind one way or the other until this morning.

The big question was whether Gulfstream could round up enough horses to card the allowance event. The racing office tried and failed twice last weekend, but tweaked the

Irwin cited: an easier trip from Palm Meadows to Gulfstream and back, Animal Kingdom's familiarity with Gulfstream, Motion's preference for 6 weeks instead of 5 leading up to the World Cup, ideal weather this weekend compared to the unknown variable for February 25, and a Gulfstream course that has improved with recent rain after a bone-dry start to the meet, which was a big part of the equation when Irwin and Motion compared it to Tampa a few weeks ago.

The allowance event is Race 5 and is scheduled for 2:25 p.m. Eastern. Animal Kingdom drew the outside post in a field of 6. The two inside horses are both entered with the \$80,000 optional claiming price.

Monument Hill may be in the best current form, after winning a mile allowance race as the favorite last time at Gulfstream. Royal Hill exits an allowance win at Tampa.

From *gulfstreampark.com* comes the following:

Animal Kingdom, the 2011 Kentucky Derby (G1) winner, will make his first start of 2012 at Gulfstream Park on Saturday afternoon.

Trainer Graham Motion entered last year's Eclipse Award champion 3-year-old in a \$60,000 turf allowance, carded as the fifth race on an 11-race program. Owned by Team Valor International, Animal Kingdom has been training strongly at Palm Meadows, Gulfstream's state-of-the-art training center in Boynton Beach, for his 2012 debut.

"I'm very excited to get him back, and now that we've entered him I'm extremely anxious," Motion said. "I have been pleasantly surprised how quickly he's come around," Motion said. "I think he got a good base in him at Fair Hill before he came down here. Once he got down here we've gotten some serious works on the grass."

Animal Kingdom launched his 3-year-old campaign last March at Gulfstream Park, where he finished second in a turf allowance with a late-closing effort that was compromised by a slow start. That performance encouraged Motion and Team Valor International to start their colt in the \$500,000 Spiral (G3) over Turfway Park's synthetic track less than a month later, and the Kentucky-bred colt responded with a 2 ¾-length triumph that gave him more than enough graded-stakes earnings to qualify for a spot in the Kentucky Derby field.

Following a brilliant workout at Churchill Downs, the decision was made to run Animal Kingdom for the first time on a dirt track in the Kentucky Derby. The son of Leroidesanimaux ran back to his workout and zipped through the stretch to score by 2 ¾ lengths and join his connections in the winner's circle.

Two weeks later, Animal Kingdom made a valiant effort to catch victorious Shackleford in the Preakness, falling a half-length short after trailing the field early. Following a troubled sixth in the Belmont Stakes, it was discovered that he had suffered a fracture in his left hind leg that required surgery and knocked him out of action for the rest of the year.



Megan Jones/Team Valor photos