

ANIMAL KINGDOM TO TEST CHURCHILL DIRT FOR KENTUCKY DERBY TILT

From *Thoroughbred Times* comes Mike Curry's story as follows:

Animal Kingdom passed class test in Spiral



Animal Kingdom closed from last to first to win the Vinery Racing Spiral Stakes (G3) in his stakes debut on Saturday at Turfway Park, passing a class test and opening up the option of trying him on the dirt to see if he is a Kentucky Derby Presented by Yum! Brands (G1) contender.

Animal Kingdom came out of the win in good order and shipped back to Keeneland without any problem right after the race. Graham Motion trains the Leroidesanimaux (Brz) colt for owner Team Valor International and said he knew this winter he had plenty of talent when he was able to hold his own with Team Valor's Breeders' Cup Juvenile Turf (G2) winner Pluck in morning workouts.

"He's been very impressive to me in the morning," Motion said on Sunday. "He and Pluck worked together every time, and it just worked out really well that they could work together. He's the kind of horse that in the morning, galloping around out there, anybody could get on him. He barely will take a hold of you. But when we go to breeze him, he's a totally different horse. He's all business."

Motion also finished second in the Rushaway Stakes with Team Valor's Crimson China. Prior to the Spiral, Motion and Team Valor's Barry Irwin discussed whether to enter Animal Kingdom or Crimson China in the Spiral, with the other heading to the Rushaway. They made the right choice "I just think we felt like he wasn't quite as experienced as the other colt and wasn't going to be ready for it, but it was nothing to do with talent," he said of Animal Kingdom. "We also thought Crimson China would really benefit from a mile and an eighth, whereas this horse I don't think it really mattered either way."

Animal Kingdom, who is out of the Group 3-winning Acatenango mare Dalicia (Ger), has made 3 of his 4 starts on synthetic surfaces, including the Spiral win, and his other start was a victory on grass.

Motion said he owes it to the colt to find out if he can handle a switch to dirt. "Barry and I have talked about it and we have to breeze him on the dirt and see how he handles it. I don't think it would be fair not to at least consider the Derby," he said. "He's obviously a really nice horse who is going to handle the distance. If he shows us in the next three or four weeks that he can handle the dirt in the morning, it's something we'll have to strongly consider. I think what we'll do is, we'll keep him at Keeneland and take him over to Churchill and breeze him on the dirt and see how it goes. Like I said before, he's a very good work horse