

May 7, 2011

**ANIMAL KINGDOM TAKES THE 137<sup>TH</sup> RUNNING OF THE KENTUCKY DERBY  
TEAM VALOR INTERNATIONAL'S HOME-BRED DRAWS OFF BY 2 ¾ LENGTHS  
TWENTY PARTNERS REALIZE THEIR LIFETIME DREAM AS SPORTS PEOPLE  
ANIMAL KINGDOM IS VOTED TOP 3-YEAR-OLD COLT IN THE UNITED STATES  
NINETEEN TURF WRITERS IN POLL MAKE AK THE UNANIMOUS SELECTION**

*reprinted from Bloodhorse.com:*

## Haskin's Derby Recap: Kingdom Come

09 May 2011

Graham Motion stood outside Barn 22 the morning of the \$2,171,800 May 7 Kentucky Derby Presented by Yum! Brands (gr. I) and admitted he had no idea what to expect from Team Valor International's Animal Kingdom, who was about to make his first career start on dirt. Motion was well aware that no horse had ever won the Derby making his dirt debut.

"I just don't know," Motion said. "The statistics are all against him, I feel good about running the horse, but it's such an unknown. I love the horse, I love the way he worked over the dirt, and I love his attitude. He's got everything going for him. It's just that unknown."

But as Jim Morrison said, "There are things known, and there are things unknown. And in between are the doors."



Later that evening, Animal Kingdom burst through one of those doors, and awaiting him on the other side was Kentucky Derby immortality. By powering down the Churchill Downs stretch to a 2 ¾-length victory in front of a record crowd of 164,658, the unknown had become known. Racing had a new star and a legitimate Triple Crown threat.

But most of all, his victory unleashed a flood of emotions, a great deal of it resulting from the improbable victory by John Velazquez and the unusual

circumstances that led to him winding up on Animal Kingdom.

In the past three years, Velazquez has seen his Derby favorite Quality Road withdrawn a week before the race because of a quarter crack, the heavy Derby favorite Eskendereya withdrawn several days before the Derby with a career-ending injury, and this year's early favorite Uncle Mo scratched the morning before the race due to an intestinal ailment.

Although disappointed and frustrated, Velazquez understood that this sport can rip your heart out at any time and you have to learn to come to terms with it.

“What can you do; it’s part of racing,” Velazquez said later that day in the quiet of the backstretch. “One year we’ll win it when we least expect it.”

Never could he have imagined this would be that year.

When Robby Albarado, who was named to ride Animal Kingdom in the Derby, suffered a broken nose after being kicked by a horse and felt he was unable to ride the day before the Derby, it was decided not to take any chances, and they replaced Albarado with Velazquez.

“That call to Robby was a tough one make,” Motion said. “But when he took off his mounts on Friday that was a concern, and when Johnny became available, we decided to go with him.”

The Derby gods had made an uncharacteristic 11th hour appearance on the scene. Destiny had somehow brought together Motion and Velazquez, whose families have been close friends for years.



“We met Graham when he worked for Jonathan Sheppard,” Velazquez’ wife Leona recalled. “After he became a trainer and went to Florida for the first year, Johnny rode for him and they struck up a friendship. We became very close to Graham and (his wife) Anita. Then Anita and I became pregnant at the same time and our sons (Michael Velazquez and Chappy Motion) were born two weeks apart, and they’re best friends. You can’t make it up.”

Anita added, “We have dinner together and go to each other’s houses. When Animal Kingdom won, the first thing Chappy said to me was, ‘Does this mean I get to play with Michael tonight?’”

So, for the first time in Derby history, a jockey lost the mount on one of the favorites the day before the race and wound up being named on the eventual winner.



Add to the script Motion losing his big Derby horse, Toby’s Corner, winner of the Resorts World New York Casino Wood Memorial (gr. I), four days before the race due to injury. Motion described the loss of Toby’s Corner as “brutal.”

The colt was scheduled to leave Fair Hill Tuesday morning when it was noticed he was lame. Toby’s Corner’s owners, Dianne and Julian Cotter, were already en route from Florida to pick up their daughter Carrie and her family in North Carolina when they received a call from Motion saying that

Toby’s Corner had an injury would not make the Derby. They now had to decide whether to turn around and go home or continue to Louisville. They decided to keep going and try to enjoy the Derby experience and their new rooting interest, Animal Kingdom, who they visited almost every morning they were there. They were nothing but gracious and supportive their entire time in Louisville.

It was no wonder that emotions poured so freely following Animal Kingdom's rousing victory, in which he closed his final half-mile in a spectacular :47 1/5, the second-fastest closing half ever in the Derby behind Secretariat.

Following the race, a stunned Leona was in tears, as was her 12-year-old daughter Lerina. Clutched in Leona's hand was a wooden cross.

"The only other time I clutched this in my hand was when Rags to Riches won the Belmont Stakes (gr. I)," she said. "I still don't believe this is happening. Up and down. Up and down."

In the jockey's lounge after the race, Lirena was still beaming through her braces, as Michael was off in the corner playing ping-pong. "I wasn't expecting this," she said. "I'm in shock. It was really awesome. My brother is only 8 and I hope he remembers this; he was crying hysterically."

Perhaps no one was more emotional than Velazquez's agent, Hall of Fame jockey Angel Cordero.

It was Cordero who discovered Velazquez from a videotape of the apprentice rider in action in Puerto Rico. Cordero brought Velazquez to America and mentored the young rider, eventually taking over his book. From the time Velazquez came to this country, he has looked up to Cordero as a father figure. After the tragic hit-and-run death of Cordero's wife Marjorie in Jan. 2001, he felt his life was over. All he had to live for were his children and Velazquez, who he was determined to make one of the great riders of all time. Cordero said it was Velazquez and that quest that helped keep his life together.



Now both are inscribed in the history books as Kentucky Derby winners.

"He's like my son," said a visibly shaken Cordero. "I know how much I've dreamt this for him and how much I've wanted it. After what's happened the last three years I could see he was down. When I saw him coming down the stretch I wished I could fly down there and ride that horse with him. When he crossed the wire I had tears in my eyes. I was yelling so hard I thought I was going to have a heart attack. It's just destiny. It's like a movie script."

But the real hero was Animal Kingdom, who was bred by Team Valor, which keeps only eight broodmares. Another Team Valor-bred horse from the same crop was Pluck, who captured last year's Breeders' Cup Juvenile Turf (gr. IIT) for Todd Pletcher. It was after that race that Team Valor president Barry Irwin decided to keep all their horses at Fair Hill with one trainer and sent them to Graham Motion, who he regarded as a "helluva trainer." One of those was Animal Kingdom, a son of Leroidesanimaux – Dalicia, by Acatenango, who was trained by Wayne Catalano.

Standing by the gap on the Monday before the Derby, Catalano recalled the immature chestnut colt sent to him by Team Valor.

"He came from Randy Bradshaw along with another colt who was more advanced," Catalano recalled. "Barry said to take my time with him. He was just a big, green, backward Baby Huey type of horse, so we took our time with him. He didn't want to do much until we put a set of blinkers on him."



Bradshaw always felt Animal Kingdom would handle dirt by the way he trained over it as a young horse. “I told Barry both were really nice horses, but my gut feeling told me Animal Kingdom will be better on dirt,” Bradshaw said.

In his career debut on Sept. 18, he came from 10th and last in a 1 1/16-mile maiden race at Arlington to finish second before breaking his maiden going 1 1/8 miles at Keeneland on Oct. 23.

“When he won the second start of his life the way he did going a mile and an eighth I knew he was a Derby horse.” Bradshaw said.

But that race marked the end of Animal Kingdom’s stay in Catalano’s care.

“A short while later, Barry called me and said he wanted to have all his horses in one spot and was sending them to Graham Motion,” Catalano said. “You’re always disappointed when you think you’ve got something special. But I’m happy to see him do well and that we kept everything good and didn’t mess him up.”



Motion put Animal Kingdom on the grass and he was beaten a head in a one-mile allowance/optional claimer at Gulfstream. It was time for the fates to take over once again. The plan was to run another colt, Crimson China, in the Vinery Racing Spiral Stakes (gr. III) on the Polytrack at Turfway Park and run Animal Kingdom on the same card in the listed Rushaway Stakes. But when Crimson China didn’t have sufficient earnings to get in the race, they switched and ran Animal Kingdom in the Spiral and Crimson China in the Rushaway.

Animal Kingdom’s 2 3/4-length victory put him in the Kentucky Derby. “In life, everything has to fit together,” Irwin said. “It’s nice to have the goods; it’s nice to be intelligent, but unless things go your way and you’re lucky, it’s not going to happen.”

It didn’t take long for Animal Kingdom to become a favorite in the barn. “He’s such a character and has the coolest personality,” Heather Craig, who began exercising the colt just before the Spiral, said a week before the Derby. “Originally, his exercise rider in Florida, Jodie Petty, would kick him in the belly to get him to go, and he would just turn around and go, ‘Really?’

“But since the Spiral, he’s been training like a machine, with these huge, bounding strides. Now he’s a true racehorse and tugs his regular exercise rider David Nava around the racetrack.”

Those bounding strides didn’t escape the eagle eye on Bob Baffert, who had Santa Anita Derby (gr. I) winner Midnight Interlude. “That’s the horse,” Baffert said emphatically after having watched Animal Kingdom work six furlongs in 1:13 on April 30 and observing his subsequent gallops.

It was that six-furlong work, following an unproductive work that didn’t go as planned a week earlier that convinced Motion and Irwin to point for the Kentucky Derby.

“If he hadn’t shown us what he did, we wouldn’t have run him in the Derby,” Irwin said.

The 137th Kentucky Derby, provided its share of human interest stories. The most publicized was trainer Kathy Ritvo, who had been near death before receiving a heart transplant that saved her life, and Mucho Macho Man, who was believed to be dead at birth, but miraculously jumped to his feet

and ran off across the paddock. Then there was longtime local favorite Jinks Fires and his son-in-law and jockey Jon Court competing in their first Kentucky Derby with Arkansas Derby (gr. I) winner Archarcharch. There was 23-year-old jockey Rosie Napravnik with a legitimate chance to become the first female rider to win the Kentucky Derby on Louisiana Derby (gr. II) winner Pants on Fire.

One trainer who has been dreaming about the Derby since he was a child was Dale Romans, who grew up only three miles from Churchill Downs and between him and his father have been in the same barn for 40 years. Romans was confident in his colt, Florida Derby (gr. I) runner-up Shackleford, who he was planning to send to the lead and dare someone to try to catch him.

“My father trained mostly claimers and I started working in the barn when I was 8 years old, emptying muck baskets and filling up water buckets,” said Romans, who finished third in last year’s Derby with Paddy O’Prado. “I’ve spent more time in this barn than I have at home. We never thought about the Kentucky Derby back then. It wasn’t even a dream, because it couldn’t happen.”

One owner looking for a change in luck in the Derby was Ahmed Zayat, who saw his Santa Anita Derby winner Pioneerof the Nile finish second to longshot Mine That Bird in 2009 and then lost his red-hot Derby favorite Eskenderya in 2010. After a lengthy court battle with Fifth Third Bank later that year, Zayat bounced back in 2011 with several top-class 3-year-olds, but had to watch his best colt, Jaycito, fall off the Derby trail in mid-April.

But Zayat still had another classy colt in the late developing Nehro, who suffered narrow defeats in the Louisiana (gr. II) and Arkansas Derbys, closing fast each time. Zayat’s confidence soared as he spent the Thursday before the Derby with Nehro, kissing him while he was grazing, kissing him in his stall, and kissing him while he was being schooled. The colt was looking better physically by the day and was attacking the grass and his feed tub.

Kieran McLaughlin, trainer of Fountain of Youth (gr. II) winner Soldat, has fond memories of watching his first Derby in 1979 from the roof of Barn 10 where he was working as a groom.

There also was a European connection, as trainer Aidan O’Brien sent over Ms. John Magnier’s UAE Derby (UAE-II) runner-up Master of Hounds.



Team Valor had come close in the Derby in 1997 when Captain Bodgit was beaten a head in the Run for the Roses by Silver Charm, and Irwin has been waiting ever since to return for another chance with a legitimate contender.

The big story all week was the condition of 2-year-old champion Uncle Mo, as rumors of his withdrawal from the Derby spread throughout the backstretch. Those rumors became reality the morning before the race when Todd Pletcher and

owner Mike Repole announced that the Grey Goose Breeders’ Cup Juvenile (gr. I) winner would not run in the Derby.

With Uncle Mo out of the Derby, the clear-cut favorite at 5-1 was Florida Derby and Holy Bull (gr. III) winner Dialed In, trained by Nick Zito and owner by Robert LaPenta, who had teamed up to finish second in last year’s Derby with Ice Box.

At the start, Dialed In was squeezed and immediately dropped back to last, falling far off the pace, and on the inside it was apparent Archrarch was in big trouble, as he continuously swerved, steadied, and bobbed. As Romans had predicted, Shackleford established a clear lead, followed by Comma to the Top and Soldat on the outside. Animal Kingdom broke alertly and was able to get a good position in midpack, while racing four wide into the clubhouse turn.

Shackleford continued to wing it unchallenged on the lead. After a solid opening quarter in :23.24, he was able to slow the pace down, getting his half in :48.63. Nehro, who had come from far back in the Arkansas Derby, was racing well off the rail in sixth, but in good striking position, with Mucho Macho Man right behind him.

Velazquez had Animal Kingdom in a comfortable spot and was able to ease up gradually while following Mucho Macho Man. Shackleford, meanwhile, was able to slow the pace down to a crawl, the three-quarters in 1:13.40, the slowest opening three-quarters since 1947, with Comma to the Top and Decisive Moment still right behind taking up the chase.



Around the turn, Corey Nakatani, on Nehro, wanted no more of the slow pace and gunned his colt into contention. Nehro now loomed menacingly on the far outside. Several lengths behind him, Animal Kingdom was reaching a critical point in the race. The traffic jams were forming and Velazquez was able to split Midnight Interlude and Watch Me Go to get out of one potential hazard, but there was one more move he had to make. As he cleared those two he had to outrun and clear a tiring Soldat and ease to the

outside before a rallying Brilliant Speed could trap him in behind Mucho Macho Man.

He flew by Soldat and found a seam to the outside, giving him clear sailing out in the middle of the track. By now, Nehro was charging up on even terms with Shackleford, but was well to the outside of him. Shackleford, game as usual, held on tenaciously, but probably never saw Nehro.

The pace had picked up with a mile in 1:37.49. After turning for home, Animal Kingdom began to show his greenness, as he drifted in on Mucho Macho Man. Although there was no contact, it forced Mucho Macho Man in toward Pants on Fire, who was putting in a steady run. Velazquez threw a cross on Animal Kingdom and he began to drift in again, this time on Nehro. Velazquez had to go to a left-handed whip to get him off Nehro, and Animal Kingdom drifted back out. Velazquez then had to switch back to a right-handed whip, but by this point, Animal Kingdom was already in the lead and drawing away. This performance demonstrated how much raw talent this colt has, to be able to run a race like this in a 19-horse Derby field while racing greenly.

With his victory he became the first horse since Exterminator in 1918 to win the Derby with only four career starts; the first horse since Needles in 1956 to win the Derby off a six-week layoff; and the first horse ever to win the Derby having never started on dirt. With his pedigree, his versatility, and his powerful closing punch that he can sustain for over a half-mile, there is no doubt this colt's future in limitless.





There also were a number of firsts regarding his pedigree. Leroidesanimaux became the first Brazilian-bred horse to sire a U.S. classic winner. Dalicia became the first German-bred mare to produce a U.S. classic winner. And Acatenango became the first German-bred broodmare sire of a U.S. classic winner.

Mucho Macho Man, who had been a bit late changing leads, began to show his best stride inside the sixteenth pole, passing Shackleford and nearly catching Nehro for second. From out of

the pack, where he was surrounded by horses, Master of Hounds came flying late, weaving in and out as if he were a running back dodging linebackers. Once finally in the clear, he leveled off down on the inside and managed to get fifth in a three-horse photo with Santiva and Brilliant Speed.

As for Dialed In, he remained well back in last for the first three-quarters, and basically had no shot after a half in 1:13 2/5. He did pass horses in the stretch to finish eighth in the 19-horse field.

The final time was a respectable 2:02.04, with Animal Kingdom coming home his final quarter in :23 4/5, second only to Secretariat's :23 1/5. This followed a :23 2/5 quarter, giving him his powerful :47 1/5 final half-mile.

One of the first ones on the track was Aron Wellman, vice-president of operations for Team Valor.

"Oh, my God, this is unbelievable," he said. "He ran like a champion. This is what we dream about. It's surreal."

Watching back in Maryland at her aunt's house was Becky Kelly, foreman at Fair Hill.

"That was just amazing," she said. "We've always had a lot of confidence in this horse's ability. My aunt used to be a trainer and I grew up having the dreams and knowing the importance of winning the Kentucky Derby. So it's such an honor now to be affiliated with a Derby winner. We all work so hard and it's an incredible team effort. And Graham makes it fun by creating such a great atmosphere."



The only major casualty in the race was Archarcharch, who had that horrible trip early, had his saddle slip on the backstretch, and then was pulled up after the wire with what was diagnosed as a condylar fracture of the left foreleg, which is not considered life-threatening. But it did mark the end of a promising career. In addition, Pants on Fire bled significantly and Comma to the Top returned with a small ankle chip.



In another ironic twist to the story, Toby's Corner's jockey Eddie Castro wound up winning the \$100,000 Beaugay Stakes (gr. IIIT) at Belmont Park on Derby Day with Daveron for Motion and Team Valor. Daveron's dam, Darwinia, is a full-sister to the dam of Animal Kingdom.

No jockey – trainer team has been closer and more successful for so many years than Velazquez and Todd Pletcher. So, how fitting that one year after Pletcher wins his first Kentucky Derby without Velazquez, Velazquez wins his first Derby without Pletcher.

No such thing as the Derby gods, huh?

With the victors in the National Museum of racing for the traditional winner's party, Ahmed Zayat and his son Justin were heading out of the track, exiting by the museum.

"How do you run second twice in three years and lose the favorite the other year?" a naturally disappointed Zayat asked. "That's hard to take. It was Pioneer of the Nile all over again. He was doing so well and was so ready. But I'm very proud of my horse."

Justin added, "We dream of winning this some day."

Kathy Ritvo continued her amazing journey, and now has a classic-placed horse.

"He's only going to get better," she said. "He's a June 15 foal. Hopefully, he'll come back in a couple of weeks (in the May 21 grade I Preakness) if he's doing well and we're ready to go. He was fabulous today. He gave his all and finished strong. It was really exciting. When I saw him turn for home and he was running, I was jumping around and cheering him on."

And so, one of the wildest and most confusing Kentucky Derbys is in the history book. Sometimes destiny takes a roundabout way of getting somewhere, but in the end it all makes sense.

The day before the Derby, John Velazquez was trying to come to terms with another crushing blow at the Kentucky Derby. He understood that this sport can rip your heart out at any time and you have to learn to come to terms with it.

"What can you do; it's part of racing," Velazquez said in the quiet of the backstretch following the Uncle Mo announcement. "One year we'll win it when we least expect it."





reprinted from *The New York Times*:

## Derby Winner Sets Shining Example for Wayward Industry

By JIM SQUIRES

Wendy Wooley/EquiSport

PhotosFrom left, John Velazquez, the trainer Graham Motion, and the Team Valor chief executive Barry Irwin were all smiles after Animal Kingdom, a homebred from imported bloodstock, won the Derby.

LOUISVILLE, KY — Even though the winner has a Brazilian-bred sire and a German-bred dam, the 137th Kentucky Derby made a big run toward retaining its eminence as the world's greatest race. The reasons are legion.



Animal Kingdom was Kentucky-bred, born and raised in the Bluegrass State, as was 75 percent of the field. His sire, with an impossible to pronounce, decidedly non-commercial name — Leroidesanimaux — is at once a shining example of everything that has been going wrong in the American thoroughbred breeding industry and everything that can save it.

The Derby champion's sire is a beautifully bred, inexpensive stallion with a grass-horse pedigree that never earned more than a \$17,500 stud fee or was ever subjected to the massive overbooking of mares that ultimately resulted in the devastating devaluation of all Kentucky stallions. And until Saturday, he had disappeared into near obscurity because of the sport's mindless fascination with speed-on-dirt-sale horses and the kind of financial shenanigans that put his stallion manager into disgrace and bankruptcy. The crashing of the now-bankrupt Stonewall Farm, where Leroidesanimaux entered stud in 2008, is a shining example of an over-borrowing, overspending industry that believed itself immune to the laws of supply and demand.

Yet Animal Kingdom is precisely the kind of horse that made the Kentucky thoroughbred the most valuable and sought-after equine commodity in the world for the last half century. A homebred from imported bloodstock, just like the horses that made the Bluegrass famous, he never produced offspring precocious and marketable enough to be stuffed with steroids and pushed through the yearling and 2-year-old training sale mills only to become nonperforming multimillion dollar failures. That alone ought to be enough to make Animal Kingdom an American equine hero the equal of Zenyatta, but there is more — a lot more.

The connections that followed him into the world's most coveted winner's circle to be seen by millions were a credit to the sport, unlike some of their swaggering, embarrassing, fist-pumping predecessors in recent years. His modest, soft-spoken trainer, Graham Motion, is one of the two leading earners in the business never cited for a drug positive and one who would no trouble giving up drugs like Lasix on race day.

Barry Irwin, the leader of Team Valor, is more emotional, loquacious and sometimes controversial, but he was the model of humility Saturday, reduced to tears and unable to utter anything more than to brand his Derby luck “a dream come true.” Irwin wants to win but not badly enough to retain trainers cited for drug positives and being untruthful, a rarity among owners in the sport.



Although Team Valor has benefited by moving horses to the United States from non Lasix-tolerant racing jurisdictions, he is one of the owners perfectly happy with a drug-free playing field. He believes he can breed a horse that can compete around the world without relying on race-day drugs. Animal Kingdom may have proved that Saturday, winning on dirt after earlier scoring victories on both turf and synthetic surfaces in a short racing career.

The presence of Team Valor in the winner’s circle also validates a business model that represents an important economic opportunity in the sport’s future. Already the most successful and only truly global of the United States-based partnership racing stables, the Team Valor concept brings new owners into the business at an affordable level. Many of its successful horses have had literally dozens of owners, among them Unbridled Belle, who once sold for \$6,000 but eventually earned \$1.9 million and turned her \$5,000 dam into a once-fluid revenue stream for a struggling farm — mine.

Moreover, Animal Kingdom and the nature of the field he conquered could signal an important turnaround in the direction of the Kentucky breeding industry that has been in a decade-long spiral. More than half the starters fit the same profile as the winner — from smaller foal crops produced by inexpensive sires and modestly bred mares for small-time breeders.

Behind him on the board at extraordinarily profitable odds for winning bettors was Nehro, a son of beautifully-bred stallion Mineshaft who stands at Lane’s End, the top Kentucky-owned stallion farm, for \$25,000 — perhaps the best stud-fee bargain in the world this year. Finishing third was Mucho Macho Man, a grandson of the 20-year-old American racing icon Holy Bull, who is still available to breeders for \$10,000. Missing from the entire field or not having their names called at all were all the leading yearling and 2-year-old sale horses from the 2008 foal crop and offspring of the speed-gene-dispersing, sale-leading sires of recent years. Not a single Storm Cat or Unbridled Song in the gate. And missing from the celebration afterward were all the rich publicity-seeking egomaniacs trying to buy the Triple Crown and become celebrities in the sport.

Tote up all that with the best day yet in a terrible-weather Kentucky spring, a record crowd of nearly 165,000 people, and the third-highest all source Derby day wagering of \$165 million, and there might have been justification for the Kentucky governor still proclaiming the commonwealth as the Horse Capital of the World — maybe.

reprinted from ESPN:

## The fresh face of horse racing

By Bill Finley

Special to ESPN.com

OK, Barry Irwin is not the most diplomatic person, maybe he picked the wrong time and place to make his infamous "I got tired of trainers lying to me" comment, and if you called him arrogant or a pain in the butt, you wouldn't be alone. And I wish this sport had about 1,000 more just like him.

Irwin, the president of Team Valor International, the syndicate that owns Kentucky Derby winner Animal Kingdom, is honest and he expects the same from the people he deals with and the sport he competes in. To him, anything less is totally unacceptable. Unfortunately, that makes him the square peg in this round hole of a sport where all manners of duplicity are commonplace. Whether it's drugging horses, duping gullible owners at the sales or trainers lying to owners, the sport as a whole has too long looked the other way, accepting the unacceptable. Irwin refused to do so. Good for him.



Long before Animal Kingdom came around, Irwin gave a bunch of horses to trainer Ralph Nicks. Nicks and veterinarian David Bryant were suspended 15 days and fined \$500 after the vet was caught injecting a Team Valor horse before a 2004 race at Belmont. Immediately, Nicks was fired.

"Team Valor has a zero-tolerance policy with regards to drugs," Irwin said at the time. "We had no choice other than to do what we did. This was the most difficult business decision I've ever had to make, because we like Ralph and we think he is an outstanding horseman."

Nicks is hardly the sport's worst miscreant and has stayed out of trouble since. But he did something wrong, was caught and had to go.

Not many owners would have done that. Owners want trainers that win and there aren't that many who care how they do it. For a trainer to get a reputation as a cheat is sometimes the best thing that can happen to them as it means that there will be no shortage of owners beating down their door asking them to take their horses and work their "magic."

Irwin apparently wants trainers that not only don't cheat but don't play games with him. He shouldn't have painted all his past trainers with such a broad brush when he made his post-race Derby comments, and he has since clarified that he was not referring to Animal Kingdom's former trainer Wayne Catalano or Todd Pletcher, who has trained several Team Valor horses. But have trainers lied to Irwin over the years? Without a doubt. He decided he wasn't going to put up with it.

So Irwin went out and found someone he could trust and someone who has a reputation for always playing by the rules. Rather than deal with a bunch of different trainers he put Graham Motion in charge of all his horses. Motion has never had a medication violation in a career that has spanned 19 years and includes more than 7,900 starters.



Not only is Motion honest, he's good. He's won with 19 percent of his starters during his career and with Animal Kingdom he pulled off the difficult feat of taking a horse that had never run on dirt and winning the toughest dirt race in the world.

It's a shame that Motion and Irwin still saw fit to run Animal Kingdom, a perfectly healthy horse with no apparent history of bleeding, on a drug, Lasix. But as long as the Kentucky Horse Racing Commission allows the use of drugs in the Derby and all other races in the state, perhaps it's just too much to ask for anyone to run without the obvious advantages of legal drugs coursing through the horse's system. After all, everyone else does it.

At a time when the federal government is breathing down horse racing's neck and threatening to take drastic measures to clean up the game, the last thing the sport needed was for someone with a checkered past or tainted image to win the Kentucky Derby. What we got instead was an honest trainer, an outspoken, brash owner who believes in integrity and a horse that, except for Lasix, was no doubt running chemical free.

At least until the Preakness, they will be the face of racing. And that's a good thing.

*reprinted from The Chicago Sun-Times:*

## Horse Cents

By Michael Sneed

**Paddock palaver:** The 20-1 odds winner of the Kentucky Derby, Animal Kingdom, has some Chicago owners: Ed and Dia Weil, who are part of a 20-member syndicate that owns the Kentucky-bred thoroughbred horse.

"I was dumbfounded, numb, mind boggled and had to pinch my wife to check reality when the horse won," said Weil, who told Sneed: "But I told everyone I had to win the race in order to pay for the hats of my wife and her best friend, Anne Kaplan, who accompanied us on the trip."

† Luck pluck: Added Weil: "I joked we brought Anne with us for extra insurance because her AK initials are the same as the horse."



(from left, Dia Weil, Ed Weil and Anne Kaplan)

(P.S. Weil, whose first Derby entrant was in 2000, claims Animal Kingdom, which has only run four races, placed second at Arlington Park racetrack last August in its first race. )

reprinted from *The Daily Racing Form*:

## Animal Kingdom's Pedigree a Throwback

By Dan Illman



"The thing about a horse like this," Team Valor's Barry Irwin told the media after his Animal Kingdom won the 137th Kentucky Derby, "is he's got a different kind of pedigree than Americans are used to.

In order for him to really be worth a lot of money, he's got to go on and do something more than just winning the Derby. I mean the Derby's big. It's the biggest race there is. But breeders are very picky, skeptical people and he doesn't have a fashionable pedigree. So he's got to become a phenomenal racehorse in order to become worth a whole lot of money.

If he won the Triple Crown, then there'd be no question. But if he wins just the Preakness, would that make him an automatic hit as a stallion? I don't know."

Those words ring true and it's a crying shame. One would think that the Kentucky Derby winner would be highly valued at stud as a true representative of stamina, a quality lacking in the majority of American pedigrees. But, we live in a day and age where most breeders want speed, speed and more speed. Why? Because speed sells and breeders mate for the marketplace. Gone are the days of Paul Mellon's Rokeby Stables. Gone are the glory days of Calumet Farms' homebreds. Where are the Belmonts, Woodwards and Vanderbilts?

Now, those were breeding operations, farms that had the money and patience to wean and nurture a classic prospect. There was no rush to get them pumped up for the sales, no rush to have them race at two. Those breeding icons wanted to win the big races.

Races like the Derby.

Isn't it a shame that Alysheba never became a "fashionable" stallion. Or Silver Charm? Or Real Quiet? Or Charismatic? Or Ferdinand? Perhaps those Derby winners didn't stamp their get with the greatest physical qualities, but one must wonder if their stamina was a black mark against them. They could route and their babies probably would route with time. But, they were never given time because home-breeding operations are a dying breed, and it's difficult to sell a late-bloomer with a stamina pedigree.

That's why it's refreshing to see Team Valor's commitment to breeding for stamina. Of course, they needed foreign bloodlines to do it. Leroidesanimaux, the sire of Animal Kingdom, was bred in Brazil. His sire, Candy Stripes, is by French-bred Blushing Groom out of French-bred Bubble Company. Dissemble, the dam of Leroidesanimaux, was bred in England. Her sire is Ahonoora, by Lorenzaccio, by Klarion.

With the exception of Blushing Groom, they are not exactly household names in the United States.



Animal Kingdom's dam, Dalicia, was foaled in Germany, and is by a German sire out of an Irish mare. Her sire, Acatenango, is by Surumu, by Literat, by Birkhahn.

Not exactly household names in the United States.

Dalicia excelled at ten furlongs while Leroidesanimaux showed brilliant speed at middle distances.

Irwin is right when he says that Animal Kingdom's Derby win only slightly improves his value at stud. Who will breed to a long-winded stallion with no Mr. Prospector in his first five generations? How can you sell that foal?

Perhaps it's time for another breeding revolution, such as the one Arthur B. Hancock Sr. instigated in the 1920's. In 1925, the master of Claiborne imported Sir Gallahad III from France in order to infuse new blood into the American thoroughbred. According to Abram S. Hewitt's *The Great Breeders and Their Methods*, "The advent of Sir Gallahad III at Claiborne was perhaps the most decisive single event in its long ascent to the top as a stud farm...Sir Gallahad III went from strength to strength as a sire. He led the sires' list four times, was in the first ten nine times more, and was in the first 20 two times more. In addition, he was the leading broodmare sire 12 years in a row."

In 1936, Hancock imported Blenheim II from England. In his first crop, Blenheim II sired Triple Crown winner Whirlaway.

Hancock's son, A. B. "Bull" Hancock Jr. imported Nasrullah from Europe in 1949 and that legendary stallion is still heavily involved in today's breed. Nasrullah sired Bold Ruler, the sire of Secretariat, among many, many others. Nasrullah is the grandsire of Blushing Groom, the grandsire of Animal Kingdom.



American pedigrees could use a dose of new blood, perhaps imported from overseas. Over the short term, market breeders would likely pooh-pooh the new stamina stallions. But, given time, they may improve distance potential and provide new crosses for the overworked and overused strains of Northern Dancer and Mr. Prospector.

This isn't Team Valor's first rodeo as it pertains to international success. They scour the globe looking for racing and breeding prospects. They bred Pluck, last year's Breeders' Cup Juvenile Turf winner, from a South African mare they purchased privately. On the same afternoon as the Derby, Team Valor's Daveron, a German-bred mare, won the Grade 3 Beaugay at Belmont. Gitano Hernando and Gypsy's Warning are other examples of foreign imports that have succeeded for the outfit on American soil.

Team Valor gets it. The idea is to win historical races. Races like the Triple Crown series. It's not to make a quick buck at the sales by working a baby with a questionable, but "fashionable" pedigree a furlong in nine seconds.