

From *Thoroughbred Times* comes the following:

Motion feels Animal Kingdom overlooked for divisional honors

by Mike Curry



The results of the Breeders' Cup World Championships left the three-year-old male division without a clear leader, and trainer Graham Motion hopes Eclipse Award voters do not forget the colt who won the division's marquee race six months ago at Churchill Downs.

Animal Kingdom became the first horse ever to win the Kentucky Derby (G1) without a previous race on dirt, and the Leroidesanimaux (Brz) colt did so decisively against the best of his generation. Animal Kingdom won the Derby by 2 3/4 lengths after prepping for the classic with a win by the same margin in the Vinery Racing Spiral Stakes (G3) on the synthetic Polytrack surface at Turfway Park for trainer Graham Motion and owner Team Valor International.



Animal Kingdom was a dominating winner of the 137th Kentucky Derby at Churchill Downs, when becoming the first Derby winner to win the Classic in his first race on a dirt surface.

He finished sixth in the final jewel of the Triple Crown but came out of the roughly run race with a slab fracture to his left hock. Animal Kingdom underwent surgery at the University of Pennsylvania's New Bolton Center that required the insertion of two screws to compress the slab fracture and has not raced since.

Motion, who is based at Fair Hill Training Center in Elkton, Maryland, said it has been tough to watch the season play out with no clear division leader and not have a chance to allow Animal Kingdom to state his case on the racetrack.

Animal Kingdom turned in another top performance two weeks after the Derby when second by a half-length to Shackleford in the Preakness Stakes (G1).

His season came to an end when he was injured in the Belmont Stakes (G1).

Animal Kingdom nearly unseated rider John Velazquez early in the Belmont during some bumping that was initiated when Isn't He Perfect broke inward at the start.

“It’s been a frustrating position to be in not to be able to do anything about it. Unfortunately, he was a victim of what happened in the Belmont, which wasn’t really his fault,” Motion said. “And then with the injury, it’s just been a very odd situation to be in to have to watch all of these other horses running and kind of beating each other.”

Motion watched Travers Stakes (G1) winner Stay Thirsty and Preakness Stakes (G1) winner Shackleford rise in the division over the summer, but both have only one Grade 1 win this season. Caleb’s Posse posted two Grade 1 wins in the Foxwoods King’s Bishop Stakes (G1) in the Breeders’ Cup Dirt Mile (G1), but he was well beaten in three graded Kentucky Derby preps and his lone two-turn graded win this year came in the Ohio Derby (G3). The division really is wide open for year-end honors and Motion hopes Animal Kingdom’s achievements are not overlooked.

“Ultimately, he won the classic race that everyone wants to win in what was his first start on the dirt. I think people have overlooked that,” Motion said. “He came back in his second start ever on dirt and was just beaten in the Preakness, and then we all know what happened in the Belmont.

“I just can’t believe that ultimately his record doesn’t say something. He’s beaten these horses like Stay Thirsty. I think people were so quick to jump on that horse’s bandwagon when he finished behind us in the Derby, and I think ultimately the Derby is still the classic that everyone wants to win.

“I think it’s unfair for people to hold it against him that he wasn’t able to race for the rest of the season, and really even in the Belmont he ran a pretty remarkable race. [Animal Kingdom] is very highly rated internationally, and I think that’s something that also has been overlooked a bit.”



Graham Motion trained Animal Kingdom to a win in the Kentucky Derby and second in the Classic Preakness Stakes during a memorable campaign.



Animal Kingdom has progressed nicely in his rehabilitation following the surgery and Team Valor will keep him in training at four with the first major target the Emirates Airline Dubai World Cup (UAE-G1).

“That was always our plan, and we’re certainly still on schedule for that,” Motion said.

Animal Kingdom started out by being hand-walked before graduating to exercising on the Aquatred treadmill at the Fair Hill Equine Therapy Center. He then progressed to jogging and last week was his first week of galloping.

“He’s doing great,” Motion said. “He basically had a month of Aquatred, a month of jogging, and now he’s had a week of galloping. I really hope to start breezing him in December.”