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## ANIMAL KINGDOM CONSIDERED AN UNLIKELY STAR AT BREEDERS' CUP SETBACKS, STUD POTENTIAL DO NOT DETER BARRY IRWIN'S TEAM VALOR RARE KENTUCKY DERBY WINNER TO REMAIN IN U.S. RACING'S SPOTLIGHT

From Tom Pedulla of *America's Best Racing* comes the following:

### Cup Comeback For Derby Winner

Of all the horses entered in the Breeders' Cup World Championships on Monday, none was more improbable than Breeders' Cup Mile (G1)-bound Animal Kingdom.

In an age when relatively minor issues are enough to convince owners to dispatch top colts to the breeding shed, two major injuries were not enough to discourage the connections of the 2011 Kentucky Derby (G1) champion.



*Animal Kingdom's 20 partners will watch him return to racing at the highest level in the Breeders' Cup Mile.*

It would have been understandable if Team Valor had called it a great run after Animal Kingdom injured a hock after clipping heels and finishing an unlucky sixth in the Belmont Stakes (G1). The hock injury required surgery and extended stall rest. Instead, the Dubai World Cup (UAE-G1) was eventually targeted and the son of Leroidesanimeaux took his prep race for that intended start by two comfortable lengths on the turf at Gulfstream Park in February.

The race appeared to perfectly position him for the World Cup. But no, trainer Graham Motion, not one to

"I never thought about retiring him. Ever," said Barry Irwin, chief executive officer and founder of Team Valor International. "We're in the racehorse business. We're in the business to race horses. As long as this horse is healthy and can race at a high level, I want to run him."

Irwin lamented that many of his counterparts do not share the same competitive spirit.

"This game used to be a sport and now it's all about commercialism," he said. "It involves people who have reduced it to what it means financially."



miss anything, did not think he was quite right. A thorough examination revealed a hairline fracture in the pelvis. Although no operation was needed, he missed three months of training.

For the partners, that meant another long period of paying bills with no hope of return. They were undeterred.

“The people that own this horse, by and large, are doing it for fun,” Irwin said. “Certainly, they want to make some money. We are going to make some money. But the main reason anybody buys a horse with us, in the hope of getting a horse like this, is to race it.”

Motion credits Team Valor with allowing him – and Animal Kingdom – to go at their own pace.

“There’s never been any pressure on me to do it,” he said. “It’s always about him having to take us there and, to this point, everything has gone without a hitch.”

Interestingly, Motion was never interested in having a prep race for the Mile.

“I actually was always of the feeling that I would rather run without a prep if we were going to do this,” he said. “I think a horse can tend to overdo it in a prep. A prep was going to make his schedule much tighter. I thought we had plenty of time to get him ready with works and have a fresh horse.”

When he is at his best, Animal Kingdom is extremely difficult to beat. He proved that when he rolled in the Derby by 2 ¾ lengths in his dirt debut. His record speaks for itself. He owns four victories in eight starts with three second-place showings for earnings of \$1,965,500.



*Graham Motion conceived the idea last spring to bring Animal Kingdom back in the Breeders’ Cup Mile, but he and Barry Irwin waited for months to reveal the plan until the 4-year-old colt showed he would be up to it.*

The issue, of course, is not Animal Kingdom’s quality but his readiness for his much anticipated comeback.



“I’d like to think he’s 90 to 95 percent,” Motion said. “I think he’s as fit as I could possibly have him. What he’s lacking is, maybe, that mental-race fitness.”

Last season’s champion 3-year-old male can provide one of the great storylines of this Breeders’ Cup if he should make a triumphant return. Motion would settle for less.

“I certainly have confidence to run him in the race,” he said. “I realize it’s going to be asking a lot of him to win it. Certainly, I would love to see him come back and run well.”

In this case, getting there would represent its own victory.