

FRANK MITCHELL: COULD MORE CHALLENGES AWAIT ANIMAL KINGDOM? DERBY AND DUBAI KING COULD BE THE 'FACE OF RACING FOR MILLIONS' IMPROVING FORM AS HE AGES IS ALMOST A GIVEN WITH HIS PEDIGREE

From the *Paulick Report* comes the following by Frank Mitchell:

The Lane's End Weekender Pedigree: Animal Kingdom

"He who is tired of watching Animal Kingdom race is tired of sport." That's a rough rewriting of Samuel Johnson's comment about London, but it captures the spirit that the great man of letters was working to convey.



So, it is good news for those of us who hold the 5-year-old chestnut son of Leroidesanimaux in high esteem that owner-breeder Team Valor (Barry Irwin) and John Messara, whose Arrowfield Stud bought the controlling interest in the breeding rights to Animal Kingdom, have been sounding both sporting and adventurous in the wake of the horse's impressive victory in the Group 1 Dubai World Cup on Saturday.

In addition to the discussion of a race at Ascot in June, Messara told the press corps that he was high on the idea of trying Animal Kingdom in Australia in a pair of prestigious races this fall and next spring.

Animal Kingdom is scheduled to be shipped to England on Saturday.

Participating in those races would necessarily delay the horse's retirement to stud from August of this year, which had been planned so that Animal Kingdom could enter stud in Australia at Arrowfield for the Southern Hemisphere season, to probably a year later for the 2014 season in Australia.

That would be great news for racing and potentially for Messara, who could see the horse's stud value escalate radically if Animal Kingdom strung together important victories in these different racing environments.

No horse since the great New Zealand champion Strawberry Road has covered that much territory and carried his form at the highest level through all the changes of climate and competition. But Animal Kingdom might take the challenge a step further.

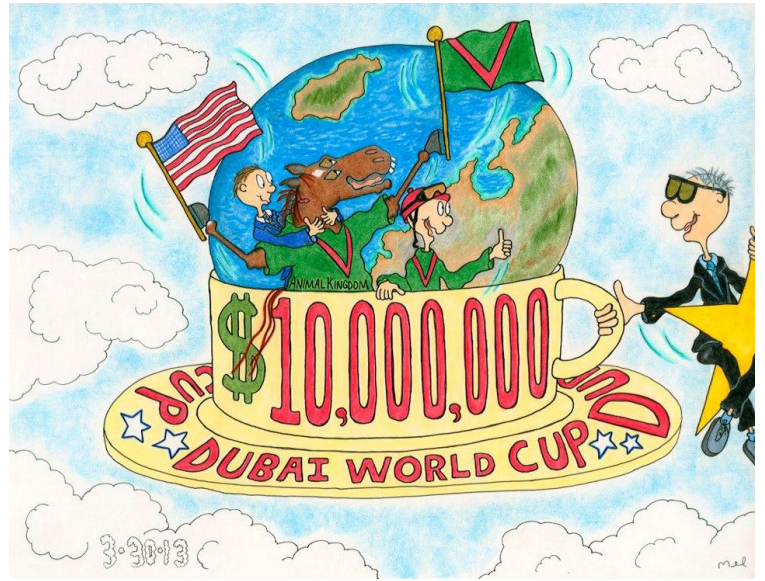
The Kentucky Derby winner has shown excellent quality, courage, and racing ability in his four most important races to date: 2011 Kentucky Derby and Preakness, 2012 Breeders' Cup Mile, and Dubai World Cup. Winner of the first and fourth of those, Animal Kingdom pushed Shackleford to a peak performance in the Preakness and caught 2012 Horse of the Year Wise Dan at his best form and distance in the BC Mile.

Animal Kingdom's improving form with age is almost a given with his pedigree, by a Brazilian-bred champion in Leroidesanimaux who had speed and high class that reached a peak during his 5-year-old season on the track, winning the Eclipse Award as leading turf horse.

Likewise, the World Cup winner is out of the G3 stakes-winning Dalia, a German-bred and -raced filly that Team Valor bought and brought to the States, where she raced and then became the dam of Animal Kingdom.

Dalia is a daughter of the great German racehorse, sire, and broodmare sire Acatenango (by Surumu), who won seven times at the G1 level, including the Grand Prix de Saint-Cloud.

So, from the top and bottom of his pedigree, Animal Kingdom is loaded with ancestors who were travelers, who showed international form and high class, such as Blushing Groom, Lyphard, Lorenzaccio, and Dancing Brave.



Cartoon by Marcy Leonard's Daily Racing Funnies

And, although he doesn't look much like him, I was most reminded of Dancing Brave when Animal Kingdom smoothly took command of the World Cup coming into the home straight and pricked his ears.

Was the World Cup that easy for this horse?

Whether it was or not, as Animal Kingdom stretched away to win comfortably from his multiple G1-winning opponents, the impression he gave me was that rather cheeky expression of superiority that Dancing Brave could convey even when faced with champions or classic winners.

Should this talented and handsome classic winner become the contemporary equivalent of the globe-trotting Strawberry Road but win all the big events, Animal Kingdom will be taking the racing public of Australia, North America, and potentially the rest of the world along for the exhilarating ride.

As social media and immediate internet access have made racing in the UAE as easy to follow as racing at our local tracks, the worldwide net of racing fans has likewise grown. Sports fans love a winner, especially one who has come through the fire of adversity to win the great events, and Animal Kingdom is the face of racing to millions of potential fans and punters.

And, should all these "ifs" come to bear successful fruit, Animal Kingdom would become the most sought-after stallion prospect in the world.

Frank Mitchell is author of Racehorse Breeding Theories, as well as the book Great Breeders and Their Methods: The Hancocks. In addition to writing the column "Sires and Dams" in Daily Racing Form for nearly 15 years, he has contributed articles to Thoroughbred Daily News, Thoroughbred Times, Thoroughbred Record, International Thoroughbred, and other major publications. In addition, Frank is a private consultant to breeders on pedigrees, matings, and conformation. He is a hands-on caretaker of his own broodmares and foals in central Kentucky. Check out Frank's lively Bloodstock in the Bluegrass blog[2].