

JOHN VELAZQUEZ TO BE REUNITED WITH ANIMAL KINGDOM AT ASCOT WINNING KENTUCKY DERBY RIDER WILL BREEZE CHAMPION IN ENGLAND EXPERIENCE OVER COURSE AND WITH HORSE SEALS THE DEAL FOR RIDER



ROYAL ASCOT

John Velazquez will ride his Kentucky Derby winner Animal Kingdom when the recent Dubai World Cup hero makes his career finale at the mid-June Royal Ascot meeting in England.

“Johnny knows the horse better than any other rider and he has had success at Royal Ascot,” trainer Graham Motion said. “He won on a straightaway at Royal Ascot and if we decide to go in the (Group 1) Queen Anne Stakes on opening day up the straight, that experience figures to come in handy.”

Velazquez rode at Royal Ascot in 2000, 2009 and 2011. He has not been aboard Animal Kingdom since an allowance win at Gulfstream Park in February 2012. Joel Rosario guided Animal Kingdom to his dominating triumph in the Dubai World Cup.

Barry Irwin of Team Valor said “No American jockey is riding better than Joel right now. We thought he gave a peerless performance in the World Cup. But we don’t think it would be fair for the jockey to ride him on a straightaway when neither jockey nor horse had done it before.

“Dropping from a mile and a quarter around turns on a synthetic track to running uphill on a straight course on grass is quite a transition for any horse, especially at this level. So the decision to go with a jockey that knows the horse and the course made the job easier. It was a difficult decision.”

Key to naming Velazquez was the rider’s willingness to fly to England in order to breeze Animal Kingdom prior to the Royal meeting.

Motion has nominated Animal Kingdom to both the opening day Group 1 Queen Anne Stakes over a mile and the second-day Group 1 Prince of Wales’s Stakes over a mile and a quarter, keeping his options open as the horse steps up his preparations.

Animal Kingdom has raced 11 times for 5 wins and 5 seconds. His lone non-productive race came as the favorite to win the Belmont Stakes in 2011, when a chain-reaction bumping incident almost caused both rider and horse to fall to the ground. With earnings of \$8,399,384, the Leroidesanimaux horse ranks behind only three other American-based horses in career earnings on the all-time list.

