

The New York Times

## For a Horse of the World, a Finale in a Regal Race



The 2011 Kentucky Derby winner, Animal Kingdom, will run in his final race, the Queen Anne Stakes at Royal Ascot in England, on Tuesday.

By JOE DRAPE, New York Times

Published: June 15, 2013

There is no denying that Animal Kingdom is a citizen of the world. His father was Brazilian and his mother German. He has won the most famous race in the United States, the Kentucky Derby, and the globe's richest, the Dubai World Cup. His talent has united an international cast of horsemen: an English-born trainer, an Australian breeder, an Arab sheik and 20 American partners.

It is fitting, then, that Animal Kingdom's final race is taking place at one of the oldest and most elegant events in all of sports, Royal Ascot in England. On Tuesday, before members of the royal family and throngs of the morning-coated, top-hatted and racehorse-besotted English, the colt will compete in the Queen Anne Stakes.

Taking Animal Kingdom to Britain is a sporting gesture for a throwback horse. The last Kentucky Derby winner to grace Royal Ascot was Omaha, the 1935 Triple Crown champion. He did not win, and Animal Kingdom has his work cut out for him in the Queen Anne, a mile grass race unique to Europe because it is run on an undulating straightaway with uphill climbs.

“Win or lose, it’s what racing is all about,” said the colt’s trainer, Graham Motion, who grew up in horse country near Newmarket, England. “We went looking for the biggest challenges. It’s why we all got into racing — to compete at the highest levels. We’re taking all comers.”

English bookmakers have made the 5-year-old Animal Kingdom the favorite to win what will be his final race. His presence here has been covered with fascination usually reserved for international celebrities like David Beckham.

This is a country that loves its racehorses as much as it does a wager, and for five days this week, Royal Ascot will bring together bookies and bettors, as well as fashion and tabloid stars.

“It’s quite romantic and old-fashioned that this horse would cross the pond and take on the world’s best,” said Nick Luck, the racing host for Channel 4 of Britain. “This is a horse that furthers the cause of international racing. A victory for Animal Kingdom can massively enhance the reputation of American horse racing and American horsemen.”

Last fall, Barry Irwin, the managing partner of Team Valor International, mapped out a globe-trotting campaign for Animal Kingdom, the son of the Brazilian sire Leroidesanimaux and the German mare Dalicia. Team Valor bred Animal Kingdom and ran him in the United States, where he not only captured the Derby, America’s signature mile-and-a-quarter dirt race, but won on grass and synthetic racetracks.

This show of versatility was overlooked by American breeders, but caught the eye first of Arrowfield farm in Australia and then of Darley Stud, which is owned by the ruler of



Rob Carr/Getty Images

“Win or lose, it’s what racing is all about,” Animal Kingdom’s trainer Graham Motion said. The colt with John Velazquez, on the way to victory at Churchill Downs in 2011.

Dubai, Sheik Mohammed bin Rashid al-Maktoum. They bought 80 percent of Animal Kingdom's stallion rights for \$10 million, which further emboldened Irwin to prove that his colt was one of the greats as well as to increase his value.

"This is part of a two-race scheme," said Irwin, a brash-talking impresario and former sportswriter. "The first was to win the richest race in the world, and the second being to gain as much international prestige for the horse as possible."

Animal Kingdom ran magnificently and easily won the \$10 million Dubai World Cup, plumping his career earnings to nearly \$8.5 million and running his record to five victories and five runner-up finishes in 11 career races. He was sent from the desert kingdom to a bucolic yard, as the training stables are known here, in Lambourn in Berkshire, where for the last 10 weeks he has been learning a new style of racing.

So has Motion, his trainer, who shuttles between there and his home base in Elkton, Md. Motion, 49, grew up at Herringswell Manor Stud, a boarding farm near Newmarket. It was operated by his parents, Michael, an international bloodstock agent, and Jo, an amateur steeplechase rider.

The family moved to the United States when Motion was a teenager and before he had an opportunity to attend Royal Ascot. He knew it well, though. Royal Ascot is as English as the queen.

In fact, it was founded by Queen Anne in 1711, more than two decades before George Washington was born. It is near Windsor Castle, and its dress code for men calls for waistcoats and ties — no cravats allowed.

The Motions gathered around the television each June to see who was winning on the racecourse, and which smartly dressed stars rubbed elbows with the royal family off it.

"I never thought I'd have a horse of this caliber to bring me here," Motion said.

Even though he trains in the European fashion in Maryland, letting his horses hack, or jog, through the wooded trails and open fields of a 350-acre training center, he conceded that preparing Animal Kingdom for his run at history had been daunting.

In European racing, the emphasis is on stamina, and horses are trained uphill on grass rather than around a dirt oval with a stopwatch measuring the effectiveness of a workout. So that his colt would not get confused or lost, Motion assigned him Perpetually, on loan from Sheik Mohammed, whom Animal Kingdom follows up the hill for anywhere from a half-mile to a mile.

Then they walk down together and do it again.

In Dubai, Animal Kingdom triumphed on a synthetic surface, going a mile and a quarter, making left turns — conditions that he was used to from American racing. For Royal

Ascot, Motion chose the Queen Anne's straightaway mile rather than the mile-and-a-quarter Ascot Gold Cup.

"I didn't want him to have to negotiate an uphill course and run the wrong way for the first time," Motion said.

Motion also switched jockeys. John Velazquez, who won the 2011 Derby aboard Animal Kingdom, replaces Joel Rosario, who rode the colt to victory in Dubai. The reason?

"John has ridden and won at Royal Ascot; Joel has not," Motion said. "I wanted a rider who knew the horse and the course."

Animal Kingdom also will not be running on furosemide, or Lasix, which regulators say enhances performance by flushing 20 to 30 pounds of water out of a horse. It is prohibited in Europe, Hong Kong and the rest of the world's major racing circuits. In the United States, however, almost all horses, whether they need it or not, are injected several hours before racing.

Animal Kingdom ran and won without it in Dubai, and Irwin of Team Valor is among the most vocal proponents of drug-free racing in America.

"I would like to show that an American horse can come over to race in the highest-class venue of the sport and compete without the use of medication," he said. "I want the horse to show his greatness so that he has an even better place in history."

Where Motion sees obstacles, however, the bookies have seen the shortest-priced favorite of the Royal Ascot meeting. Animal Kingdom's odds are likely to match those of last year's runaway winner, Frankel, the English horse who retired last fall with a perfect record in 14 starts.

"Over the last 48 hours, the support for Animal Kingdom has been relentless, including several four-figure bets, and it now looks certain that the Graham Motion-trained runner will emulate last year's star, Frankel, by starting odds-on for the Queen Anne Stakes," Simon Clare, a spokesman for the bookmaker Coral, told The Racing Post.

Motion knows that his first chance at running a horse at Royal Ascot is likely to be his last. He is going to don his morning coat, pop on his top hat and leave the cravats at home. He is going to enjoy celebrating his heritage, or course, in the palace of English horse racing.

But most of all, he is going to cherish the horse who made it all possible.

"I'll never train another horse like this," he said. "They come around once in a lifetime."