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ANIMAL KINGDOM EYES CHAMPIONSHIP 3YO HONORS IN BELMONT STAKES KENTUCKY DERBY WINNER RAN A HUGE SECOND IN PREAKNESS STAKES

Animal Kingdom lost the Preakness Stakes at the break through no fault of his own and turned in a visually impressive display of talent and courage to get to within a half-length of Shackleford at the end of the second jewel in Thoroughbred racing's Triple Crown.

When the gates sprung open, third choice Mucho Macho Man, who stands more than 17 hands, broke awkwardly, veering to his right, interfering with second favorite Dialed In, who in turn came over in the path of Animal Kingdom, who had broken half a step slow. The size of Mucho Macho Man, coupled with his erratic movement (the colt was reported to have lost a shoe for the second time in his last three races), made for a very untidy beginning to the Preakness Stakes.

Johnny Velazquez, who has ridden the Leroidesanimaux colt in both the Kentucky Derby and Preakness Stakes, said "My colt was not fast out of the gate and that allowed Dialed In to move over on me. We got so far back, it was unbelievable.

"When the kickback started hitting my colt in the face, he wasn't used to it at all. It kind of startled him. When he ran in the Derby, the kickback was only hitting him chest high, but in the Preakness it was different. It was coming into his face and eyes and I think it was stinging him. He sort of lost his focus for awhile.

"By the time he was on the backstretch, the colt wasn't bothered by the kickback at all and he was getting into the race. The problem is that there were so many horses in the race, I couldn't find any room from the half-mile pole to the middle of the turn.



Shackleford took Animal Kingdom's path when he switched his leads under pressure in the final 70 yards of the 2011 Preakness. Animal Kingdom was beaten half a length by the longshot victor.

"I had to take him wide to find my clearest path. He fired big—every bit as big as he had at Churchill. But he was so far back, it was difficult for him to close the gap. He fell just short. It was heartbreaking for me. I really feel we should have won this race. But I couldn't be prouder of the colt. He is the real deal. You got a Champion here, boss!"

The pace was fast early and slow in the middle. Winning jockey Jesus Castanon rode a truly brilliant race, going out fast to press the sprinter Flashpoint, assumed command down the backstretch and slowed things up dramatically. The point during the race that Velazquez could find no room occurred partly because there were a lot of horses, but mostly because Castanon backed up the pace so much that everything tightened up.

When Animal Kingdom made his dramatic late charge down the homestretch, the task of reaching Shackleford seemed impossible, but as he began motoring, the Team Valor colorbearer gave pause to his followers for a moment to allow them the unthinkable thought that he just might get the job done. But, alas, Animal Kingdom's valiant bid fell just short at the wire.



Animal Kingdom was devouring the ground with each and every stride and, as he became lapped on the winner, Shackleford jinked under pressure, switched leads and came over into the path of Animal Kingdom. Had this maneuver happened an instant later, there is every chance that an inquiry may have been called by the track stewards.

The effort took more toll from Animal Kingdom than it had from him in the Derby, as he did not finish his dinner completely and he still left a bit of food in his next meal. He also evinced signs of the race in that his body was a bit sucked up behind the saddle. Two days after the race he was completely recovered and bouncing around the shedrow.

Andy Beyer gave Animal Kingdom a 103 Beyer, same mark as he earned in the Derby. The Ragozin Sheet guys gave him a 6-plus, which was a 3-point bounce.

Barry Irwin said "It is impossible for an accurate number to be given, as the track was drying out, it was changing from race to race, and any number assigned is purely a guess."



Generally, the notices from the press went like this: Cantanon stole the race, Animal Kingdom was the best horse and there were a lot of also-rans that had no business being entered in the race. Animal Kingdom, even after winning the Derby, still had a lot of doubters, hence the large size of the field. But, as the 2 to 1 favorite, AK confirmed himself to be the top member of his generation and his following picked a lot of new admirers.

In the weekly NTRA poll of the leading 3yo runners in North America, 16 of the 18 voters named Animal Kingdom on top. In the overall poll of the top runners of all ages in North America, Animal Kingdom is the only 3yo to receive a vote as being the top-rated runner, and he is listed third overall for all aged runners.

The Kentucky Derby hero most likely will make his next start in the Belmont Stakes, which would be his final outing on dirt this season until the Breeders' Cup Classic in November at Churchill Downs, where he ran out an impressive 2 $\frac{3}{4}$ -length victor of the Run for the Roses.

Irwin spoke with trainer Graham Motion after the Preakness and said "All things being equal, I'd like to run him next in the Belmont because if he wins it, he would be a cinch to win the Eclipse Award. If we do decide to run in the Belmont, though, I don't want to wind up in what I call a 'Smarty Jones' situation.

"Smarty Jones should have won the Triple Crown. But he didn't. And the reason is that his trainer was tired of the media attention and kept his horse in Pennsylvania, away from the media crush at Belmont. So instead of taking Smarty Jones to train over the surface in New York, he showed up right on top of the race, his horse got tired and the Triple Crown was lost..

Motion said "Actually, Johnny suggested the same thing. We had him over to the house the night of the Preakness and he said the same thing. I don't know if it is necessary for him to breeze there, but we should gallop him over it for at least a few days."