

ANIMAL KINGDOM TO RETURN AT TAMPA BAY DOWNS ON FEBRUARY 25 CHAMPION IS GEARING UP FOR DUBAI WORLD CUP FIVE WEEKS LATER GRAHAM MOTION, BARRY IRWIN ARE VERY PLEASED WITH DERBY WINNER

Team Valor CEO Barry Irwin and trainer Graham Motion have settled on the Grade 3 Tampa Bay Stakes for Animal Kingdom's return on February 25 at Tampa Bay Downs.

The home-bred 4-year-old colt will use the 1 1/16-mile turf race as a prep for the \$10-million Dubai World Cup five weeks later on the synthetic course at Meydan.

Animal Kingdom has not raced since the Belmont Stakes on June 11. He came out of the classic with a hairline fracture of his left hock and underwent surgery in late June. He has posted six workouts since December 24, including a bullet 5-furlong move in :59.61 this morning on the turf course at Palm Meadows Training Center in Boynton Beach, Florida.

"The Tampa Bay will allow him enough works to be fit enough to start back," Motion said. "Any of these earlier races would have been pushing it. We want to have him fit for his first race so it doesn't take too much out of him for the race that we're really pointing for."

Animal Kingdom also began his 3-year-old season on the grass, finishing second by a head in a mile allowance race at Gulfstream Park on March 3.

The chestnut colt followed with a Grade 3 victory on Turfway Park's synthetic track in the Grade 3 Vinery Racing Spiral Stakes, and switched to dirt with great success in the Kentucky Derby.



Animal Kingdom returned to serious training in November and joined Graham Motion's string at Palm Meadows in South Florida on January 11.

"I think a turf race will be easier on him coming back," Motion said. "It's a little kinder than the dirt. If the race in Dubai was on dirt, it would probably be a different story."

Irwin has been very pleased watching Animal Kingdom in person the last two weeks.

"This horse is just on 'go,'" Irwin said. "He is relishing his work, he's happy to be out there, and he just loves to run. And he doesn't seem to be getting that tired."