

KENTUCKY BURGEOO
A REFRY OF YESTERDAY'S RACE, AND OTHER MUSINGS



Animal Kingdom, besting Mucho Macho Man (#13)



Mucho Macho Man, training in the slop before Derby Day

Kentucky's contributions to civilization are unparalleled: thoroughbred horses, college basketball, bourbon, Rand Paul, and ghastly cooking. Check the internet sometime for a good burgoo recipe, and if there is a cardiologist in the family, shhhh.

Anyway, my Mucho Macho Man ran his heart out, and maybe could have had second without a minor traffic problem, but there was no beating Animal Kingdom. He is a long distance monster, and can win the Triple Crown if he gets past the speed favoring Preakness. More about him in just a bit.

Some observations:

1. **Marriage and billboards.** Mike Sivo and Laura Surovi are still married after five (5) days. They are not from Las Vegas, just Georgia, and Mike and Laura are partners --\$800 each -- in the 13 person group that owns Mucho Macho Man. Fortunately, you don't need to be a sheik to participate in the sport of kings, which is one of its charms. This king and queen from Georgia exchanged vows in the Churchill Winner's Circle just a few days before the big race. The marriage commitment followed an investment in four Mucho Macho Man billboards in hometown Atlanta. Marriage, billboards? I told you, the Derby can make you a little silly.

Mike, Laura, and partners – with trainer Kathy Ritvo, a Massachusetts transplant to Florida with a life-saving heart transplant three year ago – had a great week, and their horse did everything but win. We will see more of Mucho Macho Man as he matures. That June birth date will be less and less important as he catches up to his older rivals.

2. **Show me the money.** I expected the traditional bumping and blocking in the run to the first turn, but good behavior was the rule. Not one jockey made an excuse, which is some kind of record for the Derby. Two of the deep closers I mentioned – Animal Kingdom and Nehro – finished one, two. A \$2 bet on them, with Mucho Macho Man and in the right order, would have returned \$3,952.40. A more pedestrian \$2 for win, place, and show on Mucho Macho Man, -- \$6 in total – would have returned \$7 on the show bet, a ho hum return of 17%, but better than my IRA for a two minute investment.

3. **Animal Kingdom, and Barry Irwin's impossible dream.** Barry is age 68 and started out as a mere reporter for the Daily Racing Form. Knowing him a bit and having invested with him, I am thrilled that he has attained his dream. Barry is a pioneer in bringing high finance concepts to racing ownership. He manages limited partnerships under the name of Team Valor. Guys like me put money into these deals instead of buying sailboats, the theory being that a diversified partnership is the best way for average people to own horses that can compete with horses owned by the well-bred descendants of 19th century robber barons and the current day sheiks who sell us \$100/ barrel oil.

For my Davis Malm colleagues who read this, you can see on my desk a winning picture of a nice filly I owned with Barry when she won a race at Belmont Park. Limited partnerships are the way for average folks, who can't afford NFL teams, to be involved in a major sport. Hey, even if you don't care for racing, an investment of \$20,000 or so gets you into some great cocktail parties. And when I consider the recent \$300 I spent to watch another guy's overpaid babies lose 11-0 at Fenway, I'll take racing any day, with a

horse I own part of, for my hobby cash.

But let's get back to Barry Irwin. Barry and I used to exchange quips when AOL was the emerging force on the internet (and when I was a small part of the legal team that brought AOL public), and I noted right away that he was a poet, like all reporters, but he also could get down to earth and make hard business decisions.

Barry's Hard decision #1. At late middle age, relocate a family from California to Kentucky, figuring you can tolerate neighbors without their real teeth if that gets you proximate to horseflesh.

Barry's Hard Decision #2. Pick a no-nonsense trainer with a pedigree in English racing and fire everybody else. Graham Motion is now the exclusive trainer for Team Valor, with his own training center and his own way of training horses. It was not a light decision to fire a bunch of horse trainers who are icons in the business. And for all of us with clients, here's a lesson most of us hopefully know. Clients just want our best efforts with straight talk – good or bad. As Barry was quoted after the move, I got tired of the bullshit.

Barry's Hard Decision #3. So what do you do when your jockey breaks his nose a few days before the Derby? Robbie Albarado is a very good jockey, and Animal Kingdom was his horse. Robbie broke his nose a few days before the Derby, and would have taken any necessary painkillers to ride on Saturday. On Friday, John Velasquez, the rider of brilliant two year old Uncle Mo, learned that his horse would be scratched. Barry hired John and fired Robbie. It was the right thing to do, and Barry has promised to do right by Robbie with future rides. But racing is a game without guarantees and cushy contracts.

A bit more about Animal Kingdom

First, the name. The sire is *Lesroixdesanimaux*, and I will not demean you by translating. Barry's Team Valor (with 20 partners for this one) bred the horse, and his pedigree indicates they wanted one who could run on grass. Surprise!! In his first try on dirt, Animal Kingdom has leapt to the front of his class, on dirt. He may be that rare type who can run on grass, dirt, and the in-between substance called polytrack.

I must say that my heart sank when I saw him in the Derby post parade. He is a physical monster. He also showed extreme composure in front of 165,000 husky fans with a few hundred gallons of bourbon in their gullets. He didn't seem to mind getting dirt kicked in his face, and his rallying move in the stretch was awesome. Maybe this is the year for the Triple Crown. If so, it will be bad luck for Mucho Macho Man, but that's racing, and the good news is that horses don't much care where they finish. It's all about the food.

George 5/8/2011