

JERSEY RACE CLUB

14 July fixture preview

By Bobsbest

There may be just the four runners in the Champion Hurdle on Sunday, but it promises an intriguing contest. It is sponsored this year by "Mrs Koka Fast", which may be an oblique reference to Joan Lowery, owner of the former champion now enjoying his retirement. Joan Lowery is a tremendous supporter of the local sport and it is thanks to her – and Koka Fast – that there is a special viewing area for disabled people opposite the winning post.

Landolino is the reigning champion. He made mincemeat of his rivals last year and on his most recent run there was ample evidence that he is back to something like his best. His first two outings this year were less convincing when, in need of the races, he was easily beaten by Sir Alex Ferguson's If I Had Him. Since we last saw him at Les Landes the George Baker trained gelding has been kept busy on the flat and was the first British-trainer winner at Ostend for many years when he took a 2 mile handicap at the Belgian seaside course. "He's no superstar", says Baker, "But he's very versatile and the Channel Islands Champion Hurdle has been the plan for some time". On the evidence of two runs in April he's entitled to beat Landolino. On the first occasion If I Had Him was over 22 lengths ahead in receipt of 8lb, and next time on 5lb worse terms he had Landolino 17 lengths behind. Without a shadow of doubt the latter has come on a bundle since April and there's unlikely to be much between them. The other two pose little danger; Deepika was trying to give Nordic Affair 34lb when they were both behind Azaria last time and now receives 5lb, so looks booked for the minor money. In what could be a tactical affair If I Had Him may have the edge.

The Bastille Handicap over the minimum 5.5 furlong trip sees Spanish Bounty again trying to give weight all round, although he has been dropped 3lb since finishing more than 18 lengths behind Pas D'Action over 7 furlongs at the end of June. In mid June Kersivay got a flyer over this trip and won unchallenged by six lengths so the 3lb weight adjustment looks kind; Spanish Bounty, a further 1.5 lengths back in third that day, is now 6lb better off and assuming a level break – sometimes not a safe assumption – it should be close between them. Of the rest, First Cat is in and out and probably better over further, Country Blue continues to run poorly and Nordic Light is 15lb out of the handicap. That leaves Fast Freddie who is running well enough, but is only 2lb below his opening mark this season and may need to be cut a bit more slack.

The Brady & Gallagher Handicap over 9 furlongs sees Neuilly run off her new mark 5lb higher than when she won by 12 lengths over the same trip last time. A strict reading of the BHA guideline, which indicates 1.75lb per length over this distance, would have seen a hike of 21lb, so it could be said the handicapper has smiled on her. That doesn't mean she's bound to win of course and there are other improvers in the field including Becks Bolero and Pas D'Action. The latter is running off a mark just 6lb higher than at the start of the season despite three wins, the most recent over a 2 furlong shorter trip while the former, not out of the first three this year, has a long 12 lengths to close on Neuilly. Red Lago's run came to an end when stepped up in grade and was beaten out of sight by Neuilly. Athania and Rebel Woman look out of their depth and Grey Panel has not been quite so convincing this season and has had a break. Major Maximus is, with Pas D'Action, the other who could give Neuilly a race if anything like his best after he has also had a break.

The Citation Handicap for horses rated up to 45 sees the return of the initially promising, but subsequently disappointing Lucifer's Shadow. We are yet to see the best of this 4 year old and that may not be until next season. I have a soft spot for High Voltage, but in horse terms he's even older than me while Vamos is ungenue and the 2lb Lady Petrus went up for winning by a whisker last time may stop a repeat. That leaves Toggle who beat all except Pas D'Action in this last year and meets nothing of that calibre this time.

The Tom & Jerry Handicap over a mile and a half is headed by Moose Moran who benefited from a fine ride to win last time and is on a roll; a 3lb adjustment may not stop him. Anfield Road is interesting back from a break; he runs well fresh and Phil Collington has won on him. I have been flagging Sissi Guihen all season and she continues to disappoint without running so badly that you'd write her off; it must be pointed out she is now running off a mark fully 10lb below the start of the season. Mr Opulence ran a smashing debut over what may have been too short a trip last time and Garden Party needs to turn over the form with Moose Moran. The remainder look out of form.

Selections:

If I Had Him
Spanish Bounty
Neuilly
Toggle
Moose Moran