

JERSEY RACE CLUB

Preview - The Jersey Derby Meeting (27th July)

By Bobsbest

The naming of races has been a hot and controversial topic of late. The debate was sparked by the renaming of one of the longest established heritage handicaps in the UK racing calendar, The Stewards' Cup, which for many is the highlight of Glorious Goodwood. This year, for the first time in the race's 174 year history the name has been dropped altogether and replaced by '32Red Cup' at the request of the race's sponsor. Cue a chorus of disapproval led by the doyen of racing writers, Sir Peter O'Sullivan, who condemned what he termed the sweeping away of many years of great tradition; "Racing, to its detriment, has extravagantly pandered to the wishes of sponsors and this is another example." It moved racing's ruling body, the BHA, to protect the future naming of the most important heritage events.

There is of course another side to the coin. Racing needs sponsors and nowhere does it need them more than here in Jersey. The Race Club has struggled through years of recession when sponsors were very thin on the ground and, to its credit, it has managed to continue to improve the quality of racing despite, in some cases, falling prize money. So, when a sponsor comes along and, not unreasonably, wants fair recognition for its contribution to the sport it's unlikely a request to rename a race will be turned down.

Interestingly, the big race on Sunday's card – one of the year's biggest - is titled simply 'The 2014 Jersey Derby'. The race's sponsor is La Vallette Investment Management Limited and apart from their cash injection they are generous in being willing to take credit for their support without adulterating the name of the race. They have been rewarded with a strong field.

Before assessing the runners, it's notable that the winner for the last two years and great local favourite, Major Maximus, will not be in the line-up, but 2011 victor King Kenny will. That Derby victory marked the peak of King Kenny's powers and over the last two seasons his form deteriorated and his handicap mark dropped. This season however he has been running well and at the first July fixture he romped away with a competitive handicap in the style of the old King. Of course he was getting lumps of weight from most of his rivals and it will be a massive achievement if Angie Corson manages to bring about sufficient improvement for him to land this renewal.

Sweet Liberta never looked in the hunt behind King Kenny that day, a run that disappointed her trainer, but the race probably wasn't run to suit her and she'd won her previous start like an improver; she meets King Kenny on 31lb better terms in the Derby and it would not be a shock if she ran a big race.

Easily the best horse in the field on official ratings is King Of Arnor. That's not a surprise as he won three valuable races in France for Andre Fabre before apparently going wrong. He arrived here after finishing last in two races at Cagnes-Sur-Mer in February, so it's hard to know what to expect. If the old King Of Arnor turns up it could be a procession, but it's a big 'if'. Alyson Malzard has another string to her bow in the shape of Rossetti. He has little in hand of Sweet Liberta on his debut run and was disappointing when 14 lengths behind Grey Panel last time, but he was giving lumps of weight and didn't run as badly as the bare form indicates.

That brings us to the two overseas raiders, Sworn Mammy representing the World Football Champion nation and I'm Harry from the UK. The former is a bit of an enigma; she cantered all over Landolino over two miles earlier this year and was odds-on to repeat the dose last time, but flopped badly, beaten 13 lengths by King Kenny. The question is, which Sworn Mammy will turn up this time? It may be academic because George Baker probably has the key to the race in I'm Harry. A winner four times on previous visits, he won at Nottingham and been second twice at Doncaster and Windsor in June and July, and will arrive stripped, fit and ready for a fight. It's a fascinating race as befits one of the jewels in the Race Club's crown.

The supporting card starts with The 101 Years Young Handicap Hurdle, named in honour of a centenarian racegoer who, it is hoped, will be on hand to present the trophy to the winner. The two local runners look outclassed and it's a virtual match between Brendan Powell's Dark And Dangerous and Neil Mulholland's Benny's Quest. The latter is a modest chaser and should not be able to cope with his fellow raider's hurdle speed.

The Liberation Brewery Handicap over 7 furlongs, not surprisingly sponsored by Liberation Brewery, a long time and loyal supporter of local sport, brings together the sprinters and the milers. UK raider Clear Focus is only 1 for 12, but that was a recent win over Bath's 6 furlongs and he'll be hard to beat. Spanish Bounty and the speedy Purley Queen are the best of the home side.

Round 4, The Animal Health Trust Celebration Mile is a nine furlong race for horses rated 70 or lower. The AHT is a charity which does tremendous and cutting edge work in the field of animal, not just equine, health and the

figure working quietly, but tirelessly behind the scenes is former Race Club President Bunny Roberts. If you see her rattling the tin on Sunday, please share your winnings with a very good cause. A nine horse line up makes this look highly competitive, but George Baker the horse, trained by George Baker, seeks compensation for a defeat by Copper Falls early in the season. The latter declines the engagement and both Georges should be victorious.

The Building A Better Working World Handicap, is sponsored by EY, formerly Ernst & Young, relatively new supporters of the sport in Jersey, but a very welcome addition. It is run over a mile and threequarters for horses rated below 55. Despite another stiff challenge from the UK this can go to Mr. Opulence, who Tony Le Brocq has improved to win 2 of his last three races, being runner-up in the Champion Hurdle in the other.

Selections:

Dark And Dangerous

Clear Focus

I'm Harry

George Baker

Mr. Opulence