

ROSSETTI CAN REIGN AGAIN

FRIDAY EVENING'S JERSEY RACING PREVIEW

By commentator Mark Johnson

It is Champion Hurdle Day at Les Landes on Friday when the centre-piece of the five race evening meeting is the most prestigious jumps race of the year to be held in the Channel Islands. Gates open at 5pm with the first race at 6.30pm.

An unusually big field of eight are due to go to post for the 2m1f Smith and Williamson 2016 Champion Hurdle (race 3 on the card at 7.40) headed by the reigning Champion Hurdler ROSSETTI who will be a first ride in the Channel Islands for top UK-based jockey Noel Fehily.

A repeat victory for ROSSETTI will confirm the grey 8 year-old as one of the true "greats" of modern day Channel Islands racing. Having already won the Jersey Derby on the flat in 2014 his then trainer Aly Malzard switched his attention to hurdling last season culminating in a 10 length romp in this race. However no horse has won back-to-back Channel Islands Champion Hurdles since the Guernsey-trained GUNNER SID did it in 1999 & 2000.

ROSSETTI made his 2016 reappearance here at Les Landes in April, when second, but then transferred to the care of Neil Mulholland in the UK for a successful hurdling campaign in England which saw him finish runner-up at Southwell in May before winning a £4,500 to-the-winner Handicap Hurdle at Stratford on 14 June.

However a return to Jersey, and a defense of his Champion Hurdle crown, was always the plan and for the first time on Friday he will be ridden by high profile jockey Noel Fehily whose big winners include Rock On Ruby in "The" Champion Hurdle at the 2012 Cheltenham Festival. Fehily is also well known for his association with dual King George IV Chase winner Silviniaco Conti at Kempton in 2013 & '14.

This will be a first big race ride for Noel Fehily since he was airlifted to hospital following a nasty fall at Newton Abbot on 4 May in which he suffered bad bruising to his back. He only made his comeback to the saddle at Worcester on Wednesday of this week.

Although ROSSETTI is the one they all have to beat, there is unquestionably more strength in depth to this year's Champion Hurdle field than twelve months ago and the reigning champion isn't even the highest rated horse in the race! DRUM VALLEY is officially the best horse on old UK form and he had excuses when he ran disappointingly on his recent Jersey debut as he was found to be coughing after the race.

In an ironic twist to this race DRUM VALLEY is trained by

ROSSETTI's former trainer Aly Malzard and ridden by his former regular jockey Mattie Batchelor. Victory aboard DRUM VALLEY would be Batchelor's fourth consecutive win in this race.

The other major player in the contest should be CAHILL, trained by Christa Gilbert and ridden by Mark Quinlan, who has won twice already this season over hurdles at Les Landes including in a dramatic Handicap Hurdle, by 12 lengths, at the last meeting.

The Champion Hurdle has often been run as the first race on the card but officials have quite rightly moved such an important race now to the middle of the card which also means that it will now be included in the popular Pick 4 Jackpot which will still run on races two to five.

There is a truly international feel to the opening Country Blue Handicap (6.30) over 7 furlongs as amongst the eight runners are two trained in the UK, one on Guernsey and a German-trained runner.

German trainer Rudolf Storp saddles the mare STYLE AND PANACHE who has seven career victories to her credit made up of four wins in the UK, two in Germany and the 6 furlong Handicap at the 2014 Guernsey race meeting. The UK-trained duo of OCEAN BENTLEY and TAX REFORM may be the biggest dangers.

COUNTRY BLUE (the horse), after which the first race is named, runs 35 minutes later in the Summer Evening Handicap Sprint (7.05) over 5½ furlongs. COUNTRY BLUE recorded a seventh course & distance success at the last meeting (and also won this race last year) but at the weights, and likely odds, it may be worth taking him on with the Karl Kukk-trained VALMINA who returns to his optimum trip here after not quite getting home over 7 furlongs last time.

CITY GROUND should be able to defy top weight in the La Verte Rue Handicap (8.15) over 1m1f. He bids to give highly successful UK trainer Michael Appleby his first winner in the Channel Islands although CITY GROUND himself won here at Les Landes in September 2014. This will be CITY GROUND's 50th race and he bids for career win number ten. He is ridden, as usual, by leading UK amateur Serena Brotherton who recently celebrated her own 100th winner under rules. The main danger may be the locally-trained GREY PANEL who was runner-up in this race last year but who won it in both 2013 & '14.

What could be a lucrative evening for "overseas" visiting runners could end with another UK-trained winner in the shape of ZARLIMAN in the "Building A Better Working World" Handicap (8.50) over 1m4f.

Trained by Neil Mulholland ZARLIMAN is bidding for a hat-trick of wins on the flat having scored in January and April over this distance on the All Weather at Kempton. However this is a strong race as locally

saddled dangers are numerous including last year's Jersey Derby winner AUSSIE LYRICS, the 2012 & '13 Jersey Derby winner MAJOR MAXIMUS, hat-trick seeking BLACK NIGHT and the winner of this race for the last two years (and the 2011 Jersey Derby winner) KING KENNY. It is a cracking finale on a not-to-be-missed card - followed of course by arguably the best sunset in the world of racing over the North-West corner of the Islands in St Ouen.

*Readers were rewarded with a couple of nice priced winners at the last meeting as headline pick PAS D'ACTION (11/4) & MR OPULENCE (2/1) both won.

SELECTIONS

6.30 5 STYLE AND PANACHE
7.05 2 VALMINA
7.40 4 ROSSETTI
8.15 1 CITY GROUND
8.40 4 ZARLIMAN