

JERSEY RACE CLUB

Preview Jersey Derby fixture, 28 July 2013

By Bobsbest

The Jersey Derby is one of the high points of the season. Generously sponsored this year by Richard and Cynthia Thompson, the race determines the champion middle distance horse and, as it is not a handicap but run on weight-for-sex terms, logic suggests the best horse should win. On official figures Moose Moran and Neuilly are joint top-rated and as the latter is a mare she will enjoy a 3lb weight advantage so, all things being equal, she should win. However as we have seen so often, in racing all things are seldom equal. There are two previous winners in King Kenny, successful in 2011 and last year's victor, Major Maximus. Both were enjoying a rich vein of form at the time and that is not the case for either this season. At 9 years of age King Kenny is unlikely to recapture his dash of earlier days while Major Maximus, a rapid improver last season, has been very disappointing in his most recent appearances; one suspects that this year's prevailing firm going is not altogether to his liking and a downpour may improve his prospects. Landolino lost his hurdling crown last time, going down very narrowly in a thriller of a Champion Hurdle; he lost no honour in defeat and clearly in great heart he is a live contender being officially only 3lb (equivalent to 2 lengths) inferior to stablemate Moose Moran. The field is completed by relative newcomer, Mr Opulence, who has 8lb to find on the ratings, but ran well on the first of two local outings. On his latest run he has no chance of overturning the form with Moose Moran. The most relevant piece of recent form is found in the Happy Father's Day Handicap over the Derby distance on 16th June when Neuilly, receiving 1lb, was mugged by Moose Moran in the final stride and lost by a nose. The 2lb additional advantage she will enjoy in the Derby makes her the narrow form choice.

The Card opens with the Mrs Tiggywinkle Hurdle. An admirer of the inventiveness with which some races have been named this year, it didn't take me long to discover this race honours Beatrix Potter, writer of the Peter Rabbit children's books one of whose much loved characters is the hedgehog Mrs Tiggywinkle. It just happens this race fixture falls on the anniversary of Beatrix Potter's birth, in 1866. One hopes the runners jump better than hedgehogs. This is a race for horses that have not won more than one hurdle race since 2011 and features Athania who won a desperate renewal last year. She is top rated of these on

flat form, but this is a different game and it looks tougher than last year with Bollin Fergus, an easy winner of a maiden hurdle earlier this season, having to give just a 5lb mare's allowance to Athania. National Monument has not run too badly over hurdles this year and has most experience, but the jumps will have to bring about a big improvement in Vamos for him to succeed.

The remainder of the card comprises handicaps. Handicapping, always likely to bring about differences of opinion, has been a particularly controversial topic this year. In fairness it has to be said the handicapper had a good day at the races last time out, with three of the four flat handicaps producing very close finishes. The Race Club President, Peter Edwards, has made it known the Club has acknowledged the concerns surrounding handicapping and is considering options carefully. Doubtless one of the issues will be the fact that the Club is run largely on a voluntary basis, and that includes the handicapper. It requires a significant commitment to carry out an important honorary function within the Club, a fact not always sufficiently well recognized by those who enjoy a day's racing at Les Landes.

First of the handicaps is The Plantagenet Handicap over the minimum sprint distance and sponsored by Mrs Angie Richardson, a long-term and generous supporter of local racing. Four of the five runners met a fortnight ago over this trip when they all finished behind First Cat and Spanish Bounty. Country Blue, the rank outsider, did best of them, beaten less than a length, but the rest were strung out like they'd run in a 3 mile 'chase. Lucifer's Shadow won on that card, a 7 furlong low-level affair, getting home by a nose and a short head from Vamos and Lady Petrus; that form does not look particularly strong and he's never won over this trip. Not a race to approach with any confidence, this may go to the improving Country Blue.

The Episode Fund sponsors the eponymous extended mile handicap at the head of which is the aforementioned First Cat. It was a surprise to many that he had the toe to win over five furlongs last time, but apart from the runner up it was a weak race and, though he has won over a mile (Salisbury, 2009) this is tougher and further than would appear to be his optimum. Beck's Bolero and Pas D'Action are both marvellously consistent. The latter had the better of the argument between them last time, by about 2.5 lengths, but he was getting a very handy 12lb advantage; the gap has only closed by 2lb, which is probably not enough for Beck's to get revenge. We haven't seen La Verte Rue since April so presumably she's had a problem, but at this time in 2011 she beat Beck's a length in receipt of 5lb and here she gets a whopping 17lb; if fit she must go close. Rebel Woman was only 2 lengths adrift of Pas D'Action last time

when carrying 6lb overweight, but Matt Lawson will do the allotted weight comfortably here and she's not to be overlooked. In many ways this is the most fascinating race on the card and I have a sneaking feeling it may end with the girls on top.

The Bloodstock Advisory Services Handicap bears the name of another long established and appreciated sponsor of Jersey racing. Where, I wonder, would the Race Club be without such staunch allies? It's a mile and threequarters race restricted to horses rated 55 and lower. In truth it's a modest affair, but something has to win. How are the mighty fallen! In 2010 Garden Party won the Clarendon, Jersey's most important handicap, but he hasn't won again since the following April. He wasn't seen this season until mid-June and Tom Bougourd worked wonders to get him back to something not far from his best when beaten just over a length by Moose Moran; that's the best recent form on offer here. Nordic Affair's consistency over hurdles is due more to his accurate jumping than his speed and he has had just two abortive attempts on the flat in the last two seasons. Toggle is a veteran whose best form is over about half this distance and he's never run beyond 10 furlongs; he's a bit long in the tooth to be learning new tricks. Lady Petrus was second in this last year, but she is another whose career has been mostly over shorter trips; she's honest and will try her heart out. River Du Nord, behind Lady Petrus in this last year, has been absent a long time and is out of the handicap. All of which brings us to Robbmaa. He has shown absolutely nothing this season, but I recall him popping up at a decent price in a mile and a half handicap last August and at the time that didn't seem to be a fluke; he had Garden Party, Lady Petrus and River Du Nord behind that time and, in receipt of nearly 2 stones from likely favourite Garden Party, this could be his day in the sun.

Selections

Bollin Fergus
Country Blue
Neuilly
La Verte Rue
Robbmaa