

JERSEY RACE CLUB

Preview 20 June (Big Buck's) fixture.

by Bobsbest

As someone fortunate enough to have been at the Cheltenham Festival to witness all four of Big Buck's World Hurdle victories, I look forward to seeing the hero of 18 consecutive victories close-up when he parades before racing at Les Landes on Friday evening. His owner Andy Stewart deserves the thanks of all who love a brilliant racehorse for going to the trouble and expense of bringing him here. Take the opportunity, arrive early, enjoy the moment, we are unlikely ever to see his like again.

The plan is for Big Buck's to be led into the parade ring soon after 5.30; as he is led round Andy Stewart will discuss his champion with Lee McKenzie before the horse is taken out onto the course where he will parade in front of his fans. Big Buck's will then complete another circuit of the ring before making way for lesser athletes competing in the opening race.

Prior to the last meeting I was bemoaning the parlous state of jump racing in Jersey and it is particularly disappointing, on the day Big Buck's, a peerless hurdler, is paraded at the course, that jumping should have reached a new nadir at Les Landes. The Gwanako Handicap Hurdle honours Big Buck's travelling companion, himself a winner over the Grand National fences and now a very successful point-to-pointer; sadly it has attracted just two runners. Steely was a poor second of three, jumping stickily at times, in a maiden hurdle in May and this looks a penalty kick for his sole rival, Agapanthus, trained Neil Mulholland in Dorset. He has only to repeat his second of thirteen at Plumpton last December to win easily. The bookies will bet on the distance as they won't be prepared to lay odds on naming the winner. A couple more races of this calibre and hurdling at Les Landes will be a thing of the past.

Round two is The Episode Fund Handicap over a mile and a half and only four line up, headed by newcomer to Alyson Malzard's team, King of Arnor. This tremendously well bred son of Monsun out of a Sadler's Wells mare won three valuable races in the French provinces for Andre Fabre, before being elevated to Group Two company; he then changed stable and lost his form, but he would not have to be anywhere his best to win here. That said, he finished plumb last in both his races on the Cote D'Azure this year and is probably best watched. Rossetti, another Malzard debutant is a four-time winner, most recently in a jump jockeys' flat race at Epsom last September and he looks the stable's first string with Mattie Batchelor up. Sweet Liberta was slightly disappointing last time, but she's

racing off 4lb less than at the start of the season while King Kenny must run from over a stone out of the handicap.

The Quilter Cheviot Handicap is the main event, a sprint over the minimum trip. Quilter Cheviot have been loyal supporters of racing at Les Landes and their race has attracted all the local speedsters who are taken on by Novabridge from over the water. Neil Mulholland's raider has won 9 from 47, including here last August when he beat Fast Freddie, Country Blue and Kersivay in a close finish. Country Blue has the best of the weights now, enjoying a 6lb pull for half a length. Kersivay won this last year. Purley Queen was impressive when winning over this trip and you can forget her run over 7 furlongs next time when she seemed amiss. The other two are yet to show any worthwhile form.

The Ravenscroft Big Buck's Handicap over the extended mile has drawn the biggest field of the night and arguably the most intriguing contest. Becks Bolero and Pas D'Action both won at the last meeting over a mile and a quarter and 7 furlongs respectively, but both are effective at this trip as is First Cat who has a 2lb pull with Becks and is much better at the shorter distance. Top weight Spanish Bounty is too consistent for his own good and though he has had some help from the handicapper he possibly still needs to be eased another couple of pounds. Lucifer's Shadow will find this tougher than the low level handicap he took last time, but he did it really well with Grey Panel well beaten in fourth. Fast Freddie is 10 years old, but can still go a bit.

The Dandara Handicap is a mile and a quarter contest for horses rated 55 or lower. It would be hard to overstate the ease with which Mr Opulence won the maiden hurdle a fortnight ago; he has to give 13lb and more all round, but it's not impossible that he'll prove up to it. Athania ran her best race for ages with Mattie Batchelor's assistance when second to Lucifer's Shadow. Rebel Woman is consistent in this grade, Rocquaine upped her game last time, but Lady Petrus, honest as she is, is regressive and hasn't won for a year.

Selections

Agapanthus

Rossetti

Purley Queen

First Cat

Mr Opulence