

JERSEY RACE CLUB

Preview September 7th Meeting

By Bobsbest

They say the passing of time accelerates as you get older; if so I'm must be ancient indeed as it seems only a couple of weeks since I was writing in eager anticipation of the new season ahead, yet here we are at the final meeting of the year. Indeed, this season has been extended by a couple of weeks from the usual August Bank Holiday finale to accommodate all nine Jersey fixtures plus Guernsey's solitary date, which seems to have become the fixture around which all the others must revolve.

There will be time enough a little later to reflect on the ups and downs, strengths and weakness, of the season, but for the moment Sunday's card offers plenty to contemplate. To begin, the weather could not be worse than that for the last meeting, indeed it promises a resumption of the generally sunny and warm conditions racegoers have enjoyed through most of the season and the racing is good, so with reasonable luck we can end with a bang.

The most valuable race on the card is the Animal Health Trust Celebration Mile Handicap. The AHT is a charity, which does enormously valuable and often pioneering work in the treatment of sick animals, not just horses, and is worthy of the support of all animal lovers. My suggestion is that anyone fortunate to take some winnings from the bookies or the Tote could do worse than dropping a modest share into the AHT collection tin.

City Ground heads the weights. He will make the long journey from North Yorkshire accompanied by his venerable trainer Mick Easterby. Octogenarian Easterby is one of the very few figures in sport who actually deserves the label "legend"; he has been training for 53 years during which time he has won most of the big handicaps as well as training a champion sprinter in Lochnager and a classic winner in Mrs McArdy. Of course that won't make City Ground a winner unless he's good enough, but he will get plenty of help from the saddle from Serena Brotherton, Britain's top amateur flat jockey. Ms. Brotherton's record this season is outstanding, having ridden 13 winners from 44 rides, a 30% strike rate. City Ground has won 7 of his 36 starts, most recently having taken a 10 furlong Brighton handicap at the beginning of August; he will be hard to beat. First Cat has been very dependable for first season trainer Karl Kukk, but has gone up 9lb since the start of the season. The equally consistent Pas D'Action is on a mark 13lb above his opening rating, but both should continue to run well and, with Lucifer's Shadow, represent the best prospects of keeping the prize at home. Neil Mulholland's Kristal Hart ploughed through the mud to outpoint Lucifer's Shadow last time and meets the latter on 3lb worse now.

As ever we open with a hurdle, this time the Gone With The Wind Handicap, named not for the consequences of the stiff breeze that often prevails at Les Landes, but for the anniversary of the evacuation of Atlanta during the American civil war. As Rhett Butler said, "Quite frankly my dear..." you know the rest. Sadly, once again it

is a poor race like so many jump races this year. It looks a virtual match between regular raider The Bay Bandit and the much improved Mr Opulence. According to handicapper Gareth Colley, Tony Le Brocq has improved the latter a stone this season and he won't go down without a fight, but The Bay Bandit may have too many guns.

The Bill Shoemaker Record Handicap, run over five and a half furlongs, honours "The Shoe", a diminutive, but brilliant jockey who beat the all-time record for handicap wins on this day in 1970. To describe Novabridge as inconsistent would be polite; in four runs here he has won well twice and been unsighted on the other occasions. He carries top weight and, if in the mood, could win easily, but he is a risky proposition. The start of these sprints is very important and Kersivay is one that often gets a flier; he's been a good standard bearer for Alyson Malzard and races off a mark just 4lb above his opening rating. Chester'slittlegem is actually 3lb below her May figure, will appreciate this return to the minimum trip and the 5lb pull she gets from old rival Purley Queen brings them close.

Race four is the Good Queen Bess Handicap named for Queen Elizabeth I who was born this day in 1533; whether she was interested in horseracing is not recorded. It's a mile and a quarter handicap for locally trained horses rated up to 55. With overseas challengers excluded it's a weak race comprising runners that have not managed to register a win between them this term. Something has to win this time though and on the balance of form it could be Athania. I'm tempted by the fact that Rocquaine's rating has been in free fall, but for me she's had all the chances she deserves.

It might be said that It Doesn't Matter Any More is an appropriate title for the last race of the season. In fact, the race is named in honour of that fountainhead of almost all pop music, the late and very great Buddy Holly, born on 7th September. The race name is the title of his posthumous 1959 number one, which stayed 21 weeks in the charts. Sunday would have been his 78th birthday. The race is a mile and a half handicap and it brings together 5 winners this year in Midnight Sequel, Sweet Liberta, Agapanthus, King Kenny and Lady Petrus. King Kenny's rekindled form has seen his rating rise from a low of 34 in June to 47, still a long way below his heyday best, but he's by far the most reliable of these and can end the season on a high.

Selections

The Bay Bandit
Chester'slittlegem
City Ground
Athania
King Kenny