

JERSEY RACE CLUB

Preview 6 July – The Brady & Gallagher 40th Anniversary Champion Hurdle fixture

By Bobsbest

We are at half-way in the 2014 racing calendar and it's timely to reflect on the positive, and slightly less positive, aspects of the season so far.

Local racing has moved up a notch. The tide of runners from the UK has continued to rise and we have seen a successful raid from as far afield as Germany. While some will regret prize money and trophies going overseas there can be no doubt the quality of racing is on an upward curve. Indeed without off-Island runners some of the fields would have been very thin, particularly in the hurdling division.

Handicapping was widely criticized last season leading to Club President, Peter Edwards, giving an undertaking that the situation would be reviewed in the close season and he was as good as his word. The new handicapper, Gareth Colley, has made a very good start. Handicapping is more dynamic now and it conforms much more closely to accepted BHA standards than had been the case for some time. Doubtless he will continue to refine his methods and it was surprising to learn that he has to make his judgments based solely on watching the race unfold in real time, without the benefit of video replay facilities. Perhaps this omission will be rectified.

The Big Buck's initiative resulted in a coup for the Club with much valuable publicity as well as a treat for racegoers. It is to be hoped a few more celebrity appearances, both equine and human, may further boost the Club's reputation.

The blot remain the poor fields and poor quality of hurdle racing. The four jump races so far have had fields of 3, 5, 3 and 2 racing for an aggregate of £6,450. Unless there are early indications of improvement there will be pressure to redistribute that money toward better supported races.

The long gap between the first two fixtures needs attention perhaps with Guernsey being required to be more flexible in the date of its single fixture.

Overall, more positives than negatives and the Club continues to make excellent progress against ever challenging financial circumstances.

Sunday is Channel Islands Champion Hurdle day, this year titled the Brady & Gallagher 40th Anniversary Champion Hurdle in honour of the sponsor. Frank Brady is a long-time racehorse owner who has enjoyed considerable success, not least with his Group 1 winning colt Wootton Bassett, and was a supporter of the late Joan Le Brocq's stable; it good to see his firm continuing to support the local sport. This year's renewal seems sure to see the pot leave Jersey. Of the five runners, two come from Neil Mulholland's Dorset yard and both have won here this season. Of the pair The Bay Bandit is officially rated almost two stones superior to Agapanthus. Next best on ratings is Constanzia, but she has been desperately disappointing under both codes since joining Alyson Malzard and it will raise eyebrows and questions if she proves good enough. Mr. Opulence won his maiden hurdle easily and has since won on the level, but has 22lb to find on official figures. Steely has run twice over hurdles and jumped better last time, but has the proverbial mountain to climb.

The George & Leona Perpetual Handicap is sponsored again by the Sullivan family in memory of great stalwarts of racing at Les Landes. It's a five and a half furlong race with Novabridge, another Mulholland raider, heading the weights. He ran disappointingly behind Kersivay and several more of these last time and while 6lb better in with the latter still seems to have plenty to do. Kersivay was heavily backed that day, but didn't have much to spare over stablemate Country Blue and there shouldn't be much between them again. Fast Freddie won over an extended mile last time, but the drop back in trip may not suit him so well nowadays. Under Review comes from Liam Corcoran's yard and was formerly with Michael Brown and running regularly on the all-weather at Dundalk; he won off a mark of 57 in November 2013 and runs here off 1lb less. Pantella is an interesting runner. He's trained by U H Scherello in Germany, but was formerly smart when in the care of Kevin Ryan, winning a decent Beverley maiden in 2011. Regulars will need little reminding that the last runner from Germany, Sworn Mammy, won at the first June meeting with insolent ease; Philip Prince who rode then is making a return journey and will ride Pantella. Purley Queen is all speed and may come out best of the locals.

The Hatstone Lawyers Handicap, run over 7 furlongs, is for horses rated 45 or lower. Lucifer's Shadow won this last year, but went up 5lb for his facile June win, since when he ran quite well to be fourth in a better race. Christa Gilbert's yard remains in good form and the grey should make another bold show back down in grade. Buaiteoir travels from Nikki Evans Monmouth stable, but he cut little ice when 6th of 7 behind Ancient Greece in May; he hasn't won since January 2011. Wicked Tara is another from the UK, trained by Natalie Lloyd-Beavis at East Garston. She is a maiden of just 5 runs in which she hasn't managed to beat a single rival. Jackpot is an in and out

performer and the others have not yet shown enough to suggest they're close to winning.

EY – formerly known as Ernst & Young – sponsor the Building a Better Working World Handicap, to be run over an extended mile. Rossetti was all the rage on his debut, but he had no answer to Sweet Liberta over half a mile further last time when attempting to give 17lb; time may show that wasn't a bad performance. Rossetti's previous form suggests he may not improve for the drop in distance. On the other hand the admirably consistent Becks Bolero is at home at this trip and he seems sure to run well again. Special Report is another Mulholland charge and ran second to Landolino over hurdles in May and hasn't run badly twice since at Newton Abbot; he's versatile and should be fit as a flea after a good third in a handicap hurdle in mid-June. We haven't seen the best of Grey Panel yet this year, perhaps missing his regular partner Tim Clark who is now doing great things based at Newmarket and is presumably too busy to make the trip. Grey Panel has to run from 11lb out of the handicap, but a good performance would not come as a surprise, he won the race last year.

The intriguing title of the last race, The Great Uncle Bulgaria Handicap, is, I'm told, in celebration of the fact that this is Wimbledon finals weekend. Wombles of Wimbledon – get it? It's a mile and a half affair and features 5 overseas-trained runners including Sworn Mammy, making a return journey from Germany. The local team comprises Sweet Liberta, Up In Flames and King Kenny, but it should be noted River Du Nord is an honorary local, having been raised and raced here originally by her owners Johnny Mercier and Jane Edgar. Sworn Mammy started the season on a mark of 29, but so facile was her victory last month that she now races off 45 and it would be a brave man who'd say she couldn't possibly win off the new assessment. Ballyheigue has been running well and winning under Hattie Heal this season, most recently second in an amateur riders' handicap over a similar distance at Mussleburgh in May. King Kenny lurks on a mark of 34, half that of a couple of years ago; he's been running well and should get the fast going he likes.

Selections

The Bay Bandit
Pantella
Lucifer's Shadow
Special Report
Ballyheigue