

BANK ON BAKER'S BARWICK
FRIDAY EVENING'S JERSEY RACING PREVIEW
By commentator Mark Johnson

It is Champion Hurdle Day at Les Landes Racecourse, St Ouen, 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 - the JT Rewards 2018 Champion Hurdle. Gates open at 5pm with the first race at 6.30pm.

Five runners go to post for the 2m1f (3,400 metres) JT Rewards 2018 Champion Hurdle headed by **BARWICK** trained in the UK by George Baker and ridden by former four-time Channel Islands Champion Jockey Mattie Batchelor.

Baker, a regular visitor to Les Landes over the past few seasons, and Batchelor combined to previously win the race in 2013 with the Sir Alex Ferguson-owned If I Had Him. Jockey Batchelor went on to complete a hat-trick of wins in the race by scoring aboard The Bay Bandit (2014) and Rossetti (2015).

Front-running 10 year-old **BARWICK** is a nine-times career winner (eight wins on the flat & one over hurdles) and has never run a bad race in three starts at Les Landes. He won at the track in August last year, over 1½ miles on the flat, and has finished runner-up on the other two occasions including at the last meeting again over 1½ miles.

BARWICK may have only won one of his five starts over hurdles but that victory came at Worcester, over 2 miles in August 2016, where the jumps are similar brush hurdles to the ones he will encounter on Friday.

The main, locally-trained hope in the big race will be CAHILL who represents reigning Channel Islands Champion Trainer Christa Gilbert. CAHILL, who will be ridden by Alice Mills, was beaten just a head when runner-up to Rossetti in the 2016 renewal of this race.

Both CAHILL and the James Moon-trained VERONICA'S NAPKIN (ridden by Davy Delalande) have already won over hurdles at Les Landes this season. Also both horses won their respective hurdle races by the same margin, 3 lengths, from the same runner-up Samuel French.

The five-strong field is completed by BEYOND MEASURE (who represents dual Champion Hurdle winning trainer Aly Malzard - having saddled Koka Fast in 2009 and Rossetti in 2015) and a second Christa Gilbert-trained representative BORN LEGEND.

Champion Hurdle day is the only meeting of the year at Les Landes when the hurdle race is run in the middle of the card - usually it is the first race. The opening race on this occasion is an ultra-competitive seven-runner 5½f sprint - the Wilsons Estate Agents Handicap (6.30). **FRUIT SALAD** has run really well, without managing to win, in all three of her starts so far in Jersey and the likely firm ground on Friday evening should give her a great chance to finally open her local account. At the last meeting she was runner-up to veteran UK-trained sprinter **DOCTOR PAKES** with course specialist **COUNTRY BLUE** unlucky in the run and eased to finish sixth.

With some big priced winners at the last meeting the popular Pick4 Jackpot (where racegoers have to pick the winners of races 2, 3, 4 & 5) was not won resulting in a carry-over of nearly £490 into Friday's pool. The opening race of that bet's sequence is the President's Handicap (7.05) and it is quite possible that one of the most popular horses currently in training in the Channel Islands, and ultimate course & distance specialist, **PAS D'ACTION** could win again.

The Guernsey-owned but Jersey-trained 10 year-old has won 12 times including 11 races at Les Landes with 10 of those victories coming over this 7f (1,400m) trip. He probably has most to fear from Captain James.

The Kark Kukk-trained mare **GABSTER** bids to become the first horse to win four times this season when facing seven rivals in the Ravenscroft Handicap (8.15). Gabster is in the form of her life, she has won her last three races, but over a distance possibly short of her optimum she may be vulnerable. A close third in last year's Jersey Derby, after finishing runner-up in this corresponding race, **BENOORDENHOUT** is a classy foe and is taken to end **GABSTER**'s winning run.

HAWAIIAN FREEZE appeared a little unlucky not to win here over 1½ miles last month when not given the greatest of rides by a visiting French jockey having his first ride at Les Landes. She now gets inform rider Davy Delalande aboard. **OCEAN CRYSTAL** beat **HAWAIIAN FREEZE** a head last month but the order may be reversed in the concluding Moscow Mule Handicap (8.30). Prolific Les Landes winner **GREY PANEL** (who is bidding for win number 15 at the track) comes here in form and rates a big danger.

* Racegoers should be aware that there will be **NO** TV coverage of the World Cup Quarter-Final played that evening.

CHANNEL ISLANDS JOCKEYS CHAMPIONSHIP

Paddy Aspell 4 wins (4 seconds & 4 thirds)
Philip Prince 4 wins (4 seconds & 1 third)
Davy Delalande 4 wins (1 second & 1 third)
Alice Mills 3 wins (no seconds & 1 third)

CHANNEL ISLANDS TRAINERS CHAMPIONSHIP

Karl Kukk 5 wins (5 seconds & 6 thirds)
James Moon 5 wins (3 seconds & 1 third)
Aly Malzard 4 wins (5 seconds & 12 thirds)
Christa Gilbert 4 wins (1 second & no thirds)

SELECTIONS

6.30 3 FRUIT SALAD
7.05 2 PAS D'ACTION
7.40 1 BARWICK
8.15 3 BENOORDENHOUT
8.40 3 HAWAIIAN FREEZE