

Raiders take the honours again.

Bobsbest

(Bobsbest is racing correspondent of the Jersey Evening Post)

The horses travelling from the UK took the major honours again on Friday evening at Les Landes, winning four of the five races, but it was a much closer contest this time and Brown Velvet broke the visitors' stranglehold with a thrilling win in the closing contest.

The evening had started with an impressive success for Jamacho in the La Verte Rue Associates Handicap Hurdle. The odds-on favourite accounted for Bal Amie and Bowl Imperior in commanding fashion, setting himself up for a tilt at the Channel Islands Champion Hurdle at the first August meeting. One or two local trainers and owners may rue English raiders coming over and taking the prizes, but they are doing a great job for local tourism and hospitality. Jamacho's owner Rob Aplin was fulsome in his praise for the welcome he'd received. "We've had a great time", he said, "Everyone has been friendly and all of us, me, trainer Charlie Longsdon and jockey Brian Hughes are going to bring our whole families back for a holiday in August".

A fixture without a challenge from Mike Burbidge is rare and his team, all trained by Neil Mulholland and ridden by Brian Hughes, took the next three races on the card. Man of the Sea doubled up on his win at the last meeting when taking the Geoffrey Edwards Memorial Handicap, but it was a close run thing, Brian Hughes' strength in a finish making the difference as they held off Relaxed Boy and Fruit Salad by a head in a driving finish, that pair dead-heating for second. Newcomer The Defiant was slowly away, but noted making good late headway to finish fourth. It's the horses that win races, but there's no denying a top jockey can make a big difference and Hughes is a class act; discerning local racegoers have few enough opportunities to see genuine champions and he was a pleasure to watch in action.

The main event, the Millbrook 2021 Jersey Guineas went to Molliana. She is so versatile that the switch from two miles over hurdles to half that distance on the flat comes alike to her; she is fast becoming queen of Les Landes. It wasn't easy though, Serena Brotherton sent Hard to Handel about his business two and a half furlongs out and quickly opened up a gap on the field, but Molliana and Wolf Hunter, badly interfered with on the bend, chased hard and Molliana got up inside the final furlong to win by a length and a half with Wolf Hunter possibly unlucky in third.

Master Burbidge was another repeat winner in the Liberation Brewery Handicap, completing a four timer for Brian Hughes who had also

partnered Molliana. Rebeus is a most promising newcomer for Alyson Malzard and was a good second despite top weight; Gabster ran another sound race in third. Aussie Lyrics, well supported second favourite, was disappointing in what was an incident packed race. Safira Menina planted herself about a furlong from the start and despite all Freddie Tett's efforts refused to join the field. Then Koshi finished riderless after unshipping Keelan Baker at the final bend. Neither horse nor rider were any worse for the incident.

Safira Menina's connections may have thought they had got some compensation in the last, the Windsor House Handicap, when Dark Moonlight led well inside the final furlong, having just got the better of N Over J. However, Brown Velvet, who had unshipped her jockey Rhian Ingram on the way to the start and galloped free before being caught and re-joining the field, came with a devastating late run to mug Dark Moonlight right on the line. Trainer Christa Gilbert thought they had been beaten, but after a long look the judge separated them by the minimum distance of a nose, with N Over J just a neck behind. There will not be many closer finishes at Les Landes this season. This was an unusual reverse for Neil Mulholland whose odds-on favourite Nina's Field could do no better than sixth, just over five lengths behind the winner. His team were magnanimous in defeat as they can afford to be, having won seven of the ten races run so far in this delayed season.

It would be hard to overstate the advantage enjoyed by the English runners because of the lack of match fitness of the locals. However, four local trainers have had runners finish in the frame and there are distinct signs they are closing the gap.

There were some minor glitches with the tote information screen, which needs attention, and it would help swell the Pick Four jackpot if regular announcements were made about the increasing value of the kitty. Friday's was worth over £240 to the winners, not bad for £1 particularly bearing in mind the first three were odds-on favourites. The bookies did good business too with orderly queues throughout the evening. Racing reverts to Sunday afternoon fixtures with the next meeting on 25th July by which time, hopefully, remaining coronavirus restrictions will have been lifted.