

the Weekend card



Marken Julian



Marten invites readers to ask questions about any of the views expressed in the Weekend Card. Please indicate in your email or letter to whom your query is addressed and we will try and publish as many as space allows (rebecca@martenjulian.com or marten@martenjulian.com).

The Podium Question

Question: A reader has asked why it is that certain horses appear to have a preference for racing right or left-handed.

Marten writes:

A variety of explanations have been put forward for this.

The first relates to the horse's 'lead' foot. When a horse gallops it should alternate between leading with the left to the right, depending on the turn of the track. So, for example, when a horse is racing left-handed – anti-clockwise – it should lead with the left foot. It may then switch or alternate leads in the straight. Some horses struggle to switch leads and are significantly predisposed to favouring one foot over the other. For example, a horse with a left-foot bias will become unbalanced racing right-handed because it's natural inclination will be to lug left – against the turn of the bend, and therefore forfeit ground by running wide.

Another explanation is that a horse may be struggling with chronic pain or discomfort, possibly in the back. This may be more marked on one side of the horse, and consequently intensify when the horse is racing towards it. A horse will naturally do everything to move itself away from pain.

The other is, quite simply, that a horse may remember a track. Nobody knows what a horse can recall, but an unhappy experience in the past may still resonate. The opposite may apply as well.

The Sleeper Section

Marten Julian

Doctor Harper (8yr Bay Gelding) 2nd 14/1,

It was especially galling to see Doctor Harper fail by just a short-head to catch Tour Des Champs at Cheltenham on New Year's Day. To my eyes the nine-year-old was always travelling well but the winner is a useful horse when fresh and this was his day.

Doctor Harper has been raised 3lb for this, and that would put him at the bottom of the weights in one of the big spring staying handicap chases.

He is entered for two races this weekend. The first is at *Warwick on Saturday (3.35)* and the other at *Kelso on Sunday (2.40)*. The former is over an extended 3m 5f and the Kelso race is a mile shorter at around 2m 5f. I would expect him to favour the longer race, for which he is currently priced at 8/1 in the ante-post markets. We need to stay with him for the time being.

Entered at Warwick on Saturday (3.35) and Kelso on Sunday (2.40).

Ifubelieveindreams (2yr Bay Filly)

This daughter of Iffraaj missed the break and was a little keen towards the rear of the field on her racecourse debut at Lingfield last month. She then came back on the bridle and was travelling well on the final turn only to run into trouble and find herself tightened up on the rails. But for that she would have made the first three. From her pedigree and the evidence from this run she will be well suited to a mile.

No immediate entries.

Just Minded (5yr Bay Gelding) 3rd 7/1,

Just Minded shaped very well on his hurdling debut at Wetherby over Christmas, keeping on steadily in the final quarter mile to finish a never-nearer third of 14 to the more experienced Craggaknock. This was good form, with the even-money favourite Azzuri and the Ayr winner Master Of Finance in second and fourth.

Just Minded has an entry for an extended 2m 3f NH novices' hurdle at *Wetherby on Saturday (12.30)*. He is bred to relish the step up in trip and I expect him to go close here before progressing into a useful staying chaser in seasons to come.

Entered at Wetherby on Saturday (12.30).

Lost Legend (9yr Bay Gelding) L 8/1,

I am not sure how much longer we should give this 10-year-old. He is undeniably well treated on his current mark of 120, having dropped 5lb from 125 to 120 following his dismal effort at Leicester over Christmas. The son of Winged Love virtually downed tools from flag-fall, a situation that Richie McLernon was quick to accept. This time 12 months ago Lost Legend was running into the frame in valuable handicaps at Cheltenham from marks of 142 and 144.

I suggest we give him one more chance at what is sure to be a decent price.

No immediate entries.

Molly Carew (5yr Bay Mare)

You may wonder why I want to include a maiden mare that has finished well beaten in her three starts to date in this section, but I saw enough on her hurdling debut at Fontwell to believe that she will win races when the time is right. I stress the latter point because she may be one for handicaps after two more runs, but at Fontwell I liked the way she made progress from the back straight to join the leading bunch until appearing to tire turning for home.

The daughter of Midnight Legend, who is related to winners, had run in a similar way in her two bumpers, showing up until fading out of contention. Molly Carew looks destined for a low mark in handicaps and could be one to have on your side in the spring. Neil Mulholland will have a plan for her.

No immediate entries.

Pop Rockstar (5yr Brown Gelding)

Jonjo O'Neill is a dab hand at getting his moderate horses handicapped to win, and there is no denying the promise this son of Flemensfirth has shown in his last three runs over hurdles.

Following a sixth of 13 on his sole start for Adrian Maguire in an Irish bumper in May, he made his debut for this yard in a maiden hurdle at Fontwell in November. Pulled up on that occasion, he has since shaped well at Plumpton, Ffos Las and Chepstow, notably catching the eye under considerate handling when fourth to the useful Constantine Bay on the last-named occasion.

I am not sure what mark he will get but taking lines of form through those around him I expect something in the low 120s.

No immediate entries.

Western Wave (4yr Bay Gelding) L 7/2, L 9/2

Western Wave underperformed for the second time when tailed off at Chepstow last weekend. The five-year-old was well supported there, from 12/1 to 9/2, but he lost his place after the fourth and quickly dropped out of contention. The heavy ground might have had a part to play, but he has become disappointing and may not be seen back to his best until the spring. He is best left for the time being.

Removed from the list.

Selections

Doctor Harper (3.35 Warwick Saturday and 2.40 Kelso Sunday)

Just Minded (12.30 Wetherby Saturday)

The Premier List Update

Marten Julian

Here are the dozen Premier List horses in my latest Dark Horses Jumps Guide. Runners since the last Weekend Card or forthcoming entries are featured below.

Beat That, Buveur D'Air, Flying Angel, Cloudy Dream, Connetable, Hester Flemen, Jenkins, Kayf Blanco, Otago Trail, Three Musketeers, Two Tiffs, Un Noble

Un Noble ran poorly at Newcastle last weekend. I will be seeing Nicky Richards over the next few days and will ask him if the horse has a problem. The horse has dropped 2lb, from 128 to 126.

The Postscript Update

Marten Julian

There are no horses from the Postscript service with forthcoming entries.

The Ante-Post Agenda

Marten Julian

I am more than happy with the JLT recommendation for **Buveur D'Air** following his success at Warwick. It's fair to say that he did not beat Gino Trail, who was conceding him 6lb, in the manner of a 30/100 chance, but I like the way he quickened from the last, albeit not as impressively as he had the time before at Haydock. He is now down to a top price of 7/1 for the JLT at Cheltenham.

By the way I would have plenty of time for the runner-up here. Kerry Lee's horses are just finding a touch of form and this specialist two-miler loves the soft ground.

Buveur D'Air advised at 14/1 for the JLT Novices' Chase

Churchill advised at 8/1 for the 2017 2,000 Guineas

Spatial advised at 20/1 for the 2017 1,000 Guineas

Under The Radar

Marten Julian

Un Noble dropped away tamely last weekend at Newcastle. As stated elsewhere I will try and find out what the problem is.

Eric The Third was a non-runner at Naas on Sunday, perhaps on account of the ground. He will go close one day having dropped a further 2lb from 86 to 84.

Conquer Gold is entered for an extended 2m 7f novices' handicap chase from a mark of 119 at *Kelso on Sunday (1.40)*. She was dropped 1lb despite running well last time at Ayr and I expect her to prove a better performer over fences. Let's keep close tabs on her this weekend, both in the market and the race itself.

Nicky Richards has also made entries for **Progress Drive** over at extended 2m 3f at *Wetherby (12.30)* on Saturday and over and extended 2m 6f *Kelso on Sunday (12.40)*. The latter looks the tougher race but the longer trip should suit him better. Take note that this is a very lazy horse, who never makes things look easy. He has been given a handicap mark of 127.

Selections

Conquer Gold (1.40 Kelso Sunday), Progress Drive (12.30 Wetherby Saturday, 12.40 Kelso Sunday),

Previously Noted Horses

Conquer Gold, Eric The Third, Progress Drive, Un Noble, Reivers Lad, That's Life, Upsilon Bleu

The Clock Watcher Marten Julian

Knockgraffon was yet another second for us when just failing to concede 19lb to outsider of four Icing On The Cake in an extended 2m handicap chase at Newbury on New Year's Eve. Time may show that winner was relatively unexposed and so although likely to be raised 4 or 5lb, I still want us to stay with this six-year-old. He is very consistent, having finished in the first three in all but one of his 10 lifetime starts.

Previously Noted Horses

Knockgraffon

The Weekend Action Marten Julian

I had to resort to a low-grade handicap hurdle at Newcastle and an all-weather race on Friday to find you two winners last week, with the main cards dominated by highly competitive handicaps and tricky condition events.

This weekend we head to Kelso on Sunday for the extended 2m 5f handicap chase on *Sunday (2.40)*. I hope Doctor Harper opts for Warwick because in his absence I suggest we take a close look at **Bernadelli**.

Nicky Richards has endured a torrid first half of the season, with at least five on-course fatalities to my knowledge and another expensive store horse lost at home. He is due for a change of fortune, and Bernadelli now has plenty in his favour. He struck winning form last season on heavy ground, winning handicap chases off 125 at Newcastle in December and off 132 at Ayr in February.

Three defeats later he is still a little high on 133, but the trip on Sunday and soft ground look ideal and his two runs this season have not been without promise.

Saleh was a handy winner for us last week and his trainer Lee Carter can do the job again for us with **Free Zone**, who runs in the 6f claimer at *Lingfield on Friday (2.00)*. The

eight-year-old was a very shrewd purchase out of Jamie Osborne's yard at Chelmsford in November, winning for his new connections back there just a fortnight later. He has since run second and third from three starts in handicaps and he looks well-treated by the terms of this race on Friday.

Free Zone is a gutsy and reliable performer at this level who is especially effective from the front. Adam Kirby, who rode him last time, takes the mount again.

Selections

Free Zone (2.00 Lingfield Friday), Bernadelli (2.40 Kelso Sunday)

The Weekend Selections Retrospective

Marten Julian

Little Glenshee has been given a bit more of a chance having dropped by 4lb, from 121 to 117, following her poor effort last time at Ayr. This is still 7lb higher than her chase rating, but at the age of 11 and with her loss of form it may be time for her to get to the paddocks, where she could be covered this spring. She has an entry back over two miles at *Ayr on Monday (1.40)*.

Last week was a good one for my section, with my sole two selections **Saleh** and Lough Kent both winning.

The former won a Class 5 in good style last time at Kempton, appreciating the return to a mile from seven furlongs. He was able to run there from a mark 2lb in hand, but I don't expect him to struggle with a rise of a few more pounds.

Lough Kent confirmed the promise shown at Haydock when beating Island Confusion by five lengths at Newcastle on Saturday.

Jimmy Moffatt never lost faith in the eight-year-old, who shows him plenty of ability on the gallops. Whether he will be able to ever recapture the ability that saw him perform creditably from marks in the mid to high 130s remains to be seen, but bought in August for 10,500gns this is yet another example of Jimmy's skill at rekindling the spirit in horses from higher-profile yards. He has been raised 6lb, from 108 to 114.

Selections

Little Glenshee (1.40 Ayr Monday)

Irish Eyes

William Reilly

Racing is full of talk right now about such things as ITV Racing, FOBTs, prize-money, and now the closure of Kempton. As Nicky Henderson has said, what the closure of Kempton indicates about the future of jump racing is a key concern.

Irish racing faces its own problems. As in Britain, racecourses and the holders of picture rights are starting to call the shots. Bookmakers are still seen as the anti-hero - more so in Britain - as if revenge for some perceived or real past wrongs must be applied.

By the way, ITV Racing is not universally available in Ireland. If you are on package provided by EIR, you can't get it so are reliant upon whichever ITV broadcasts TV3

chooses to show. If you have a Sky package, you can access ITV via 'Other Channels' but, I believe, cannot record channels this way. It's all rather disappointing and, hopefully, will change.

Racing's big challenge is to engage with customers, old and potentially new. To do this, as with any business, you need to understand your customer. Channel 4, for all its technical excellence, never seemed fully to get over that hurdle and went the way of, well, Kempton. We hope for better going forward.

Whatever frustrations lie within the above areas, the quality of horseracing at our disposal is superb. Gordon Elliott rates Death Duty as his best novice hurdler. He'll make a three-mile chaser in time and his stamina was seen to good effect when winning the Grade 1 Lawlor Hotels Novice Hurdle at Naas last Sunday.

My selection for the race, Augusta Kate (remarkably, available at 8/1 earlier in the week) was challenging him when falling at the last flight. Thankfully, both she and Ruby Walsh walked away unscathed from the mishap. It was inexperience, I would say, that caused her to fall. It's a big step up from a maiden hurdle to a Grade 1 race, but she clearly has a lot of ability.

A horse that I'm removing from my list is Squouateur as, once again, he showed little over fences last Sunday. I felt that he was the type for a handicap but you would need to know more than I do to be waiting on him now.

Punchestown stages the Grade 2 Moscow Flyer Novice Hurdle on Saturday and Fairyhouse stages the €100,000 Dan Moore Memorial Handicap Chase on Sunday.

Dan Moore is one of the sport's greats. A champion jockey, he then won the Cheltenham Gold Cup as a trainer with L'Escargot (twice) and the Aintree Grand National with the same horse in 1975, where he thwarted the great Red Rum's bid for a third-successive National win in Liverpool.

Dan's son Arthur could run Dandridge on Sunday and it would be no surprise if he ran well. However, I like Gordon Elliott's **Ball D'Arc**, who ran well at Leopardstown over Christmas despite being hampered after the last fence (2.30 Fairyhouse Sunday).

Willie Mullins may well run Blixt in the Punchestown finale on Saturday, a mares' bumper. She is a half-sister by Yeats to the great Hurricane Fly.

Selections

Ball D'Arc (2.30 Fairyhouse)

Previously Noted Horses

Flat

Opt Out – looks well-handicapped; seven furlongs or a mile would be his trip; **Complicit** - surely his time has come (next time out, at six or seven furlongs)

Jumps

Diamond King (novice chaser; jumps well; will come into his own over three miles or more; probably a spring horse); **Bonny Kate** (could still be well handicapped in staying handicaps); **Campeador** (his luck has to change at some point; would have won easily at Fairyhouse last time but for falling); **Mick Jazz** (still on a decent mark for a two-mile or 2m4f handicap hurdle)

Jodie's Jottings

Jodie Standing

Whilst I didn't find a winner last week, I felt we learnt a fair bit.

Espoir De Teillee was odds on based on his reputation, but he was too keen in the early stages which undoubtedly told towards the end of the race. However, his run was encouraging for a horse that is bred to excel with time.

Bigirononhipship is extremely one paced so I was worried when Sue Smith's well-handicapped front-runner Smooth Stepper got first run on us, but he stayed on to finish second, well clear of the third. I believe he is capable at this level and I will be sticking with him.

I honestly think Charlemar hated the ground in the Tolworth. I don't like making excuses for horses, but his running action is far more attuned to a better surface. He was first off the bridle and Aidan Coleman didn't give him a hard time. He looks a spring horse, and knowing that he acts around Aintree, it wouldn't surprise me if he misses the Festival for a race at the Grand National meeting.

This week, a horse I have a lot of time for is Charlie Longsdon's **Our Kaempfer** (3.15 Kempton Saturday).

In my opinion, he has always been the sort who just falls short when it comes to competing in the big races, despite having plenty of ability. Since switching to chasing he has run creditably behind the likes of Rock The Kasbah and Clan Des Obeaux, but this race looks a good opportunity for him to record his first chase success.

He proved he has a liking for the track when winning over hurdles in 2015 and I think the step back up to three miles over fences is a plus. It was unfortunate that he unseated before the race had really begun in the Rowland Merrick last time out, but hopefully he can make amends here.

There's not too much rain on the forecast, but if that were to change then the ground could go against him. He wants a sound surface. If he has the ability I believe he does, then he should be able to take advantage of his mark of 138.

I will also be keeping a close eye on Silvergrove if he lines up. He was a horse I liked a lot last season but this time around his efforts have left a lot to be desired.

I hope to see **One For Arthur** in action at Warwick (3.35 Warwick Saturday).

As you may know, I made him my selection for the London National but he opted for the Becher Chase instead where he ran a very creditable fifth, never stronger than at the line.

The eight-year-old looks the type who is crying for a stamina-sapping trip and he'll carry a nice, low weight. A feature of his chases has been his fantastic jumping which bodes well for a track like Warwick, where the fences are notoriously tricky.

Obviously, it's a highly competitive race, but I'd like to stay loyal as I believe there is plenty more improvement in him.

I have him earmarked for a National in the future, so let's see how he gets on here.

Selections

Our Kaempfer (3.15 Kempton Saturday), One For Arthur (3.35 Warwick Saturday)

The Weekend News

Ian Carnaby

The big news this week concerns the demise of Kempton Park, the first major racecourse to be closed down since Hurst Park in 1962. Plans are in place for a new, floodlit AW track at Newmarket, with Sandown - the new home for the King George VI Chase - to undergo extensive redevelopment.

Relatively few will mourn Kempton's passing. It always lacked atmosphere and the decision to lay an AW track and introduce evening racing under lights simply misfired. Kempton never came anywhere near matching Windsor's popular Monday nights and in the end the executive simply raced as often as possible to make up the shortfall in revenue. (It might be argued that Newcastle, where moderate racing seems to take place two or three times a week, is heading down the same path but we shall see.)

The Jockey Club's Kempton announcement overshadowed plans for Chelmsford, where a turf course is to be laid inside the existing AW one, with a casino introduced. Thus, Britain follows the American and Canadian model with guaranteed profits from the gaming side helping to bolster the racing. The last time I went to Century Downs in Calgary, only a few months ago, the casino was very busy indeed and clearly paid for the pacers (prize-money for modest fare far higher than in Britain), with only a sprinkling of punters watching outside.

Returning to the present, it occurs to me that Jonjo O'Neill has some good chances at Warwick on Saturday. One of my biggest disappointments last season came at Punchestown, where **Champagne At Tara** failed to get into the argument at all in a multi-runner handicap hurdle (*1.15 Warwick*). At first I thought this was not one of Robbie Power's better days but perhaps the horse takes a bit of knowing.

Switched to novice chases this term, he went very close at Ascot last time, though the word 'outbattled' appears in the close-up. That is a worry but he does most things pretty easily in his races and I shall give him another chance in the Edward Courage Cup, the second on the card. I should mention that I think Donald McCain's Ubaltique is the best handicapped horse in the race but he would be turning out again very quickly after a good second at Chepstow.

However Champagne At Tara performs, I want to be with stable-companion **Call To Order** in the Pertemps Qualifier over the extreme distance of 3m 2f (*2.25 Warwick*). Lightly raced, Call To Order did us a good turn at Cheltenham last time and has been raised 7lb for his pains. He still looks reasonably treated and Jonjo has won this race before, Join The Clan fairly hacking up two years ago.

The Pertemps is always a slight worry, with horses turning up just to get qualified and trainers trying to protect their handicap mark with the final in mind. Still, there is plenty to be said for winning while you can and I hope Call To Order, who was always travelling very easily indeed at Cheltenham, will follow up.

Venetia Williams is in good form and remains very much a 'Saturday' trainer these days. A few of her handicap chasers need plenty of cut, including **Houblon Des Obeaux**, who shares top weight in the Betfred Classic Chase over 3m 5f (*3.35 Warwick*). The fact that he was eventually beaten some way in third in the Coral Welsh National is not strictly relevant. He turned for home alongside Native River and was going just as well as the eventual winner but started to feel the strain soon afterwards. It was his seasonal reappearance, the ground having been too quick in the Hennessy at Newbury, and I thought it a splendid effort. Of course, the handicapper shows no mercy and each-way will have to be the call.

We found stable-companion ASO, who ran well twice at Cheltenham before landing some good bets at Chepstow. He was lobbing all over his field for most of the journey but finally had to be ridden to get the better of the runner-up. **Aso** has also been raised 7lb and another handicap will not be easy, so attempting the Listed 32Red Casino Chase (*Kempton, 2.05*) is the right move. These are classier opponents, it goes without saying, and only a minor win bet is advised.

The two main selections are Call To Order and Houblon Des Obeaux each-way.

Selections

Champagne At Tara (1.15 Warwick Saturday), (2.05 Kempton Saturday), Call To Order (2.25 Warwick Saturday), Houblon Des Obeaux (3.35 Warwick Saturday)

Marten Julian

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