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Cheltenham Festival

ONLINE SUPPLEMENT 2018



Part One

The Going: The ground on Monday morning was heavy, with soft patches, and more rain forecast on Monday but a dry day on Tuesday. The times of the early races will reveal more, but clearly horses that favour good going are likely to be inconvenienced.

Day One

1.50: Sky Bet Supreme Novices' Hurdle (Ext 2m)

There is no reason why Getabird should not handle the conditions.

The word 'heavy' has featured in two of his four victories and his dam's sire Revoque loved the mud. There is talk in certain quarters of him being unsuited to racing left-handed, but if he's good enough that shouldn't bother him. Kalashnikov lost a shoe when beaten four lengths by Summerville Boy on heavy ground at Sandown but then beat a field of more experienced hurdlers at Newbury despite concerns the going would be too soft for him. Summerville Boy had previously been beaten by Western Ryder and Slate House, both times at this track, but he looked an improved performer at Sandown.

Expect a gamble at double-figure odds on First Flow. Kim Bailey's six-year-old is rated 8lb inferior to the favourite but he loves the mud, having galloped through these conditions to win at Newbury and Haydock. I do not expect the 11/1 to last through the night. Mengli Khan may lack the mental fortitude for this race – he was delicate on the Flat – while Paloma Blue needs to improve but will give us a guide to Samcro's form last time at Leopardstown. Claimantakinforjin won a bumper in heavy ground but may prefer better conditions. Sharjah acts in heavy but disappointed last time. Slate House is useful but struggled in heavy on his most recent start and Western Ryder was beaten a long way by Summerville Boy at Sandown.

Getabird warrants his position at the top of the market but in the conditions I like Summerville Boy each-way. I also advise a smaller each-way bet on First Flow.

2.10: Racing Post Arkle Challenge Trophy (2m)

Tactics could have a major part to play here, with Saint Calvados, Footpad and Petit Mouchoir all capable of racing prominently. The three riders may decide beforehand how they are going to play it, but of the three the one that may be the most reluctant to forfeit the front-running role is Aidan Coleman on Saint Calvados.

Petit Mouchoir was a marginally better hurdler than Footpad – they finished third and fourth respectively in last year's Champion Hurdle – but Footpad has looked the more impressive over fences.

The race could be set up for a closer, with Brain Power the most likely to fill that role, but for all the praise heaped on him by his trainer he has generally underperformed, both as a hurdler and chaser. However it would not be a massive shock if things were to fall into place for him.

With odds of 5/4 and 11/4 the next two, the race makes little appeal for betting purposes. I am happy to sit back and watch.

2.50: Ultima Handicap Chase (3m if)

Danny Cook expects a good run from the consistent Vintage Clouds. The eight-year-old has generally been thereabouts in his races and he acts well in the mud. He is, though, high enough in the handicap off 141 and may just be a little short of class.

Gold Present has risen 25lb since winning at Doncaster in November but his form has been shown on better ground and he has to defy a career-high mark. Coe Star Sivola is up 7lb from Exeter while O O Seven may prefer better ground. By contrast Ramses de Teillee loves heavy ground but has run just four times over fences. His trainer David Pipe has trained the winner of this race three times in the last 10 years.

Yala Enki stays all day and can't have conditions deep enough but he also has a career-high mark to overcome. Shantou Flyer goes through the mud and Cogry could outrun his odds if he's on a going day.

My long-term selection for this has been Singlefarmpayment and I'm happy to stay with him. He won at this course off 133 in December, 2016, and was beaten a short-head in this race last year off 142. He was still in with a chance when falling in the Ladbrokes Trophy at Newbury and is now 3lb higher than last year. This has been his target all season.

This is going to be hard going with confirmed mud-loving stayer Yala Enki now having to come in for consideration. Singlefarmpayment is the each-way selection with a single win saver on Yala Enki.

3.30: Unibet Champion Hurdle (Ext 2m)

Buveur D'Air loves the mud and although short enough at 1.64 overnight on Betfair he is a worthy favourite. He seems untroubled by heavy ground, is a very slick jumper of hurdles and is tactically uncomplicated. The concern is that he is a stuffy horse who hasn't been tested yet this season, so may be vulnerable to a fitter rival in the closing stages in what looks likely to be more of a stamina than speed test.

The horse with proven stamina over further and Class 1 form in heavy ground is Yorkhill, a mercurial performer and a far from straightforward ride. We saw him on a bad day last time at Leopardstown over fences but he will appreciate this return to hurdles for the first time since April, 2016. He does not like to be in front too long so tactically things could go his way under a patient waiting race under David Mullins.

My Tent Or Yours, second three times in this race, may find the ground too soft. Faugheen, equipped with cheekpieces, handles the mud but may now be mentally vulnerable after a lengthy and distinguished career. Wicklow Brave was beaten over 14 lengths in this race last year but has won twice in heavy ground. Elgin likes soft going but he lacks experience at this level. Melon is not yet up to this class. Mick Jazz is consistent and Ch'tibello has won twice in the mud but has more to do. Charli Parcs has yet to show on the track the quality of work he produces at home.

The horse from left-field that appeals given the conditions is Yorkhill. He has never clashed with the top hurdlers around but has won at two Cheltenham Festivals – the 2016 Neptune and the 2017 JLT Novices' Chase – and his trainer Willie Mullins has always maintained that he could win a Champion Hurdle. Given that he will relish the conditions at around 17 on Betfair it may be worth chancing that we meet him on a going day. Buveur D'Air is a worthy favourite while if Faugheen is back to full fitness then he could still threaten the best. My Tent Or Yours may find conditions against him. I suggest Yorkhill each-way.

4.10: OLBG Mares' Hurdle (2m 4f)

Apple's Jade loves the mud, has beaten a top-class performer in Supasundae over half-a-mile further than this and has never finished out of the first two in 14 starts. She is short enough at 1.59 but is hard to fault.

Benie Des Dieux also loves the mud but reverts to hurdling from chasing and is rated about a stone below the favourite. La Bague Au Roi stays beyond this trip but is untried on ground this testing. Kayf Grace, who has never won beyond 2m if, can be keen. Jer's Girl is admirably tough but held by the favourite. Midnight Tour and Midnight Jazz prefer better ground.

It is hard to oppose the favourite but Jer's Girl has got to within a couple of lengths of the favourite and at 20 on Betfair makes each-way appeal.

4.50: National Hunt Challenge Cup (4m)

No Comment has been prepared with this in mind but he has never won beyond an extended 2m 4f and comes here with just one run over fences to his name. He did, though, shape well on that occasion. Jury Duty is very tough, loves the mud and will be ridden by Jamie Codd. He is sure to go close. Mossback also acts in the mud but is prone to make the occasional mistake.

Rathvinden will like the conditions but the one to consider is the mare Ms Parfois, who receives weight from her rivals. She has won in heavy ground and won three of her five starts over fences. The key to her chance may be in her pedigree, as her dam is by Sir Harry Lewis – a profound influence for stamina. Sizing Tennessee is a confirmed mudlark but Keeper Hill may find conditions against him. Pylonthepressure is suited to the mud but has not won beyond 2m 3f.

This will be a stiff test for both horse and rider. At the weights the mare Ms Parfois warrants an interest each-way.

5.30: Close Brothers Novices' Handicap Chase (Ext 2m 4f)

There are a handful of horses in this field with proven form on heavy ground. Two that make some appeal are Livelovelaugh and Any Second Now. Both horses have been campaigned at a higher grade than this, but this makes limited appeal as a betting medium.

