



**RONAN GROOME**  
**CHELTENHAM**  
**RACING FESTIVAL NEWS**

**DAY TWO**

The times of the races today at Cheltenham first suggested the ground was good to soft, and with sun shining throughout, it seemed like it could only go one way. We'll leave it to Simon Claisse to call tomorrow but I think the ground will go good, good to soft in places by off time and dry out again. They could easily be watering tomorrow evening.

Talking to some, Chacun Pour Soi need only show up to win tomorrow's Queen Mother Champion Chase (3.05) and the success of the hotpots today will only further fuel that confidence.

He's been seriously impressive at Leopardstown this season, travelling through his races powerfully and jumping beautifully, but I'm still mad keen to take him on. The Cheltenham factor, and lack of it in his case is one thing, the chance of quick ground is also a late curveball, but the main qualm I have is that his rivals aren't getting the respect they deserve, for all that the defection of Altior is a blow to the race.

I think you can make a case for three quarters of this field.

Nube Negra was electric when going past Altior at Kempton and is the subject of bullish trainer quotes, with the drying ground also in his favour. Course specialist Put The Kettle On is last year's Arkle winner, so often an excellent guide to the following season's Champion Chase.

Politologue has an excellent record in this race and will be primed to the minute for a repeat success by his trainer who has the joint best record in this contest ever. First Flow comes into this off a career best Grade 1 win at Ascot. Cilaos Emery is a seriously talented chaser who showed exactly that with a smooth comeback win at Naas last month - his fourth win from six starts over fences. I'd even give Rouge Vif, who hammered Nube Negra in the Kingmaker Novice Chase last season, a chance on good ground, which he looks more likely to get.

Of them all, I think **Put The Kettle On** is the biggest chance of pulling off the upset. She was a good winner of the Arkle 12 months ago, a race in which both she and the runner-up Fakir D'oudairies pulled 19 lengths clear of the aforementioned Rouge Vif, and there is good reason to suggest she idled there, because she kicked on again when Joseph O'Brien's runner got close to her and may well be value for more of a winning margin. She won the Shloer Chase here in November, elongating her perfect record over the course and distance, and though she was well held by Chacun Pour Soi at Leopardstown over Christmas, you'd have to be hopeful she can get closer to him now at her track, whereas that is a question the favourite has to answer.

Henry de Bromhead is a brilliant trainer of a two-mile chaser and has sent out two winners of this race in the last ten years - the only Irish trainer to do so - and he has lined up Put The Kettle On for this ever since her run at Christmas. She has a brilliant course record, goes really well fresh, has been trained for this race all season and considering she was initially a summer horse, the potential for a quick surface won't perturb her. She looks well worth playing at 9/1.

I have to admit, Wednesday at Cheltenham isn't a big punting day for me, usually because I don't play in the Cross Country and Champion Bumper, and probably more so this season because Monkfish dominates the picture for the Brown Advisory and I can't find a way in to break the deadlock between the three at the top of the market in the Ballymore.

More on those contests later but let's talk about the bets I think are worth doing.

**Ibleo** is an excellent play in the Grand Annual (4.15) at 11/1.

Since returning off a 800+ day gap at the end of January last year the Venetia Williams-trained eight-year-old has never finished outside the top two and progressed on every single one of his runs. He comes into this on a hat-trick having run out a seriously impressive winner of a Sandown handicap chase and then backed that up with a comprehensive win at Doncaster. The form of the latter has worked out really well with the second The Big Bite the moral winner of the Greatwood Gold Cup (tried to run off the course when in front) and the third Whoshotthesherrif winning by 15 lengths on his next start.

Ibleo also has valuable course form having finished second to Sky Pirate here earlier in the season. He meets that runner again on 11b better terms and although well held on the day, he looks a different proposition now.

Irish horses Embittered and Entoucas top an open-looking market. The former finished third in the County Hurdle last season and has been competing at Grade 1 level over fences this season. He handles the course and could well be nicely treated but the latter seems to have shown more of his hand in good handicap chases in Ireland and makes his course debut.

The Coral Cup (2.30) looks like wide open but again two Irish horses top the market. Of the pair, I'd much rather Grand Roi, given the form of his previous run was boosted by the classy and consistent Bachasson lately while in contrast, the form Koshari's Cork win looks shocking and he himself was well held on his most recent start at the Dublin Racing Festival.

With that said, I think there are some potentially very well treated horses on the home team, in particular Nicky Henderson's quartet, headed by impressive last-time-out winners Craigneiche and Monte Christ, who have been well supported since declarations. Of that pair, I like **Monte Christo** more, purely on price terms, as the pair have very similar unexposed profiles.

The Isaac Souede and Simon Munir-owned five-year-old wasn't expected to do much when lining up for the 2m 5f handicap hurdle that closes out the King George card at Kempton, but he still managed to bolt up, despite racing greenly throughout. That was just his fifth start for Henderson and represented a clear career best and significant improvement from his seasonal debut. He has been rested up again and kept back for this and if he can deal with this big field, he must have a big chance, considering his promise of improving past a mark of 145.

As mentioned, I just can't find a way into the Ballymore (1.20).

As much as the top three, all Grade 1 winners over this sort of intermediate distance last time out, are seriously promising horses, I find myself wanting to take them on but with nothing to do it with. Bob Olinger looked good at Naas but the form of his Lawlor's Of Naas Novice Hurdle win doesn't look amazing to me and the runner-up Blue Lord, talented though he is, pulled for the entirety of that contest.

Bravemansgame looked all class in the Challow Hurdle at Newbury but essentially beat two home and we haven't seen the runner-up Star Gate since. Gaillard Du Mesnil beat a deeper field at Leopardstown but that was on soft ground and over a furlong further so I'd worry a bit about him on the conditions. For all that it's an exciting contest, it's just a no-bet contest for me.

The imperious Monkfish faces only five runners in the Brown Advisory Novices' Chase (1.55) so there isn't even an each-way angle into the contest. I like The Big Breakaway but even if you knew the Colin Tizzard yard was in full working order, I couldn't get him any shorter than his price is now.

Sometimes you just have to sit back and enjoy.

## SELECTIONS

**MONTE CHRISTO 14/1 (2.30 CHELTENHAM), PUT THE KETTLE ON  
10/1 (3.05 CHELTENHAM), IBLEO 12/1, (4.15 CHELTENHAM)**

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