

PUNDITS' PICKS OF THE DAY



FRANK HICKEY



RUBY WALSH



MICK FITZGERALD



TIMEFORM



PADDY POWER

1.05pm

GRADE 1 NOVICE HURDLE 2M 6F

- FH** It's very significant that Mouse Morris runs **GENTLEMANS GAME** at this level on just his second start under rules. He won his first start by 21 lengths.
- RW** A very tough race to call. Paul Townend has opted for **GAILLARD DU MESNIL** and he's been getting his calls right. A value play could be Holymacapony who has already beaten Gaillard Du Mesnil.
- MF** I am hoping the cheekpieces they are putting on **FAKIERA** work the trick here. He stayed on really late at Navan and this could turn into a stamina test. If Willie trained Cape Gentlemen he would be a lot shorter in the betting. It's Fakiera each-way though for me.
- TF** **GAILLARD DU MESNIL** built on his promising debut when running out an emphatic winner of a maiden here in December. He's fancied to handle this longer trip and come out on top once more.
- PP** I think it's an open race and I'm willing to forgive **HOLYMACAPONY** his last run as too bad to be true. Before that he beat Gaillard Du Mesnil by 8 lengths.

2.10pm

GRADE 1 ARKLE NOVICES S'CHASE 2M 1F

- FH** **ENERGUMENE** put in a really fast time on chase debut at Gowran Park and then at Naas. A huge player now and for the Arkle Chase at Cheltenham.
- RW** **ENERGUMENE** has impressed me this season and can win again.
- MF** **ENERGUMENE** put up a hell of a display when winning comfy at Naas, the only worry for me with him is he jumps a little right and it could turn into a burn up. I like to see good horses win and he could well be a star. Darver Star for the each-way play.
- TF** Douvan and Un De Sceaux won this for Willie Mullins and **ENERGUMENE** could be of a similar calibre based on the way he took care of Captain Guinness at Naas last month.
- PP** Energumene should probably will win, but he'll also make it a strong pace which will really suit **FRANCO DE PORT** to come from the back and pick up the pieces. He's my pick.

3.15pm

GRADE 1 IRISH CHAMPION HURDLE 2M

- FH** **SALDIER** is talented but very lightly-raced, having only had seven starts over hurdles and will improve for his Christmas reappearance run.
- RW** **SHARJAH** was good here over Christmas and he can over-turn Honeysuckle.
- MF** I think **SHARJAH** could win here, they got the tactics all wrong last year but ridden cold suits him and I think he can get the better of the great mare, Honeysuckle.
- TF** The winning machine that is **HONEYSUCKLE** landed back-to-back successes in the Hatton's Grace on her reappearance and can now double up in this race and take her record to a perfect 10-10.
- PP** It's hard to get away **HONEYSUCKLE**, especially with the deep ground likely to inconvenience many of the opposition. Funnily enough I see Abacadabras as the danger rather than Sharjah who ran bad here last year and the over hyped Saint Roi.

1.35pm

GRADE 1 DUBLIN CHASE 2M 1F

- FH** **CHACUN POUR SOI** beat Min by nearly four lengths in this race last year and it is difficult to see why things should be different now. Tornado Flyer at an each-way price is worth a bet.
- RW** **CHACUN POUR SOI** has beaten Min at this trip before and I fancy him to do it again.
- MF** Chacun Pour Soi is so hard to oppose here but I like Frank's keenness for **TORNADO FLYER** at an each-way price and in Frank we trust!
- TF** **CHACUN POUR SOI** is confidently expected to cement his position at the top of the 2m chasing tree with victory here for the second year running.
- PP** Nothing much to say here, **CHACUN POUR SOI** should just win. I do think Min is way better than the rest though so keep an eye on the without market, he should be clear favourite in that.

2.45pm

MATHESON HANDICAP CHASE 2M 1F

- FH** The Greatwood Hurdle winner **THE SHUNTER** was previously a very easy winner over fences at Punchestown beating Enjoy D'allen who has won his last two starts. He has a big chance again reverting to fences here.
- RW** I like the look of Cheltenham Festival winner **ARAMAX** who won nicely at Fairyhouse in a beginners' chase. An opening handicap chase mark of 141 looks workable
- MF** **THE SHUNTER** won well at Cheltenham and only 4lbs higher will do for me over fences.
- TF** **THE SHUNTER** can make a winning start to life in handicap chases with his mark looking a shade lenient.
- PP** I really like **EPSON DU HOUX** and think he looks very progressive. He's gone up in the handicap after an impressive win at Naas but he's improving fast.

3.50pm

HANDICAP HURDLE 2M

- FH** **DROP THE ANCHOR** was badly hampered last time when third to Advance Virgo and can make light of his 2lb penalty here.
- RW** A wide-open contest where **ESKYLANE** runs off a rating of 133 compared to Gabynako (138) who he beat in a maiden hurdle. He could be well in at the weights and is my choice.
- MF** I'm going for a novice who could be better than his mark, **GABYNAKO** each-way for me.
- TF** **THE MOYGLASS FLYER** ran too free in a Leopardstown handicap in December, but still finished third. Having crept in right at the foot of the weights, he's an obvious contender.
- PP** A speculative pick but I'm going with **BLUE SARI**. I think JP McManus will probably win the race and how many of the others would have run Envoi Allen to less than a length in the Cheltenham bumper?

4.25pm

FUTURE STARS INH FLAT RACE 2M

- FH** **KILCRUIT** was an impressive winner at Navan where he didn't really come off the bridle and 3rd placed that day, Ballycairn, did come out and win a Leopardstown bumper over Christmas. Kilcruit should do it.
- RW** Willie Mullins has plenty of strength in depth in the finale. Patrick has opted for Kicruit but to me **RAMILLIES** was visually more impressive when winning.
- MF** In Patrick Mullins we trust! **KILCRUIT** for me.
- TF** **KILCRUIT** was hugely impressive when making a winning start for Willie Mullins at Navan a couple of months ago so, with further improvement expected, he's taken to come out on top in an ultra-competitive Grade 2.
- PP** **RAMILLIES** looked a machine when winning over Christmas, it's obviously a worry that Patrick Mullins has chosen Kilcruit instead of him but I'm sure he's made a mistake in the past and think he may have again! Sorry Patrick!

