

Cheltenham Festival 2021 countdown

Blackmore poised for greatness



Brian O'Connor

Honeysuckle and A Plus Tard among an enviable list of rides for groundbreaker

Asport on the ropes from the reputational battering it has suffered in recent weeks could get no greater boost than for Rachael Blackmore to flourish at next week's Cheltenham festival.

She has prospered before at jump racing's greatest fixture, the pioneering jockey winning three times in the last two years.

A Plus Tard landed a handicapper in 2019 and days later Blackmore became the first woman to ride a Grade One winner over hurdles at the festival when the outsider Minella Indo sprang a 50-1 shock in the Albert Bartlett.

Last year saw Honeysuckle get the better of a thrilling head to head with Benie Des Dieux in a Mares Hurdle. To many her jockey's daring rails move on the turn-in looked like the difference between victory and defeat.

The descending tag of 'female jockey' has long since been binned as Blackmore's spectacular career-path continues to underline how no allowances are given or expected

when competing in the saddle. The finishing post is oblivious to gender.

The woman herself prefers to swerve such considerations. The 31-year-old is uncomfortable being viewed through an overtly political prism, preferring to be regarded simply as a successful professional. That she has succeeded so spectacularly in doing so is likely to prove her greatest legacy.

But a sport beleaguered by a glut of negative press could do with a timely morale-booster right now, an opportunity to advertise the best of itself.

Blackmore and the unbeaten mare Honeysuckle are the poster combination of this festival, boasting a perfect unbeaten 10 out of 10 career record together, and are favourites to land Tuesday's Unibet Champion Hurdle.

Ultimate prize
If the Grand National remains jump racing's greatest shop-window, and the Cheltenham Gold Cup its ultimate prize, then the Champion Hurdle is the third leg of jump racing's unofficial triple crown.

For Blackmore, winning would be the greatest single victory of a career boasting over 300 winners. The significance of a woman riding the winner of such a championship event is incalculable, an image to endure.

Typically, the woman herself doesn't indulge in such considerations. As cautious out of the saddle as she is bold in it, there can't be an unhatched chicken she has ever contemplated counting.

Yet her confidence in the mare is total.

It's hardly surprising on the back of an Irish Champion Hurdle success last month that was a step up again on anything Hon-

eyssuckle had previously done.

There wasn't an iota of doubt in Blackmore as she sent the Henry De Bromhead-trained star to the front soon a long way out and Honeysuckle kept stretching clear.

It put to bed any doubts about her ability to win at the highest level over two miles and suggested a horse whose progress is far from finished.

"I thought that was an unbelievably good performance, the way she quickened up. And we know she stays. She ticks a lot of boxes," Blackmore says.

Sharper challenge
Significantly the prospect of two miles around Cheltenham's old course, a sharper challenge than the new track used on Thursday and Friday at the festival, doesn't concern her.

"It is [sharper] but on what she showed the last day I don't mind what track we're on to be honest," the rider adds.

Should Honeysuckle win it will send the odds tumbling on Blackmore being leading jockey of the week.

An enviable book of rides for Henry De Bromhead, including A Plus Tard in the Gold Cup, will be supplemented by 'spares' from Paul Townend's discards among the Willie Mullins battalions.

Friday's Gold Cup takes place on the stiffer New Course where A Plus Tard is a leading player although his unproven stamina will be put to the test.

Having proved a revelation when tried at three miles for the first time in the Savills Chase during Leopardstown, the Cheveley Park Stud-owned horse faces an extra two and a half furlongs up the famously gruelling Cheltenham hill.

Blackmore was fourth in last



Rachael Blackmore guides Honeysuckle to win the Hatton's Grace Hurdle at Fairyhouse. Photograph: Lorraine O'Sullivan

year's Gold Cup on the doubtful stayer Monalee. However she is hopeful her latest 'Blue Riband' contender has the class to do better.

"The Gold Cup is a different test again for him. He's venturing into the unknown. But you'd have to be very encouraged the way he finished off the race in Leopardstown.

"To be a Grade One two mile chase winner and a Grade One three mile winner, that's a very classy individual.

"But it's mainly the way he was finishing at Leopardstown; that has to be encouraging the Gold Cup trip won't be a problem to him. It's a hell of a hill but

he's come up in it front before and I personally don't think that will trouble him. He's very relaxed. I think he'll be fine," she said.

Accomplishment
The last jockey to complete the Champion Hurdle-Gold Cup double was AP McCoy in 1997. That Blackmore can entertain such an accomplishment next week - perhaps more realistically than any of her rivals - is testament to the groundbreaking impact she has made over the last five years.

Should she succeed in one of the championship events, never mind two, the lack of live public

acclaim at the course will be a stark reminder of the unique circumstances of this behind-closed-doors Cheltenham. "I definitely think you can't overestimate that atmosphere at Cheltenham when crowds are there. It's such a special place because of the people and the atmosphere.

"But there are certain horses it will definitely work in their favour not having crowds there. I don't think there will be a disadvantage to anyone but it might help some horses."

Racing as a whole could find itself particularly delighted that Blackmore is there.

Talking horses Cheltenham snippets

By Brian O'Connor

By the numbers

1 Only triple-Queen Mother Champion Chase winner: Badsworth Boy 1983, 1984 & 1985.

1 Willie Mullins aiming to fill the single major gap left on his big-race CV in the Champion Chase Chacun Pour Soi's 4/5 favourite to do it.

1/5 Willie Mullins to be leading trainer for a ninth time.

2 Ryanair Chase Gold Cup double - Imperial Commander in 2009 & 2010.

8 Wins in Champion Hurdle - Nicky Henderson, the most successful trainer in race history.

11 Number of entries left in the Queen Mother Champion Chase. They include two former winners - Pitoulogue (2018) and Altior (2020, 2019).

21 Years since Richard Johnson won Cheltenham Gold Cup on Looks Like Trouble. He will try to win it again on his 2018 winner, Native River.

Celebrity chat

Micheal Duignan (Offaly GAA chairman)

1 Will Al Boum Photo do Gold Cup hat-trick?

"I think so. They've taken the same approach this year with a little race in Tramore. So I can't see any reason why he isn't as good as before."

2 Who wins the Champion Hurdle?

"I'm a major Honeysuckle fan. Tactically she's very versatile and she does get the 7lbs mares allowance. Goshen might be her danger."

3 Best Cheltenham memory?

"My first time going to the festival was when Istabraq (left) completed his Champion Hurdle hat-trick in 2000. It was an amazing experience. I remember meeting JP McManus and he signed a race-card for us. So did Aidan O'Brien and Charlie Swan. It was a wonderful first trip and Istabraq was the perfect result."

Top festival trainers

- 72 - Willie Mullins
- 68 - Nicky Henderson
- 46 - Paul Nicholls
- 32 - Gordon Elliott
- 26 - Jonjo O'Neill
- 20 - Philip Hobbs
- 18 - Eward O'Grady
- 17 - Nigel Twiston-Davies

Quote un-quote

"We've definitely got a fair idea of what we want to do and how we'd like the race to be run. He's got the right profile and I still think there's more improvement to come. I can see him winning the Stayers Hurdle."

News

All systems go for Foster horses at Cheltenham

Brian O'Connor

BHA satisfied with "clarity" over Elliott's role at Cullentra House

Regulatory agreement has been reached that ensures the participation of horses trained by Denise Foster at next week's Cheltenham Festival.

The British Horseracing Authority (BHA) has said it has been given "clarity" by the Irish Horseracing Regulatory Board (IHRB) over Gordon Elliott's role at his Cullentra House yard.

Last week Elliott had his licence withdrawn for a year by the IHRB - with half of it suspended - having damaged the reputation of racing due to a hugely controversial image of him sitting on a dead horse.

Prior to that the BHA had already banned Elliott from saddling runners at Cheltenham, and Foster has stepped in to assume the licence at Cullentra where Elliott is still allowed to live and work.

That provoked some speculation on the extent of his day-to-day role at the yard over the next six months.

The BHA's chief executive, Julie Harrington, then appeared to cast an element of doubt on the Cullentra team's involvement at the festival when she commented on waiting to see what "conditions" the IHRB was applying to Foster.

With the IHRB insistent there are no such extra conditions on her licence, the potential for a schism between the cross-channel bodies ap-

peared to briefly flicker. However, yesterday a BHA spokesman said the "clarity" they had been seeking has been provided by comments from the IHRB's chief executive, Denis Egan, and that a line has been drawn under the matter.

Egan had commented to the Racing Post in relation to Elliott assisting Foster: "I think the level of assistance would be the same as he'd assist Henry De Bromhead or Willie Mullins (who received horses taken away from Cullentra.)"

"If they have any question about the horses I'm sure he'd be available to answer them."

"But in relation to the day-to-day training, Denise is responsible for everything that goes on up there and she's given a commitment to that effect."

Controversy
Reference to the impact of the controversy on Elliott's health was heard at last week's referrals hearing.

Yesterday a study examining the mental health of racehorse trainers in Ireland revealed almost one in two met the threshold of a common mental disorder.

The study came from 124 individuals, or almost 30 per cent of trainers in the country. The IHRB-funded study carried out by Lewis King, a PhD student at Waterford Institute of Technology, suggests CMD symptoms may be greater among trainers than other rural occupations such as farmers.

Prevalence rates of depression (41 per cent), adverse alcohol use (38 per cent), distress (26 per cent) and anxiety (18 per cent) were observed.

Chacun Pour Soi and Altior on course

Red-hot favourite Chacun Pour Soi and dual winner Altior are among 11 confirmations for the Queen Mother Champion Chase.

Chacun Pour Soi was well-fancied to provide Willie Mullins with an elusive first victory in the feature event on day two of the Cheltenham Festival last season, only to be withdrawn on the morning of the race after suffering a setback. Having won each of his

three starts since the nine-year-old is all the rage to set the record straight 12 months on.

The Nicky Henderson-trained Altior, winner of the Champion Chase in 2018 and 2019, also missed out last season due to injury.

However, at 11, he will return with something to prove after a lethargic display on his only previous start this season in the Desert Orchid Chase at Kempton.

CLASSIFIED EXTRA

PUBLIC NOTICES



Iascach Intire Éireann
Inland Fisheries Ireland

Ceadúnais Iascaireachta Bradán Tráchtála 2021 (Líon Tarrainthe & Sciob-Líon)

De réir an Ordú chun Iascaireacht Bradán a Rialú, 2021, fáilteoidh Iascach Intire Éireann roimh iarratais ar an gceadúnas thuasluaite.

Tá foirmeacha iarratais le fáil ó d'Orifig Iascach Intire Éireann áitiúil atá listaithe thíos.

- IFI Baile Átha Cliath T: 01-8842600
- IFI Cluain Meala T: 052-6180055
- IFI Maigh Chromtha T: 026-41221
- IFI Luimneach T: 061-300238
- IFI Gaillimh T: 091-563118
- IFI Béal an Átha T: 096-22788
- IFI Béal Átha Seanaidh T: 071-9851435

Láithreán Gréasáin: www.fisheriesireland.ie

Dé hAoine 9ú Aibreán 2021 an dáta deiridh reachtúil a nglacfar le hiarratais chomhlánaithe chuig an oifig IFI iomchuí. Ní féidir glacadh le haon iarratas a gheofar i ndiaidh an dáta sin.

Commercial Salmon Fishing Licences 2021 (Draft Net & Snap Net)

In accordance with the Control of Fishing for Salmon Order 2021, Inland Fisheries Ireland invites applications for the above.

Application forms may be obtained from your local Inland Fisheries Ireland Office listed below.

- IFI Dublin T: 01-8842600
- IFI Clonmel T: 052-6180055
- IFI Macroom T: 026-41221
- IFI Limerick T: 061-300238
- IFI Galway T: 091-563118
- IFI Ballina T: 096-22788
- IFI Ballyshannon T: 071-9851435

Web: www.fisheriesireland.ie

The statutory closing date for receipt of completed applications to the relevant IFI office is Friday 9th April 2021. Applications received after this date cannot be accepted.

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PLANNING APPLICATIONS

**PLANNING & DEVELOPMENT ACT, 2000, AS AMENDED
NOTICE OF DIRECT PLANNING APPLICATION TO AN BORD PLEANÁLA**

Dublin City Council intends to seek the approval of An Bord Pleanála, in accordance with Section 226 of the Planning and Development Act 2000, as amended, to increase the capacity of the Dublin Waste to Energy Facility ("the Facility", An Bord Pleanála ref: PL29S/EF2022) from 600,000 tonnes per annum to 690,000 tonnes per annum.

The Facility is located at a site on Poolbeg Peninsula, Dublin 4, and is bounded to the north by Pigeon House Road, to the west by Shellybanks Road, and to the east by Ringsend Wastewater Treatment Plant.

An Environmental Impact Assessment Report (EIAR) has been prepared in respect of the proposed development. The Facility operates pursuant to an existing Industrial Emissions (IE) Licence (Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) Ref. No. W0232-01). This application relates to a proposed development which requires a review of the existing IE Licence which has been applied for separately to the EPA (EPA Ref. No. W0232-01). The Facility is not a Seveso site to which the Chemicals Act (Control of Major Accident Hazards Involving Dangerous Substances) Regulations SI 208 of 2015 applies.

This application for approval and EIAR will be available for inspection free of charge, or may be purchased on payment of a specified fee (which fee shall not exceed the reasonable cost of making such a copy) during the public opening hours excluding Bank Holidays, at the following locations:

- The Offices of An Bord Pleanála, 64 Marlborough Street, Dublin 1, D01 V902
- Dublin City Council, Civic Offices, Wood Quay, Dublin 8, D08 F9F3

The application plans and particulars and the EIAR may also be viewed at or downloaded from the following website: www.dublinwastetoenergy.ie/eiar

Submissions or observations may be made in writing only to An Bord Pleanála ("the Board"), 64 Marlborough Street, Dublin 1 in respect of:

- i. The likely effects on the environment of the proposed development; and
- ii. The implications of the proposed development for proper planning and sustainable development of the area concerned, if carried out.

Any submissions / observations must be accompanied by a fee of €50 (except for certain prescribed bodies) and must be received not later than 5:30pm on 14/05/2021 and must include the following information:

1. The name of the person making the submission or observation, the name of the person acting on his or her behalf, if any, and the address to which any correspondence relating to the application should be sent;
2. The subject matter of the submission or observation; and
3. The reasons, considerations and arguments on which the submission or observation is based in full.

Such submissions and observations will be considered by the Board in making a decision on the application. Any submissions or observations which do not comply with the above requirements cannot be considered by the Board.

The Board may at its absolute discretion hold an Oral Hearing on the application. (For further details see "A Guide to Public Participation in Strategic Infrastructure Development" on the Board's website www.pleanala.ie).

The Board may in respect of an application for approval of the proposed development decide to:

- a) (i) approve the proposed development, or (ii) make such modifications to the Proposed Development as it specifies in the approval and approve the Proposed Development as so modified, or (iii) approve, in part only, the Proposed Development with or without specified modifications of it of the foregoing kind, and any of the above approvals may be subject to or without conditions, or
- b) Refuse to approve the proposed development.

Any enquiries relating to the application process should be directed to the Strategic Infrastructure Section of the Board (Telephone 01-8588100).

Any person may question the validity of any such decision of the Board by way of an application for judicial review, under Order 84 of the Rules of the Superior Courts (S.I. No. 15 of 1986, as amended by S.I. No. 691 of 2011), in accordance with Section 50 of the Planning and Development Act, 2000 as amended. Practical information on the review mechanism can be accessed under the heading "Information on cases/weekly lists - Judicial Review of Planning Decisions" on the Board's website, www.pleanala.ie, or on the Citizens Information Service website www.citizensinformation.ie