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Win Bet - Beverley 16:20 - Shamrokh @ 13/2

A Warrior for the Eclipse! - By The Champagne Kid

Today I will be at Sandown to see the 121st running of The Eclipse. I won't give the race's full title with the sponsor's name, due to the sponsor telling me some years ago they did not wish to do business with me any more (I still have copies of the somewhat terse correspondence with them) and I see no reason to advertise their name here.

The race was, of course, named after the great racehorse Eclipse, foaled during, and named after, the solar eclipse of 1st April 1764. In all he 'raced' 18 times, although 8 of these were walkovers, and in the contested races the fields were generally very small. The most competitors he faced in a race was 4, and he was eventually retired to stud in 1771, basically due to a lack of competition willing to take him on. He was a great success at stud, siring around 350 winners, and he can be found in the bloodlines of virtually every thoroughbred running today.

The first running of the race bearing his name was in 1886 with what was at that time the biggest prize fund in British racing, £10,000, and was won by a horse named Bendigo. Over the years many, many great horses have won The Eclipse, and I love when this time of year comes around and Racing UK shows the final 2 furlongs of most of the last 20 years' renewals back-to-back during breaks in the live racing.

Some of my own personal favourites are Ezzoud in 1994 (whom I didn't back in The Eclipse but did the two times he won the Juddmonte International at York); Halling who was a dual winner in 1995 and 1996 (and also a dual winner of the Juddmonte International those same two years); the 'iron horse' Giant's Causeway, who was a real gutsy fighter whenever he was challenged close to home, in 2000; Falbrav in 2003; Notnowcato in 2007, who was given a brilliant ride by Ryan Moore down the stand-side rail when all others raced far-side and the TV cameras missed Notnowcato almost right up to the winning line.

Then there was the great Sea The Stars in 2009; Derby winner Golden Horn in 2015, who went on to win the Prix de L'Arc de Triomphe later in the year, and through to last year's winner the Sir Michael Stoute trained Ulysses.

Today's renewal does not in my view stand out as having the look of a particularly strong one. The Eclipse is the first Group 1 race of the year in which the 3yo generation meets its elders, and in this year's race, there does not appear to me to be a top-class older horse to take on the youngsters. At the time of writing, there are only three older horses; Forest Ranger, Cliffs Of Moher and Hawkbill. All of these are currently priced at 9/1 or higher. Hawkbill has the prestige of being a previous winner of the race in 2016 as a 3yo; Forest Ranger will doubtless race prominently and might just hang on for a place, whilst Cliffs Of Moher seems to be out running in Group races every second week and cannot to my mind be seen as a probable winner.

That leaves the three year olds. Now that Masar, the Derby winner, is out of the race, that leaves the filly Happily, the 100/1 outsider Raymond Tusk, both unlikely winners in my view, and the two likelier candidates, Roaring Lion, the Dante winner who was third to Masar in the Derby, and Saxon Warrior, the 2000 Guineas winner who was fourth to Masar in that race, and who ran third just seven days ago in a 'family affair' Irish Derby, a race dominated by the O'Brien 'mafia', with son Joseph training the winner and father Aiden training the 2nd, 3rd, 4th and 5th home.

To look at direct form between the two major contenders, Masar had beaten Roaring Lion 3 times, beaten Saxon Warrior once (the Derby) and lost once to Saxon Warrior (the 2000 Guineas. Roaring Lion has, as already stated, lost 3 times to Masar, and also twice to Saxon Warrior, but beat Saxon Warrior when one spot ahead of him in the Derby. From all this, you can, if you are so inclined, work out Saxon Warrior's direct form with the others. It's like a game of Cluedo, or, as the infinitely amusing Irish columnist and novelist, Flann O'Brien (no relation!), might have said – "It's a tough pancake!"

Whilst the lack of an apparent strong challenge from the older generation detracts from the race for me to a certain degree, the fascinating recent history of the main protagonists against each other makes up for that.

So, who will win? For me, the Saxon Warrior entry is slightly strange. It would not be often that you would see an Aiden O'Brien Group 1 horse racing in a second Group 1 race just 7 days after a previous one. That said, Aiden O'Brien clearly is a trainer who knows what he is doing. Far be it from me to suggest that shenanigans were afoot in that Irish Derby won by Aiden's son Joseph, but when looking for the answer to an almost impossible question such as this race throws up, and I get that slight 'something strange happening here' feeling, I pay more attention to it than hours of who-beat-who-when-and-by-how-far-and-at-what-distance circular argument studying.

So, based on a hunch (that being one way to separate the main contenders) if I have to choose a winner it's Saxon Warrior for me. He should be available at about 9/4, and whilst it's not a price to get too excited about, it makes for a worthwhile 'interest' bet for those who want to have a wager in the race.

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Rick's Sports Betting: The Surface Is Key In Racing And Tennis - By Rick Elliott

In the midst of the World Cup there are huge events in horse racing and tennis. The Coral Eclipse at Sandown Park brings together the horses that finished first, second and fourth in the Derby while it's the middle Saturday of Wimbledon which is the most famous and prestigious tennis tournament in the

world. The ground conditions are not a major factor in football but racing and tennis are two sports in which the surface on which the action is taking place is critical to the outcome.

In racing very few horses show the same level of form on different surfaces. Some horses are not ground-specific but they have an action that is more suited to one type of going. There are form trends which indicate that most horses have a preferred surface. In the lead up to major races there are reports from the Clerk of the Course about the expected going. Weather forecasts can sometimes be wrong (as Michael Fish is very much aware) so weather centres are under pressure to get it right.

When a trainer is discussing if a horse will run in a race the projected going is often a factor. Some horses like a cut in the ground while others run better when the ground edges towards firm. Rainfall and sunshine determine the state of the ground but the drainage system at a track is also important. Some courses can deal with plenty of rain and the going does not change because the water is drained out of the turf. A trainer takes into account rainfall forecasts and how well a track drains in placing horses.

It's a case of horses for courses in the context of underfoot conditions and the same could be said of tennis players. Mentality and physical attributes determine a player's best surface. The four majors are played outdoors on hardcourts (Australian and US Open), clay (French Open) and grass (Wimbledon). Rafael Nadal has achieved the career Grand Slam but he has won 11 French Opens but Wimbledon just twice. In 2018 he had a great chance of winning the Wimbledon Championships.

Roger Federer is the best grass court player ever but he is good enough to win Grand Slams on other surfaces. The Swiss player has won eight Wimbledon titles and 20 majors in total but that includes just one French Open in 2009. The very best players excel on one surface but can win championships at the highest level on other surfaces and only the best win all four majors. Novak Djokovic took years to win the French Open but he won the title in 2016 to complete the career Grand Slam.

Nadal is one of the most obvious examples of a player performing better on a particular surface. Rallies on clay are relatively long because it is a slow surface which means players can stay in rallies. Grass is a much faster surface and the ball stays low so there is less recovery time. Nadal was the Wimbledon champion in 2008 and 2010 despite the small window after the French Open. Wimbledon is now a week later than in the past which means Nadal has an extra seven days to adjust from clay to grass. The world number one can be the Wimbledon champion again.

Today's Sports Betting Preview - By Rick Elliott

Dreams Can Get Closer To Reality For England Today

If England beat Sweden today, Russia or Croatia on Wednesday and then France or Belgium next Sunday they win the World Cup. There are now six teams left in the tournament and only France and England are former winners. The last four world champions will not be winning this World Cup. England may never get a better chance to pick up the most famous trophy in sport even though in 1966 it was a different design. The 2018 World Cup will be won by a team from Europe after Brazil's demise against Belgium and football really could be coming home as ENGLAND are now 7/2 with William Hill to win the World Cup.

The Colombia tie was a massive test that England passed and now they play Sweden in the quarter-finals. The Scandinavian outfit have a strong team ethic but lack a striker and much creativity in midfield. Both teams have scored in just two of Sweden's last 13 matches and they often get by with no more than one third of possession. When push came to shove they were brilliant in the crucial group match against Mexico and were seconds from holding Germany. However, England have got set pieces off to a fine art and Harry Kane is scoring penalties for fun. ENGLAND must be backed at 10/11 with Ladbrokes to beat Sweden today. A win sets up a semi-final match against Russia or CROATIA, 8/15 with Coral to qualify.

Even though the England match is being shown on BBC the racing on ITV has been brought forward as a contingency plan. Nobody knew if England would be playing today and which channel would broadcast the match so the live racing coverage will be done and dusted before 3pm. The feature is the Eclipse Stakes over 10 furlongs at Sandown. ROARING LION can confirm Derby form with Saxon Warrior and win this Group 1 contest and that outcome is 13/8 with Betfair.

Indian Summer – England To Be Tested by Heavyweight Clash with India - By Dave Owens

With the temperatures in England currently more like Madras than Manchester, the upcoming 50 over series between England and India could well feel more like a home series for the tourists – especially with the fantastic and fanatical support India receive at limited overs game in England, where Indians come out in their droves to support their heroes on English soil when the opportunity arrives.

The three matches 50 over series also sees the arrival of an excellent test for England's No 1 ranked side. India are a power house limited over line up with a star-studded batting line up and high-class spinners to complement their bowling line up. The dual between the teams should be fascinating with England currently looking at taking the one-day game (particularly batting) to a new level which was

seen with their total demolition of Australia 5-0 and in the process scoring the highest international 50 over score of all time with an incredible 481 in the third ODI. The volume of international cricket can sometimes see a one-day series lack great context or the power to capture the public's imagination, this series has no such problem with two sides desperate to assert their authority over the other and loud passionate crowds supporting players eager to show their skills at the highest level.

The series could well hinge on the intriguing matchup of India's two excellent wrist spinners in Kuldeep Yadav and Yuzvendra Chahal. The pair have been an absolute revelation in the last year and it seems incredible how easily they have ousted arguably two of the best spinners in the world in Ashwin and Jadeja from the Indian line up to stake their claim in the side. If England's dominant batsman have had a problem in recent times its against the highest quality spinners and it will an excellent test of how far they've come when they go head to head against the Indian pair.

The 50 over games are preceded by a 20/20 series and should give some excellent insight into how the sides and match ups are fairing going into the longer format. From a betting perspective it offers a good opportunity to look at how the form and confidence of England's batters go against the spin duo and where the main threats are in both batting and bowling markets. Its recently been a case of England's explosive top 3 batting so well that they have totally dominated the innings and not offered any opportunity to the rest of the line-up. The step up in class offered from the Indian attack could see it take a different tack, with England's better players of spin being more attractive propositions. Aside from the result of the 20/20s – the sub plots of both sides offer plenty of added interest.

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Trackside In Ireland - By Declan O'Donoghue

On the day after the Irish Derby there was of course a touch of After The Lord Mayors Ball at The Curragh on Sunday.

Ireland continues to bask in the freakish sub tropical sweltering conditions, and some of the form lines from Headquarters last weekend should carry a Government Heath Warning as even some horses who normally thrive on fast ground simply downed tools this time.

The bookies had a real Beano in the opener on Sunday when Klute won snugly at 20/1 for Jessica Harrington and Colm O'Donoghue.

"We've always liked him, he liked being in front and Colm said he just let him gallop along. He's in the National Stakes but we'll see."

"He stayed the seven furlongs well, and we could drop him back to six if we need to."

He does hold an entry for the Phoenix Stakes over six furlongs, but, promising and all that he is, a leap in class and a drop in distance would be a big ask. Red Avenger 11/1 and Kailee 14/1 - who met all sorts of traffic problems - fought out a tight finish in the seven furlongs handicap. Both had attracted each way support.

Red Avenger held on by a short head to give Dublin trainer Damien English his first Curragh winner. A prolonged Stewards Enquiry followed - though the winner didn't seem to have done much wrong - but in any event the placings remained unaltered.

Aidan O'Brien and Ryan Moore took the Grangecon Stakes with 6/4 jolly So Perfect who left it late enough when quickening to beat Skitter Scatter by half a length.

The Cherry Hinton was mentioned as a likely next target for a filly who Moore thinks still has plenty of improvement in her.

The old firm of O'Brien and Moore struck again in the next, another Group 3, with Yucatan, who seemed to love the really fast ground.

Cheekpieces didn't work at Royal Ascot but blinkers did the job here for the 2/1 market leader, and "the blinds" will be persevered with and he'll be kept at this kind of level.

A strong UK challenge for the Irish Derby the day before had melted like a runny ice cream cone but the visitors struck back in style on Sunday when Urban Fox was a surprise but thoroughly deserving winner of the Pretty Polly Stakes.

Clipped from 12/1 to "nines" Danny Tudhope kicked her on two furlongs out and she fairly slammed Oaks winner and 4/6 odds on jolly Forever Together.

"We were hoping to be placed" said Maureen Haggas, wife of trainer William, afterwards "and we weren't sure about getting the trip but she stayed it very well, we're delighted with that."

"This is nice old race, and to beat the Oaks winner in a Group One at The Curragh is a bit special."

Gamble of the race was the seemingly Ballydoyle third choice Athena who was 33's in the morning and was hammered in to 7/1.

In last place for most of the way under Donnacha O'Brien she picked up a bit on the stands side coming home but had to settle for a staying on third. In truth nothing landed a blow on the winner Urban Fox who must be noted if she goes for the Nassau Stakes. The defeat of Forever Together meanwhile really throws the Irish Oaks in a few weeks time wide open.

Meanwhile Jessica Harrington announced that Alpha Centaurai will stay competing against fillies only this season - the Falmouth was mentioned as a likely next target - and the good news is this sparkling Royal Ascot winner will almost certainly stay in training next season.

"That's the plan at the moment anyway" Jessica said "so she can take on the colts and geldings next year if need be, no need to take them on this season" she added.

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