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






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TODAY'S FREE SPORTS BETTING TIPS...

[Shrewd Tipster](#)

Chester 15:00 - Pivoine @ 7/1 Each Way Bet

[Early Odds](#)

Market Rasen 15:15 - Theatrebar @ 13/2 Win Bet

[Declan O'Donoghue - Irish Racing](#)

Curragh 16:15 - Khalaab @ 9/2 Win Bet

The Joys Of Competitive Handicaps - By Ian Hudson

Bookmakers love big field handicaps on the Flat and over jumps and there are two such races on Saturday at Ascot and Haydock Park. The Victoria Cup and Swinton Handicap Hurdle attract a different type of horse but both races have several potential winners and punters are on the back foot. However, both contests will have a field of more than 16 entries which means each way bets will be settled at one quarter the odds for the first four places and some bookies may pay out on the first five.

The thinking behind handicaps is the same in both codes. Horses are allocated a weight based on their past collateral form. The weight allocation means the slow horses race off a level playing field with the fast ones. The weight is designed to be a leveller so each runner has the same chance. In conditions or stakes races weight is set based on age and gender but in a handicap it's based on form. The betting is usually wide open and bookmakers will take bets on a variety of horses.

One slight flaw with the handicaps model is that some unexposed horses may not get an accurate assessment. The handicapper needs several races to rate a horse and it is a cat and mouse game between that person and the trainer of a horse. In the olden days Martin Pipe was a past master at hiding the ability of a horse and then striking when the money was down. Even in the modern era of all races being broadcast a good plot often takes place in lucrative handicaps like the Victoria Cup and Swinton Hurdle.

It is no coincidence that bookmakers have sponsored some of the major televised handicaps in the past. There has become a bit of snobbery and relations with bookies and the racing authorities has soured so fewer big races have a bookmakers name in the title. However, bet365 and Ladbrokes sponsor the two big handicap chases that used to be called the Whitbread and Hennessy. Saturday's lucrative handicaps on the level and over jumps provide a massive test for the punters and a bookie bonanza.

The Victoria Cup at Ascot is a Class 2 race over seven furlongs and the sponsors are totescoop6. The race is named after the bet that involves picking the winner of six designated races with the potential for a jackpot win for a small stake. The race is live on ITV4 and will form part of the Scoop 6. On ratings Firmament and Escobar are the best handicapped horses in the race for which bookmakers go 7/1 the field. However, its fun to identify a blot on the handicap. Nicholas T is lurking down the weights but a claimer takes off three pounds and the horse can make the frame at a big price.

The Swinton Handicap Hurdle is just less than two miles in distance and is one of the richest races of this nature of the season. Verdana Blue and Sizing Granite have the joint best Racing Post Ratings so in theory have something in hand over the rest of the field. However, maximum field handicaps are not an exact science and other

horses may have a better chance based on the weights. Silver Streak is a shorter price than the two top rated horses but could offer some value in a wide open race.

The two races are 50 minutes apart and an each way double will be popular. There are any number of possibilities with regards the outcome but combining Nicholas T and Silver Streak could bring a nice return for a small stake.

Today's Sports Betting Preview - By Rick Elliott

Derby Can Beat Fulham Tonight

Derby finished sixth in the Championship regular season, three places and 13 points behind Fulham. However, it is not unique for the team that earned the final qualifying place earns promotion to the Promised Land of the Premier League. However, Middlesbrough could be best equipped to win that lucrative final place in the top tier of English football and they finished one place above Derby in the final table. Fulham went close to earning a place on league position but were pipped by Cardiff and that emotional baggage may be too much to overcome. Aston Villa are not playing consistently so MIDDLESBROUGH could be the team to back to win the Championship Playoffs at 3/1 with [William Hill](#).

Derby have had a topsy turvy season and at various stages have looked like contenders for finishing in the top two and out of the running for the Playoffs. The Rams ultimately finished two points above Preston to sneak into the post-season deciders. Derby scored in their last nine home league fixtures and one goal could be enough to establish a first-leg lead over Fulham tonight. There has been a tactical change and results improved when it mattered most while Fulham just missed out on automatic promotion. The momentum is with DERBY so they should be backed at 19/10 with [Ladbrokes](#) to beat Fulham tonight.

It's the third day of the May Meeting at Chester and the feature race is the Chester Cup. The distance is two miles and two furlongs and that's over two laps of the shortest Flat circuit in Britain. Even over this extended trip the draw is important because at Chester horses are constantly on the turn and being on the inside of the track is an advantage. In an open handicap six horses have the same Racing Post Rating so the race is a minefield for punters and could turn into a bookies benefit. SILVER CONCORDE won the champion bumper at Cheltenham in 2014 and has a manageable weight at this level. The horse could make the frame from a middle draw at 16/1 with [Betfair](#).