

NTF Weekend Notes – 2018 Cheltenham Festival Days 1 & 2

Day 1 - Tuesday

1.30 Supreme Novices' Hurdle – Grade 1 Novices' Hurdle – 2m 0.5f – Heavy – 19 ran

I had a dig about to see how runners of this race fared when appearing again before seasons end (last 5 seasons). If you look at those that ran next time out under the following... hurdle race | DSLR 21-60 | 3-5 starts in current season | last race was the Supreme Novice...you get the following...13/29 | 45% S/R | +£27.34 BFLSP – W&P 18/29 | 62% S/R – 44% above expectation. That covers things like Aintree, Fairyhouse, Punchestown (and of course anywhere else they may appear).

1st – SUMMERVILLE BOY

Must have one hell of an engine to get back up after two pretty serious mistakes at the final 2 flights. It will be interesting to see which route they take with him from now on as he's not one I have strong feeling about just yet.

2nd - KALASHNIKOV

Unlucky not to land the spoils here but ultimately he's another to fall down to that 'ran in a Handicap LTO and beaten in the Supreme' stat (now 0/49). Nevertheless it was a huge run from the 5yo and he continues to rate a very exciting prospect for novice chasing next term, his size, shape and pedigree very much point to him being even better over the larger obstacles. To level that out a touch, however, I think it's fair to say that the winner of the Betfair Hurdle doesn't usually turn into a top class chaser of the future. Not many have tried in all fairness but those that have haven't really gone on to great things over fences. Could be something or nothing, but worth keeping it in mind.

5th – CLAIMANTAKINFORGAN

Never really looked a threat in this but he finished well enough and a step up in trip may be what he's after.

7th – LOSTINTRANSLATION

This one looks like he'll really come into his own when he's sent chasing next term (2018/19). He doesn't look like he's quite up to Grade 1 level over hurdles but this was a solid enough effort (a career best) and he's worth sticking in the notebook for when he goes over chasing.

10th – SIMPLY THE BETTS

It's a surprise he's not opened his hurdling account yet but that could end up being a blessing in disguise as he's going to be entering next season on a very workable handicap mark (currently rated 133). He's a big lad so they could go chasing with him but providing they keep his handicap mark

intact until next season I'd like to see him gunned at some valuable handicap hurdles, he's plenty better than he's shown so far.

2.10 Arkle Chase – Grade 1 Novices' Chase – 2m – Heavy – 5 ran

Not as easy to make a profit on Arkle runners next time out.

1st – FOOTPAD (*Star Performer)

Ground certainly came for this one and he's now 7/10 on Yielding or softer compared to 0/4 on quicker ground. I could well see this one staying 2m4f-2m5f but I'm not convinced 3m+ would be within range for him. Obviously, it's a bit early to be pigeon-holing him on distance parameters but I wasn't fully convinced by his stamina reserves when running over 3m at Punchestown last season (an 18L 3rd).

2nd – BRAIN POWER

Never convinced he enjoys undulating tracks and he's now 0/5 on Undulating/very undulating tracks compared to 6/10 on flat or slightly undulating tracks. Also a good chance this ground was against him as he's 0/3 on Soft or Heavy, with all his wins coming on quicker ground. He's a little bit hard to figure out in all truth and I'm not yet convinced he's a top of the tree performer in the making as he is 0/7 at G1 & G2 level and his prime conditions may just be... Flat/Slightly undulating tracks | Good-Good to Soft | G3 level & below...which gives a form line of 1111211 (6/7, 1p – All 6 career wins). He could be worth a chance in a G1 or G2 if he gets the flat track/decent ground he wants but I'd have my reservations.

2.50 Ultima Handicap Chase – Grade 3 Handicap Chase – 3m1f – Heavy – 18 ran

Overall not a race that is of a great source of next time out winners (when racing again in current season) with 5 years stats of 8/89 | 9% S/R | -£22.92 BFLSP – W&P 21/89 | 24% S/R – 12% below expectation. You can, however, find those 8 winners with a couple of filters...Last race was Ultima Handicap | 2m4f-3m5.5f C1 or C2 Chase | Aged 6yo-9yo | 4-7 starts in season | 2-6 previous Handicap Chase starts...which gives...8/18 | 44% S/R | +£48.08 BFLSP – W&P 11/18 | 61% S/R – 209% above expectation.

1st – COO STAR SIVOLA

Seems to be a much stronger proposition in the Jan-Mar period (4/9) compared to other months (0/5) and he now has Festival form of 341 and the Williams team seem to be able to get him to peak for this week.

3rd – VINTAGE CLOUDS

Another solid run from the 8yo but he hit his usual flat spot at a bad time and that almost certainly cost him the win (or at least his chance of fighting out for the victory). He stayed on in his usual

dogged fashion and he again makes me think he'd be worth a punt at the Grand National at some point in the future. He's now placed all 7 times he's raced on Heavy ground.

5th – SINGLEFARMPAYMENT

I think he's just struggling from his current mark (ran here off OR 145) as he was going well enough until push came to shove and then he just couldn't find anything more. He won't need a massive drop in the weights but I'm thinking OR 142 & below looks his ceiling. I'd have prime conditions as...LH tracks | 3m+ | G3 & below | DSLR 45 or less | carrying 11-2 or less...which gives a form line of 5F2111 (3/6, 1p – all 3 career wins). Obviously, a handicap mark of or around OR 142 would also be preferable.

8th – CASSE TETE

Possibly not a lover of heavy ground as he is now 0/4, 0p on Heavy, with both wins coming on Soft & Good to Soft. Not sure he's an out and out stayer either (yet) as he's 0/3 over 2m5f+, with both wins coming at 2m4f. He's young and lightly raced though so he should have more to offer.

PU – GOLD PRESENT

Almost certainly undone by the Heavy ground here and he's better than this. He's now PP122 on Soft/Heavy, with the 1 coming in a maiden hurdle at Stratford where he simply outclassed the opposition (making the ground irrelevant).

3.30 Champion Hurdle – Grade 1 Hurdle – 2m 0.5f – Heavy – 11 ran

The last 5 Champion Hurdlers all reappeared again that season and all 5 won – 2 at Aintree & 3 at Punchestown. All 5 started, unsurprisingly, at odds-on. If we are looking for an angle to follow the Champion Hurdle runners on their next start, then this could be it... Running at Aintree Fest or Punch Fest (Hurdle) | Finished top 8 in Champion Hurdle LTO | Aged 6yo-9yo...which gives...10/20 | 50% S/R | +£20.98 BFLSP – W&P 12/20 | 60% S/R – 55% above expectation

3rd – MICK JAZZ

The one thing this lad does is travel smoothly and he turned for home looking a potential danger. He couldn't quite match the front two on the climb up the hill but this was a serious effort and he deserves plenty credit. He's probably hard to place as he's too high for handicaps but he's not quite good enough to win these G1's (he won one at Xmas but that race obviously fell apart for one reason or the other) but he has now placed in the Irish Champion Hurdle & this on his last 2 starts and he's one that's well worth keeping in mind if you fancy one at decent odds to out-run his price and sneak into the places.

5th – ELGIN

The heavy ground maybe just blunted him enough here but it was still a decent effort from the 6yo. I suspect he's another one that's stuck between Handicaps and graded level but King did mention a

possible flat campaign over the summer and that could be an interesting move as he is generally a smooth traveller.

4.50 NH Cup Novices' Chase – Grade 2 Chase – 4m – Soft – 16 ran

An interesting one for those that ran again next time out before seasons end...last run in NH Cup (4 miler) | DSLR 26-60 | Hcp Chase | 0 previous Hcp Chase wins | 0-2 Hcp Chase starts | 6 or less starts in season...which gives...8/17 | 47% S/R | +£69.81 BFLSP – 269% above expectation.

2nd – MS PARFOIS

Very unlucky not to land this and it's unfortunate that her one real mistake 2 out, after jumping soundly throughout, probably just cost her in the end. I have a feeling she may continually find 1 or 2 too good at G1/G2 level (0/3 at G2 level compared to 6/10 at Listed level & below) but she'll certainly be interesting in staying handicap chases next term when there is cut underfoot.

3rd – SIZING TENNESSEE

Starting to run up a decent sequence of form and if he drops another couple pounds for this (was beaten 22L so chance he will be dropped from OR 145) he'll be of interest in handicaps.

UR – JURY DUTY

Was travelling well for a long time but once he really had to dig into the stamina reserves he found the tank to be empty. He's not all that easy to sum up and I'd be in 2 minds about whether he stays 3m or not given that he's 4/7 over 2m4f-2m6.5f but 0/7 over 3m, although he has placed 6 times over the 3m trip. Sometimes he looks like he's staying on at 3m but other times he seems to be emptying. He wore a tongue-tie for the first time here so I wonder if they may resort to a wind-op now to see if that will help him see out the 3m trips better. Certainly worth keeping an eye on him and any potential wind-op.

5.30 Close Brothers Novices' Chase – Listed Handicap Chase – 2m 4.5f – Soft – 19 ran

Tough to find a solid angle for horses running again in same season after contesting this but the following is at least worth considering...Ran in Close Brothers Novice Hcp LTO | 2m-2m5.5f Hcp | Horse aged 7yo | 2-5 previous handicap chase starts...which gives the following...6/12 | 50% S/R | +£35.83 BFLSP – W&P 8/12 | 67% S/R – 197% above expectation.

1st - MISTER WHITAKER

Clearly a horse well ahead of his mark, a neat and accurate jumper and one that obviously enjoys some cut underfoot – 31211 (3/5) on G/S or Soft compared to 26433 (0/5) on Good ground. His form under the following... G/S or Soft | 2m4f – 2m5f...reads as follows... 1121 (3/4) and at the minute they would be classed as prime conditions. I think he's got a fair few pounds still to work with so it

will be interesting to see how much the handicapper raises him by. One thing well worth considering, however, is the fact that only 1 of the 13 winners of this won next time out and a rather worrying 7 (SEVEN) failed to finish their race next time out.

2nd – RATHER BE (*One to Follow)

Easily a career best from the 7yo and he was possibly unlucky to bump into a well-handicapped horse such as Mister Whitaker, one he also had to give weight to. I'm not 100% convinced very undulating tracks are exactly what he wants – 9UU2 (0/4) on V und tracks compared to 111212811 on less testing tracks – so he's worth keeping on the radar if he heads to Aintree next time out (won over hurdles at Grand National meeting last year).

9th – BALLYHILL

Not a bad effort considering conditions were probably against him. He's better with a run under his belt (this was first start for 45 days) and in smaller fields (9 or less runners) and I'd have prime conditions for him as ... 2m0.5f+ | 9 or less runners | DSLR 30 or less...which gives a form line of 1F511 (3/5 – All 3 career wins). Plenty of his form suggests he's got more to give from OR 138 and he's worth keeping on the radar.

10th – WESTERN MILLER

Conditions would have been bang against this front-runner and he needs a much smaller field to try and dominate. They tried him at higher levels these last 2 starts but he's not up to taking on the best novices in competitive races and hopefully the handicapper relents and drops him a few pounds for his last 2 runs (beaten 50L & 33L). I'd have prime conditions as... 2m3.5f – 2m5.5f | DSLR 45 or less | 11 or less runners | Good-G/S | C2 & below (maybe C3 & below?)...which gives a form line of...21451171 (4/8, 1p - all 4 career wins).

11th – TESTIFY

Possibly just a small field soft/heavy ground bully and this large field won't have suited him. One of those you can see winning at the likes of Haydock when the mud is flying (already 2 from 2 there on heavy ground).

PU – TYCOON PRINCE

Was still going well enough until making a serious blunder 4 from home and that pretty much ended his chances right there. He's actually yet to win over further than 2m1f (2m-2m1f = 5/9 | 2m2f+ = 0/5) and he's now PU in both starts in 16+ runner fields so chances are he would have struggled with the climb up the hill anyway. I'd be looking at prime conditions something around the following...2m-2m1f | 10 or less runners | Oct-Feb...which gives a form line of F123111 (5/8, 1p – all 5 wins).

Day 2 - Wednesday

1.30 Ballymore Novices' Hurdle – Grade 1 Novices' Hurdle – 2m5f – Soft – 14 ran

Some decent stats for next time out runners (before end of season) from this one... Ran in Ballymore Novice Hurdle LTO | 2m5f or less | Horse aged 5yo or 6yo | no more than 5 starts in current season...which gives the following...9/17 | 53% S/R | +£51.88 BFLSP – W&P 13/17 | 76% S/R – 68% above expectation. In all honesty it's been profitable to follow all Ballymore Hurdle runners on their next start, regardless of if it's before seasons end or start of next season, but for now I'm happy to concentrate on those appearing before end of current season.

1st – SAMCRO (*Star Performer)

Possibly/probably the most exciting novice in training. You'd like to see them go straight over fences next season as everything about him screams chasing superstar in the making.

2nd – BLACK OP

An extremely exciting prospect for chasing next season and he looks a 3m chaser in the waiting. He doesn't really respect his hurdles so there would be little point in keeping him hurdling next term and I'd expect significant improvement for when he goes chasing.

3rd – NEXT DESTINATION

Despite finishing strongly here I'd put this down as a shade disappointing effort. Another that will improve for chasing next season and, probably, a longer trip.

6th – VISION DES FLOS

They've really tested this lad this season and I don't think the results really reflect his ability. He may just be one that needs more time than others but there's plenty of ability there and he could yet turn into a G1 performer.

9th – BRAHMA BULL

A big lad who will be suited by fences and a longer trip. This will have been a good learning curve for him on only his second hurdle start.

2.10 RSA Novices' Chase – Grade 1 Novices' Chase – 3m 0.5f – Soft – 10 ran

This has not been a great race to follow when runners appear again before the end of the season. In the past 5 seasons 37 RSA runners have run again that season and have returned the following...4/37 | 11% S/R | -£19.98 BFLSP – W&P 14/37 | 38% S/R – 46% below expectation, perhaps highlighting just how impressive it was of Might Bite to back up his RSA victory with a win at Aintree last season. Those that have run in a handicap next time out before seasons end are 0/13, 4p.

1st – PRESENTING PERCY

Two from two at the track (2 from 2 at festival), relatively adaptable with regards to ground and staying power in abundance (has won over 3m5f) means he has to be on the radar for next year's Gold Cup. This was impressive.

2nd – MONALEE

Personally I think Fehily took too long to settle him here and he was still trying to settle him half-way round the second circuit. He should have just given him a bit more reign and sent him on, let the horse do what he wanted and see if the others could catch him. Chances are the winner (Presenting P) would have caught him anyway but the tactics employed just burned up too much energy for my liking. On the plus side his jumping was, in the main, very accurate and he was probably just beaten by a better horse (despite the riding tactics). It's slightly worrying that he keeps finding at least 1 too good for him in the spring (22224 in March-April) and he obviously needs to change that if he is going to be a full on G1 animal (his form in the Nov-Feb period reads 112F11).

3rd – ELEGANT ESCAPE

A fine effort and beaten 14L may even allow his handicap mark to be dropped a little from OR 153. He's now 0/5 at G1 level and I still think his future, next season, lies in handicaps. His win at Newbury at the start of the season suggested the Ladbroke Trophy (Hennessey) would be a good starting point for next season.

4th – BALLYOPTIC

A solid run from the 8yo but Cheltenham seems to keep finding him out (4P24 at track). Probably another one for handicaps next term.

Fell – AL BOUM PHOTO

Now 5F (0/2) when racing over 3m+ and 52F (0/3) at G1 level. I'd suspect he's not a 3 miler and possibly not quite a G1 animal either, albeit I'd reserve judgment on the G1 angle until he's proven he's not up to the level at shorter trips.

3.30 QMCC – Grade 1 Chase – 2m – Soft – 9 ran

Some interesting observations about next time out runners (in current season) from QMCC. Those that finished 5th or worse in the QMCC and ran again in current season are 1/19 | 5% S/R | -£17.51 BFLSP – W&P 4/19 | 21% S/R – 69% below expectation, as such it seems best to concentrate on those that finished in the top 4. If we look at... Top 4 finish in QMCC LTO | 8-17 previous Chase starts | Grade 1 & Aintree or Sandown...we get the following...6/9 | 67% S/R | +£31.51 BFLSP – W&P 7/9 | 78% S/R – 88% above expectation. Not a lot to work with but at least 1 winner each of the last 5 seasons.

4th - POLITOLOGUE

I think it's about time to step him up in trip now. I've queried his LH track form and whether he may be best going Right-Handed but I'm now thinking it's maybe the Cheltenham hill he doesn't enjoy. He's run 4 times at the track for a form line of 440U (0/4) and he's yet to finish closer than 10L. He was going well for a long time in this but as soon as they faced up the hill for the final time he faded badly. He could be interesting if going for the 2m4f Melling Chase at Aintree, unless Altior also goes for the race.

Fell – CHARBEL

They need to stop firing this one at G1 races as he just isn't up to the level. He's now 0/10 at G1 or G2 level compared to 111112 (5/6) at Listed level and below and he quite simply needs his sights lowered. Cheltenham also doesn't seem like the place for him as he's now 5FF (0/3) on his 3 starts at the track.

4.50 Fred Winter Handicap Hurdle – Grade 3 Handicap Hurdle – 2m 0.5f – Soft – 22 ran

Interesting that when you look at those that ran again in same season it pays to follow those that go down the Non-Handicap route rather than the Handicap route, with the splits being... Handicaps – 4/35 | 11% S/R | -£10.50 BFLSP | | Non-Handicaps – 9/38 | 24% S/R | +£24.48 BFLSP. Looking deeper we get the following angle... 4th or worse in Fred Winter LTO | Non-Handicap | Top 2 finish 1 of last 3 starts | 3-5 previous Hurdle starts...which gives the following...9/20 | 45% S/R | +£42.48 BFLSP – W&P 12/20 | 60% S/R – 145% above expectation.

5.30 Champion Bumper – Grade 1 Bumper – 2m 0.5f – Soft – 23 ran

The Bumper always produces next time out winners but it's well known angle and overall they are not profitable to follow blind (27/109 | 25% S/R | -£42.25 BFLSP). If you look at the stats for those that ran again in the current season then those that finished 7th or worse in the bumper and ran again in the current season are 2/37 | 5% S/R | -£31.88, those that did finish in the top 6 are 6/19 | 32% S/R | +£8.29 BFLSP – W&P 12/19 | 63% S/R. Looking deeper we get the following angle... Top 6 in Bumper LTO | Won 1 of last 3 | 2-4 previous bumper starts...which gives the following...6/14 | 43% S/R | +£13.29 BFLSP – W&P 9/14 | 64% S/R.

2nd – CAREFULLY SELECTED

This one has stayer written all over him and he was plenty credit for pulling the field along for the majority of the contest. Three miles over hurdles and fences look the route he will end up heading down and he's already run to a serious level in his 3 starts. He could very easily prove to be the best horse in this bumper.