

THE JAMES WILLOUGHBY COLUMN



Business as usual at Kingsley Park

DURING HIS last five seasons as the sole licence holder, Mark Johnston averaged a 15% win-rate, and 36% of his runners reached the first three. Including results up to April 28 this year, Charlie Johnston has won with 32 of his first 210 runners and another 38 have finished second or third. So, Charlie's win-rate is also 15% but his place-rate is slightly lower at 33%.

When old-school statisticians compare statistics like these, they try to reject the so-called 'null hypothesis' that the two regimes of data simply represent the same level of performance. The old-school technique involves the use of 'p-values' – probability estimates that two samples come from the same underlying population.

In the case of Charlie's lower place-rate, the probability is that a trainer who achieved a place-rate of 36% like Mark could expect to see 76 horses finish in the first three if sending out 210 runners like Charlie. But only 70 (32 +38) of Charlie's runners have been in the first three, so what is the probability a result as low as this could happen merely at random?

The answer is 0.2321. Factors such as horses finishing third and being included in the sample, when they were only a short head from finishing fourth and not being included, can skew the results for no more reason than just luck, so we need to allow for natural variation in statistics before jumping to conclusions. Classically, our old-school statistician who set a threshold at the 5% probability level could not reject the null hypothesis. It is likely that nothing about the yard's established performance level has changed. And this result is what you would expect.



Dubai Mile

Three-year-olds promise much

THE STATISTICS have been solid so far for Charlie Johnston, but there have been individual performances that are more than that. In particular, the three-year-old division has offered promising signs from individuals who look sure to do better still, and Dubai Mile has yet to appear.

Dubai Mile is heading for the QIPCO 2,000 Guineas. We discussed here last year that this is the right move with a former high-class two-year-old, even if he is more of a Derby horse. Firstly, you can never be certain that a horse will be suited by longer distances when it has not raced for many months. Dubai Mile won the G1 Criterium de Saint-Cloud over a mile and a quarter last October, but it is not unknown for horses to get faster as they get older. Secondly, the upside of winning – or even placing in – the 2,000 Guineas is so large that any horse who has won a Group race already should be taking its chance. It makes no sense to wait for a race like the G2 Dante Stakes with an animal who is already a G1 winner and is fit enough to compete. The Johnstons have shown repeatedly they can get one ready off a layoff. Dubai Mile is around 33-1 for the Guineas and 25-1 for Epsom at the time of writing.

In his absence, Dear My Friend, Finn's Charm, Hadrianus and Killybegs Warrior have all broken through the three-figure performance barrier, according to Racing Post Ratings (RPR). This is highly encouraging, especially because their physicals suggest they have scope to get stronger and more set in their frame.

The hulking **Dear My Friend** is a fascinating horse. He is by the sprinter Pivotal, but he is much more of a stayer than his father, who can get long-winded horses such as the yard's Chester Cup winner Making Miracles.

Having won by five lengths over the extended seven furlongs at Beverley last June, Dear My Friend picked up a nice pot in a Listed race over a mile at Newcastle last month. The trip seemed barely adequate for him, and he prevailed because of ability, not suitability. His owners Middleham Park are shrewd customers and dare to dream that he could meet his engagement in the Derby, for which he is a general 50-1 shot.

Finn's Charm looked fantastic on his reappearance, winning a handicap at Musselburgh off 92 by more than four lengths. This performance was particularly significant because he had ended his two-year-old season with two heavy defeats. Under a typically rhythmical Joe Fanning ride, the Kingman half-

brother to G1 Middle Park winner Charming Thought dominated from the front and posted an RPR of 106. It was good to see him return some of the reinvestment made in quality pedigrees by Subjectivist's owner Dr Jim Walker.

Finn's Charm looks as though he will go a mile and a quarter, but a mile on a turning track suits him well. Given that both his wins have been earned at the clockwise Scottish venue, it is not hard to imagine him winging round Goodwood later this summer.

Hadrianus is from one of the last crops of the great Galileo. He gave the odds-on Epictetus a late, fleeting scare when keeping on well to finish second to John Gosden's Classic aspirant in a Listed race at Epsom. That 10-furlong try was worth an RPR of 103 and suggested better to come on a sounder surface, probably over a mile and a half. Again, the rangy Hadrianus really looks the part and surely cannot have been a natural for Epsom's undulations.

The tough **Killybegs Warrior** was third to Canberra Legend and Kolsai in what could be a useful renewal of the Listed Feilden Stakes at Newmarket. That was his first try at as far as nine furlongs, and it suited him well. The ground would have been as soft as he wants also, and he is a horse who should continue to thrive. Looking further ahead, make a note of him when he returns to the July Course at Newmarket at which he is unbeaten.



Killybegs Warrior

and I am interested to see if she can make up into the kind of long-distance runner I envisage.

My take on the Grand National protest

LIKE EVERYONE in the sport, I was shocked and saddened by the methods employed by a protest group at the Grand National. I was also impressed by the way the sport responded to the issues so irresponsibly raised, with lots of sensible and well thought-out content from various individuals.

It is important for the sport that it does not allow the dangers and difficulties of a 40-runner race over four and a half miles to be conflated with those of the sport as a whole. To love racing, you do not need to love the Grand National, and it was interesting that many commentators expressed disquiet at the images the first circuit of the race produced.

It is staggering the field-size has not been reduced, because the aim of safety is to reduce total accidents, not the percentage of accidents which seems always to be used as the relevant metric.

Like it or not – and many racing fans do not – the Grand National is the shop window to sports fans otherwise disinclined to engage with racing. The race will not lose its character if 10 horses are removed from the field; this will result in at least 25% fewer total accidents purely down to the numbers. And the increasing space around runners at the fences will almost certainly cut casualties still further.

There is no other safety measure that can come anywhere close to the same reduction in total casualties. It has to be done for the 2024 Grand National – there is too much at stake for the other 99.99% of races which do not resemble it.

My Klarion horse to follow for 2023

EVERY SEASON at this time of year, I like to pick out one horse in the yard which has captured my imagination. For 2023, her name is Good Morals. She has already come out and won an uncompetitive race, but I reckon there is a lot more to come.

Good Morals is not an imposing filly. Neither is she particularly fast. She is a daughter of one of my favourite stallions in Farhh, who scores well on the metrics I use to assess stallions independent of the mares they have visited.

Farhh is responsible for lots of good horses, most notably around these parts Derby runner-up Dee Ex Bee, one of my previous picks as a horse to follow.

I reckon Good Morals can stay any distance. After a promising enough two-year-old campaign, she broke her duck in a nothing race at Wolverhampton in which the runner-up was reported to have had breathing problems and there was nothing behind. But, for a horse rated 75, Good Morals impressed against the clock in the closing stages, hitting a top speed well above what you might expect for such a strong stayer who is still developing.

Good Morals is just the type to respond to Charlie's training