

Spotlight on Franny

FRANNY NORTON'S two winners and a second for the yard in the one-day late May meeting at Chester showed once again the jockey's brilliance at mastering the tricky track, *writes JOHN SCANLON*

Dubbed the 'King of Chester' on account of his remarkable record at the Roodee — he has ridden no fewer than 144 winners at the unique circuit — Franny was the subject of an in-depth interview in the Racing Post last month. The feature, which reviewed his career as a whole and inevitably highlighted his Chester record, was published before he added to his Roodee tally with that Johnston Racing double on May 27.

He was aboard Politico as the Blue Point colt, owned by Saeed Bin Mohammed Al Qassimi, stepped up to six furlongs. Franny led from the start and having moved across to the inside rail

never saw another rival. He eventually pulled clear to score by three and a half lengths from Sioux Warrior.

Politico is the first foal out of the No Nay Never mare, Servalan, who won two Listed events in Ireland. He was bought for €63,000 by Johnston Racing in a private sale from Ballylinch Stud at last year's Goffs Orby Sale.

In the next race Franny was beaten just a head aboard Pons Aelius, but he was soon back in the winner's enclosure after riding Perfect Play to victory in the three-year-old handicap over an extended mile and a quarter.

The Siyouni gelding, owned by the Ossie Ardiles Syndicate of Newsells Park Stud, faced seven rivals. Once again Franny showed the advantage of quickly securing a position on the rail. Travelling strongly throughout, Perfect Play set sail for home coming off the home turn and stretched clear in the closing stages to win by two and a quarter lengths from Razoni.

The gelding is out of the Giant's Causeway mare, Giants Play, who won a Grade 2 at New York's Belmont Park (10f) as a four-year-old. He is a half-brother to Ispolini, by Dubawi, winner of the Group 3 Deutsches St Leger in 2019.

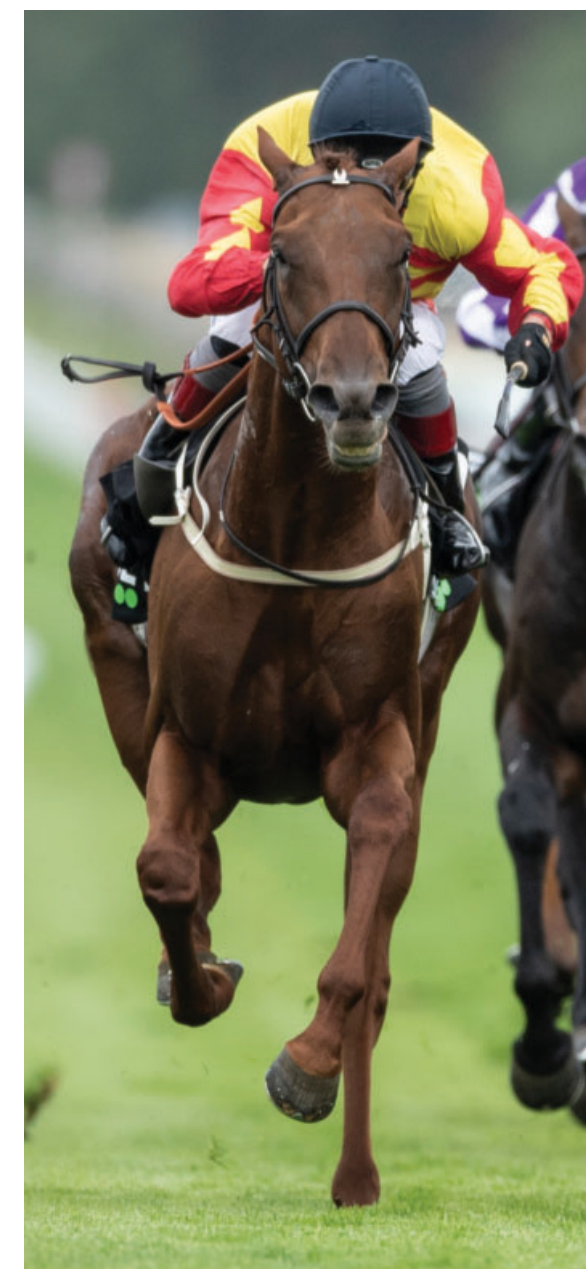
As the Racing Post revealed, Franny, a popular Liverpoolian who hails from



Franny scores a double on the day aboard Perfect Play



Paddy Trainor leads Politico and Franny in at Chester



Sir Ron Priestley, with Franny aboard

Belle Vale and is a lifelong fan of Liverpool FC, was a black belt in judo and a hugely talented amateur boxer.

AFTER achieving much success as an apprentice, his career threatened to stall when he lost his claim.

Like many jockeys in that position, he found rides hard to come by. Turning back to boxing helped him break out of a culture of drinking but, just as he began to be offered more rides, his boxing career really took off. He was a stable lads' boxing champion eight times, boxed in the ABA Finals and was selected for the England squad for the 1998 Commonwealth Games. There was even talk of him turning professional.

Fortunately for racing, and for Johnston Racing in particular, Franny decided to concentrate on his riding

career and has since enjoyed great success through dedication and hard work.

He credits Dr George Wilson of Liverpool John Moores University for the help he has received with regards to health and nutrition.

He also praises Johnston Racing for their support.

'Mark Johnston has prolonged my career, without a doubt,' he told the Post.

'I couldn't have carried on doing what I've been doing without him, and he has been massively instrumental in the second half of my career.'

'He's very easy to ride for and gives no orders. He knows you're going to make mistakes and although you can't make too many, whether you give one a great ride or a terrible one it's done and dusted afterwards and on to the next one.'

Franny said he felt the transition to

Charlie as licence-holder at Kingsley Park was working well.

'Charlie is a walking encyclopedia on form and is unbelievable at reading a race,' he said.

'If anything goes wrong, he's got the ideal person to go to (in Mark) and they're a great combination. He has taken a lot of pressure off Mark and is hopefully going to be a great success.'

Looking back on his time riding for the stable, Franny picked out Paul Dean's Sir Ron Priestley as one of his all-time favourites.

'I won three Group races on him and he was the best success I had, so he's a horse with a lot of meaning,' he explains.

'I just loved him because he was a warrior who wore his heart on his sleeve. He would ride a race for you. He was an absolute legend.'

A legend -- rather like Franny himself!