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KLARION KICKBACK

They've got it wrong way round

Much has been made of the BHA's proposed premierisation and their desire to declutter the 2pm-4pm window on Saturdays by moving some of the minor meetings.

I'm okay with the concept of premierisation but I think they may have got the fixture planning the wrong way around. They should be trying to pull some of their biggest events OUT of Saturday afternoon where racing struggles to compete with more mainstream sports.

Apart from the Grand National and the Derby, which ironically are run later than 4pm to give them more exposure, it's interesting to note that all the other biggest races in terms of betting turnover take place at the Cheltenham Festival which takes place between Tuesday and Friday. So is it really all about Saturdays?

In football, the home of premierisation, virtually all fixtures take place on Saturday afternoon but it's the most important games, not the minor matches, that are moved to a different time slot in order to optimise the audience. Typically, such games are played on Saturday lunchtime, early Saturday evening or on a Sunday or Monday.

The great news for racing is that Sundays are so poorly utilised at the moment that there is considerable scope to move some premier fixtures to Sundays, assuming the racecourses involved are flexible and prepared to embrace more change than usual. There's no need to increase weekend fixtures, just revise the balance between Saturday and Sunday.

Between mid-April and mid-October, 80% of weekend Flat meetings take place on the Saturday, versus just 20% on the Sunday. A good example is Saturday July 16 where there will be six Flat fixtures including York, Chester, Ascot and Newmarket. The next day there are no Flat meetings whatsoever, so surely it would make sense to move at least two of the premier meetings to the Sunday?

It's difficult to overstate just how badly racing in the UK utilises Sundays compared to other successful racing countries. During the prime Flat season there are seven Sundays where there is no Flat racing at all and, inexplicably, we currently have almost twice as many race meetings on a Monday than we do on a Sunday (109 v 61). Moreover, there are almost as many jump meetings run on Sundays in summer as Flat meetings (28 jumps v 33 flat). It's all a bit of a mess.

Everybody bar the racecourses thinks there

are far too many fixtures. That said, it's difficult to understand why the existence of minor race fixtures on a Saturday will distract anybody from the day's biggest races which benefit from being on mainstream TV, just like they have for years.

Reduce the number of overall fixtures by all means, but moving minor fixtures around on a Saturday all seems a bit pointless. However, there really are compelling reasons why a substantial number of premier fixtures should be moved from Saturdays to Sundays.

Ged Shields
Silkstone
South Yorkshire

Could Epsom be at risk?

It was with a certain amount of sadness that I read that the racecourse which hosts a prestigious race named after our late Queen and the venue for the Group 3 Kranji Mile worth one million Singapore dollars (£580,000) is to close the turnstiles for good in order to give way for suburban housing development.

The reason given for the closure of Singapore's racecourse is that attendances and revenue from betting has fallen drastically since the Covid pandemic with the consequence prize-money has also had to be reduced in the never-ending downward spiral of trying to make horse racing viable.

The Singapore Turf Club describes the atmosphere at the Kranji Mile meeting as 'a popular event for horse racing enthusiasts and casual fans alike. The race is known for its competitive field, with some of the best horses from around the world competing for the top prize. The race is also a great opportunity for visitors to experience the thrill of horse racing and enjoy a day out with family and friends'.

All this does not wash with the Singapore Government which is desperate for land to build more social housing. And where have we heard this before?

Prior to the Derby we were treated to a TV interview with trainer Simon Dow who has been training on the Epsom Downs for some 40-odd years. He was asked by Rishi Persad what had changed over those years.

Simon said that it was becoming increasingly difficult to train racehorses on the Downs due to 'urban sprawl'. With the

UK government committed to building additional housing and the fact that housing for people rather than for racehorses is edging ever nearer to the winning post at Epsom Racecourse, are we now in danger of losing UK's prestigious million-pound race?

Alasdair Ross,
Larbert
Stirlingshire

Pack 'em off to Oz!

Deciding which English racecourse has developed the most unpleasant atmosphere since pop concerts after racing became de rigueur is, despite the obvious claims of Newbury, by no means an easy task.

Many of us will have our own view of the matter, and some of those views will be passionately held. To prevent an unseemly argument breaking out in the columns of the Klarion, might I suggest that a formal survey is undertaken to establish which track has managed to alienate more of its existing racegoers by staging concerts on race-days than any other?

Let the survey be commissioned, at no small expense to the industry, by Rod Street of Great British Racing. Let the prize for the winning racecourse be a long-haul flight to Australia for its chief executive, in economy class, wedged between myself and the author of Straight Talking. And let his/her ticket be one-way.

Martin Trew
Worcestershire

Mark responds: 'You couldn't pay me enough to go on that flight!'

The Klarion welcomes your letters

Send to: klarion@johnston.racing or
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Letters may be edited.