



The Handicap Snip

The Chester Cup Handicap (Class 2)

The Chester Cup is the feature race of the Chester Festival run in early May. It's a Heritage Handicap over 2 miles 2 furlongs & 147 yards. First run in 1824 this really is one of the historic races of the flat season and one that has been a good friend to members in recent years. Indeed, we were all on last years' winner No Heretic at 14/1. Let's see if we can find the winner again.

General Observations

One of the key strategies in the Snip methodology is to answer the question:

what kind of horse wins a race like this? In fact, that is fundamental.

My first conclusion from my research is that the winner is very probably going to be less than 9 years old. There's been no winner older than 8 since at least 1975 (as far as I went back) so horses like Oriental Fox and First Mohican won't be making the short list.

The draw does have an effect with approximately 50% of winners and a third of placed horses drawn 1 to 5, so waiting for declarations might be a wise betting decision. I also note that racing prominently, or at least tracking the pace not too far back has been a winning tactic. Those drawn wide either have to drop out and wait for a run or use energy to get to the front.

Some National Hunt trainers have won the race in the last few years:

Nicky Henderson in 2017 (No Heretic 14/1 get in!), Don McCain twice and David Pipe. We'll see whether any NH trained runners make the final declarations and are on the short list.

Like many of these Heritage Handicaps, there are a group of trainers (and owners) that target this race.

The first on my 'watch out for' list is Richard Fahey who's seen 8 of his 18 runners make the frame in 9 renewals including two winners. He has 5 entries this year although possibly only two will make the line up. Close examination will be required of any that do run.

Others on the radar are D. McCain, Mark Johnston, Ian Williams, Dermot Weld and Tony Martin. They all have entries and will all need scrutiny.

The Betting Market 7th May

Let's have a look at the market to see what's currently fancied

Sea Of Heaven: Currently favourite, best priced 8/1 with a few internet only firms, generally 7/1 on the high street. His last appearance was when running 3rd in the Cesarewitch. Trained by Sir Mark Prescott and ridden by Luke Morris. Won 3 races over 2 miles including once at Chester. Won on g/f, good and g/s going.

Could well improve still further this season as a 5 year old after just 10 starts on turf. Twice finished within hailing distance of Sweet Selection who has won the Cesarewitch and Sagaro Stakes since so the form looks strong. You can certainly make a strong case. My question is whether he really wants 18.5 furlongs. Will probably make the short list.

Golden Spear : 10/1 generally, Tony Martin trained 6yo hurdler, was 5th behind Sweet Selection and Sea Of Heaven in The Cesarewitch. Won a handicap off 87 at Leopardstown 3 weeks after the Cesarewitch run and now runs off 93 here. He's going to need a career best probably not going to make the short list.

Nakeeta: 12/1 readily available; Iain Jardine trained 6yo, beaten half a length by Golden Spear in the Leopardstown race. Second in the 2016 renewal of this off 93 and comes back on 101. Honest, tough handicapper but have to think there'll be something better treated.

Endless Acres: 12/1 general, struggling to see why, maiden on turf, been running on AW. Dismissed from consideration.

Winning Story: price ranges 7/1 to 12/1, 4yo Godolphin owned, only two runs on turf. No idea why he's fancied. Won't be on the short list.

Magic Circle: 14/1, R. Beckett trained 5yo, winner of a 2 mile handicap at York, then two lengths behind Nakeeta and Golden Spear. Will need significant improvement to win off this mark but could yet improve enough as a 5 year old

Who Dares Wins: 16/1, Alan King trained 5yo, decent hurdler (RPR 149), won over 1 mile 4 furlongs on fast ground at Chester; very interesting if he could translate his improved hurdle form to the flat off a light weight

The Cashel Man: 16/1, 5yo David Simcock trained, 4th in Cesarewitch when given an overly negative ride, made up a lot of ground, 15lb higher than last winning mark, very possibly set to improve again this season. Deep hold up tactics a negative in this race.

Blakeney Point: 12/1 to 16/1, Roger Charlton trained 4 year old. Named after a lovely place on the North Norfolk wild windswept coast and that's about as close as he'll get to appearing on my short list

Zafayan: 16/1 readily available, Dermot Weld trained 6yo was 3rd in the 2015 renewal off a pound higher. Not run since September 2016 though so a big ask to win this off such a lay off. Definite contender for a place though.

Watersmeet: 16/1 Mark Johnston trained 6yo, in good form on the AW of late, races off 101, 6lb higher than last turf win, usually races up with the pace, Johnston excellent record of getting in the frame in the race, needs taking seriously if getting a low draw but both distance and handicap mark are a worry. Could run well for a long way then fade.

First Mohican: 16/1 generally, 9yo regular in these staying races, 2nd in the Cesarewitch so can definitely be competitive; same owner and trainer as Who Dares Wins. Won't make the short list.

Moorside: 20/1, 4 yo filly from Charles Hills yard. Not on my radar at all.

After these we get into the 25/1+ shots and I'll only pick out those of interest from now on.

Yorkidding: 25/1 to 16/1 range, 5yo mare trained by Mark Johnston, 3rd on reappearance in Ripon 2 mile handicap that previous winners also placed in, dangerous if getting to the lead, starting to look like the further the better for her and 96 a 'sweet spot' mark.

Suegioo: 25/1, 8yo former winner of this when trained by M. Botti, now with Fahey, Koukash owned. 9lb above mark he won off seems harsh

Angel Gabriel: 33/1, 8yo trained by Fahey for Dr. Koukash, runs off 96 here, was 8th off 104 in 2016 from stall 18, 11th off 106 in 2015 and 2nd off 91 in 2014. Also won a Northumberland Plate off 96. If getting a single figure draw can get closer to the front this year off this mark.

William Of Orange: 40/1, D. McCain (ex Mark Prescott), been hurdling reaching mark of 114, may not get in race, one flat effort suggests he's capable off the mark. 11 of 12 and 17 of 17 on last two flat runs however.

Gabrial the Hero: 40/1 Fahey / Koukash trained 8yo, 4th in 2016 renewal off 4lb higher, arrived on back of two AW wins then, was drawn 12 creditable effort to make the frame. Down the field on seasonal debut. Hard to fancy on that form.

Good Tradition: 33/1 general, D.McCain trained (ex D. Weld), 6yo hurdler, only 8 starts on flat, makes flat handicap debut here. Ran on flat as pacemaker in the Irish St Leger Group 1. On the right weight and finished second on latest hurdles start. Needs consideration.

Gabrial's King: 25/1, 8yo Fahey / Koukash trained, very creditable 5th in the 2016 renewal off 2lb higher considering raced from stall 17 and lead well inside the final furlong after being held up well in rear. May be struggling to get in hence the big price. Player if he runs.

2017 Chester Cup Short list:

As ever, the idea is to eliminate the unlikely and keep all those considered strong candidates without throwing out the eventual winner too early

Sea Of Heaven
Who Dares Wins
Zafayan
Watersmeet
Magic Circle
Yorkidding
Angel Gabrial
Good Tradition
William Of Orange
Gabrial's King
Gabrial The Hero

Hopefully the winner is on it and by focusing the laser I hope to narrow it down still further.

Let's look at some keys to races like this

Class

Like most valuable handicaps you need some class to win the Chester Cup. The vast majority of winners had previously won a class 2 race, and those that had not won were previously placed in a class 2.

Good Tradition has never placed on the flat in a race worth more than £10K and never ran in a flat handicap. Although the 'NH trainer' angle is powerful you need the right tools for the job and this fellow looks unsuited. Looking at his hurdles form it is some 30lb inferior to Who Dares Wins' form, yet he has to concede him a pound. I'll eliminate now.

It would seem harsh to eliminate the rest based on this alone so we press on

Weight Carried

Only two horses have carried more than 9 stone 6lbs to victory in nearly 40 years of the race so I'm not very keen on anything asked to do that. In fact 29 of the last 37 winners carried 9 stone or less so I'm happy to eliminate those set to carry 9 stone 7lb or more. Looks like none of the short list will carry 9stone 7lb so that's not much help.

At this point the declarations are in and several on the short list have not made the race. Those that remain are:

Sea Of Heaven
Who Dares Wins
Watersmeet
Magic Circle
Yorkidding
Angel Gabriel

William Of Orange (second reserve, needs 2 non runners to get in)

The Effect of The Draw

For an 18 furlong race the draw effect is surprisingly significant.

I would find it very hard to back something drawn in the car park (high)

Let's see where they are drawn:

Angel Gabriel stall 19
Magic Circle stall 18
Sea Of Heaven stall 14

I won't be backing those three now so we are down to my final short list:

Who Dares Wins stall 7
Watersmeet stall 6
Yorkidding stall 3

Betting Decision Discussion

With two fancied runners, and a decent record in the race (8 of last 10 runners made a top 6 finish), with a single figure draw I'm sure Mark Johnston is more than hopeful. Franny Norton on Watersmeet and Richard Kingscote on Yorkidding are top riders round Chester and they could very well use team tactics here. One could give a lead to the other who sits just on the outside, in lane 2 if you like, protecting from horses circling. This could see both of them in contention turning for home. Will one of them get home from there?

Who Dares Wins ran a superb 3rd place in the Coral Cup at the Cheltenham Festival and is clearly in fine form. He could be very well treated on just 92 in this race and I feel I will have to back him.

Of the two Johnston runners I feel it is Yorkidding who will benefit from the lower draw and the longer trip, she looks like she needs it in fact so I definitely am laying towards her as a bet. Watersmeet is now set to carry 9 stone 8lb and runs off 101. Both of those feats have proven to very difficult to overcome in recent years so I'll pass him over. He would be dangerous if getting a soft lead but I believe from 7 he'll move up and track his stablemate.

The two selections are available at 16/1 and 10/1 so I see no problem in backing both. We may be able to get enhanced place terms. Hopefully, this will provide our first big priced Handicap Snip bet of the season to get us rolling.

Advised Bet

YORKIDDING 3 points each way 16/1

WHO DARES WINS 1 point each way 10/1