British Raiders Out To Gatecrash The Punchestown Festival

Tuesday 23 April, 2013

As the National Hunt season draws to a close, racing fans are treated to one final feast of jumps racing action as the Punchestown Festival gets underway on Tuesday afternoon, which will showcase the best the sport has to offer over five days in County Kildare.

It has often been a fixture that has been dominated by homegrown talent in recent years, but the 2013 meeting sees a number of British Raiders add some real class to the festivities and the meeting should get off to a sensational start on Tuesday Sprinter Sacre will take his chance in the Boylesports Champion Chase, as he aims to maintain his unblemished record over the larger obstacles to 10 straight victories.

Praise has been heaped on Nicky Henderson for letting the emphatic Queen Mother Champion Chase take his chance in the Grade One and the Seven Barrows inmate will be sent off at prohibitive odds of 1/6 to take the two-mile crown, where he is set to lock horns again with Sizing Europe, who he demolished with aplomb in the aforementioned Cheltenham Festival contest.

Henderson could well feature prominently on the second day as well as Long Run bids for victory in the Punchestown Gold Cup, but he will face a stiff task to end the season on a high as not only will he have to turn the tables with Sir Des Champs, who finished ahead of him in the Cheltenham Gold Cup, but First Lieutenant, who was last seen storming to victory in the Betfred Bowl at Aintree, will also take his chance in another cracking betting heat.

A plethora of Graded races flood this five-day fixture, but the most hotly-anticipated duel of the week will come on Thursday as Ladbrokes World Hurdle winner Solwhit locks horns with five-times David Nicholson Mares' Hurdle winner Quevega, in a monumental renewal of the World Series Hurdle! The bookmakers are already finding it difficult to split the two with the latter bidding for her fourth win in the race, but Solwhit showed when following up his Cheltenham victory at Aintree that he excels over three miles and will be a tough nut to crack for the Willie Mullins-trained wonder mare.

Friday's highlight will see another regular in the Punchestown winners' enclosure aim to retain his Rabobank Champion Hurdle crown as Hurricane Fly bids for a fourth straight win in the race and the dual Champion Hurdle winner will be a warm order favourite in the betting offices to record victory.

One of the most impressive winners at Cheltenham in March came in the form of Dessie Hughes trained Our Conor who romped to victory in the JCB Triumph Hurdle and the classy juvenile will aim for the coveted double on the final day of the meeting in the Champion Four-Year-Old Hurdle, which promises to be another top class event and will round off a sumptuous week of National Hunt racing in the Emerald Isle.

Follow all the action from Tuesday 23rd April - Saturday 27th April at http://www.punchestown-festival.com

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