

Countdown to Cheltenham 2017



	Does Colin Tizzard have the Gold Cup winner?	Who do you fancy for the Champion Hurdle?	Who is Douvan's biggest threat?	Does JP McManus have the Stayers' Hurdle sewn up?	Which novice most catches your eye?	Who are the ones to watch from Ireland?	Give us a value bet	What is your best bet for the four days?	Give us a Lucky 15 for the meeting
188Bet Jeff Parkes	In what could be a brutally run affair, Cue Card may struggle to get home. Form and time judges will say Native River has a bit to find, but he still looks the likeliest winner to me.	Alan King has his string in much better shape going into this year's festival and if Yanworth is close enough jumping the last he'll win.	Undoubtedly the fences. I can imagine L'Ami Serge looming upsides two out before being blown away, and he might be the one for betting without Douvan.	Unowhatimeanharry has all the tools to win. He's unlikely to win on the bridle but Stayers' Hurdles rarely are.	It has to be Neon Wolf. The sectionals at Haydock last time suggest he has the requisite speed for that race.	I have an interest in Shattered Love NRNB in the Neptune. Although still a novice and entered for the mares' novice hurdle, the longer trip of Tuesday's race may sway connections to go there.	In a wide-open event, Cyrus Darius at 66-1 each-way for the Champion Hurdle.	Le Prezien NRNB at 12-1 in the Grand Annual.	Taquin Du Seuil – Coral Cup Champers On Ice – Kim Muir Le Prezien – Grand Annual Holywell – Ultima
bet365 Pat Cooney	No. Cue Card has the 'too old at 11' stat to overcome, while Native River was entitled to win the Hennessy and Welsh National off 155 in both races.	I think the strong-travelling Brain Power will be the last horse still on the bridle coming to the final hurdle in a fast-run race, so he's my pick.	Fox Norton, but only a 'force majeure' stands in his way. I suppose Douvan could fall, but none of his rivals will get near him with a clear round.	Unowhatimeanharry and perhaps Jezki would make him odds-on to win it, but Cole Harden and whoever Willie Mullins runs will make it difficult so, on balance, no.	The form book gives West Approach a strong chance in the Albert Bartlett. His third behind Unowhatimeanharry in January means Death Duty will have to be top draw to beat him.	Joseph O'Brien's Edwulf impressed at Naas last time and looks a horse going places. He's in the National Hunt Chase and the RSA but he'll be a big player in either.	Dolos in the Fred Winter. Paul Nicholls' novice is probably better than his rating and appeals at a price as he's relatively unexposed and Cheltenham may suit him.	Cause Of Causes in the cross-country chase. He comes alive at this meeting having won at the 2015 and 2016 festivals. Expect a big run again.	Brain Power - Champion Hurdle Cause Of Causes - cross-country Dolos – Fred Winter West Approach – Albert Bartlett
BetBright Gavin Geraghty	No. Unfortunately Cue Card may have missed the boat last year. He has had more bad runs than good since. Native River still has to prove himself in open company.	Yanworth has the fewest questions to answer in an open contest and will power up the hill. He has best form in the race and should be clear favourite.	Realistically, the fences are his biggest threat. If something were to go amiss, Fox Norton looks best served to pick up the pieces. He has been the best of the rest this season.	I believe so. Unowhatimeanharry has beaten his main opposition on numerous occasions this season and on all evidence appears to have the measure of his Irish rivals, too.	The obvious pick is Altior as he's been awesome, but the best novice performance to my eye came from Neon Wolf, who destroyed a good yardstick in Elgin last time. He sets the benchmark wherever he runs.	Douvan will be a joy to behold. From a punting point of view, Melon and Yorkhill, while this finally seems to be Djakadam's chance to land the big one.	Squouateur in the Close Brothers Novices' Handicap Chase (16-1) or Kim Muir. He was the biggest gamble of last year's festival and connections will fancy recouping the losses plus interest off his mark.	Uxizandre. I loved his comeback run. He's had plenty of time to recover and to get fully tuned up to regain his crown. The Ryanair he won in 2015 appears to be a lot stronger than this year's renewal.	Yanworth – Champion Hurdle Neon Wolf – Neptune Uxizandre – Ryanair Chase Djakadam – Gold Cup
Betfair Niall O'Reilly	He has the front two in the market so obviously has a very good chance, but I'm struggling to get excited about either and I get the feeling bookmakers might get a result this year.	Buveur D'Air at the moment, although I'm a big Moon Racer fan and think he'll end up being the value if he runs here.	I've backed God's Own (right) without Douvan, but can't see him having any chance of beating him if he gets round in one piece.	It looks a weak renewal, with Shaneshill being the only one I'd give any chance of upsetting JP.	I've thought Moon Racer was a machine ever since he won the Champion Bumper and he's done nothing to sway my thoughts this year.	Death Duty is probably the one I'm most interested in seeing. In the handicaps Battleford will be running off 135 if he gets a run, which looks fairly lenient.	I'm interested in Minella On Line if he shows up in the Ultima at 50-1. He would've gone close to beating RSA hope Royal Vacation two starts back but for a fall.	Defi Du Seuil is my banker of the meeting and I can't see him being beaten in the Triumph.	Romain De Senam – Close Brothers Novices' Handicap Chase Dolos – Fred Winter Battleford – Martin Pipe Defi Du Seuil – Triumph Hurdle
Betfred Andrew Griffiths	With the front two in the betting he has a tight grip on the Gold Cup, but Djakadam is our pick to snatch it from his grasp. His form is watertight and he looks primed to run the race of his life after a perfect preparation.	A wide-open renewal with no standout performer. The front three all have holes in them and Brain Power may be the one to take advantage. He's progressive and will love the quick ground.	He's a different gear and in all likelihood the fences are his biggest danger. Our play in the race would be The Game Changer without Douvan, as he ran a blinder in last year's Arkle.	Jezki probably isn't good enough but Unowhatimeanharry has been a revelation since joining Harry Fry and there are few chinks in his armour. Our only worry would be if the ground came up quick.	Over hurdles we like the chances of Movewiththetimes in the festival opener. Over the big obstacles Yorkhill excites us most. He has the ability to turn the JLT into a procession.	Dandridge and Rock The World catch the eye in the Grand Annual. They both ran blinders last year and can go well in what looks a slightly weaker renewal.	The Game Changer without Douvan in the Champion Chase.	Djakadam (left) to make it third time lucky in the Gold Cup.	Movewiththetimes – Supreme Squouateur – Kim Muir Yorkhill – JLT Djakadam – Gold Cup
Betway Alan Alger	He did have, but Thistlecrack's absence will hand this to another stable. Champagne West fits the profile for me. There was lots to like about his Thystes win.	I like Brain Power. Victories in December at Ascot and Sandown put him right in the picture and there are some nice sounds being made about Nicky Henderson's six-year-old in the right circles.	Rather what than who. The what is the 13 fences. God's Own looks the value each-way shout in a race that might cut up.	I think he does and in all likelihood it's going to be with the favourite Unowhatimeanharry. He looks ideal for this race and keeps finding. He could have most to fear from Clondaw Warrior.	I really like Nicky Henderson's Beyond Conceit. I think he's well over a bet wherever he runs. Over fences I like Colin Tizzard's Royal Vacation in the RSA.	Debuchet should be noted in the Champion Bumper – the right people wanted to be on this one in early March. Ireland will win the Mares' Hurdle. Tombstone needs respect wherever he runs.	Irish Roe in the Champion Bumper. She's likely to have the assistance of Graham Lee and her course-and-distance dead-heat in November (with Lee in the saddle) looks good on the clock.	Mega Fortune in the Triumph Hurdle. The Spring Juvenile Hurdle win at Leopardstown was a superb Grade 1 performance and is good enough to win this race.	Brain Power – Champion Hurdle Champagne West – Gold Cup Irish Roe – Champion Bumper Mega Fortune – Triumph Hurdle
BoyleSports Alan Reilly	With Thistlecrack sidelined I really feel it could be Djakadam's year. He's had an uninterrupted campaign and will be fresher than his main rivals. He'll be our worst result by a distance so I'm hoping that I'm wrong!	The pace of the race ought to suit the solid favourite Yanworth and in Mark Walsh he will have top class assistance – but for me anything under 3-1 doesn't represent value.	There isn't one! All being well, we'll hopefully see him at Punchestown for the BoyleSports Champion Chase.	The favourite has done nothing wrong and can beat only what is put in front of him. On good ground, Jezki is a major threat. So yes!	If it's in any way soft, it has to be Neon Wolf in the Neptune. In fact, if they switch him back a day he could win the Supreme on suitable ground.	Mullins' three mares – Vroum Vroum Mag, Limini and Let's Dance – plus On The Fringe, Cantlow, Yorkhill, Death Duty and Carter McKay.	A good ground festival might mean Diego Du Charmil will run in the County Hurdle. Last year's Fred Winter winner, whose stable has an excellent record in the race, is value at 16-1.	Depending on the ground Neon Wolf – while I like Wholestone in the Albert Bartlett. He's a knocking each-way bet.	Wholestone – Albert Bartlett Djakadam – Gold Cup Uxizandre – Ryanair Jezki – Stayers' Hurdle
Coral Andy Lobo	Having lost Thistlecrack his hand is weakened and with a few others deciding to chance their arm it looks an open race. I can see his runners drifting on the day as money comes for the Irish.	I think JP McManus has this race at his mercy. Buveur D'Air holds Petit Mouchoir on last year's form, and if he gets there on the day Yanworth looks to have a massive chance, too.	The fences! L'Ami Serge reportedly heads to the race and, although disappointing recently over hurdles, his previous festival form would give him a definite place chance.	He obviously has the favourite Unowhatimeanharry, who has to go well and the biggest danger is Jezki. I can forgive his last run and his comeback win suggested he retained plenty of ability.	I'm looking forward to seeing Augusta Kate over a trip. The fact she was sent off favourite for last year's bumper shows how well regarded she is. She wasn't beaten when falling last time.	Other than Augusta Kate, Bacardys in the Neptune is sure to go well. In the Coral Cup, Peregrine Run seems to have been let in lightly judged on his course win earlier in the season.	Peregrine Run in the Coral Cup. He would surely be shorter if trained by a more fashionable stable. Peace And Co could have been let in lightly in the County if work reports are to be believed.	Bacardys in the Neptune. He has the latent ability having placed in the festival bumper and won the Aintree equivalent. Stepping up in trip will suit and he can improve past the British hopes.	Bacardys – Neptune Peregrine Run – Coral Cup Augusta Kate – Albert Bartlett Jezki – Stayers' Hurdle
Ladbrokes Matt Trounce	No. I think Cue Card is flattered by his two wins this season and Native River has been well placed. Djakadam is the likeliest winner for me.	Buveur D'Air (right). This looks a very weak renewal and if there is one superstar in the field it is likely to be him.	I think L'Ami Serge can chase him home. These are his conditions and if he puts it all in I think he's the second-most talented horse in the field.	Unowhatimeanharry will be hard to beat but I couldn't have Jezki after the last run. Snow Falcon and Clondaw Warrior are two who could improve for the stronger gallop.	Movewiththetimes is a slow burner and, with the experience of Newbury under his belt, I expect him to turn around the form with Ballyandy.	Cause Of Causes looks to have been laid out for the cross-country chase. The weight of money in recent weeks has been interesting considering connections already have the short-priced favourite.	Henri Parry Morgan is just waiting to win a big handicap chase. If his jumping holds up, he's a massive player in the Ultima Handicap Chase.	Buveur D'Air in the Champion Hurdle.	Movewiththetimes – Supreme Henri Parry Morgan – Ultima Starchitect – Plate Champers On Ice – National Hunt Chase
Paddy Power Daniel Collins	With Thistlecrack missing I think it will elude Tizzard this season. I would take a chance on one of the previous festival winners in More Of That or Minella Rocco.	Having won around Kempton and Wincanton, I can't understand those who say Yanworth is too slow. He looks rock solid to me, with the Cheltenham test sure to suit.	Barring an act of God, it's impossible to envisage defeat for Douvan. God's Own may pick up the spoils in the without market if not being scared off into the Ryanair.	I'm not convinced Unowhatimeanharry is a banker and prefer Jezki, who has a touch of class. But I'd take them both on with Cole Harden, who ran encouragingly in the Clevee.	Neon Wolf looked a potential superstar at Haydock and will take all the beating if he can translate that to better ground. Altior has looked all right over fences too.	Phil Smith must be trying to get back into Gordon Elliott's good books as Tombstone, and Diamond King look to hold fantastic chances in handicaps.	Duke Street qualified at the start of the season and could outrun his odds if sneaking into the bottom of the Pertemps having won his prep run at Chelmsford.	Lay Might Bite in the run for the RSA at all prices down to 1.01. I can see him travelling away but not quite having the heart for it come the business end.	Long Call – Fred Winter Tombstone – Coral Cup Duke Street – Pertemps Hargam – County Hurdle
Sky Bet Richard Horner	Both have obvious chances but there are reasons to be against both, so as bookmakers you have to be against the pair at a touch over evens coupled and field for a result.	I can't believe I'm saying this but the only hint of value is 14-1 about The New One, who runs in the worst renewal of his career and can hit the frame if the ground is on the soft side.	The fences look to be Douvan's main danger, so let's hope both Altior and him both win well and we could look forward to the clash in next season's Queen Mother.	He certainly looks to at the moment and if Unowhatimeanharry runs to form he should be hard to beat. Jezki was disappointing last time but better ground will help him run much better here.	Yorkhill is the one I'm looking forward to watching in the JLT. He could either jump well and win on the bridle or his headstrong nature and tendency to make mistakes could cause him problems.	Mall Dini in the Kim Muir will be very popular – and Empire Of Dirt will go well whichever race he runs in.	With rides such as Buveur D'Air, Unowhatimeanharry and Neon Wolf, Noel Fehily looks value at a decent price to upset Ruby Walsh in the top jockey market.	Caid Du Berlais at 20-1 for the Plate. He's back down to a nice mark and signs at Doncaster last time suggested he will be spot-on for this at a course he likes.	Caid Du Berlais – Plate Le Prezien – Grand Annual Value At Risk – Close Brothers Novices' Handicap Chase The Druid's Nephew – Ultima
Sporting Index David Billington	A bit over 40 per cent likely, according to the market. Native River has a nice profile, in that he's still improving and peaking at the right time.	Yanworth might not have been visually impressive in small fields over the winter, but has still got the job done each time. A faster pace should see him in an even better light.	Probably just the fences, which looks unlikely, or random chance. Special Tiara looks a fair price each-way to be best of the rest, or take advantage should anything strange happen.	I'm struggling to find an obvious alternative to Unowhatimeanharry. There is a lack of progressive youngsters in opposition and I can't see the others reversing form with him.	Gordon Elliott seems unusually bullish about Death Duty. The horse has done everything right so far this season and looks rock solid.	That man Gordon Elliott has a strong hand in the handicaps. Diamond King in the Plate looks to be on a very fair mark.	Bryan Cooper to be top jockey at 12-1.	I like Bacardys a lot in the Neptune. He's run well at Cheltenham before, in last year's Bumper, and seems to be improving as he steps up in trip.	Bacardys – Neptune Unowhatimeanharry – Stayers' Hurdle Death Duty – Albert Bartlett Native River – Gold Cup
William Hill Mike Bellamy	Until recently we would have said yes but Cue Card has been relatively weak in the market lately and there is plenty of confidence behind Djakadam.	Brain Power, provided it's good ground. It's a wide-open Champion Hurdle, but perhaps Wicklow Brave doesn't deserve to be 40-1.	An act of God!	The favourite is very strong but Cole Harden can be his biggest threat if the ground comes up good.	Death Duty looks a star of the future.	Anything Gordon Elliott runs in the handicaps, including Diamond King in the Plate and Tombstone in the Coral Cup.	Wicklow Brave in the Champion Hurdle.	Someday in the Champion Bumper.	Brain Power – Champion Hurdle Someday – Champion Bumper Pacha Du Polder – Foxhunter More Of That – Gold Cup (Each-way)