

DO'S & DON'TS OF FESTIVAL PUNTING

BY TOM KERR

DO



GET TO A FESTIVAL PREVIEW EVENING

In the weeks leading up to Cheltenham pubs, hotels and racecourses around the country host preview evenings where expert panellists chew over their festival fancies. You might leave more confused than you arrived, but there will be pearls amid the ocean of information that washes over you.



KEEP AN EYE OUT FOR SPECIAL OFFERS

This isn't just a big week for punters – bookmakers will be going all out to get as much custom as possible. This is good news for bettors, who are bombarded with special prices, money-back concessions and sign-up offers. Pick your bookies carefully and it could make a big difference to your bottom line.



FOLLOW HORSES WITH FESTIVAL FORM

It's easy to be seduced by recent form, but remember a lot of the winter action takes place on heavy going that historically is unlikely to be repeated at Cheltenham. A better guide is often the simplest: horses that have form at Cheltenham in March are well-placed to run strongly again.

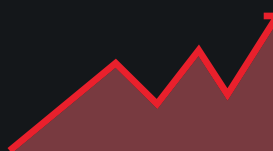
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LISTEN TO EVERY TIP YOU GET

Tips are ten-a-penny at Cheltenham, traded relentlessly in every bar and bookies in the land. If you follow every tip you hear – especially those that begin 'My nan's postie knows a fella...' – you'll end up with a fiver saver on every second horse at the festival.



PEAK TOO SOON

This applies to betting and boozing. While it can be tempting to pile into the Supreme Novices' Hurdle, or squeeze in a third pint of Guinness with your full English, remember that Cheltenham is a marathon not a sprint.



BELIEVE IN BANKERS

He's odds-on, hasn't dropped a race all season and his rivals are hopelessly overmatched – how can he lose? Many Cheltenham punters have asked themselves this question over the years and many have had cause to regret it when disaster strikes. Horses are not machines – they carry little injuries, they have off days, they fall over (just like us, in fact). Lumping on every banker at the festival might seem a road to riches, but it rarely is.

LUCKY MULLINS

WHEN TO BACK RUBY AND WILLIE



Ruby Walsh has been top jockey at the festival nine times since 2004. Willie Mullins has sent out 12 winners at the meeting in the past two years. They make a formidable partnership. Walsh's strike-rate for Mullins in non-handicap hurdles since 2009 is 42 per cent (14 winners from 33 mounts) for a £1 level-stakes profit of £7.03. Mullins is just 1/55 in such races when Walsh doesn't take the mount – that one winner was Glens Melody, who was handed the Mares' Hurdle last season when Annie Power (ridden by Walsh) fell at the last when four lengths clear.

THREE POST EXPERTS SELECT A LUCKY 15 FROM THE WILLIE MULLINS YARD



	JUSTIN O'HANLON	EDWARD QUIGLEY	DAVID JENNINGS
LEG 1	SKY BET SUPREME NOVICES' HURDLE MIN	OLBG.COM MARES HURDLE VROUM VROUM MAG	OLBG.COM MARES HURDLE VROUM VROUM MAG
LEG 2	JLT NOVICES' CHASE OUTLANDER	NEPTUNE INVESTMENTS NOVICES' HURDLE LONG DOG	NATIONAL HUNT CHASE ROI DES FRANCS
LEG 3	TRULL HOUSE STUD MARES NOVICES' HURDLE LIMINI	JLT NOVICES' CHASE SHANESHILL	WEATHERBYS CHAMPION BUMPER AUGUSTA KATE
LEG 4	JCB TRIUMPH HURDLE FOOTPAD	TIMICO CHELTENHAM GOLD CUP DJAKADAM	JCB TRIUMPH HURDLE LET'S DANCE

GOING FOR GOLD

NICHOLLS GOES COLD ON CHASERS

Champion trainer Paul Nicholls is renowned as the trainer of legendary chasers Kauto Star, Denman and Master Minded. But did you know that last year's Queen Mother Champion Chase winner Dodging Bullets is his only chase winner from 88 runners at the festival since 2010? His record with hurdlers is much better – 11 wins from 89 runners since 2010 for a £17.08 profit to £1 stakes.

INEXPERIENCE NO BARRIER TO GOLD

Coneygree may have been the first novice to win the Cheltenham Gold Cup in more than four decades when he triumphed last year, but it was far from unusual that the winner was relatively inexperienced over fences compared with many of his rivals.

In fact, history suggests that the best chance of Gold Cup victory lies on a chaser's first attempt at the race while they still have few runs on the board. It is interesting that leading fancy Djakadam fulfils the second criterion, but not the first after finishing runner-up last year. Coneygree landed the ultimate prize on just his fourth outing over fences, making him the eighth winner in the past ten years who went into the race with fewer than ten chase starts. The only horse to buck the trend was Kauto Star, who had run ten times over fences before his first Gold Cup win in 2007 and double that number by the time he reclaimed the crown two years later.

Coneygree was one of seven winners last year to make all or most of the running, including Faugheen, Cole Harden and Coneygree in three of the big four championship events.

It remains to be seen if it turns out to be a temporary blip or a new trend, but don't be deterred if you do fancy a front-runner.



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FESTIVAL FREE BET SPECIAL

Place £/€20+ on the Supreme Novices' Hurdle (1.30pm on Tuesday 15th March) and get a Free £/€5 Bet for EVERY Mullins trained Cheltenham winner on Day One. Terms apply

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