



ROYAL ASCOT



DAY 3 PREVIEW

THURSDAY 19 JUNE

RACE 1

THE NORFOLK
STAKES (GROUP 2)
5F

PRIZE MONEY
£150,000

RACE 2

THE KING
GEORGE V STAKES
(HANDICAP)
1M 3F 211Y

PRIZE MONEY
£110,000

RACE 3

THE RIBBLESDALE
STAKES (GROUP 2)
1M 3F 211Y

PRIZE MONEY
£250,000

RACE 4

THE GOLD CUP
(GROUP 1)
2M 3F 210Y

PRIZE MONEY
£650,000

RACE 5

THE BRITANNIA
STAKES (HERITAGE
HANDICAP)
1M (STR)

PRIZE MONEY
£120,000

RACE 6

THE HAMPTON
COURT STAKES
(GROUP 3)
1M 1F 212Y

PRIZE MONEY
£150,000

RACE 7

THE BUCKINGHAM
PALACE STAKES
(HANDICAP)
7F

PRIZE MONEY
£110,000

TIMEFORM TIPS

RACE

1

1st **CHARLES DARWIN** (3)
2nd **NAVAL LIGHT** (13)
3rd **AFJAN** (1)

RACE

2

1st **SERIOUS CONTENDER** (5)
2nd **MERCHANT** (8)
3rd **PROPOSE** (11)

RACE

3

1st **CATALINA DELCARPIO** (2)
2nd **SERENITY PRAYER** (10)
3rd **HOLLYS GRACES** (6)

RACE

4

1st **TRAWLERMAN** (4)
2nd **ILLINOIS** (8)
3rd **SWEET WILLIAM** (3)

RACE

5

1st **RAAFEDD** (25)
2nd **TEROOMM** (8)
3rd **TRIBAL NATION** (24)

RACE

6

1st **DETAIN** (3)
2nd **TRINITY COLLEGE** (14)
3rd **HIGH STOCK** (7)

RACE

7

1st **RAMAZAN** (21)
2nd **HOLGUIN** (10)
3rd **MIRSKY** (25)



Port Fairy winning the Ribblesdale Stakes at Royal Ascot 2024.



Jayerebe winning the Hampton Court Stakes at Royal Ascot 2024.



English Oak winning the Buckingham Palace Stakes at Royal Ascot 2024.

Ascot Top Three Plays

1st - Norfolk Stakes (Group 2)

This may well go to Aidan O'Brien's colt CHARLES DARWIN, who has been highly progressive in Ireland, sets a decent standard and, as a full-brother to former dual 6f Group 1 winner Blackbeard, has an eye-catching pedigree too. Potential improver Naval Light has plenty going for him as he bids to follow up the yard's win in this last year and may be next best ahead of interesting French-trained raider Afjan. First Legion may be best of the rest.

Selections [CHARLES DARWIN](#) (3) [NAVAL LIGHT](#) (13) [AFJAN](#) (1)

2nd - King George V Stakes (Heritage Handicap))

The one to appeal most is SERIOUS CONTENDER, presumably put by with this in mind after winning at Leopardstown over 10f in March when very much shaping as if 12f would suit even better. It may be significant that Ryan Moore has plumped for this Irish Derby entry ahead of two interesting stablemates, so this potential improver may well be the answer. A wide draw has been no bar to success in this race in recent times. Highly progressive Merchant may be the main danger ahead of the selection's stablemate Propose. Omni Man may be the pick of the remainder.

Selections- [Serious Contender](#) (5)[Merchant](#) (8)[Propose](#) (11)

4th - Gold Cup (Group 1)

Ready preference is for TRAWLERMAN, who will have strong prospects if running to the same level as when a clear second to the redoubtable but now retired Kryprios in this last year and who looked as ever when winning well in his prep for this at Sandown last month. Illinois is a classy sort whose rallying win over 1m7f at Longchamp in October provided a strong clue that 2m4f will be within range. If that is indeed the case, he has the form to be the main danger ahead of Sweet William, better than ever last season and who resumed with a good effort at York last month. Candelari is the other main player but this is a significantly tougher Group 1 than when winning in most decisive style at Longchamp last time. He could have more to come but he will need to step up a bit on that Longchamp form.

Selections [Trawlerman](#) (4)[Illinois](#) (8)[Sweet William](#) (3)

GOLD CUP

RUNNER BY
RUNNER GUIDE

BY DAVE ORTON

This year's Gold Cup at 4.20 on Thursday, live on Sky Sports Racing, has been blown wide open by the recent retirement of the great Kyprios, winner of the past two editions. Aidan O'Brien is the record-winning trainer of the week's biggest race and relies on just one this year, while last season's second and third are back for more. Throw in some top international form to the eight-strong field and despite the defection and the Gold Cup still looks well up to scratch.



1. COLTRANE (6)



This guy knows all about the Gold Cup having finished second and fifth in the past two editions. He's now into veteran status, though, and, while he ran more respectably behind Trawlerman at Sandown latest, it's safe to assume that his best days are in the rearview mirror.

2. DUBAI FUTURE (5)



Missed all of 2024 but returned with a bang recording back-to-back staying wins at Meydan in Dubai earlier this year. Flopped when thrashed by Candelari at Paris Longchamp latest, but it was too bad to be true and now gets the assistance of one of the world's best jockeys in James MacDonald. Won the Wolferton Stakes at the Royal Meeting in 2023, likes fast ground and his best form doesn't leave him far off the market principals.

3. SWEET WILLIAM (8)



Enjoys racing at Ascot and finished a six-length third to Kyprios in last year's Gold Cup. Wasn't far off his best when not far off the classy Rebel's Romance on his comeback in the Group 2 Yorkshire Cup last month, and fully entitled to improve on that. Has ground to make up on old rival Trawlerman, but isn't one to discount lightly.

4. TRAWLERMAN (2)



Failed to win in 2024 and wasn't near his best when resuming behind Dubai Future in Meydan earlier this year. Came right back to it when comfortably seeing off Coltrane in the Group 3 Henry II Stakes at Sandown last month, however, and no surprise to see him subsequently well backed in the ante-post betting. Doesn't have Kyprios to worry about now and a length second in last year's Gold Cup sets the standard for the others to aim at. Must go well again.

ST JAMES'S PALACE STAKES

RUNNER BY RUNNER GUIDE

Continued

5. WONDER LEGEND (5)



Hugely progressive stayer on the all-weather for James Ferguson and took his form to a new level winning the big one at Newcastle in April. Surely has more to offer yet, although this is a completely different kettle of fish and quick ground is an unknown for him.

6. YASHIN (7)



Rather lost his way in Ireland for Jessie Harrington, having registered placed form to his name behind Kyprios in 2024. However, proved a decent acquisition for new connections when taking the Sagaro Stakes here on Trial's Day in April, beating Coltrane by a length and showing the benefit of a first-time tongue-tie. Trainer Michael Bell won the Gold Cup with Big Orange in 2017, but this six-year-old needs the market principals to blow out if he's to repeat the feat.

7. CANDELARI (4)



Classy son of Frankel who really ought to be lining up unbeaten for the excellent Francis Henri-Graffard. His sole defeat came in a horribly tactical affair at Chantilly in April, and proved that to be all wrong when recording a personal-best in the newly upgraded Group 1 Prix Vicomtesse Vigier at ParisLongchamp last month. The Gold Cup trip will be new territory stamina-wise and has to prove himself on fast ground, but surely the best of him has still to come. Big player.

8. ILLINOIS (1)



Ballydoyle will be hoping Illinois is their new kid on the block in the Cup division, with Kyprios now off at stud, and last year's likeable Queen's Vase winner has obvious claims of keeping the prize in house. His comeback win over the gutsy Al Qareem at Chester's Boodles May Festival has since been well advertised and he'll have no trouble with the quicker terrain at Ascot. The son of Galileo has yet to race beyond 1m7f and his form to date isn't quite the best in this line up, though, so his current odds of around 5-4 do look skinny going into the race.

VERDICT



Illinois is such a likeable performer and understandably will do for many in his quest to hand Aidan O'Brien a tenth Gold Cup. His form doesn't justify him being around the 5-4 mark, though, and if there's a fly in the ointment it's likely to be **CANDELARI**, who makes greater appeal at bigger odds and is taken to become the first French-trained Gold Cup winner since Westerner in 2005.



ROYAL ASCOT THURSDAY PICKS

BY TIM CARROLL



SANDAL'S SONG | NORFOLK STAKES



I wasn't going to have a bet in the Norfolk Stakes this year until I saw American colt **SANDAL'S SONG** being shopped around at 20/1. This looks another open renewal, more so than the top of the market might currently suggest, but for me the Wathnan Racing juvenile shouldn't be that big in the betting. The George Weaver (trainer of 2023 Queen Mary winner Crimson Advocate) two-year-old booked his ticket to Royal Ascot when taking out the colts' division of the Royal Palm at Gulfstream last month, which was won last year by Gabaldon, who then went on to finish runner-up in the Windsor Castle. Like Gabaldon, Sandal's Song's debut came in the Royal Palm, stalking the pace before finishing strongly to win by over a length, with the first two pulling well clear of the rest. Apparently he recorded just four pieces of serious work prior to his introduction, while according to his trainer that race was the first time he'd galloped on turf, so he's entitled to come on plenty for that effort. He ran an Equibase speed figure of 84 that day, which is slightly less than Gabaldon managed (87), though he was tardy out of the stalls. However, he still ran through the line with plenty of purpose, which is what you want to see from an American juvenile heading to the Royal meeting.



ILLINOIS | GOLD CUP



The recent retirement of champion stayer Kyprios has opened up the division, and although **ILLINOIS** has as long way to go to join some of the illustrious Gold Cup winners sent out by his trainer, who has won the race a record nine times, he does look a top staying prospect in the making. He was only narrowly denied in the St Leger by stablemate Jan Brueghel as a three-year-old, with that form looking better all the time, but he certainly looked a more complete article when taking out the Ormonde Stakes at Chester last month on his run of the year. He's already shown a liking for Ascot too, having won the Queen Vase on his only visit here last season, and while he is a four-year-old up against several more-hardened rivals, his age group has actually won six of the last 11 renewals of this race, while favourites (13/8 at the time of writing) have a very good recent record having struck six times in the last 10 years.

