

RACING POST

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Issue No. 12,011

NEWMARKET FAMILY PORTRAIT

Fascinating insight into how HQ has changed in 25 years Page 3



NICOLA CURRIE

The heroine of Shergar Cup day pulls no punches in a revealing interview Pages 6-7



FRIDAY NIGHT AT THE CURRAGH



CAROLINE NORRIS (RACINGPOST.COM/PHOTOS)

INSIDE Previews and best bets including Pricewise with two value picks in the Irish Cambridgeshire

Black market firms hiring VIP managers and targeting high-staking punters

RACING POST INVESTIGATION

By Bill Barber, Industry editor

INDIVIDUALS who formerly worked as controversial VIP managers for regulated bookmakers are being approached by black market operators, who see their customer lists, including problem gamblers who have subsequently quit betting, as "commercially lucrative".

Stricter affordability checks being carried out by legitimate operators in the UK following pressure from the Gambling Commission are also driving high-staking punters to the black market, according to two

individuals who used to work as VIP managers for licensed operators.

Both individuals wanted to remain anonymous, but in an affidavit seen by the Racing Post, one of them said that they had received seven concrete offers and four additional approaches from either smaller or black market operators offering to pay somewhere between 15 per cent and 30 per cent of the net losses from any individuals that they sign up.

One of the individuals also stated there have been requests **Continues page 8**

Today's cards (F) Newmarket 1.10 50 (F) Thirsk 1.00 24 (F) Ffos Las 1.20 34 (F) Hamilton 4.35 44 (F) Goodwood 4.53 40 (F) Curragh 4.15 58 (J) Down Royal 3.55 72

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RACING POST INVESTIGATION

From front page

for lists of customers who have self-excluded from gambling.

The revelations again highlight the risk to potentially vulnerable gamblers posed by the black market and follows the investigation in yesterday's edition of the Racing Post into the dozens of websites preying on such customers by actively advertising themselves as routes for circumventing the self-exclusion scheme provided by GamStop.

The Gambling Commission told the Racing Post it found the claims "concerning" and said it would take action to close down operators illegally interacting with British gamblers.

Programmes involving high-value customers – also known as VIPs – have been one of the most contentious aspects of the gambling industry in recent years. Under such schemes, high-spending customers are rewarded with hospitality, bonuses and offers.

However, last year the Gambling Commission said that seven out of ten enforcement cases it had brought against online operators had involved VIPs or "very large spending" customers.

In the spring of 2020 operators agreed to develop an industry code that would restrict and prevent customers under 25 years of age from being recruited to VIP schemes.

Customers would also have to pass thorough checks relating to spend, safer gambling and enhanced due diligence before becoming eligible for incentives, while reward programmes would be required to have full audit trails.

It was claimed the measures reduced the number of customers signed up to such schemes by 70 per cent and a number of jobs were lost as operators reduced their VIP teams.

However, at the end of

'The black market, at least in part, sees vulnerability as commercially lucrative'

September the Gambling Commission warned the industry such schemes were on their "last chance" after the regulator had seen "repeated instances of failure to protect high-value customers".

It has recently been reported that VIP schemes would be banned as part of the government's gambling review.

The former VIP manager responsible for the affidavit said that some of those made redundant by the crackdown on such schemes had gravitated towards the black market due to lack of similar employment options, "and have been encouraged to seek to bring their customers with them".

"The contacts of former VIP managers comprise the highest value customers in the gambling world, with annual stakes ranging from £5,000 to £5,000,000," they added.

The former manager said that the offer of a percentage of losses from a single high-staking customer could be more lucrative than working in the regulated sector for his peers.

They went on: "I have been in direct contact with other VIP managers, and I am certainly not unique in terms of the offers being made for my contacts and knowledge-base.

"These conversations have

'Without a doubt, the key group of players sought after by the black market are former or existing VIPs, and in particular the black market wants direct introductions facilitated by someone like me'

Former VIP manager



included the prospect of collaborating with my peers to combine our contacts in order to secure a higher percentage return from the unregulated operators.

"I have received offers from operations ranging from smaller regulated operators that appear to be tempted to circumvent regulations, to sophisticated black market operators with established websites."

The former manager said that the black market operators wanted to recruit the highest-staking players without concern for the risks they posed from either a criminal perspective or whether they were vulnerable.

"Without a doubt, the key group of players sought after by the black market are former or existing VIPs, and in particular the black market wants direct introductions facilitated by someone like me," they said.

"As a secondary resource, the black market also wants databases of contacts, including VIPs and excluded players. I have been contacted by customers who have already

received emails from unregulated operations, which suggests that lists of player data

have already been sold to black market operators.

"Of particular concern, and something that adds a sinister note to all of this, is that I have had black market operators specifically requesting lists of GamStop-excluded customers. The black market, at least in part, sees vulnerability as commercially lucrative."

Earlier this year a Gambling Commission consultation on remote customer interaction included a proposal that a monthly net gambling loss of as little as £100 would mean punters would have to prove their income in order to continue to bet.

That has caused huge concern for British racing's leadership, who fear the sport could lose upwards of £60 million a year from lost levy and media rights income if punters are put off by intrusive questions about their finances.

The results of the commission's findings have yet to be released, and the government has subsequently indicated that the issue would be dealt with in its gambling review.

However, the Racing Post has been contacted by a number of punters this year who say their betting has already been

affected by intrusive questions from operators.

The former VIP manager's affidavit said: "What has emerged more recently . . . is that it is not only the black market operators looking to people like me to bring in customers, but also our player-contacts are approaching us in the hope that we will introduce them to bookies on the black market."

A second former VIP manager contacted by the Racing Post said they were in no doubt that such checks were driving customers from the regulated market.

They said: "I can't speak for anyone else but I have been contacted by ex-customers to help place their business with new or more open-minded providers. However, this in itself is nothing new and was par for the course throughout my time working as a VIP manager and agent.

"What I can say now is that it is purely because of the changes the Gambling Commission has forced upon the main providers and is leading to punters going elsewhere or leaving the game completely."

They said that even people

who could pass the checks did not want their private information shared with bookmakers.

As for the unregulated operators that such customers are being drawn to, they added: "The operators in the UK I've come across are providing word of mouth contact and the likes of WhatsApp as a medium to provide services.

"At the higher stakes end they are wealthy connected individuals providing a bespoke service to very high-end clients.

"Abroad the systems are far more advanced providing online sites, casino and sportsbook. Credit is usual with settlement weekly but some jurisdictions have seen the facility to accept payments through banking systems, especially crypto."

The former manager responsible for the affidavit acknowledged that VIP management had "in the past occasionally adopted practices that were rightly deplored and as such have been phased out of the regulated market".

They added: "While I have no doubt that the intentions of the Commission are ultimately aligned with regulated operators, ie to protect genuinely vulnerable customers and to keep crime out of gambling, the measures adopted are having an adverse effect."

The Gambling Commission has said the risk of black market gambling should not be a reason to stop taking action to make regulated gambling safer.

However, in response to the claims made by the two VIP managers, a spokesperson said: "Such approaches, if correct, are clearly concerning and we would urge the two former VIP managers to provide us as much information as possible as a matter of urgency so we can feed this into our drive to tackle unlicensed operators.

"Where we see individuals or companies illegally interacting with British consumers we take action to close them down.

"We would also expect our licensees to ensure they are abiding by all legal requirements in respect on the use of player data. Failure to comply with data protection requirements would impact on their suitability to hold a gambling licence."

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RACING POST

Thursday, January 28, 2021 — Download the free Racing Post app for must-have news, tips and fast results — £3.50
Issue No. 11,800

Chancellor listens to fears over affordability checks on punters

By Bill Barber

CHANCELLOR Rishi Sunak has contacted culture secretary Oliver Dowden about concerns raised by the racing industry over a Gambling Commission consultation which the sport fears could lead to a huge financial blow.

Sunak is the Conservative MP for the North Yorkshire constituency of Richmond which includes Catterick racecourse and the Middleham training centre.

Catterick wrote to Sunak recently as part of a wider effort by the sport to contact MPs over the consultation on "remote customer interaction"

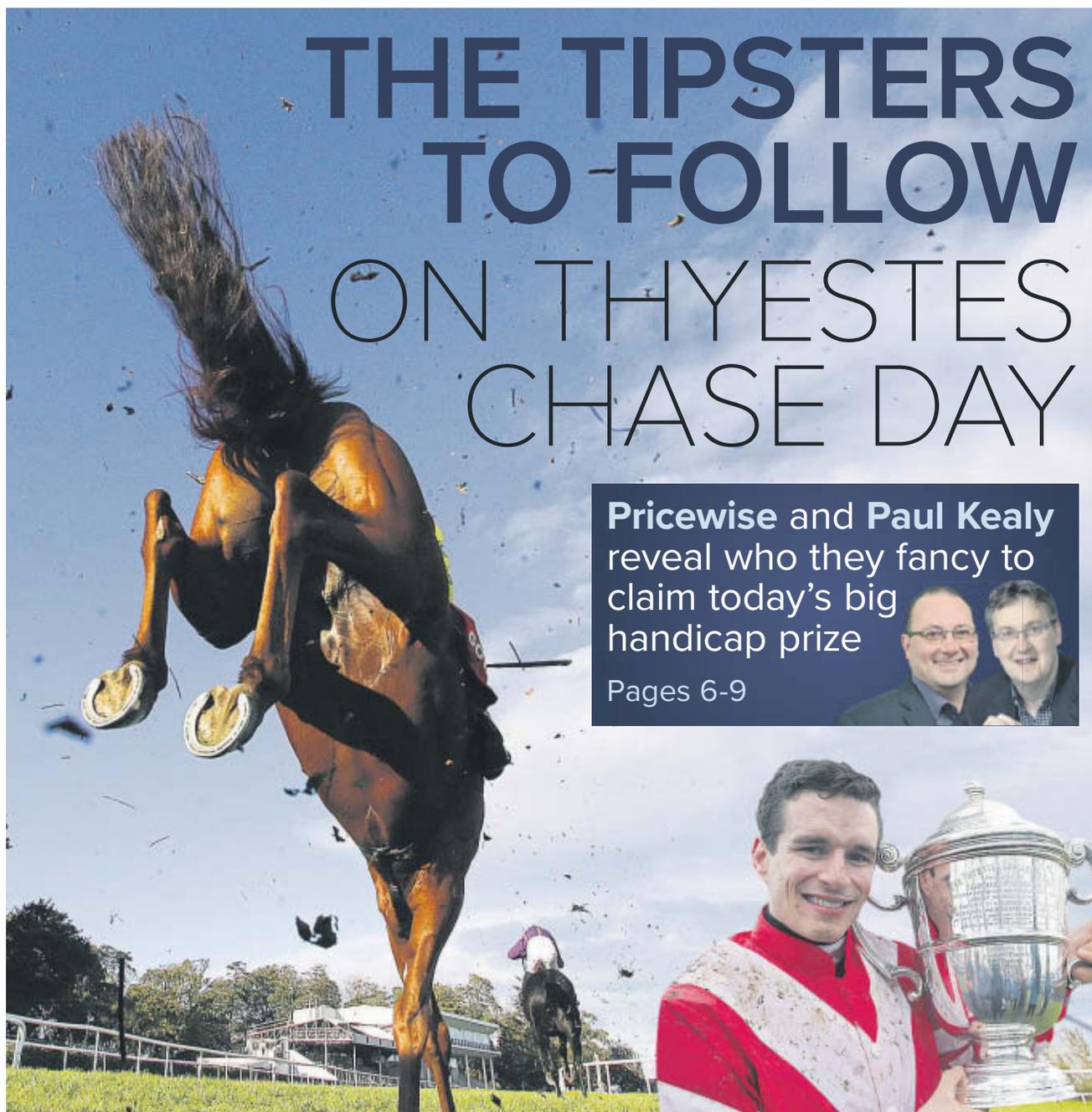
which includes enhanced affordability checks to tackle problem gambling.

Among the possibilities raised in the consultation and call for evidence is the prospect of the introduction of a threshold on net gambling loss of as little as £100, which would lead to customers having to provide evidence they could afford to lose more.

It is understood the new BHA chief executive Julie Harrington raised the issue with her counterpart at the Gambling Commission, Neil McArthur, during an introductory meeting this week.

The Racing Post has seen a

Continues page 2



THE TIPSTERS TO FOLLOW ON THYESTES CHASE DAY

Pricewise and Paul Kealy reveal who they fancy to claim today's big handicap prize

Pages 6-9



NEW SIRES

Supplement inside



O'Brien could base staff in Newmarket to avoid travel woes

By James Stevens

AIDAN O'BRIEN is hopeful that Brexit, coronavirus and the related travel restrictions will not hinder his chances of adding further Classic riches to his expansive CV.

O'Brien's thoughts are already turning to the logistical challenge behind bringing his

Guineas team, both human and equine, to Newmarket in May.

The master of Ballydoyle stationed stable staff in a house in Newmarket last season to be able to continue to have runners within England - while further afield he scooped Group 1 prizes in Hong Kong, France and the US.

O'Brien is considering his options again and could base stable staff in Newmarket while flying them over in advance to allow time to quarantine if necessary.

Brexit has added further complications but O'Brien hopes that by the first Classic of the season on May 1 the situation will be clearer,

partially thanks to the experiences of fellow Irish trainers seeking to bring runners to the Cheltenham Festival in March.

O'Brien, who trains four of the five Classic ante-post favourites, said: "We're lucky as Cheltenham will happen and have to be sorted before things come our way. Like all these things, they're all slow at the

start, and it's always messy and stressful on everyone.

"I think everyone knows where we all want to get and it usually gets sorted. Hopefully come Guineas time it will all be a bit more straightforward.

"We all have to do what we have to do to keep the whole thing going. Everyone has to

Continues page 3

Today's cards **J** Gowran Park 1.15 46 **J** Fakenham 12.53 26 **J** Wetherby 1.02 34 **AW** Southwell 1.10 56 **AW** Newcastle 3.40 62 **AF** Meydan 3.05 20

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TODAY

CARDS, GOING & WEATHER

Gowran Park (J) 46
 1.15-4.30 7 races - €204k - RTV/RTE2
 HEAVY Showers



Fakenham (J) 26
 12.53-4.05 7 races - £67k - SKY
 SOFT, Heavy places INSPECT 7.30am Showers



Wetherby (J) 34
 1.02-4.17 7 races - £54k - RTV
 HEAVY, Frozen places INSPECT 8am Showers



Southwell (AW) 56
 1.10-4.25 7 races - £58k - SKY
 STANDARD TO SLOW Showers



Newcastle (AW) 62
 3.40-7.30 8 races - £47k - SKY
 STANDARD TO SLOW Showers



Meydan 3.05-5.25 - 5 races - SKY/RTV 20

Tote Jackpot First six races at Wetherby (1.02-3.45)

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NEWS



ALAN CROWHURST (GETTY IMAGES)

Santini: has been given Haydock entry in case of heavy ground at Cheltenham on Saturday, trainer Nicky Henderson explained

By David Carr

AFTER recently bemoaning the lack of opportunities for Gold Cup contenders, Nicky Henderson has put last year's runner-up Santini in the William Hill Grand National Trial at Haydock next month.

The champion trainer remains keen for the high-class nine-year-old to return to Cheltenham for the Paddy Power Cotswold Chase on Saturday but he has given him the option of taking on Aintree hopes under a likely big weight at the Merseyside track on February 20.

The 3m4½f contest was won en route to Gold Cup success by Cool Ground and Master Oats (run at Kempton) in the 1990s and Henderson said: "The plan is to run at Cheltenham on Saturday but if it's very testing ground we'd think again as it's not the right time to be doing that. There is only the Denman Chase after this weekend and the plan is to run Champ there, but I'm not saying they both can't go there. "Everything is just a bit up in

Santini entered in Haydock National trial as Henderson keeps options open

the air with the ground like it is so it is hard to make plans. I'm not saying he would jump into a Grand National by having an entry in this race, I just want to make sure all avenues are covered.

"It's unlikely that he runs there as it probably comes a bit too close to Cheltenham but the options are so limited. Haydock is unlikely to come up with better ground at this time of year but you never know. He would stay the trip around

Haydock that's for sure."

Secret Reprieve and Notachance, the winners of the Welsh Grand National and Classic Chase, are the sponsor's 7-1 joint favourites for the Grand National Trial.

Santini's possible absence from Saturday's Cotswold Chase could tempt Sandy Thomson to run Yorkhill in that Grade 2 contest, rather than the Sky Bet Chase at Doncaster the same afternoon.

After giving the Rehearsal

Chase winner a workout on the all-weather at Newcastle yesterday, Thomson said: "I don't know where he'll run but the Sky Bet looks as competitive as it's been for a year or two and the Cotswold could cut up.

"If Santini doesn't go, Bristol De Mai will and Yala Enki might but apart from them there's not a hell of a lot in it. And a small field might be better than a very competitive handicap where they go a million miles an hour."

'There is a problem but I believe

From front page

copy of one of the letters sent to MPs in the new year which details the £250 million hit for racecourse revenues caused by the Covid-19 pandemic and speaks of a further £60m impact on the sport's revenues if blanket affordability checks as low as £100 were introduced.

It also highlights concerns that action could be taken without consulting parliamentarians and calls for the

decision-making process to at least align with the government's separate Gambling Act review.

John Sanderson, group chief executive of Catterick's owner International Racecourse Management, said: "Catterick sent him [Sunak] a letter as suggested by the Racecourse Association because he is our MP and we had a very quick, very positive and friendly response saying he would raise the matter and that he had

contacted the secretary of state at the DCMS.

"It was a very, very positive reply from him indeed, I thought."

Sanderson, who added Sunak had told Catterick he would contact them again when he had received a response, said the consultation was causing concern.

He added: "Affordability is a big worry as it is estimated to take £60 million out of racing. That is a hell of a lot of money

under any circumstances."

Another politician to have been contacted is the Labour MP for St Helens North, Conor McGinn, one of the sport's staunchest supporters in Westminster who has Haydock racecourse within his constituency.

He said: "Like other MPs across parliament who have racecourses or racing interests in their constituency, I've been contacted by Haydock, who share a view across racing that

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Guineas favourite Battleground could 'go for an easier race' before Royal Ascot bid

JULIAN FINNEY (GETTY IMAGES)



Battleground: uncertainty over three-year-old campaign

From front page make adjustments on every side and we all want the same result. We need to be able to compete for the good of racing all over Europe."

He added: "There could be a new quarantine rule coming in where you need to be there [in Britain] one or two weeks before. If that's the case then it'd be like [for us] Australia, where we sent people down, do their two weeks quarantine and they stay there then."

"We had a team at Newmarket last year. Wherever the racing was, the lads would put them on a plane and the team would pick them up over there. I suppose something like that would happen. I hope we'd be able to be there to do that and it'd be great if we could."

O'Brien named St Mark's Basilica, who was yesterday officially crowned Europe's best two-year-old of 2020, as a likely Qipco 2,000 Guineas contender along with Wembley and Van Gogh.

But the participation of 8-1

favourite Battleground is unclear, with O'Brien potentially targeting the St James's Palace Stakes at Royal Ascot instead.

On his Guineas contenders, O'Brien (right) said: "I had a good chat with the lads and they'll decide but the two Dewhurst horses - St Mark's Basilica and Wembley - could be, and Van Gogh too."



"He's [Battleground] a Guineas horse along with the other three but it's very possible that, with all of them going to the Guineas, he could go to Ascot with one run before rather than them all going to Newmarket."

"He's a lovely horse and Newmarket would suit him so a lot will depend on how they all are in the spring. Battleground could go for an easier

race and then the St James's Palace - it all depends on how the spring is going for them all."

Meanwhile, Investec Derby favourite High Definition remains on course for Epsom.

"High Definition would be a shorter price to go for that [a Derby trial] than a Guineas," said O'Brien, speaking at the European two-year-old

Classifications press conference.

"The Guineas is a great trial for the Derby but we have other horses for it so it's very possible he might go for a trial and then straight to the Derby."

O'Brien also gave an update on last season's dual Classic winner and Arc favourite Love, who has wintered particularly well.

"She's cantering away at

the moment and she's done very well," he said. "I'd have thought she'd be ready for all of those middle-distance races."

"We'll be wanting to keep her on nice ground so where she starts will depend on that. There's the Tattersalls Gold Cup but she probably wouldn't go there unless it was nice ground."

"She loves nice ground so we're hoping to have her for all those summer middle-distance races and have her into the autumn. Physically she's done really well and everyone is happy with her."

ANALYSIS AND FULL RANKINGS LIST AS ST MARK'S BASILICA CROWNED TWO-YEAR-OLD CHAMPION PAGE 13

this is the wrong target'

some of the conjecture around affordability checks - if even anywhere near true - would be absolutely devastating for racing and its finances and furthermore seem completely unworkable in the context of betting on horseracing."

Kenny MacAskill, the SNP MP for East Lothian whose constituency includes Musselburgh, said the Gambling Commission's intervention seemed "unnecessarily bureaucratic."

"While I am supportive of action on gambling this seems far too wide and ignores the real issues of online and other forms," he said.

"It's akin in my views to clamping down on alcohol. Support pubs where it's supervised and regulated and address off sales where it's

cheap and unregulated. It seems to me that racecourses and much of horseracing is the former."

He added: "There is a problem with gambling and protections are required but I believe that this is the wrong target."

That was a view echoed by Philip Davies, the Conservative MP for Shipley.

He said: "It's perfectly clear that the gambling industry needs to do more in making sure that people are not betting way beyond their means."

"We've obviously seen cases of people who have got into terrible debt and addiction and quite clearly the industry needs to do more to make sure that where people are gambling large amounts of money it's money they can afford to lose."

However, he added: "Putting a blanket limit on everybody is nonsensical. What the industry has got to do is find a way of making sure that it does actually do more to make sure that people can afford to lose what they are losing."

"Ultimately one of the main arbiters has to be the individual concerned. You can't take them out of the equation, you can't remove the individual from having some responsibility for deciding what they can or can't afford."

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Deep Impact	Alzao
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	Terlingua
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Issue No. 11,911

GOLD CUP PRICEWISE

Tom Segal's ante-post special on
the Royal Ascot highlight Pages 12-15



Chester supremo Thomas sacked for misuse of resources

By Bill Barber

CHESTER chief executive Richard Thomas has been dismissed by the racecourse after being found to have misused company resources for a personal project.

The news comes following speculation about Thomas's future after he was absent from the course for its prestigious May meeting two weeks ago.

Ian O'Doherty, chairman of the Chester Race Company (CRC), said the decision had followed an internal investigation.

"Richard Thomas has left the role as CEO of Chester Race Company Ltd," he said. "Following a thorough investigation into recent misuse of CRC resources to support a personal project, Richard's contract was terminated."

"We are extremely disappointed
Continues page 2



DAVID DAVIES (GETTY IMAGES)

Spectators and bookmakers engrossed in the action at Nottingham yesterday on the second day of crowds returning to racecourses in England. Yesterday at the Races, page 10

Lee Mottershead on
the wonders of a
Windsor night
meeting, page 6



Lucky Vega heads huge weekend for Harrington

By David Jennings

JESSICA HARRINGTON yesterday stressed it is a "very big weekend" for her Commonstown team as Lucky Vega tackles the Tattersalls Irish 2,000 Guineas at the Curragh on Saturday, a race she is trying to win for the first time.

The dual-purpose trainer, who celebrated her first Classic success when Alpha Centauri landed the Irish 1,000

Guineas in 2018, will be doubly represented in the 2021 running on Sunday with No Speak Alexander and Zaffy's Pride, while Cayenne Pepper will take on Love on the same day.

Lucky Vega went down fighting in the Qipco 2,000 Guineas at Newmarket, finishing half a length behind Poetic Flare in third, and he has been made 15-8 favourite with Paddy Power to win the Irish equivalent after 14 horses stood their ground

at yesterday's five-day forfeit stage.

The biggest threat could come from the yard of Aidan O'Brien, who is chasing his 12th win in the race and a first since Churchill in 2017. He is responsible for four of the entries and Battleground, Van Gogh and Wembley could all bid to put their disappointing displays in the 2,000 Guineas behind them.

Poetic Flare was only sixth in the French equivalent at Longchamp on

Sunday but was left in at the Curragh by Jim Bolger at the five-day forfeit stage.

Harrington said: "It's a very big weekend for us and I'm really looking forward to it. It's all systems go for Lucky Vega, although you'd have to be worried about the ground and the forecast for the rest of the week."

"But there is nothing we can do about it. It was pretty soft when Lucky
Continues page 2

Today's cards (F) **Ayr** 2.10 **62** (J) **Warwick** 1.15 **26** (F) **Yarmouth** 1.00 **32** (AW) **Kempton** 5.25 **52** (J) **Southwell** 5.10 **44** (F) **Cork** 1.35 **70** (F) **Happy Valley** 11.45 **22**

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TODAY

CARDS, GOING & WEATHER

Ayr	F	2.10-5.30	7 races - £87k - RTV	62
GOOD TO FIRM, Good in places Showers				
Warwick	J	1.15-4.30	7 races - £72k - RTV	26
Chases GOOD TO SOFT, Soft pl; Hurdles SOFT, Good/soft pl Showers				
Yarmouth	F	1.00-4.40	8 races - £56k - SKY	32
GOOD, Good to firm in places Showers				
Kempton	AW	5.25-8.35	7 races - £52k - RTV	52
STANDARD TO SLOW Showers				
Southwell	J	5.10-8.20	7 races - £52k - SKY	44
GOOD, Good to soft in places Showers				
Cork	F	1.35-5.15	8 races - €119k - RTV	70
GOOD TO YIELDING, Yielding in places Showers				
Happy Valley	+	11.45-3.50	9 races - SKY	22

Tote Jackpot First six races at Ayr (2.10-4.55)

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ADVANCE GOING & WEATHER

Tomorrow	Market Rasen GOOD Showers
Chelmsford STANDARD Showers	Sandown SOFT Showers
Lingfield SOFT Showers	Tipperary GOOD TO YIELDING Showers
	Wolverhampton STANDARD Showers

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NEWS

Thomas dismissed as Chester chief executive

From front page
about this outcome, however, we are pleased that our internal processes identified the matter and ensured that we were able to address it in the way that we have. Richard has made a significant contribution to the development and growth of the company over the past 20 years.

"The recent 2021 Boodles May Festival was a great success and as a business we are now all focused on the return of spectators to the Roodee."

Attempts were made to contact Thomas for comment.

It is understood the CRC board is set to meet later this week to discuss next steps and who will replace Thomas, who

had been in the role for more than 20 years.

Thomas, 51, began his career in the racing industry with short stints at Aintree and Huntingdon before taking over as managing director at Haydock. He joined Chester as chief executive in 2000.

He had been the driving force behind the success of the CRC, which also owns Bangor and took on the long-term operating contract of Musselburgh last summer. In its last published accounts the company reported profit before tax of £4.1 million for 2019.

However, in August last year Thomas confirmed 20 full-time staff at Chester and six ground-staff at Musselburgh had been

made redundant as a result of the Covid-19 pandemic.

In 2012, the company launched its own in-house betting service ChesterBET at Chester and its equivalent at Bangor following the sale of the Tote.

Other milestones included the CRC agreeing a ten-year deal to move to Sky Sports Racing from the then Racing UK, with live coverage of fixtures at Chester and Bangor shown on the channel from 2019. Chester was also crowned the overall champion at the Racecourse Association's Showcase Awards in 2013.

Richard Thomas: took over as Chester chief in 2000



'Cayenne is great - I've been delighted with her'

From front page

Vega won the Phoenix Stakes and we were probably more worried about the quick ground for him at Newmarket than we are about Saturday."

No Speak Alexander and Zaffy's Pride both seemed to enjoy soft ground when finishing first and second in the Athasi Stakes at the track this month.

Harrington said: "No Speak Alexander was very good the other day and she'll be fine on the ground. She will stay too - that's going to be important. Zaffy's Pride is tough and the ground won't bother her."

Cayenne Pepper has been given the green light to take on Love and the rest of the Ballydoyle battalion in the Tattersalls Gold Cup, and Harrington has issued an upbeat bulletin on the four-year-old.

She said: "Cayenne Pepper is great, really good. She's wintered very well and got a lot stronger. I've been delighted with her."

Dermot Weld's two-time Irish St Leger winner Search For A Song has also got the go-ahead for the 1m2½f Group 1.

Joseph O'Brien, who is hoping Thunder Moon can leave a lethargic effort in the Qipco 2,000 Guineas behind on Saturday, believes the Zoffany



Cayenne Pepper has been given the go-ahead for the Tattersalls Gold Cup

colt may have lost his race at the start at Newmarket.

O'Brien said: "Thunder Moon got quite upset before the race at Newmarket and wasted a lot of energy. It was just one of those things. We've regrouped and trained him for the Curragh. Ideally he wouldn't want it soft, but he's come out of Newmarket in good shape."

O'Brien's Pretty Gorgeous, ruled out of Newmarket after an unsatisfactory scope, is set to make her belated reappearance in the Irish 1,000 Guineas.

"I'm happy with Pretty Gorgeous and she seems pretty versatile with regard to the ground - it's obviously going to be on the slow side," O'Brien said.

One filly who will not be

lining up on Sunday is the Kevin Prendergast-trained Mehnah.

Prendergast said: "Unfortunately, Mehnah pulled a muscle in her last piece of work. It's nothing serious, she just tweaked one, but it's enough to keep her out of Sunday. We'll see how she is but hopefully we might aim her at the Coronation Stakes at Ascot now."

The ground at the Curragh was yesterday yielding to soft, soft in places, on the straight track and yielding to soft on the round course. Persistent rain is forecast for later in the week.

Tattersalls Irish 2,000

Guineas (Saturday)

Paddy Power: 15-8 Lucky Vega, 9-2 Wembley, 11-2 Poetic Flare, 6 La Barrosa, 15-2 Battleground, 10 Thunder Moon, Monaasib, 12 bar.

Tattersalls Irish 1,000

Guineas (Sunday)

Paddy Power: 2 Joan Of Arc, 9-4 Pretty Gorgeous, 5 Fev Rover, 11-2 Shale, 9 No Speak Alexander, 10 Miss Amulet, 14 Empress Josephine, 16 bar.

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