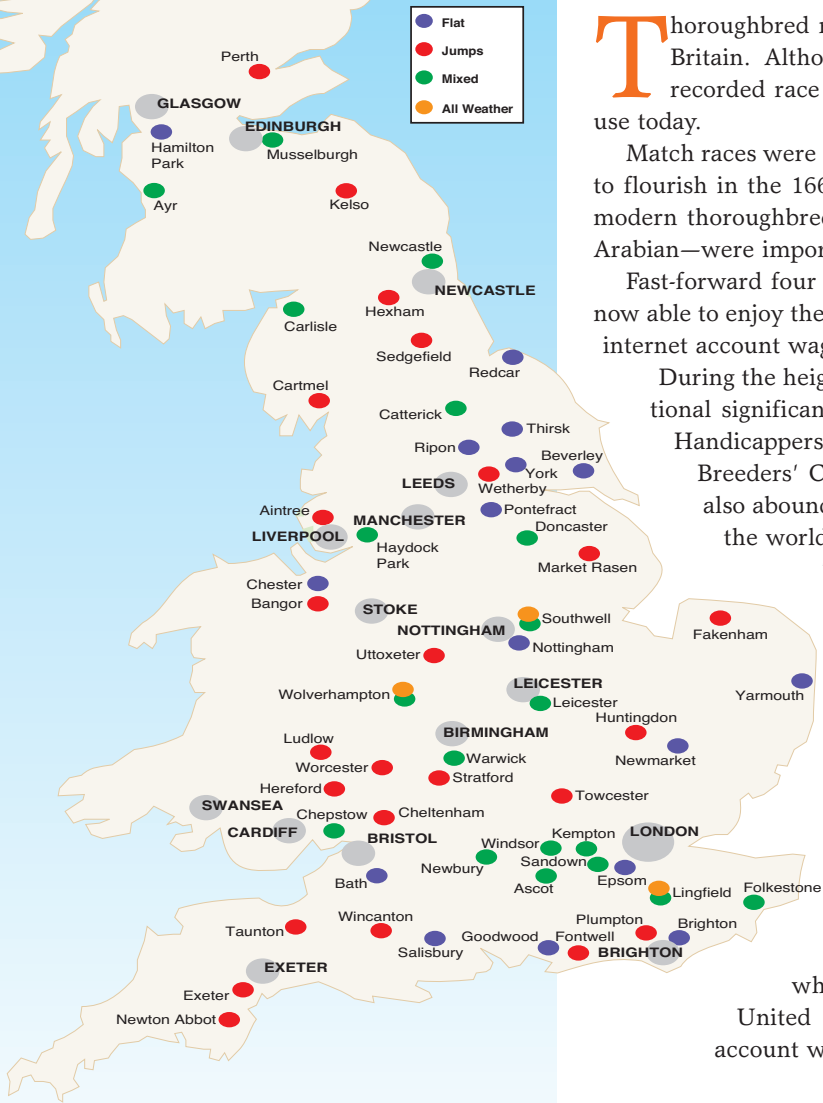


SUMMER FESTIVALS IN THE UK

*How to Bet Like a Brit:
The Basics of
Handicapping British Racing*

by Scott Finley



THE FIRST RECORDED RACE MEETING WAS HELD AT CHESTER IN 1511.

Thoroughbred racing throughout the world traces its origins to Great Britain. Although horses competed during Roman times, the first recorded race meeting was at Chester in 1511, over a course still in use today.

Match races were held on Newmarket Heath in 1622, and the sport began to flourish in the 1660s under royal patronage. The foundation sires of the modern thoroughbred line—the Byerley Turk, Godolphin Barb, and Darley Arabian—were imported from the Middle East around this time.

Fast-forward four centuries, and horseplayers in the former colonies are now able to enjoy the best of British racing thanks to satellite technology and internet account wagering.

During the height of the summer season, many stakes races of international significance are run at racing festivals in the United Kingdom. Handicappers looking to study the form of European shippers to the Breeders' Cup should pay attention. Decent betting opportunities also abound with UK Tote pools offering the lowest win takeout in the world at 13.5 percent.

The New York Racing Association (NYRA) has embraced British racing as an integral part of the "Saratoga Experience." Since 2007, the Spa has featured simulcasts from the United Kingdom every Wednesday through Saturday morning.

Visitors to Saratoga should plan to arrive early and stop by Bunbury's, the specially constructed replica British pub in the Saratoga backyard. Light breakfast fare is available, along with free past-performance programs, self-service wagering, and a fun crowd cheering home the winners from across the pond.

For those horseplayers with a global perspective who cannot make it to Saratoga, simulcasting from the United Kingdom and Ireland is featured daily on the major account wagering platforms.

CREDITS: UK MAP COURTESY OF RACING POST; CHESTER PHOTO COURTESY OF MIRRORPIX

NEWMARKET HEATH HELD MATCH RACES AS FAR BACK AS 1622.



Basics of British Racing

Racing is conducted primarily on grass throughout Europe. Four of the sixty British racecourses also have all-weather tracks, but these tracks run more in the winter months when it is too cold for turf racing.

A particularly pleasant aspect of British racing is summer "evening meetings," which begin around 6:00 p.m. local time (1:00 p.m. EDT). On Friday afternoons, when many American tracks offer their own twilight post times, evening racing from the United Kingdom is the best product available to simulcast players Stateside.

Full fields racing on grass over a wide range of distances, with a variety of demanding course layouts, pose a unique handicapping challenge. Armed with good information and a better understanding of the nuances of British racing, horseplayers in America can cash a few bets and witness some of the best and most enjoyable racing on offer anywhere in the world.

Flat races are run at distances from 5-furlongs up to 2-1/4 miles. A typical card has seven races and will include two or three sprints, a mile, and two "middle-distance" races of 1-1/4 miles or 1-1/2 miles. Sprint races up to 7-furlongs are run over straight courses at all but a few British tracks.

Handicaps are the daily fodder of the



BUNBURY'S, A UK-THEMED PUB IN THE BACKYARD AT SARATOGA, FEATURES UK RACING AND WAGERING.

sport, much like claiming races in North America. High-weight in a handicap must carry 140, 136, or 133 pounds and the low-weight no less than 112, thus there is a considerable spread in the weights. This often creates contentious races with close finishes. Handicaps are run over all distances and for all age groups, including 2-year-olds beginning in July.

Maiden races are carded daily, with one or more on every program. The maiden "auction" race is an interesting condition, where only horses sold at public auction for less than a certain price are permitted to compete. Weights are assigned based upon sale price, and since the conditions exclude home-

bred from powerful stables, these races provide smaller outfits with maiden opportunities where their runners can be competitive.

Pattern races (Group One, Two, Three, and Listed) are run at the better tracks, generally on Saturday or at the midweek summer festivals.

Older females compete regularly against their male counterparts. Only a small number of handicap, maiden, and stakes races are carded specifically for fillies.

Highlights of the Summer Season

The British flat season runs from March until early November and is organized around a series of festival meetings.

PHOTO CREDITS: NEWMARKET HEATH COURTESY OF RACECOURSE MEDIA GROUP; BUNBURY'S AT SARATOGA COURTESY OF LYNDA M. FINLEY

Summer Festivals in the UK

THE APTLY NAMED GLORIOUS GOODWOOD.



YORK RACECOURSE: HOME OF THE PRESTIGIOUS JUDDMONTE INTERNATIONAL (G1).



These "big-race" events are held at three- or four-week intervals and feature a host of important stakes races run at the premier tracks.

British racing fans mark their calendars by these festivals, and the same top-class horses turn out repeatedly at most venues.

Royal Ascot in mid-June is Britain's best-known racing event, capturing the world's attention with fashion statements, celebrity sightings, and the finest five days in all of racing.

Coinciding with the Saratoga and Del

Mar meets are the following highlights of British racing's summer season:

July 23-25: Betfair Weekend at Ascot Racecourse (no longer bearing the "Royal" designation once the June meet concludes) features Europe's middle-distance championship, the King George VI and Queen Elizabeth Stakes (G1) run over 1-1/2 miles. The "King George" is Ascot's most valuable race, with a purse of approximately \$1.5 million, and it is often when the 3-year-old stars first take on older horses.

Scintillating Epsom Derby (G1) winner Workforce is pointing for the King George on his way to what could be a trip to Churchill Downs for the Breeders' Cup.

July 27-31: Glorious Goodwood, Britain's equivalent of Saratoga and Del Mar all rolled into five days, is headlined by the Sussex Stakes (G1), the first championship mile race of the year. Henrythenavigator and Raven's Pass fought out the finish in the 2008 Sussex Stakes (G1) before reprising their epic duel in the Breeders' Cup Classic (G1) later that year at Santa Anita.

Supporting the big race are an astounding nineteen other stakes, including the Nassau Stakes (G1), for fillies and mares, and the Oak Tree Stakes (G3), the companion race to the Goodwood Stakes (G1) run at Santa Anita during the fall Oak Tree meet.

August 17-20: Yorkshire's Ebor Festival showcases York Racecourse's oldest, richest, fastest, and most famous races. The opening day feature of this festival is the Juddmonte International (G1), ranked one of the top-three races in the world in 2009 after Sea the Stars scored impressively on his way to six consecutive Group One wins.

Other highlights are the Darley Yorkshire Oaks (G1) and Coolmore Nunthorpe Stakes (G1), the latter being Europe's premier sprint, where 2-year-olds often race against their elders, receiving a huge weight concession over the flying 5-furlongs.

Handicapping to Win

Past performances for European racing contain limited information because fractional times and points of call are not recorded. British form is primarily verbal, with comments describing how a horse has raced in past starts, supported with basic data on track, turf condition, distance, final time, race type, finish position, beaten lengths, weight carried, odds, and company lines.

PHOTO CREDIT: GOODWOOD RACECOURSE PHOTO BY MIKE CALDWELL FOR GOODWOOD RACECOURSE; YORK RACECOURSE

Speed figures and race class, two recent additions to the American-style past performances for British races, are valuable tools for selecting winners.

Other key handicapping factors to consider are:

Class: Races in the United Kingdom are rated Class One through Class Seven by the British Horseracing Authority (BHA). Horses dropping in class can be excellent long-shot plays, as recent form is often deceptively poor. Conversely, horses rising in class when coming off winning performances tend to be underlays and often do not reproduce their previous good form.

- **Class 1:** Group and Listed Stakes.
- **Class 2:** Heritage Handicaps;

handicaps and allowance races with purse values in excess of \$20,000.

- **Class 3:** above-average handicaps.
- **Class 4:** better maiden races; average handicaps.
- **Class 5:** average maidens; claiming; lower-rated handicaps.
- **Class 6:** lowest tier of handicaps; also races restricted to apprentice jockeys or amateur riders.
- **Class 7:** poorest quality races, usually run in the winter on all-weather tracks for the lowest-rated horses.

Weight: Each horse with three lifetime starts is assigned an Official Rating by the BHA Handicapper. Race conditions

then determine weight carried, and the spread may be considerable. Winners racing back in less than ten days must carry an additional six-pound weight penalty. Weight levels the playing field for even the fastest horses, particularly in longer races or on tracks with soft or heavy conditions underfoot.

Clever trainers go to great lengths to hide their charges' true form from the BHA Handicapper. Watch for a sudden stretch-out in distance the first or second time that a horse races under handicap conditions. If such runners are also taking money in the betting ring, this can signal a shrewd move and a well-meant "gamble"—get on!

Horses for Courses: British racecourses have so many unique characteristics: uphill, flat, downhill, left-handed, right-handed, sharp turns, sweeping bends, and so on. Horses that are proven over a track are much better plays than runners facing the variables of a new racecourse for the first time. Seven "specialist" tracks are detailed below:

Beverley: stiff, uphill finish and a pronounced draw advantage toward high post positions make this one of the more biased tracks in Britain.

Brighton: unique downhill layout, very similar to Santa Anita.

Watch for leading track jockeys, as only a few riders excel over this track.

Catterick: tight turn that favors early speed from low draws. Horses that run well at Bath and Chester will handle Catterick.

Chepstow: undulations in the stretch and a draw bias in sprints toward high numbers make this a specialist track. Horses that have excelled at Lingfield (turf sprints) and Epsom do well at Chepstow.

Chester: a Roman chariot course centuries ago, Chester is a circular, one-mile track, the smallest in Britain. A low draw and early speed are essentials in all races up to 7-furlongs but particularly in 5-furlong sprints.

British Racecourses (Flat): Track Codes, Quality, Location

LEFT-HANDED (counter-clockwise)

Ayr - Ayr Races (2)	North
Bat - Bath (3)	South
Brg - Brighton (3)	South
CaB - Catterick (3)	North
Chw - Chepstow (3)	South
Che - Chester (1)	Central
Don - Doncaster (1)	North
Eps - Epsom Downs (1)	South
FLs - Ffos Las (3)	South
GLs - Great Leighs (2)	South
Hay - Haydock Park (1)	North
Lin - Lingfield (2)	South
Nby - Newbury (1)	South
NC - Newcastle (2)	North
Not - Nottingham (3)	Central
Pon - Pontefract (3)	North
Red - Redcar (3)	North
Sou - Southwell (3)	Central
Thi - Thirsk (3)	North
War - Warwick (3)	Central
Wol - Wolverhampton (3)	Central
Yar - Yarmouth (3)	Central
Yor - York (1)	North

RIGHT-HANDED TRACKS (clockwise)

Asc - Ascot (1)	South
Bev - Beverley (3)	North
Car - Carlisle (3)	North
Fol - Folkestone (3)	South
Goo - Goodwood (1)	South
Ham - Hamilton Park (3)	North
Kem - Kempton Park (2)	South
Lei - Leicester (3)	Central
Mus - Musselburgh (3)	North
Rip - Ripon (3)	North
San - Sandown Park (1)	South
Sal - Salisbury (2)	South

STRAIGHT TRACK

New - Newmarket (1)	Central
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FIGURE-8

Wds - Windsor (2)	South
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ALL-WEATHER COURSES

Kempton Park (Polytrack flat; jumps on turf)
 Lingfield (Polytrack and turf)
 Southwell (Fibresand and turf)
 Wolverhampton (Polytrack only)

Except as noted above, all racing in the United Kingdom is on turf.

Summer Festivals in the UK

Epsom: home of the Derby (G1) with sharp downhill sections and an uphill run to the finish. A good effort requires a balanced horse that can handle unusual track conditions. It has a similar layout to Brighton and Lingfield (turf routes), so upgrade horses that have run well at these courses.

Goodwood: a looping, right-handed track layout, with a downhill run into the stretch. Well-balanced horses that can accelerate quickly off a moderate pace are well suited to Goodwood. A high draw is essential in all races of 7-furlongs and longer.

Trainers: Perhaps the most important factors when handicapping British racing are trainer patterns, history, and recent stable form. All horses in the UK are trained away from the track at private establishments, so intended runners must ship often long distances for every start. When and where a trainer places their runners is of much more significance than in American racing.

Newmarket is the hub of the racing industry in Britain, with two racecourses, numerous private training yards, leading stud farms, the National Horse Racing Museum, and offices of several industry bodies and associations. Often referred to as simply "Headquarters," Newmarket is the

home base of the majority of the trainers who annually sit atop the standings for winners and earnings.

By focusing on runners sent out by the trainers in the chart below, players can be confident that these horses are well-placed and will be competitive in the big summer events.

The following statistics are courtesy of the *Racing Post* and represent records since 1999 at Glorious Goodwood and York Ebor Festivals.

Jockeys: Most of the top jockeys in the UK are under contract to trainers or owners, riding on a "first-call" basis for their connections in exchange for an annual retainer (in addition to the riding

Summer Festival (UK) Trainers: 1999-2008

Trainer	Starts	Win	Place	Show	Win %	ROI (\$1 stake)	Gr Stakes	Handicaps	2-y-o
Sir Michael Stoute	227	39	31	33	17.2%	-8.64	26-127	12-93	6-23
Mark Johnson	322	39	22	28	12.1%	-46.04	14-84	22-205	12-86
David Nicholls	271	29	12	19	10.7%	13.37	4-30	22-227	6-12
Aiden O'Brien	128	21	23	21	16.4%	-51.02	20-109	1-9	3-37
Saeed bin Suroor	95	19	12	10	20.0%	-0.37	16-72	2-15	1-15
Luca Cumani	82	18	13	5	22.0%	17.58	5-29	12-49	0-1
Barry Hills	267	18	27	17	6.7%	-159.23	5-77	5-121	10-103
Richard Hannon	341	17	37	30	5.0%	-166.17	6-108	6-142	9-178
John Gosden	112	15	16	10	13.4%	-22.57	6-60	7-41	3-24
John Dunlop	149	14	17	20	9.4%	-54.63	5-60	3-59	6-33
Paul Cole	111	11	9	6	9.9%	-43.63	2-30	7-57	6-37
Marcus Tregoning	88	11	10	9	12.5%	-31.83	5-34	1-29	8-34
Gerard Butler	99	11	11	5	11.1%	6.50	5-26	4-48	2-22
Richard Fahey	98	10	7	7	10.2%	35.50	1-10	9-80	0-14
Brian Meehan	112	10	6	11	8.9%	-34.75	3-50	2-43	7-56
Mick Channon	245	10	14	20	4.1%	-158.85	7-33	2-125	5-97
Jeremy Nosedá	65	9	7	5	13.8%	-17.67	8-36	1-21	5-29
David Elsworth	109	9	10	8	8.3%	-31.17	4-42	5-55	1-17
William Haggas	57	7	4	7	12.3%	17.25	6-25	1-30	3-9

NB: figures in bold indicate 20% winners or positive ROI

fee, which is 7 percent of earnings). When more than one stable runner is entered in a race (there are no coupled entries in British racing), the contract rider will usually opt for the mount that the stable believes has the best chance of winning. These jockey choices often heavily influence the odds.

If a trainer has entered two or more runners of fairly equal ability, the "other" horse is often a value play. This is particularly true in maiden races, where first-time starters upset their more fancied stablemates with regularity.

A useful handicapping angle is to note which horses are being ridden by jockeys when their contract trainer does not have a runner in a given race. The leading jockeys are a prize catch for smaller stables. When the services of Ryan Moore, Seb Sanders, or Frankie Dettori are booked on a freelance basis, this is often a sign that their mounts have been pointed for this spot and are live plays.

The jockey statistics below are courtesy of the *Racing Post* and represent records since 1999 at Glorious Goodwood and York Ebor Festivals.

Summer Festival (UK) Jockeys: 1999-2008

Jockey	Starts	Wins	Win %	ROI (\$1 stake)	Primary Stable or Trainer
Frankie Dettori	239	36	15.1%	-63.98	<i>Godolphin</i> - Saeed bin Suroor
John Murtagh	135	23	17.0%	-0.64	<i>Coolmore</i> - Aiden O'Brien
Richard Hughes	252	22	8.7%	-46.04	Richard Hannon
Ryan Moore	199	18	9.0%	-57.25	Sir Michael Stoute
Jimmy Fortune	225	18	8.0%	-54.75	John Gosden
Darryll Holland	186	17	9.1%	-46.00	Mick Channon
Seb Sanders	96	16	16.7%	98.00	Sir Mark Prescott
Richard Hills	176	15	8.5%	-106.13	<i>Hamdan al Maktoum</i> - Barry Hills
Michael Hills	200	15	7.5%	-113.63	Barry Hills
Jamie Spencer	131	14	10.7%	-16.63	Michael Bell/James Fanshawe
Eddie Ahern	131	12	9.2%	-25.25	John Dunlop
Adrian Nicholls	75	11	14.7%	52.00	David Nicholls
Philip Robinson	83	8	9.6%	-15.25	Michael Jarvis
Martin Dwyer	146	8	5.5%	-75.00	W. R. Muir
Paul Hanagan	40	4	10.0%	-12.50	Richard Fahey

NB: figures in bold indicate positive ROI

Additional Resources

There is a wealth of racing and handicapping information available online. The following websites provide superb coverage and in-depth information on British racing:

- *Racing Post*, Britain's daily newspaper, has one of the best racing websites in the world (www.racingpost.com). Basic information is free; subscribe to access much more comprehensive added-value selections, analysis, tips, statistics, detailed form, and international racing coverage.
- *Timeform* (www.timeform.com) is a specialist publication with basic program information and comments available for free. Expanded race-cards, with comments and ratings, may be purchased.

- Bloodstock Research Information Services (www.brisnet.com) in the USA offer their own enhanced past performances for British tracks, which include Brisnet's exclusive race and class ratings, calibrated on a par with the same figures for American races.
- The two dedicated racing TV channels in the United Kingdom—*At The Races* (www.attheraces.com) and *Racing UK* (www.racinguk.com)—have excellent websites with news, tips, daily blogs by industry insiders, unique interactive track programs, and occasional enhanced mini-sites for the major racing festivals.
- For real-time odds, results, scratches, live race calls, archived video of past

races, as well as selected tips and big-race analysis, visit www.sportinglife.com/racing/.

- The British Horseracing Authority (BHA), the sport's official governing body, produce an informative website (www.britishhorseracing.com) with racing calendars ("fixture" lists), detailed track descriptions, a beginner's guide to racing and betting, as well as many other useful features.

SCOTT FINLEY is the North American representative for British, Irish, and South African racing. He has been handicapping European racing for more than twenty-five years and has attended all of the major racing events in England, Ireland, France, and Dubai.