

## Handicapping Review Panel

### Dame de Compagnie (FR)

22 February 2020

This is the outcome of an appeal by Mr Nicky Henderson, trainer of Dame de Compagnie, against the adjusted handicap rating of 142 allotted to the mare, following a re-appraisal by the handicapper of the Park Mares' Handicap Hurdle

Race (Class 2), run at Cheltenham on 14 December 2019, over 2m4½f . This revised rating was published on 11 February 2020.

The Panel has considered in detail the representations and competing assertions set out in the submissions made by Mr Henderson and the BHA handicapper, and has studied the video recordings of the Cheltenham race, and other races subsequently contested by Dame de Compagnie's opponents that day. Dame de Compagnie has not run since.

Following the Cheltenham race, the rating of Dame de Compagnie, the winner, was raised 8lbs, from 132 to 140; the second horse, Indefatigable, beaten 4½ lengths, went up 2lbs from 137 to 139, the third, Midnightreferendum, beaten a total of 9½ lengths, was left on its previous rating, 126, and the fourth, River Arrow, beaten a total of 12 lengths, was dropped 1lb, from 121 to 120. There were further reductions down the field of 16. Thus Dame de Compagnie was adjudged to have been superior to Indefatigable at the weights by 6lbs.

The Panel has no comment to make about the ratings of these horses going into the Cheltenham race, or about the fresh ratings published immediately following it, as listed above. So far as is known, none has given rise to any controversy.

The handicapper has a general power to adjust his performance figures for past races at any time, and to adjust handicap ratings in consequence ("collateral changes"). That is what has now happened here, with the handicapper imposing a further 2lbs on Dame de Compagnie's rating on 11th February. Mr Henderson has appealed against this additional impost.

The application of post-race collateral changes is a process frequently utilised in the case of maiden and novice races, and is indeed almost inevitable in such cases, when the handicapper has to provide initial ratings following such races, with often limited means of comparing the quality of the race with the ratings file generally. However the handicapper might less frequently find it necessary, or justifiable, to re-assess a field of seasoned handicappers, when the quality of the race has already been largely fixed by the ratings of all the starters.

The Panel endorses the handicappers' right to apply this re-assessment process (without time limit) in relevant cases, but nonetheless is of the opinion that the requirement to do so after a handicap should be significant and pressing, and the more that time has elapsed since the race, the less likely it is that this requirement will have been met.

Particularly so, as in this case, when five of the first ten finishers had run again without giving rise to any call for adjustment of the Cheltenham race. That is until the second horse, Indefatigable, won a Listed race on 8th February by 5 lengths (on ground said by her connections to be more suitable) and was thereafter put up 6lbs to 145.

It was this performance which led the handicapper to question his initial treatment of the Cheltenham race. He concluded that he had pitched the rating of the whole race 2lbs too low, and that ratings should be adjusted upwards accordingly. However, although in the handicapper's view "the race" should be re-assessed, this effectively impacted on only one horse, the winner; in practice Dame de Compagnie was alone being re-assessed. The second, Indefatigable had gone up already following her Warwick success, and the handicapper concluded that since all the other runners, from the third downwards, had in his view been left after Cheltenham on marks above their performance figures for that event, they should be left alone.

The Panel found it hard to see how a re-assessment of a large field could result in only one rating being changed, and more particularly how the necessity for re-assessment arose when five of the other first ten finishers had run subsequently, and only one of them by then had a rating higher than after Cheltenham (up by 1lb).

True, the February increase in Indefatigable's rating would result in Dame de Compagnie meeting her (if it ever happened) on apparently favourable terms, but that was after the passage of two months, during which Indefatigable had patently displayed improvement; witness her victory and subsequent 6lbs rise.

Consequently, on balance, the Panel does not consider that the collateral increase in Dame de Compagnie's rating was justified; **Mr Henderson's appeal succeeds** and Dame de Compagnie's rating should revert to 140. It follows that Mr Henderson's deposit should be returned.

(A footnote: the Panel must consider cases on the basis of the submissions and the evidence at the time of the appeal. It so happens that the Cheltenham third and fourth have run since then, finishing fifth and fourth respectively. While the Panel has reached its conclusion without regard to those results, those horses have done nothing to cause the Panel to question its decision.)

The members of the Panel were: Adrian Grazebrook, Vanessa Ryle and Graham Dench.