

BHA Handicapping Ombudsman – result of appeal – Tellmesomethingood (Ire)

Decision

That Tellmesomethingood should be allotted a handicap mark.

Background

Tellmesomethingood has had three runs in novice/maiden hurdles; on debut he was fourth of 7, beaten 33 lengths at Kempton (2m, good to soft, good in places) on 07/11/22, on his second start he was fifth of 12, beaten 14 lengths at Lingfield (2m, good, good to soft in places) on 14/02/23, on his third start he was third of 7, beaten 30 lengths at Fontwell (17.5f, heavy, soft in places) on 18/03/23. He was trained on his first two starts by Joe Tizzard, moving to Jim Boyle before his third one.

The handicapper assessing the most recent run declined to give Tellmesomethingood a BHA handicap mark, therefore requiring a fourth run in novice/maiden or other non-handicap company.

Following that decision, and after following steps 1 and 2 in the handicapping appeals process, Tellmesomethingood's trainer Jim Boyle submitted an appeal to the Handicapping Ombudsman, on the grounds that a handicap mark should have been given.

Due to holidays and other reasons, three different handicappers worked on assessing the form, though the decision to decline a mark was taken by the handicapper assessing the third run.

Evidence

The handicapper concerned explained that the grounds on which they had declined to give a mark were points 8 and 4 in the BHA's guidance 'Reasons why a handicapper may withhold a rating'. Point 8 is that the horse is hanging badly, to the point where it is basically unrideable. Point 4 is that the horse looked to be left at a significant disadvantage by the tactics employed.

In support of justifying citing point 8, the handicapper pointed out that Robbie Dunne, the rider at Fontwell, had reported that Tellmesomethingood had 'hung violently left'.

The handicapper reported that Tellmesomethingood had been given performance figures for the three runs of 86, 99 and 88.

The run at Lingfield had been 5 lb higher when initially assessed. The handicapper responsible for assessing that race explained that although there were initially issues with assessing the form (no standards, a modest time and a steadily-run race), subsequent events had made the level of form more transparent. Therefore Tellmesomethingood could potentially be given a mark based on that run, once qualified.

The trainer pointed out that the ground at Fontwell was very testing and therefore, although the rider could have been more vigorous, the ride given Tellmesomethingood was sensible under the conditions in order to achieve the best possible finishing position, particularly as the horse was lugging left from an early stage.

He further pointed out the lack of consistency in the handicapper's approach, in allotting a mark to Privatearing, who finished fifth at Fontwell, but not allotting one to Tellmesomethingood.

Findings

Citing point 8 relies on the rider's use of the word violently in his report to the stewards. While Tellmesomethingood was hanging markedly left after the last, for the most part he does not appear to be hanging so badly as to be unrideable. Therefore the grounds required to decline a mark under that point are not met.

Citing point 4, the most subjective of the points within the guidelines, requires the tactics employed to have put the horse at a significant disadvantage. The ride given at Fontwell was in keeping with those given in Tellmesomethingood's first two races. Although he might have been subjected to a more vigorous ride in order to finish closer, he wouldn't have finished better than third and it is most probable he wouldn't have bettered the level of performance he produced at Lingfield. Therefore the grounds required to decline a mark (significant disadvantage) are not met.

There is no issue with allocating a mark based on the run at Lingfield, the form now looking transparent and with all the other horses in the race qualified for a mark having been given one, several having now run in handicaps.

Further comments

The handicapper who made the decision undermined their own case by allotting a mark to the fifth home Privatearing, beaten 46 lengths, who had an almost identical profile to Tellmesomethingood (having a third run after improving significantly from debut to second run) and whose rider also reported after the race that the horse was hanging left. Despite the similarities in record and rides at Fontwell and that he was beaten a further 13 lengths, Privatearing was given a mark.

The principal difference in the two cases seems to be that Robbie Dunne used 'violently' in his comment to the stewards, as discussed above.