

BHA Handicapping Ombudsman – result of appeal – Cairo (IRE)

Decision

That Cairo's mark should remain at 108.

Background

Cairo, a 4-year-old colt, started the year in training with Aidan O'Brien. He finished second in a conditions race at Doha and then was well held in the Group 1 Dubai Turf (33/1) at Meydan. Cairo then joined Alice Haynes.

After a break of 10 weeks, Cairo ran twice in June, finished second in a Listed race at Leopardstown (1m1f, Good) and down the field at 150/1 in the Queen Anne Stakes at Royal Ascot (1m, Good). He had a BHA mark of 109 prior to the run at Ascot.

Cairo remained on 109 prior to finishing ½-length second to Haunted Dream (gave 3 lb) in a class 2m conditions race at Goodwood (1m1f, Good/Firm) on 2nd August. As a result of that performance, he was dropped 1 lb to 108.

Following that decision, and after following steps 1 and 2 in the handicapping appeals process, Cairo's trainer Alice Haynes submitted an appeal to the Handicapping Ombudsman, on the grounds that the handicap mark given should not have been dropped as a result of the run at Goodwood.

Evidence

The BHA Handicapper concerned expressed the view that the type of conditions race outside the Pattern that Cairo ran in at Goodwood tends not to represent strong form, with horses sometimes flattered in small fields.

In assessing this particular race, they had taken what they felt was the highest view they could, raising the winner Haunted Dream to a career-high mark of 111, having the fourth Sir Busker running to his mark of 105 and having the lightly-raced fifth and sixth Prague and Crown Board both running their best race, the latter given a figure 11 lb in advance of that for his debut win.

Cairo was given a figure of 107 for his run (he had been given figures of 101, 103 and 90 for his three previous runs). The favourite My Prospero, who finished third, was below form on his first run of the year and was dropped 3 lb, from 116 to 113.

The handicapper stressed the importance of maintaining the relativity of the marks allotted, in order to give the runners an equal chance in theory, were they to meet again. Giving Cairo a figure of 109 for his run, would require Haunted Dream to be raised another 2 lb and Sir Busker to be given a new mark of 107. Haunted Dream had twice been beaten in handicaps earlier in the year off a mark of 104. Sir Busker had been beaten in competitive all-weather handicaps off 103 and 102 earlier in 2024 (he last ran in a turf handicap in October 2021). The handicapper felt taking a view any higher than they was not justified, given the concerns about the strength of the form.

Cairo's trainer pointed out that Cairo had been campaigned at a high level in his starts earlier in 2024 and at Goodwood had beaten horses higher rated than he is. He had run his best race of the year at Goodwood.

Findings

There are clear grounds for taking a cautious view in assessing the form of the Goodwood race. The point the handicapper made about the tendency of races of this type to be muddling form is a valid one (in such races with a lower value, the handicappers are not allowed to raise the marks of beaten horses).

The Goodwood race was steadily run, which increases the chance that horses could be flattered, the figures allotted to Crown Board and Prague potentially dubious. Raising the mark of Sir Busker to one above those off which he had recently been beaten in handicaps (admittedly on the all-weather) would be a difficult step to justify on the overall evidence.

Cairo has not been given a figure of 109 for any of his performances this year. Although he has twice been run out of his depth, his performances at Leopardstown and Goodwood look to give a reasonable indication of his current level of ability. As such, the handicapper would even have been justified dropping him a further 1 lb, to his best figure of the year.

Further Comments

A BHA mark is intended to reflect purely the current level of ability of the horse in question. If the evidence points towards a horse not being quite so good as they were, then it would be unfair on the horse in question to ignore that because a horse was historically capable of a higher level of form. This is because their mark obviously ought to give them the fairest possible chance were they to run in a handicap.

That Cairo's mark is now below the level he achieved at his best as a three-year-old should not be taken as a slight towards the horse.

[ENDS]