

BHA Handicapping Ombudsman – result of appeal – In Excelsis Deo (FR)

Decision:

In Excelsis Deo's mark of 137 to remain

Background:

In Excelsis Deo was allotted a BHA performance figure of 137 for his run when unseating his jockey at the final fence off a BHA mark of 133 in the Virgin Bet Every Saturday Money Back Handicap Chase at Sandown Park on 3rd February 2024, his most recent start.

Following that decision, and after following steps 1 and 2 in the handicapping appeals process, In Excelsis Deo's trainer Harry Fry submitted an appeal to the Handicapping Ombudsman on the grounds that the new mark is too high and should be kept on 133.

Evidence

The handicapper concerned explained that the 4lb rise given to In Excelsis Deo and the winner, Harper's Brook, wasn't about them dead heating, it was that the handicapper would be happy for the two horses to meet on the same terms next time out, i.e., Harper's Brook having to concede 3lb to In Excelsis Deo as he did at Sandown.

The handicapper explained that one of the toughest parts of the job is having to increase the mark of a faller and cited two recent examples where the rating was increased, one was a faller at the second last and one where a horse had fallen at the last. The horse who fell at the last subsequently finished second off their revised mark.

The handicapper also referenced In Excelsis Deo's run prior to the Sandown run when he was raised 1lb for finishing second at Cheltenham to a horse who subsequently won at Leopardstown and is now rated 143 having been rated 130 when the pair met at Cheltenham with three and a quarter lengths separating the pair, thereby suggesting despite the rise to 137, In Excelsis Deo is 8lb better off with that winner.

In Excelsis Deo's trainer does not believe that had In Excelsis Deo not unseated his jockey that it was a given he would have gone on to win despite the winner not appearing to be the most straightforward on previous occasions. The trainer explained that when In Excelsis Deo was second at Cheltenham, he had every chance after the final fence but struggled to finish his race off and that Sandown also has a stiff finish.

The trainer also explained the rating given to In Excelsis Deo is a career high mark and that he has failed to win since winning off a rating of 127 on his UK debut in December 2022 after which he was raised 9lb to 136. After three runs his rating dropped 5lb when he ran well to finish third. A 1lb rise saw him run well again, albeit tiring, when second in the Cheltenham race.

Findings

Having reviewed the information provided by both parties and undertaking analysis of recent performances of the winner of the Sandown race, Harper's Brook, it would seem highly likely that In Excelsis Deo would have gone on to win, had his jockey not been unseated at the final fence.

As such the decision taken by the handicapper to increase In Excelsis Deo's mark seems proportionate and in keeping with handicapping custom and practice of raising the ratings of horses who are in contention of winning when falling or unseating at the final obstacle, I believe the revised mark given to In Excelsis Deo to be fair and therefore dismiss the appeal.