

Tipster set to pass on his advice



Pip Kirkby is the chief executive of Market Rasen racecourse

Market Rasen Racecourse is the place to be on Sunday for betting tips ahead of next week's Cheltenham Festival. Grand National-winning jockey Graham Lee will be here to give visitors the inside track on the best prospects for Cheltenham.

The special Punters' Panel with the jumps rider begins before the first race which is at 2.20pm. The Cheltenham Festival theme continues through the afternoon as expert opinions are sought between the races. Racegoers will be able to discover the top tips of race-day presenter Mike Vince. Tom Halliday scholar Ollie Garner, the Tote's George Primarolo - as well as myself!

There will also be scenes reminiscent of Noel Edmond's House Party. Fifteen lucky visitors will win the chance to enter a glass cube and the one who picks up the most tickets in 30 seconds will go home with £1,000 of vouchers to spend at the racecourse. And our splendid new restaurant MaMa's opens for the first time - with the official ceremony carried out by MasterChef contestant Eamonn Hunt from Lincoln.

Market Rasen form is best for Cheltenham
The big race on today one of the Cheltenham Festival is the Stan James Champion Hurdle. I can't see past the odds-on favourite Hurricane Fly. In Sizing Europe, there's another short-priced market leader for Wednesday's feature, the sportingbet.com Queen Mother Champion Chase.

I prefer the value - at about 5-1 thereabouts - in Big Zeb who won the race two years ago. My pick of the opening two days though comes in the Weatherbys Champion Bumper the last race on Wednesday. At odds of 10-1, New Year's Eve is my selection.

The horse was a very impressive when winning here at Market Rasen next month, and he's my bet of the festival. Everyone is still hoping that Kauto Star will recover from his heavy fall on his home gallops to be able to take his place in the starting line-up for the Cheltenham Gold Cup.

Next week, I'll give you a tip for that race too. The next racing at Market Rasen Racecourse is on Sunday 11 March: Premier Members £26; County Enclosure £19; Tattersalls £14; Family Enclosure £9.

Accompanied children 18 admitted free of charge. Parking free. For more information at www.marketrasenraces.co.uk. The first race is at 2.20pm, and gates open from 12.30pm.

Lincolnshire Horse Trials

Olympic medalist Fox-Pitt relishing task of clinching a place at this year's London Games

With the Olympics just around the corner, the equestrian world is starting to shape up for the forthcoming Games. The Echo's *Dave Marshall* speaks to potential Olympian William Fox-Pitt about his chances of selection, his horses and his hopes for next week's Lincolnshire Horse Trials which are already capturing the imagination



William Fox-Pitt honours list

Olympic Games

- Silver - Athens 2004 (team)
- Bronze - Beijing 2008 (team)

World Championships

- Bronze - Jerez 2002 (team)
- Silver - Aachen 2006 (team)
- Gold - Kentucky 2010 (team)
- Silver - Kentucky 2010 (ind)

European Champs

- Gold - Italy 1995 (team)
- Gold - Burghley 1997 (team)
- Silver - Burghley 1997 (ind)
- Gold - 2001 Pau (team)
- Gold - P-town '03 (team)
- Gold - Blenham 2005 (team)
- Silver - Blenham 2005 (ind)
- Gold - F-bleau 2009 (team)
- Bronze - Luhmühlen 2011 (team)

He may have represented his country at three Olympic Games and countless world class events, but William Fox-Pitt still admits to a tinge of excitement when the Lincolnshire Horse Trials come around.

As one of the first events of the year suitable for advanced horses, Fox Pitt will be one of many potential Olympians who will head for Lincolnshire next week as they begin their bid for selection for the London Games. The Lincolnshire Horse Trials start on Friday, March 16 and conclude on Sunday March 18. The event is expected to attract more than 700 competitors, with the cream of Britain's three-day-eventers hoping to impress selectors as they get their Olympic year underway.

"Lincoln will be the first event of the season for my advanced horses," Fox-Pitt said. "Each year I try to bring my

top horses up to Lincoln. It is always quite important to get started and have a good first outing. "The Lincolnshire Horse Trials is always a very well organised and efficient event, which is very well presented. "There is always an air of excitement around the Lincolnshire venue and I am hopeful that it will prove to be a productive event for me.

"The cross-country course is usually well-thought out and the ground is well prepared." As one of the more famous names in the world of British eventing, Fox-Pitt is expected to bring four of his top horses to Lincoln.

While perhaps his best known horse, Cool Mountain, has been ruled out of Olympic contention through injury, Hampstead-born Fox-Pitt will be bringing Neuf des Coeurs, Lionheart, Oslo and Parklane Hawk. And the 43-year-old is hoping



Leap of faith: William Fox-Pitt makes a massive jump on Parklane Hawk

Picture: Kit Houghton

for a confidence-boosting visit to the Lincolnshire Show-ground venue. "Cool Mountain is currently out of contention, but I am very lucky to have some extremely good back-up," Fox-Pitt said. "It is very important for morale to have a good start to the season at Lincoln. "I would like to think we are ready to do well, but I don't think it is essential that we should win. "There will be many ups and downs over the duration of the

season and experience tells me that you can have a very good year even if you don't start well." With the clock ticking down towards the London Olympics, Fox-Pitt is stepping up preparations at his base near Sturminster Newton in Dorset. With a number of top horses to prepare, the former Olympic silver medalist admitted he could easily spend all day in the saddle. "I am a professional sportsman and I need to ride more

than one horse every day," he explained. "I could spend eight hours a day riding, but I am not complaining, it is a great way to spend your working day." Fox-Pitt has already competed at the Atlanta, Athens and Beijing Olympics and the father of two is optimistic of representing Great Britain again in London. "I feel very fortunate to have two or three potential Olympic horses, but there is no indication yet which one will do

better," he added. "I very much hope I can do well and make the British team, I am very pleased with the team of horses I have. "All the riders in contention for a place on the British team will be doing their utmost so there is a lot of competition for places. "However, there is also a great deal of camaraderie amongst those involved. Although we are competing against each other, we are also very good friends."



Dream team: William Fox-Pitt

Picture: Adam Farnthorpe

Women's Football

Alleway and Bradley ruled out of Arsenal cup clash

Lincoln Ladies' FA Women's Cup hopes have been dealt a blow after defenders Laura Alleway and Sophie Bradley were ruled out of Sunday's fifth round tie with Arsenal.

The Lady Imps have been forced to apply for a new visa for winter signing Alleway following a change in FA guidelines regarding players from outside the European Union.

The Australian will now not be eligible until she has secured a sporting visa. Lincoln manager Glen Harris hopes the defender will be available for the start of the Women's Super League. But the issue will not be resolved before Sunday's tie at Ashby Avenue or the Lady Imps' Continental Cup trip to Chelsea a week later.

Harris says Lincoln are not the only Super League team to have been hampered by the new guidelines and claimed clubs were not consulted properly by the FA before the rule change.

"We genuinely thought we'd got everything sorted," said Harris. "She landed in the country on February 4 and then on following Monday out came these guidelines. "We've applied to the Border Agency for that, then we've got to go to the FA. Then the likelihood is that we'll appeal it.

"If we're successful we'll still have to send her back to Australia to get this visa. "It could be a three or four-week process. We're hoping to get it sorted out before

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New girls: Lincoln's Australian duo Laura Alleway (left) and Collette McCallum. McCallum is set to face Arsenal, but Alleway is not eligible

that I'm good enough to be playing here and over someone who lives in England."

Meanwhile, fellow centre-back Bradley faces at least a month on the sidelines after suffering an ankle injury while playing for England in the Cyprus Cup last week. "The initial fears were that she'd broken her ankle," added Harris.

"But it looks like ligament damage so she's looking at four to six weeks out. We'll be fighting to try and get her fight for

the start of the Super League. "She's been on fire for England and she's worked really hard to get her strength and fitness up having had a couple of injuries.

To Harris's relief, Lincoln do have plenty of options at centre-back, including England captain Casey Stoney, new signing Meaghan Seargent and Rachael Daly.

Stoney should be on a high after making her 100th appearance for her country against France last weekend.

Golf

Blankney golfer Jess Wilcox secured one of the biggest victories of her career by claiming the Hacienda del Alamo Women's Open.

Wilcox, playing off -1, won the 54-hole tournament by a huge six shots.

In an event sponsored by Nike Golf, Wilcox (pictured right) carded three great rounds to shoot 71-71-72 to win from Emily Taylor of Royal Lytham.

She will soon be returning to England to compete in all the major amateur competitions in England and Scotland. "This was a great event and a great triumph for Jess," said Jan Heywood of Blankney Golf Club. All at Blankney wish her every success."

Woodhall Spa

On March 1, the ladies played the first qualifying Stableford competition of the season. Dianne Eddington won with 34 points. Alyson Potton was second with 34 points. Ann Leggate was third with 33.

The agony and the ecstasy of Sunday League football
Football, p96



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French seeking some va-va voom in Lincolnshire horse trial event

When three sisters named the new addition to their family after a literary hero, they might have chosen a more complementary character than Piglet from Winnie the Pooh.

But 31 years on and equestrian star and British Olympic hopeful Piggy French wouldn't change a thing, writes *Dave Marshall*.

"I suppose I could have told people somewhere along the line that I actually had a real name," she said. "But my big sisters gave me that name because they thought I looked like Piglet when I was born and it just stuck. "I don't see why I should change now."

Piggy French will be among a list of famous names competing at this year's Lincolnshire

Horse Trials. The annual event takes place at the Lincolnshire Show-ground next week, and with the London Olympic Games only months away, Piggy, who is a member of the UK's World Class Squad, will be hoping for a good performance and a successful start to this Olympic year.

"We are getting very busy now, the season is about to kick off," Piggy added. "I really like the Lincolnshire Horse Trials, I wouldn't miss it. "The ground is very good at this time of year so it gives a good opportunity for me to bring my top horses."

"I will be bringing both my potential Olympic horses Jakata and DHI Topper W to Lincoln because it is such a good event.

"The cross-country course is well built and it gives the horses a really good run at the start of the season."

Piggy, whose real name is Georgina, finished the 2011 season in fourth place in the British Eventing rider rankings and was leading lady rider.

The Leicestershire-based rider was also selected for the British team at the European Championships, winning a bronze medal.

Her horse Jakata topped the British Eventing horse rankings for last year, while DHI Topper W finished the year ranked seventh. "It is very important that we get a good start to the season," Piggy said. "Every event is important now, we have been working towards this for the

past three years. "There is no room for error and the horses have to be as well prepared as we can possibly get them."

"Thankfully, both these horses are looking good and we will give it a really good shot, both at Lincoln and for the rest of the season."

British Olympic selectors will be at the Lincoln event as the cream of British three-day-eventing begin their quest for a place on the team.

Five horse and rider combinations will be selected to represent Great Britain at the London Games. "But, the London Olympics has been my aim for a long time now. The horses have to be solid in all three events (dressage, show jumping and cross country)."

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