

2008 Betting Review

January

The New Year heralded a changing of the guard in the Australian Open. The greatest, Roger Federer, succumbed to Novak Djokovic the 9/1 third favourite. A sign of things to come for the Fed Express.

There were 123 league places and 5 divisions between Liverpool and Havant and Waterloo, so unsurprisingly the Premiership Goliaths were red hot favourites to win this FA Cup tie.

We dismissively offered 60/1 that Havant and Waterloo would take the lead in the match and punters with more money than sense snapped up the outrageous odds. After only 8 minutes a little known striker with the exotic name of Pacquette smashed them into the lead and left us with our pants around our ankles!

We decided to pay out on Barack Obama to get the Democratic Nomination as we thought he would run away with the race ahead of Hillary Clinton. We were due to sweat in eight months time!

The month ended with Ireland unearthing one of its Cheltenham festival bankers. Sizing Europe pulverised the field by 8 lengths to win the AIG Champion Hurdle at Leopardstown. He ended that day 5/2 favourite to do the same at Cheltenham.

February

In February the longest betting saga of all time ended with Giovanni Trapattoni landing the much coveted position as Republic of Ireland manager. Just five months and eleven favourites after Steve Staunton got the bullet, the FAI got their man. Trapattoni's odds of 150/1 were a thing of distant memory as he closed in on the hot seat and the last bet struck was at 1/33. Confidential my arse!

The 50 year anniversary of the Munich air crash was not enough to spur United on to victory in their cool looking retro shirts. The Manchester Derby was won by 11/1 outsiders Man City under an under pressure Sven-Goran Eriksson.

Speaking of upsets, who could possibly say they weren't surprised by the 55/1 4-0 drubbing of Arsenal at the hands of United in the FA Cup. This was to be the beginning of the end for the Wenger boys.

So, Arsenal are on the slide and the league looks to be between United and Chelsea. Chelsea are set to win their first silverware of the season by justifying odds of 4/9 in the Carling Cup Final. However, Spurs won it in extra time – we should have known, they had beaten Arsenal well in the semis.

It was a month of upsets so we shouldn't have been too surprised when Wales came from 13 points behind to beat England at Twickenham for the first time in 20 years. They were 100/1 at half time – not even one patriotic punter backed them. As the final whistle blew the 20/1 about a Welsh Grand Slam became a thing of the distant past.



March

Barnsley were the giant killers of the FA Cup knocking out both Liverpool and Chelsea. The semi final line up was a romantic's dream with Barnsley joined by Portsmouth, Cardiff and West Brom. Only one solitary Paddy Power punter clicked the 1187/1 accumulator, and only for 10p. So the bookies were left celebrating the best ever weekend of domestic football.

The English were marching on towards Champions League glory with Arsenal beating AC Milan, United beating Lyon, Liverpool beating Inter and Chelsea beating Olympiakos. That accum was more popular – ouch!

Tiger's six tournament winning streak came to an end in the World Golf Championships and the bookies breathed a collective sigh of relief while punters rued the closing of their very own cashpoint!

Cheltenham week began with a win for Ireland and JP McManus when Captain Cee Bee won the Supreme Novice Hurdle. He wasn't hugely backed on the day – the punters chose JP's other one in the race, Binocular. They shouldn't feel too bad as the jockey chose the wrong one too – Tony McCoy was sick as a dog to finish second to a horse he could have ridden!

The banker Sizing Europe pulled up injured in the Champion Hurdle and suddenly the punters were nervously biting their nails, three more days to go.

Actually make that two – Cheltenham 2008 will be remembered for one thing. I'd love to say it was the fact that Denman beat Kauto Star in the most hyped Gold Cup for years but it'll be for the weather.

The wind blew and the hospitality tent took off. Racing had to be abandoned on day two of the festival. It was pretty good news for those going racing on Thursday or Friday, they were about to get 10 Cheltenham races for the price of 6!

Lots of fancied horses won, lots got beaten but eventually we got to the main event and the punters didn't want to know Denman. He had less friends than Billy Nomates and his odds drifted right out to 9/4 while Kauto Star went odds-on. 3 miles, 2 1/2 furlongs and 7 lengths later we have a new champion. The monster Denman has roared.



April

In April we paid out on Man Utd as league winners and also on Ronaldo as top scorer. They were red hot favourites at the time but then they only went and got beaten by Chelsea to leave us feeling more than a little twitchy.

Meanwhile in the golf, 175/1 shot Trevor Immelman gave punters a right kick in the crown jewels by winning the Masters. He said in his interview after that he never thought he'd win it – you're not the only one Trev!

In the Champions League semi finals, Ronaldo proved that maybe he wasn't such a big game player after all by missing a penalty in Barcelona, however, somehow United went through.

As for Liverpool – John Arne Riise scored and absolute screamer to settle the tie. The only problem was that it was into his own net! So, Chelsea v United in the Champions League final.....this was going to be nasty for us no matter who won!

April wouldn't be April without the Grand National. Timmy Murphy rode Comply or Die to land yet another Grand National gamble – the 7/1 favourite proved that it's not really that hard a race to pick the winner of. And for good measure not only did we pay out each way down to fifth place which was filled by the very well backed Bewleys Berry, we also paid a 10% bonus on all winning bets....the person who came up with that idea is now sweeping the floors!

May

We'll never forget May 2008. That bloke who came up with Grand National idea was given one more chance and had the bright idea that we'd refund all losing bets on the Champions League final if Ronaldo scored at any stage during the match.

This is the same player who had scored about a million goals for United already this season. Surprise, surprise Ronaldo steps up and scores an early beauty. The result of the match doesn't really matter because whatever way you look at it we're in the red. We ended up giving back over €1m to 'losing' customers...what a great day for punters!

The FA Cup final wasn't quite as riveting – in fact it was about the worst betting FA Cup final ever. Pompey beating Cardiff...who cares!

The Heineken Cup final was a terrible, terrible match for any purist (except of course a Munster purist). Munster ground out a victory and we felt violated. Not just because they had been backed by every man, woman and child in Ireland, but also because we had to watch that load of sh*@£!



The Guineas were a sign of things to come if ever there was won. The great New Approach couldn't quite beat the even greater Henrythenavigator. Henry did us a favour, winning at 11/1. No that's not a mis-print he actually was 11/1 at one stage of his career. Whatever favour was done that day has been repayed in spades! Later on in May the same Henry confirmed the form at more realistic odds of 5/4. Mental note, Aidan O'Brien is quite good at training horses.

June

In the French Open, Rafa Nadal embarrassed Roger Federer with a proper thrashing in the final. In doing so he landed pre-tournament odds of 8/13 and won his fourth French Open in a row. It would all be different when they got back to grass – wouldn't it?

Our worst golf result of the year came when a one-legged Tiger won the US Open. We went biggest price in the village at 4/1 pre-tournament because let's face it, you just can't win a major if you're not fully fit. Another mental note, beware of the injured golfer.

We had almost forgotten what football was after that 10 minute off season, but don't worry the Euros are about to begin. They were destined to be the worst competition ever because of the lack of home interest. They turned out to be a punter bonanza with only 5 draws in 30 odd matches, and with 7 of the first 10 favourites winning.

Germany were 7/2 favourites from the start, but Spain were the punters' choice and were backed right down to joint favourites. Funnily enough they meet in the final. We watched the game hoping Germany would win and we'd lose heavily, sounds silly except if Spain won we'd be completely fleeced – dough done! The only respite is that Fernando Torres wasn't top scorer.

New Approach won the Derby after a hugely controversial will he won't he run saga. At the end of the day he turned out to be cracking value at 5/1 and his trainer Jim Bolger was the happiest man in Epsom. Some of the hacks weren't too happy mind you, and the press conference after it turned into handbags at dawn.



Aidan O'Brien wasn't to be outdone and to say he dominated Royal Ascot would be like saying Tiger Woods is okay at golf. We had decided before hand that we would take a chance with his fancied horses – they were the ones punters wanted to back, and we wanted to make sure they backed them with us.

He cleaned up, winning an incredible four out of the six Group 1 races at the famous meeting. The highlight was Yeats' Gold Cup treble – the closest Royal Ascot has ever come to an Irish winner at Cheltenham!

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July

Someone wise once said to beware of the injured golfer. You'd think we'd take notice. Last year we paid out €5 million to Harrington backers after he won the British Open. This year it could only get worse, don't forget Tiger wasn't playing.

We went best price on him, as we always do, at 20/1 and then he tells the world that he has a sore wrist and that he can't play golf or do much else for that matter. His odds drift right out to 28/1 before a ball is struck, and unbelievably he's a winner for us in the book!

We had already announced an each way bonus of 7 places so it was our busiest Open ever, but with nobody backing Harrington we felt a little naked so offered a little insurance to punters that they'd get their money back if Harrington pulled out injured.

That did the trick and soon we were back where we belonged – up to our knickers in Harrington. He won and we lost. It's a case of the one that got away for punters though, we ended up paying out about €2 million but it should have been so much worse. Consider this bullet dodged!

August

Bullet dodged? Who said that? Along came the USPGA in August and once again we decided to go biggest price about the great man at 20/1 - after all Europeans never win the USPGA.

Cue Sergio Garcia, surely the new unluckiest man in golf. He goes out and plays pretty much flawless golf. But Harrington was trundling along nicely and much like Limestone Lad over hurdles it was a battle he wanted and a battle he got.



Garcia played brilliantly but Harrington played match play and faced him down. Everytime it needed to, the putt dropped. Every mistake Garcia made, Harrington capitalised. It was awesome to watch, but exceedingly expensive.

It's a bit boring now but we have finally figured out that if Harrington wins a major, we do our brains. Thirteen months and three majors later we have finally learned something!

But the question remains, will we be biggest price Harrington in the 2009 majors? Of course we will – maybe we have a bit more of a lesson to learn.

Worldwide the Beijing Olympics will be remembered for Usain Bolt's double whammy with Golds and World records in the 100 and 200 metres. In Ireland it will be for something completely different.

Bolt was very well backed and left us in his wake with a payout of well over €100k. He was very backable to win the 100 before the first heat and was 14/1 to break that World Record. However it was Michael Johnson's 200m record that was unbreakable and we offered 100/1 that he'd break them both.

The Irish boxing captain Kenny Egan was 25/1 for Gold before a punch was thrown, but then suddenly he landed a good draw and his odds were punted down to just 8/1.

He crushed all before him and before we knew it he was in the final against a home town favourite. He won the fight everywhere bar the scoreboard and was robbed by a shocking hometown decision.

Everyone who watched the fight knew he should have won, so Paddy Power paid out on Egan as Olympic Champ despite him only coming home with a Silver. Punters benefited to the tune of €150,000 which went some way towards making up for the disappointment.

In the Premiership, Stoke were expected to struggle and after getting thumped 3-1 in their first game at Bolton, we decided in our wisdom to pay out on them to be relegated.

A 94th minute winner in their very next game at home to Aston Villa left the crowd singing "Are you watching Paddy Power!" live on Sky! Paddy was very lucky to win an award on the Stoke fan site, I'm pretty sure it was 'Banker of the week'!





We weren't exactly flavour of the month with Stoke fans but a Silver Lining offer of a free £50 bet for every season ticket holder shows that everyone truly does have a price!

Dublin did the bookies another favour in the All Ireland losing out to Tyrone in the semis, but it did leave the old Kilkenny/ Kerry double looking very dangerous.

September

Andy Murray showed his class for the first time and beat Rafa Nadal to reach the final of the US Open, unlucky for him and lucky for us he ran into a red hot Federer who showed him who's boss.

The World Cup Qualifiers heralded a new dawn for both Ireland and England with the beginning of the Italian job.

England beat Andorra and Ireland beat Georgia, suddenly things were looking up!

In the hurling, Kilkenny staked their claim as being one of the best teams ever to grace Croke Park with a mauling of Waterford that will leave the Déise with dark memories of that day.

Saturday 13th was unlucky for some, i.e. Man Utd. It was the day Liverpool chose to throw down the gauntlet for the season ahead. 2-1 Liverpool at Anfield, game on!

England won 4-1 in Croatia and suddenly they are going to win the World Cup again, punters couldn't get enough of the 10/1!

It was odds on that an English Club would win the Champions League and all four represented started well.

The Ryder Cup was the big news in September and climaxed on one of the greatest sporting days of the year so far. The Tigerless USA schooled Europe and Nick Faldo, easily leaving the European giants in their wake. Harrington had a week to forget, why didn't you have one of them in July or August Pádraig???

On that final day, Kerry lost the All Ireland final to outsiders Tyrone thus keeping alive that every growing monkey on their back about Northern teams. Chelsea and United only managed to draw 1-1, which lost them both ground to a jammily convincing Liverpool.

A lot of things didn't go to plan in September, and while the other three were ticking along nicely, Arsenal began to make a complete mess out of a set of seemingly easy early season fixtures.

Hull have the honour of being the longest priced winners in Premier League history, landing odds of 20/1 at the Emirates with a 2-1 defeat of their hosts.

October

In October England beat Kazakhstan, no surprise but good for the Borat jokes.

More importantly another monkey off another back – Ireland finally managed to beat the mighty Cyprus. Who said England were going to win the World Cup – they'll have to beat us first!

The Breeders Cup was a leveller for Europe with a record number of winners but unfortunately for Aidan O'Brien (and very fortunately for bookies!) he hit the bar a couple of times but ultimately drew a blank. Suddenly his target of a record number of Group 1 winners wasn't looking so likely after all.

The highlight of the night for Europe (and probably the lowlight for O'Brien) was Raven's Pass. Henrythenavigator had beaten him a couple of times earlier in the season but could only manage second place in the biggest race of them all, the Breeders Cup Classic, and all that after taking a bit too long to get going.

Spurs finally realised that they weren't too big to go down and that they needed to get some points. Juande Ramos became the first managerial casualty of the season and it seemed to work.

It may not sound like much but they managed to beat Bolton 2-0 which led to a 4-4 draw with Arsenal and victory over Liverpool.

Things were looking up for those we thought were going down.

It was a month for being bullish and we decided that the last Presidential debate was the last chance for McCain to land a blow. He didn't manage to and we decided that now was the time. We called the election and paid out over €1 million on Obama as new President of the USA.

Two days later there were reports of McCain making significant gains in the polls – woops!



2008 Betting Review

(continued)



November

November began with a week of football results to leave punters scratching their heads and wondering if God is actually a bookie.

Arsenal hammered Fenerbahce in Turkey but could only scrape a scoreless draw at home. Chelsea were stuffed by Roma in Rome and Liverpool scraped a dubious home draw with Atletico Madrid after a controversial late penalty from Stevie G. The surprise of the night though was United's failure to capitalise on a 3-0 win and to barely scrape a draw at Parkhead. Celtic were 9/2 to win that match, the biggest odds they have ever been for a home fixture.

Lewis Hamilton finally managed to win the drivers Championship, he made those punters who backed him sweat though – he had been backed at odds varying from 9/4 at the start of the season to 11/2 mid year and 2/9 before the last race.

The New Zealand rugby team did us all the pleasure of coming to this neck of the woods and as usual they didn't leave empty handed. Ireland were a walkover but Munster....ah the mighty Munster!

1/33 shots New Zealand are behind with only minutes to go on the clock. Munster on the brink of yet another famous Thomond Park victory. Then up pops Joe Rockokoko with a late cruel try. It was oh so close to being one of the biggest upsets in rugby history.

England fared worst out of the home internationals – they were stuffed by all three Southern Hemisphere powerhouses. I wonder if Martin Johnson is enjoying his first year in charge?

The biggest event of the year, and probably the decade, was the Presidential Election. Obamania swept the world and his victory justified odds of 1/14 before the first vote was counted. We thanked our lucky stars that we weren't looking down the barrel of a double whammy payout.

Now we are betting on the most important things about the US Presidency, like who'll play Obama in the first Hollywood film about him (Will Smith is 6/4 fav), what they'll name the Whitehouse puppy (100/1 it's a pit bull called Palin) and whether we'll hear the pitter patter of tiny feet (10/1 a White House baby).

December

Liverpool fans will look back fondly on December. They hammered Newcastle 5-1 while Chelsea could only draw with Fulham. This put the reds firmly on top of the table. The question remained, could they stay there?

The bookies said no and Liverpool remained only third in the betting at 4/1 behind the faltering Chelsea and Man Utd with oodles of games in hand.

A cold snap gave us the inspired idea of paying our early on a white Christmas. It was said to be the coldest December for years so surely we were set for a white blanket on Christmas morning.

Punters were delighted and were warming their cockles with €100,000 paid out on snow. We felt mildly silly when temperatures hit 15 degrees on Christmas Day!

On the racing front it was two horses that didn't even run over Christmas who fared best in the ante-post markets for Cheltenham. Masterminded's odds were slashed to 1/2 when his potential main market rival Petit Robin flopped, and Binocular hardened to 11/8 favourite for the Champion Hurdle when the Sizing Europe's bubble was burst at Leopardstown.

But Christmas belonged to Kauto Star, he hacked up in the King George to throw down a serious Gold Cup gauntlet to stable companion Denman. His odds were slashed from 4/1 to 9/4 to do the undoable and regain his Gold Cup crown. I wonder what Ruby will ride?

At Leopardstown Willie Mullins dominated. His biggest headache in the run up to Cheltenham looks like being which of his horses he'll win which of the races with! Hurricane Fly and Cousin Vinny set the crowd alight with brilliant displays which leave them dominating the markets for the Supreme Novice and Ballymore Hurdles come March.

One person is always welcome at Christmas time, he always joins us in our sitting room. No, it's not Santa – it's Phil 'The Power' Taylor. He justified odds of 1/2 to win an incredible 14th world darts title.....What an athlete!

