

2009 BETTING REVIEW

January

As Johnny Logan famously sang....What's another year?? (That Eurovision winner would have cost us a pretty penny back in 1980.....if of course we existed back then!)

Rafas were set to be big news in 2009 and the Nadal kicked off the year by beating Roger Federer in the Aussie Open final.

The ground came up heavy at Leopardstown for Toshiba's first Irish Champion Hurdle and they couldn't have had a more popular winner than when Brave Inca held off Muirhead to roll back the years and land a mighty public gamble. The only downside was that it was a pretty depressing indictment of the standard of our hurdlers for the season ahead.

Everton started on a run in the FA Cup by holding Liverpool to a draw and then were cursed by punters knocking them out... I guess Liverpool can look back in the comfort that they were the first of many!

February

The Six Nations began with Ireland sending the French home with their tails between their legs...and what a game it was! In theory we only had to beat France and Wales to win a historic Grand Slam so already us bookies were afraid, very afraid.

Rory McIlroy announced himself on the scene by winning the Dubai Desert Classic and has now firmly established himself as bookies' enemy number one. So now instead of having one eye on Harrington, we were cross-eyed looking at young Rory too!



It was a pretty good month for Ireland all told with us coming from a goal down to beat Georgia and keep our World Cup dreams alive. The one good thing about the credit crunch is that our football team has a great recession record.

United left themselves a bit nervous and punters a bit frustrated when mauling Inter away but only managing a draw, while Liverpool on the other hand put their Everton blues behind them and beat Real Madrid away to all but book themselves a place in the quarter finals of the Champions League.



The month ended with more Six Nations glory and another famous win over the old enemy in Croke Park. To be fair England played well and we only fell across the line - it's not often we can be a little bit patronising about Irish sporting success over England so please forgive the indulgence!

March

March is usually all about racing and all about Cheltenham - this year we had the Six Nations to throw into the mix too.

Cheltenham kicked off with our biggest ever special offer on the very first race. We were going to give back all losers if the well backed favourite, Cousin Vinny, won the Supreme Novices Hurdle. He disappointed his backers but left us breathing a huge sigh of relief...but job done, a record number of new accounts ready and set to bet with us for the week.

What a week to pick! To say the results went downhill from there is a slight understatement - we were considering going to the government for a bailout after two days of champagne cork popping results for punters. As ever though, things evened themselves out and we got away with it.

When you consider that Ruby Walsh rode seven winners, we really did get away with it!

We conquered Scotland which meant that the big Six Nations decider was on. We descended on Cardiff with our sights firmly on a Championship and an historic Grand Slam.

Wales were slight favourites for the game, but the men in green stood up and took home the bacon - an absolute blow out for us bookies but we were roaring loudest of all nonetheless.

April

What an April Fools' Day! We went to Bari and all the rumours were that there'd be no drink for fans - surely an April Fools' gag? Then Italy have a man sent off in the first minute - this can't be for real! They go ahead but Robbie Keane equalises late and we are singing all the way to the World Cup Finals.... well not yet but it's looking pretty good.

The Grand National came with the usual hype and it was simply a question of what price My Will would win the National at. However, Mon Mome came fast and stormed clear from the last.

As the commentator was screaming "and Mon Mome wins the National!" every racegoer was looking at their race card scratching their head and saying "Who would have thought God's a bookie!?"



100/1 was the price and it was the third worst result in the book for punters. One lad had £250 each way which clicked for £32,000 but he was pretty much alone.

Rory McIlroy took his position at the top of our least wanted list for the Masters but when push came to shove and Kenny Perry, Angel Cabrera and Chad Campbell landed in a playoff we were sitting pretty...

2009 BETTING REVIEW CONTINUED

April (continued)

But April will forever be remembered for an epidemic, not Swine flu but 4-4 fever! Chelsea and Liverpool served up a 500/1 4-4 treat which is in theory a great result for us but funnily enough we lost about a quarter of a million!!! How the hell did that happen???

Once again we had fallen victim to offering the best odds on the market. 500/1 with Paddy Power was 100/1 everywhere else. Hundreds of punters staked an average of £2 and cleaned us out. One Leicester punter had £25 on to win £12,500. Thankfully it wasn't due to happen again for another 500 games.

The next week, Liverpool hosted Arsenal and you wouldn't Adam & Eve it but they only drew 4-4 again! This was going to be bad...and it was.

Double the bets, double the money, yikes! That Leicester punter was back in, but this time he had £53 on and so clicked a nice £26,500 – that's about £40k in a week and he tells us he lost his job a month before... maybe he should turn pro punter!

Half a million quid later we raise the white flag and cut the odds to 350/1 – because that will put them off!!!

May

The very first weekend of May threw up what would turn out to be something very special, a certain horse named Sea The Stars left all before him seeing stars as he stormed to victory in the 2000 Guineas in Newmarket.

He was 8/1 that day and was actually a pretty good result for us...the very last time those words would be uttered in the same sentence as Sea The Stars.

May was a pretty good month for rugby too, particularly if you are a Leinster fan. Their earlier ugly 6-5 win over Harlequins will always be remembered for Tom Williams' mouth full of ketchup, but their semi final win over Munster in Croke Park left the crowd fairly stunned, Johnny Sexton fairly famous and Munster fairly sick.

If Leinster's path to the final was dramatic, then Leicester's came straight from Shakespeare with a never seen before penalty shoot out win over Cardiff in the semis. There's something quite comforting about seeing 18 stone props take pressure kicks in the semi finals of a European tournament!

The final was as tense as every final is and it was Leinster who emerged with the Cup – funnily enough it was Rocky Elsom who was man of the match, for only the 700th time this season!

Manchester United won the Premier League after a pretty tight race. In the end they had 4 points to spare over Liverpool (I know, what the hell has happened to Liverpool!?). That was a good result for ante post punters, but there aren't too many who'll wait a whole season to collect!



Ronaldo's last game for United was a bit of a disappointment when they lost 2-0 to Barcelona in the Champions League final. Not to us though, United had been an incredibly well backed 13/8 in the final. In fact it was our most one sided betting book of the year so far.

Chelsea may have made a mess of the League but they got some reward in the FA Cup beating Everton 2-1 in the final. A bad result for us all round, and we would have loved Everton to go all the way considering they'd done us a few favours along the way beating Liverpool, United and Villa – they deserved to win it....tell that to Tom Watson!

June

A great start to June for backers of Sea The Stars – a historic victory in the Derby confounded Coolmore and foiled a massive punt on Fame And Glory which had made him favourite at the off.

Respite for the bookies then? Of course not, the fat cats thought they knew better but the regular punter knew best of all, this Sea The Stars was turning into a bit of an ATM.

The crowd at Ascot wouldn't exactly be well known for their paddywhackery, but this year was different. It was turning into a pretty incredible year for flat racing and it was a little like Cheltenham when Yeats won his fourth Gold Cup.

As you'd expect, an 'incredible year for the flat' means that big name horses keep winning, which means that punters keep backing them, which means that we keep getting our pants taken down – but what the heck, we'll cheer with the rest of them!

If well known horses were winning, the golf majors weren't exactly going to plan. Lucas Glover won the US Open – who? Only five players managed to finish under par and to be fair both Tiger and Mickelson were close enough if good enough.

So fair play to the 150/1 shot for managing to hold on, even if he did give us heart failure by shooting a three over par final round!



The first Lions test in South Africa left a bit of a sour taste in the mouth with a narrow defeat for the visitors after a big second half comeback. Many of the big punters had piled into the World Champs but that was balanced out by the patriotic Lions punters.



June (continued)



It's been a pretty dramatic couple of months and Wimbledon didn't fail to entertain either. Andy Murray was the talk of the town for most of the tournament but he fell to the resurgent Andy Roddick, who was all that stood between Roger Federer and history.

The Fed Express was a red hot favourite and didn't disappoint, but he had to work pretty hard – he won the last set 16-14. Pete Sampras was there to see his record 14 Grand Slams surpassed.

If any punter had bothered to ask for odds on Federer to win 16-14 in the last set we would have quoted him 1000/1, and sent the men in white coats around to his house!

July

Nobody will ever forget the Open Championship of 2009 which proved once and for all that that sport is anything but fair!



Tom Watson did everything right, he shot a first round 65 which put him right up there as a bit of a "isn't it great to see that the old boy can still make it around in one piece". Then a couple of days later it was more a case of "jaspers, is he still here?".

He never took the imagination of punters though and even though everyone was cheering for him, nobody really backed him. Stewart Cink came from nowhere and, as soon as Watson fluffed the 18th, he was always going to win the playoff.

Come to think of it – nobody will forget the runner up, but not so many might remember the winner!

Either way it was a kick in the teeth for punters as the big Tiger v Harrington battle royale never really happened.

England began winning back the Ashes with a famous home victory over the old enemy and 8/13 favourites, Australia. A very popular result with punters and us bookies paid for many a round toasting hero of the series, captain fantastic Andrew Strauss.

The Lions had managed to lose the first two tests so the last hurrah was a bit of damp squib but most punters called it completely wrong. The Lions finally found their winning groove with an easy victory over an already celebrating Springbok team. On the very same day Sea The Stars was justifying favouritism in the Coral Eclipse at Sandown. One good result and one bad.



August

The Premier League started with a bit of a bang, both United and Chelsea justified short odds beating Birmingham and Hull while Arsenal threw down a big marker with a 6-1 mauling of Everton away.

We can thank our lucky stars that Liverpool started as they meant to continue with a defeat at the hands of Tottenham – the multiple bets on the top four winning were looking pretty nasty!

The early exchanges looked as though nobody except Chelsea wanted to win the League this year. It was meant to be a two horse race but United losing to Burnley certainly put a spring into Chelsea's step.

The USPGA is usually a pretty forgettable major and passes without much notice or mention. This year looked like being much of the same with Tiger leading by two at the start of the final round – don't forget he never gets beaten from the front in majors.

That's why we decided to pay out early. Everyone who backed Woods got paid out before a ball was even struck in the final round. There aren't enough zeros on this keyboard to tell you how much we paid out – it was a lot!

So Tiger chooses this major to completely choke for the first time in his career, he shoots a final round 75 (that's not a misprint!). YE Yang wins the tournament and the whole bookmaking industry breathes a collective sigh of relief while punters around the world say "who?".

At times like these most people keep the head down and pretend it never happened. We considered this and then ran a media campaign under the slogan "It pays to bet with Paddy Power. When we get it wrong, we get it really wrong!".

September

Man Utd's victory over big spending neighbours Man City will be seen as one of the pivotal points of their season. For many it also heralded the start of what is now known as 'Fergie Time'.

Craig Bellamy scored in the last minute to earn a draw for Man City but with Utd piling on the pressure they managed to bag a Michael Owen winner in the sixth minute of injury time. It was some game though, 4-3 United. They might have been well backed to win the match, but not many got the score right!

The Irish Champion Stakes at Leopardstown was the only time we were lucky enough to see Sea The Stars in Ireland over the whole season and he didn't disappoint. Coolmore threw no less than five horses, including two of their biggest guns, at John Oxx's superstar but they still couldn't find a way to the bottom of this horse. Mastercraftsman and Fame And Glory, a St. James's Palace winner and an Irish Derby winner, were both made look pretty ordinary.

England beat Croatia 5-1 to almost guarantee their place in South Africa – this bloke Capello can manage! Many people say that England are always under priced because of the patriotic punt – it doesn't bloody well matter, if they keep winning we keep getting cleaved!

As for Ireland, the dream was still alive after a Robbie Keane winner away in Cyprus.

2009 BETTING REVIEW CONTINUED

October

Sea The Stars finished his short career with a jaw dropping win in the Prix de l'Arc de Triomphe in Paris, coming from an impossible position to storm home amid scenes of pure paddywhackery!

The only good news for the bookies was that he was off to stud.

There was a small chance of us topping our qualifying group, especially when Sean St Ledger put us ahead in the 87th minute against Italy in Croke Park. Then the defence went to the boozier to celebrate while Gilardino was scoring the equaliser three minutes later! Playoffs here we come – let's hope we don't draw France.

England managed to lose their 100% record away in the Ukraine but it didn't really matter as they had already topped their group. It was very nice of them to give some points to some of the other teams.

Jenson Button won the F1 Drivers' Championship, which doesn't seem that amazing now but remember he was 80/1 at the start of the season and made a packet for the many petrol heads who were far more on top of out of season testing (yawn!) than we obviously were.

While Button was spraying the champagne, FIFA were busy changing the World Cup Qualifying rules to suit France and Portugal. They seeded the draw for the qualifiers to make sure the big teams avoided each other which would have been absolutely fine....if Ireland had been seeded.

Luck of the Irish my ar*e, we drew France.

November

Lots of people grew silly moustaches in November, which just made it an awful lot easier for ugly blokes to get lucky in nightclubs the length and breadth of the land!

The National Hunt season kicked off as usual with the Paddy Power Gold Cup at Cheltenham and once again we had a quality winner with the Edward O'Grady trained Tranquil Sea storming clear up the hill.

In our wisdom we had offered money back to all punters if Paul Nicholls won the race – bear in mind that Nicholls is a champion trainer and has won just about every big race bar this one. He also had three of the top five horses in the race.

You'd think the fact that he didn't win was good for us, but the special put everyone onto everything else in the race and Tranquil Sea landed a nice touch being backed from 14/1 a couple of days before to 11/2 favourite. It was the first Irish winner of the race for donkey's years.



Chelsea captain John Terry scored in their awful 1-0 win over United to cement their place atop the League, not a bad result as the millions of United fans had once again bet with their hearts.

The real football story happened in Paris though. Two French players are offside but Thierry Henry wisely plays the whistle. He tries to palm the ball down but fails at the first attempt so goes again, eventually he gets it across to Gallas who bundles the ball into the back of the net.

As I said earlier, luck of the Irish my ar*e! The only good thing is that it does give us something to moan about for months and months.

We stuck up an ad in Dublin airport welcoming everyone to Ireland, unless they were called Thierry – although I very much doubt we would be top of his wishlist of destinations.

December

Lee Westwood had managed to fall away a few times over the season when in a winning position but he toyed with the opposition when winning the very lucrative Race to Dubai.

The Christmas racing festivals saw some ups and downs for punters but the most important result was the Christmas dish which is almost as popular as Turkey – Kauto Star.

Some said he was over the hill, some still say he can't jump (he has fallen three times in 33 starts and has won 2 Gold Cups and now 4 King Georges!). He was awesome. It looked really unfair, like he was racing against donkeys – 36 lengths was the winning margin in the end.

It's easy in hindsight but 8/13 was an unbelievable price considering his record in the race. Most punters don't need hindsight – bloodbath!

We figured there might be some nasty weather on the way so we decided to pay out early on a white Christmas. It cost us a pretty penny and we were kind of right, but as usual the snow only came afterwards so we ended the year with a cocked up payout – must try harder next year!

