

Handicapping Review Panel

Samson (GB)

13 July 2019

This is the outcome of an appeal by Dr Richard Newland, trainer of Samson, against the handicap rating of 115 allotted to the gelding following the Racing Welfare Racing Staff Week Handicap Chase on 03 July 2019.

The Panel considered in detail the representations of Dr Newland and of the BHA handicapper in question, studying the video recording of the race and other pertinent evidence.

The Panel recognises that a degree of subjectivity is necessarily involved in assessing a horse which won as easily as Samson did and acknowledges the expertise and experience of the BHA handicapping team in this area.

There were, however, two particular issues raised in the handicapper's submission which it disputed.

One was that Samson went four lengths clear on the run-in (before winning by two lengths), which was presented as a central part of the handicapping case. Time lapses and visual interpretation by the Panel put this at three lengths at most.

The other was that the raising of the runner-up, Gentleman Moore, from 90 to 94 was justified. Again, this was a central part of the handicapping case for raising Samson from 102 to 115.

It was correct to state that Gentleman Moore had been "placed off [94] very recently", but it is also true that had been when third of five and that the gelding had been beaten three times off 92 (twice second and once unplaced) since.

The Panel considered that the average/median rise for a horse running in consecutive handicap chases in Britain in 2018, having finished second in a field of 12 or more in the earlier race, was 2 lb to 3 lb.

It also considered that raising a horse by as much as 13 lb, as had been the case with Samson here, had occurred in less than 1% of instances in 2017 according to data provided by the BHA handicapping team previously, and seldom for horses winning by narrow margins.

The effect of a somewhat positive view of the runner-up's performance, and of the margin by which the winner went clear on the run-in, added to the subjective appraisal of the "value extra" involved for the ease of the win, arguably aggregated to a slightly excessive assessment of the winner.

At the same time, the Panel accepted the opinion of the BHA handicapper that Samson “looked a different animal” to previously and is, as an eight-year-old, “not exposed as a chaser”, and that decisive action needed to be taken given the ease of the gelding’s win.

The Panel felt that it was impossible to determine whether the fall of a horse in second place four out materially affected the result. It also felt that comments regarding the lack of recent success by the ultimately placed horses should be viewed in the context of their having been dropped in the handicap over that time, improving their prospects as a result.

Having weighed up all of the above, and more besides, the Panel was unanimous in its decision that a fairer assessment would have rated the race itself 2 lb lower and Samson himself a further 1 lb lower, to reflect usual treatment of larger-field handicap chases, the recent record of the runner-up in this one, and the disagreement about how far Samson went clear before winning by two lengths.

Its instruction is that Samson should have his rating reduced from 115 to 112, with effect as soon as possible. It also notes that the BHA handicapping team may wish to reassess the Worcester race in order to maintain internal consistency between the beaten horses and the winner.

Accordingly the appeal is allowed, and Dr Newland’s deposit should be returned also.

The members of the Panel were: Simon Rowlands, Stephen Smith and Adrian Grazebrook