



Unencumbered, with Nathan Berry on board, takes out the Group 3 BJ McLachlan Stakes (1200m) at Doomben yesterday

Picture: ANNETTE DEW

Stroak of good luck as run buoys Magic hopes

HORSE RACING
By MARK OBERHARDT
in Brisbane

RIVAL trainer Bryan Guy was one of the few who wasn't overawed by the win of Sydney colt Unencumbered in the Group 3 BJ McLachlan Stakes (1200m) at Doomben yesterday.

The Bjorn Baker-trained Unencumbered (\$4.40) had Magic Millions Classic favourite written all over him when he beat Guy's filly Stroak (\$21) by a short neck. Sagatona (\$21) was a half-

length back in third place. Guy was buoyed by the run of Stroak as was her jockey Michael Cahill.

"A couple of more bounds and we get Unencumbered. It gives me plenty of hope for the Magic Millions provided we draw a decent alley," Guy said.

Cahill, Queensland's leading jockey, agreed that Stroak's run was a good pointer for the Magic Millions on January 11.

However, winning jockey Nathan Berry was equally positive that Unencumbered



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was headed towards Magic Millions glory.

He said he had been surprised that Unencumbered had raced so close to the pace, being in fourth place

behind the leaders at the 600m.

"He was just too good for them. But if anything he got to the lead too early in the straight," Berry said.

"I think that he will be better ridden a little further back."

He said Unencumbered was a real professional with his attitude.

Baker was beaming after the win but was not getting carried away with the result.

"There will be horses coming from Sydney. But we are on the Gold Coast now and I

just hope things continue to go well in the lead-up to the race," he said.

The favourite Oakleigh Girl (\$2.40) ran fourth after being in a speed battle with Echo Gal to the 600m.

"They went very hard and I am not giving up hope just yet," said her trainer Dan Bougoure.

Echo Gal, who had been Magic Millions favourite, was under pressure at the 600m before finishing second-last. Her Magic Millions future will be decided in the next few days.

Murphy finding his feet

IRISH apprentice Oisin Murphy cracked it for his first win on his visit to Australia, getting the job done on Danny O'Brien's Settler's Way at Moonee Valley.

Feeling every point of the sticky 38-degree heat bearing down on Melbourne, Murphy positioned Settler's Way (\$8) behind early leader Subiaso in the Melbourne Signage Concepts (2040m) yesterday.

As the pace quickened, Settler's Way wore down Subiaso and then repelled a challenge from favourite Duplicity Jones (\$4) to win by a half neck. The fast-finishing Just Reminiscing (\$16) was a close third.

"We didn't go mad and he got into a bit of a rhythm and I just kicked turning for home and he found plenty," Murphy said.



Oisin Murphy

Murphy, who has ridden 41 winners in England since getting his licence in June last year, had his first ride in Australia on December 12 at Kyneton.

His UK boss Andrew Balding, who won the Mackinnon Stakes with Side Gance, arranged for the 18-year-old apprentice to ride for O'Brien when the two trainers met during the spring carnival.

"I'm learning plenty at Flemington with the likes of Damien Oliver and Stephen Arnold," Murphy said.

He is due to return to the UK next month but said there are moves to extend his stay by a few more weeks: "It's just brilliant to get a win here — it's a great racing country."

Princely finish for Weir

BALLARAT trainer Darren Weir finished with a Moonee Valley double from the last two races to add to his treble at Caulfield on Boxing Day.

Weir's double yesterday included Prince Of Penzance's win in the Sportingbet Best Tote Plus Handicap and he'll aim the horse at the Mornington Cup and Launceston Cup.

"Were taking small steps towards those races and we're hoping he can get there," Weir said.

The four-year-old gelding was bought at a New Zealand sale for \$50,000 and with the \$48,000 prizemoney won yesterday has recouped \$135,000 since his first race in March.

With Michelle Payne aboard, Prince Of Penzance was last at the 800m but as they entered the straight he clicked into gear and



Darren Weir

won by 1 1/4 lengths from Bringinbrong (\$26) with Mendivil (\$21) a nose away third.

In the penultimate race, the City Jeep Handicap (1200m), the in-form Big Buddy (\$11) swooped from the back of the field to win his third race in his last four starts.

Weir said off-season races suited the seven-year-old gelding as he made his way through the ratings.

He said the no-frills King Buddy is an honest horse that has built his prizemoney close to \$200,000.

"They're the kind of horses you want," he said.

King Buddy beat Elwick Jack (\$17) by a half length with General Groove (\$15) 1 1/4 lengths away third.

Ragged run bit too chivalrous

STRAPPING two-year-old Chivalry could be headed for a Group 1 Blue Diamond Stakes start after a bustling win at Moonee Valley yesterday.

In only his second race start, the Mark Kavanagh-trained colt was beaten for speed out of the gates and was checked in the early stages before settling second last in the Quest Moonee Valley Plate (1000m).

But he made up ground along the rails at the turn before taking a run between horses in the straight to go on and score decisively.

Kavanagh said it was an important win for Chivalry (\$3.20) and confirmed he is a horse of the future.

He said Chivalry would return to the paddock but how long he spends there depends on the horse's progress.

"He'll do the talking," said Kavanagh.

"We have in our mind he is going to be better at three, but he is really good right now."

Small field for Bernborough

SAFETY issues made it impossible to start more than 12 runners in the \$175,000 Listed Bernborough Handicap at Toowoomba on Tuesday, according to Racing Queensland officials.

The Bernborough (1600m) is one of the oldest summer feature races in Queensland and is usually run at Doomben. But RQ switched it to Toowoomba to mark the reopening of a new grass surface at the Darling Downs racetrack.

The Bernborough field has been restricted to 12 runners with seven emergencies declared, leaving some trainers and owners far from happy.

RQ chief executive Darren Condon said when the meeting was programmed it had been hoped to have at least 14 runners.

However, stewards had inspected the track recently and had insisted that 12 runners was the maximum for safety reasons.

Durnford back on home turf

UNFANCIED Durnford will be running in his own back yard when he contests the \$120,000 Listed Lord Stakes at Mornington today.

Trainer Pat Carey is hopeful the five-year-old gelding can recapture his early 2013 form when he won at Caulfield, was placed second at Sandown and was runner-up in the \$350,000 Listed Mornington Cup behind Tuscan Fire.

Since then things have gone pear-shaped for Durnford, being unplaced in his last seven races.

"Really, he's gone missing a little bit," Carey said.

Durnford has freshened up since his seventh in the Listed Ballarat Cup on November 24 and Carey has taken a different tack in preparation.

"His performance on Sunday will give an indication of how far he can go — maybe another Mornington Cup," said Carey. "He works here, it's home for him here."