

—Mondays with David Allan—



Superstars Bolt, Van Niekerk and a son of Frankel



USAIN Bolt and Lewis Hamilton celebrating yesterday in Austin, Texas.

“A funny thing happened on the way to the theatre tonight”. Anyone out there recognise that as the opening line of old-style stand-up comedians?

Well it flashed into my mind the other evening. Not much else was there, fogged by researching the first few hundred lots of 1750 Horses in Training due to sell next week.

The Crown in (aptly enough) Brewer Street stands exactly where 9 year old Wolfgang Mozart gave a recital in 1765. It wasn't a pub then, but a swift half from the array of ales set me up nicely for a short stroll across to Shaftesbury Avenue onto which I emerged right next to a bus with a huge picture of Usain Bolt down the side, about six feet from my nose.

The “funny thing” that happened was proof, of a convoluted sort, that advertising works.

There in my beloved Theatreland was an image that sent my mind straight to South African racing.

Mr Bolt has a thing for London and vice versa. He was on the side of the bus because he is opening a chain of restaurants with Jamaican zing to rival Nando's Chicken. It was not because I can't escape the word Nando's when imploring SA breeders and trainers to recognise Gitano Hernando's steady rise up the logs from moderate mares, but because of the Sun Met.

Usain Bolt is doing a number of high profile “gigs” around the world since retiring. He hosts this or opens that. Not like a retired racehorse opening supermarkets – Red Rum and Desert Orchid did loads of those duties and drew massive crowds. Pocket Power might have done the same in Cape Town? But the sprinting human is on a much higher plane.
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SA +27(0)21 828 9288 | SA mobile +27(0)72 740 9061
UK +44(0)1252 646611 | UK mobile +44(0)7774 697640
davidallan@allanbloodlines.com | www.allanbloodlines.com





Usain Bolt with Wayde van Niekerk.

DAVID ALLAN (...cont)

Yesterday, he was the Official Starter at the Austin Formula 1 Grand Prix, spending the race in and around the “Brackley Boys” pit while the team anticipated the Constructors’ World Championship. The Bolt family friend Hamilton immaculately won his sixth U.S. Grand Prix out of seven, heading for his fourth World Title.

Three months on from now, the great sprinter will be a kind of Official Starter at the Sun Met.

Celebrity at the races often goes to show that the racing is brilliant anyway, and the celebrity joins in the enjoyment and endorses it. Usain Bolt is a celebrity and a half whose presence is a coup for the organisers that will surely enhance the event but let’s take the thought process a stage further.

In UK, sports people of all sorts *own* racehorses. Ex Liverpool stars go jump racing together. Michael Owen lives and breathes his many racehorses. Lee Westwood on the golf course is never far from the racecourse when home. Michael Holding aka Whispering Death lives in Newmarket, a regular in the Stoute yard, frequently joined by his friend and fellow racing nut Michael Atherton who made a good fist of reviewing a day’s racing during Rain Stopped Play some years ago.

Their colleague in the commentary box was the late

Richie Benaud, who spent the English summers working during play, so to speak, but playing when not working – always on the racecourse with his wife Daphne, talking horses. My wife and I did just that with them between two races one star-struck afternoon at Epsom.

Back to the Sun Met. One of the main players and hosts on the day is a certain Mr Chris van Niekerk. His contribution will be as polished and effective as ever, but it is another van Niekerk who captures my imagination in this context. Wayde.

The 25 year old South African champion athlete is already developing idol status amongst the world’s athletics fans. Usain Bolt predicts his superstardom. It would be another coup and ultimately a more important one if it were possible to get Wayde van Niekerk, admired by Usain Bolt, involved in our racing. Maybe he’d like it? Maybe he’d present a Cup? Most importantly maybe he’d admire the horses. Maybe he’d come with Mr Bolt?



Michael Owen doing what he loves.

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Cracksman by Frankel and Frankie Dettori in the Golden Horn colours make light of testing ground in the Champion Stakes at Ascot on Saturday. (Julian Herbert).

DAVID ALLAN (...cont)

Wayde van Niekerk, Usain Bolt and the Sun Met Winner will have power, grace and athleticism in common.

Usain Bolt can come and go and be fun and charming and a crowd puller. Wayde van Niekerk is a South African crowd puller across the world in the making. Grab him? Maybe I'll try...

Speaking of celebrity, South Africans enjoy their Frankel-mania. The great horse took a big step forward on Saturday.

Clearly he is having success on the racecourse as befits a superstar runner serving some of the best mares in the world. In the top ten sires (money won in GB/Ireland) as the Turf Season approaches its end, Frankel sits 4th with far fewer runners than those around him. Galileo is way ahead then Dark Angel a superb second ahead of Dubawi. Then Frankel, Kodiak, Acclamation, Iffraaj, Sea the Stars, Nathaniel (due to the brilliant Enable and like Frankel, whom he nearly beat in their maiden, a second crop sire) and Invincible Spirit.

Frankel's figures are fascinating. With his second 2 year olds in training, he has had a total in GB/Ire of 92 runners to date with Galileo, Dark Angel, Kodiak and Acclamation each having 250-350 runners.

Amongst all the spot lit exploits of his progeny that do run (225 foals to 2015 including 2yos of 2017; 125 runners worldwide; 65 individual winners of which 20 are Stakes Winners).

Within those 20, it was a bit surprising that there was no Group 1 winner outside Japan. Now there is courtesy of a simply fantastic win by Cracksman in the Champion Stakes Gr1, a race won by Frankel himself.

Perhaps through immaturity and/or bad luck, Cracksman won neither Derby but won the Great Voltigeur at York and the Prix Niel at Chantilly, both Group 2s. Then he came back to 10 furlongs to romp away with the Champion Stakes.

There was a Wow Factor. Like his Dad. Like early Usain Bolt. Like Wayde van Niekerk. - tt.

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