

3.40 PUNCHESTOWN

MONEY BACK AS A FREE BET

IF YOUR HORSE LOSES

18+ 18€ UK online only. Max free bet (FB) €410 on losing bets. Applies to 1st bet on 3.40pm Punchestown (28/4/26) from 2.50pm 28/4/26 on win, single & win part of a win single (outright). Outright combined odds max 100. Free void cashed out bets excluded. FB expires in 7 days. One per customer. Account/payment restrictions. T&Cs apply.

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BOYLE SPORTS

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SPORTING ALL-ROUNDER Patrick Mullins

Jockeys take to the track at Festival

BY EAMON DOGGETT HISTORY WILL be made at the Punchestown Festival on Ladbrokes Gold Cup Day tomorrow - as some of Ireland's top jockeys swap their saddles for running shoes.

The inaugural Irish Ladbrokes Jockey Sprint will see some 20 jockeys race against each other on foot.

Among those set to line up are Patrick Mullins, Danny Mullins, Darragh O'Keeffe, Brian Hayes and Aine O'Connor.

Ladbrokes hosted the first UK Jockey Sprint at Ayr in September 2025, and since then Irish jockeys have been clamouring for their own edition to crown the fastest jumps jockey at a fitting Irish venue.

Jockeys were encouraged to take part, with Ladbrokes pledging €250 per runner to be donated to Irish Injured Jockeys.

Nicola McGeady of Ladbrokes commented: "We've all seen how fast these jockeys can go on horseback, but just how fast can they go on their own two legs over 200 metres?"

"This cup would definitely hold pride of place in any jockey's trophy cabinet - and it's for a very worthy cause too."

Punchestown's Janet Creighton added: "With a €250 charity donation per athlete on the table, it truly is a case of taking part that counts, although, knowing some of the jockeys in the line-up, it's as much about winning on horseback as it is on foot!"

"Thank you to them and, of course, to Ladbrokes for this engaging initiative for a great cause."

BY BRIAN FLANAGAN

APRIL 1986 was an incredible month of sport all over the world.

Jack Nicklaus became the oldest man to ever win the Masters at 46, Michael Jordan scored a world record 63 points for the Chicago Bulls, little Oxford United won the League Cup at Wembley with a certain John Aldridge and Ray Houghton playing starring roles.

But at Punchestown racecourse, one of the more unusual and unique moments in Irish sporting history took place on the third day of the season-ending Festival.

40 years ago this week, the two best National Hunt horses in the country, Dawn Run and Buck House, clashed in an iconic private match race just weeks after the pair had won the Gold Cup and Champion Chase at Cheltenham.

They were two exceptional eight-year-olds, born within a month of each other in 1978, and were household names at a time when Ireland, unlike now, didn't have very many jumping stars.

It was billed as the race of the century and saw the biggest crowd attend Punchestown since a reputed 150,000 came for the visit of the Prince Of Wales over a hundred years earlier in 1868.

A 'winner takes all' prize of IRE25,000 was put up and the crowd of around 40,000 were treated to a truly special occasion with the mighty mare Dawn Run coming

on top in a thriller despite the two mile distance being well short of her optimum trip and the pair running off level weights.

Tragically, just two months later in June, both horses were dead within a week of each other, Dawn Run suffering a fatal fall in the French Champion Hurdle at

Autueil and Buck House succumbing to a bout of Colic at home on his owner's farm..

In the Dawn Run corner that day was a 24-year-old Tony Mullins, back on board the mare having been controversially 'jocked off' for her unforgettable Gold Cup triumph at Cheltenham the previous month.

She was trained at Doninga in Kilkenny by his father Paddy Mullins but her formidable owner, the unyielding Mrs Charmian Hill, had insisted on experienced British-based rider Jonjo O'Neill being on board for the Gold Cup after Tony had been unseated her prep race at Cheltenham the previous January.

"It was just unreal. We arrived at the races and it only dawned on me walking in

when I saw the crowd that day, I'll never forget it, it was just unreal," recalls Mullins (left). "It was like being in Croke Park, the hum of the people and the whole atmosphere, parents bringing kids to see this great match. It just all gelled together and worked perfectly."

Jonjo O'Neill's absence was due to him being hospitalised after falling at the first fence on Dawn Run at the Aintree Festival a few weeks earlier, a traumatic visit that subsequently led to the discovery that he had lymphatic cancer.

The Jonjo v Tony Gold Cup debate had been covered extensively in the racing press over the previous few months and on that April afternoon, the

now 64-year-old remembers being apprehensive beforehand.

"The best way of putting it is, I was anxious, with all the Jonjo talk and the write ups in the papers and who should and shouldn't be riding her, it was very controversial," said Mullins, who

was famously hoisted in the air by O'Neill following that famous Gold Cup win.

"But the amazing thing, where I was anxious in the weigh room beforehand, I just went into another world when I got up on the saddle and Dawn Run was under me," he added.

Ironically, the idea for a private match came about as a result of a rare mistake from Dawn Run's legendary trainer Paddy Mullins.

Having made that early exit at Aintree, she was expected to next race in a new IRE30,000 race to be

run at Gowran Park, but to much surprise her name didn't appear in the entries.

Mullins had forgotten to enter her and, despite moves to get her supplemented, the stubborn race organisers were adamant that connections had missed their chance.

Dawn Run had only raced in Ireland once in the previous two years so there was huge disappointment that it would be the next season before her adoring fans would see her again.

Step forward Vincent O'Brien. The then most successful racehorse trainer in the history of the turf conceived the idea that Dawn Run and Buck House should meet in a match at Punchestown — all he needed was the prize-money and the connections approval.

"Vincent (O'Brien) came to me and said do you think your father would be agreeable to run in a match race if we arranged one," remembers Tony.

Both the Purcell family and Mouse Morris (owners & trainer of Buck House) and Paddy Mullins and Mrs Hill liked the idea, although the 'galloping granny' who had ridden Dawn Run to win a race at Tralee in her early 60s, said she wouldn't be contributing to the prize-money.

Tony didn't think she was wrong: "She was probably entitled to (not contribute to prize-money). She had the draw, the most famous mare in the world probably."

O'Brien met with the businessman Michael Smurfit, the then Chairman of the publicly funded Racing Board, and he agreed to put up IRE10,000 in a controversial move that



STAR OF THE SHOW Dawn Run with owner Mrs Hill and jockey Mullins after the race

sparked criticism from many inside and outside the industry.

Punchestown, Coolmore Stud and the Purcells put up IRE5,000 each, taking the total purse to a handsome IRE25,000 — around £120,000 in today's money.

The race itself was over two miles on ground described as 'sticky'. It was a pity one had to lose but Dawn Run's class showed and, despite getting no mare's allowance and jumping left, she won by two and a half lengths.

Champion Chaser Buck House was a horse that performed better on good ground but he did have everything else in his favour under Tommy Carmody on a day when Lester Piggott saddled his first of just 34 winners in his brief spell as a trainer at Epsom.

"It was just phenomenal," adds Mullins. "When I jumped the third last I thought I had everything in hand and I was quite confident."

"The second last was on the bend at

that time and I met it wrong and I lost five or six lengths. I nearly fell off with the fright. I said 'if I'm beaten now I'm going to be chastised'. I think that was the first time ever sitting on Dawn Run for that two or three seconds, it was the first time I felt that I might get beat."

"It was a huge, huge relief to know I was back in command about 50 yards before the last. Even though I wasn't in front, I knew I had it."

"She jumped a little to the left at the last but I'll never forget when we landed the crowd were roaring, the actual volume or force of it pushed us over. It hit us like a gush of wind and pushed us back over in front of Buck House."

"I'll never forget that roar, it sort of gave me a bit of a fright and gave her a fright too. It was unreal."

Sadly it was to be the last of the 21 races Dawn Run ever won.

Against the wishes of both trainer Paddy and jockey Tony, Mrs Hill went on

a return trip to the Grande Course de Haies d'Autueil (French Champion Hurdle) in Paris where the mare had won in 1984.

She finished runner-up in her prep race (Prix la Barka) in France under Tony, who was adamant that the mare wasn't going to beat the winner Le Rheusois next time either.

"In 1984, I won the Prix la Barka on her and the French Champion Hurdle. After the match we went back the same path and I rode her in the Prix la Barka and stupidly when I came in I jumped off her and said you're not going to beat that horse (Le Rheusois) if you come back and she jocked me down again!" said Mullins.

"That day I was beaten in the Prix la Barka, I think that was the first time I was beaten on her in 15 runs and I knew there was no hard luck on the day, it was the better horse."

"Her hurdling speed had gone (from being chasing). It was just her zip for hurdling that had gone with age."

On June 27th, in searing 100 degree heat at Autueil, the most brilliant National Hunt mare ever seen fell and broke her neck at the fourth last and died instantly.

With Tony Mullins once again out of the saddle, Mrs Hill recruited a French jockey Michel Chirol, in what was a bitterly catastrophic and sad end to one of horse racing's greatest stories.

"Who was really wrong, I mean we were always savaged over what happened but she died racing and Buck House died in the field, so who was wrong?" says Mullins.

A tragic postscript to the perfect match. But anyone who was there will never forget.



Staples is leading the way

BY EAMON DOGGETT

ONE OF the big subplots of this year's Punchestown Festival will be the race to be crowned conditional jockeys' champion.

Wexford man Eoin Staples (above) is on 33 winners for the season, three clear of Cork native Michael Kenneally (inset) but both have plenty of rides - and opportunities to add to their tally - at the season-ending Punchestown Festival.

Staples, who enjoyed a major success this season when partnering Gavin

Cromwell's Now Is the Hour to win the Goffs Thyestes Chase at Gowran Park in January, looked to have the conditional title sewn up a few weeks ago.

But Kenneally's come roaring back, highlighted by a three-timer at Clonmel last weekend, while he also hit the crossbar twice at Kilbeggan on Friday.

The Cork native started out as an apprentice on the Flat, initially teaming up with English trainer Michael Bell.

Kenneally then moved to Australia before returning home and training to become an electrician. But when the pandemic hit, he returned to horse racing, riding out for the Nicky Henderson stable.

He then began picking up rides in Ireland and has enjoyed a dream season as a conditional jockey.

The 30-year-old told The Racing Post: "If you told me at the start of the season that it would go as well as it has, I would have laughed at you."

"It's been a dream season and my age hasn't affected me. If anything, it has been a bit of a benefit. You don't let things get to you as easily when you are that little bit older."



FLYING FINISH Dawn Run jumps the last ahead of Buck House in the match race back in 1986

LASTING LEGACY

Dawn Run and Tony Mullins led in by her owner Mrs Hill after winning the match race