



Racing in Beijing: development of horseracing in China could be a big boost for Europe

China outing gives me a real sense of excitement

FRIDAY VIEWPOINT

Bloodstock agent **Charlie Gordon-Watson** talks about a fact-finding trip to the nation seen as an important part of racing's future



THE NEWS that Ireland is to partner the Chinese government in the project to help establish a multi-billion dollar thoroughbred breeding and training industry in China is obviously a very exciting development.

I went to China in February. It was definitely worth going and I shall go again – I often find you learn more the second time. I visited Wuhan racetrack, an impressive facility which stages Mongolian pony racing and its owners have invested a lot of money into it. To put it into context, there are 15 to 20 establishments similar to Hong Kong in China and, as we know, as much is gambled in one afternoon at Happy Valley as there is over five days at Royal Ascot. So, based on gambling terms alone, China offers huge potential.

Obviously, they've got to get the gambling legislation

through and from what I heard out there that could be about three to four years away. So that's a bit of a drawback.

Having said that, we wouldn't be seeing developments such as the Tianjin Equine Culture City (a \$2 billion facility which is scheduled to open in 2013 and will encompass two racetracks, five training tracks, 150 training bases, 4,000 horse stalls, a state-of-the-art horse clinic, an international equestrian college and an auction house) unless people were pretty sure it was going to happen.

The impression I got in China is that the Irish have been very proactive, as have the French. I'm not in the slightest bit surprised that the Irish have been the pioneers; the bloodstock industry is important in the eyes of the Irish government and it is totally appropriate that

Coolmore is at the forefront of this partnership. But it won't be totally restricted to Ireland as it ought to spin off to the rest of Europe.

The Hong Kong Jockey Club also has an influence – they now have a base in Beijing. The record top lot at last month's Hong Kong International Sale was bought by Chiu Yung, a Chinese owner, and I know a few Hong Kong trainers have Chinese owners.

Overall, I think the upwardly mobile Chinese want worldwide recognition of their wealth and this is one way of showing it. It's very exciting.

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