

Al Zahir Goes Head to Head with Al Shamoos in the Group 1 Presidents Cup Sunday

9 February 2019, Abu Dhabi, UAE ~ Sunday, 9 February 2019, one of the biggest meets of the season takes place at the Abu Dhabi Equestrian Club in the Capital with the 2200m Group 1 HH The President Cup for Purebred Arabians, in which Al Zahir bids to retain his crown. The card also includes the 1400m Thoroughbred equivalent, a Listed contest.

Trained by Ali Rashid Al Rayhi for His Highness Sheikh Hamdan bin Rashid Al Maktoum **Al Zahir** seeks to join a small group of horses to win the race more than once, including Zahir's sire Madjani, that landed the spoils in both 2005 and 2006. HH The President owned both other multiple winners with **Ezil** winning the race in both 2001 and 2002, but pride of place must go to **Alanudd**, the Purebred Arabian legend also known as **Unchained Melody**. Her victories came in 1994, taking a third in 1995 before rattling off four consecutive renewals between 1996 and 1999.

With post position 5 and backed by Jim Crowley, the 6-year-old Al Zahir has not tasted victory in the 2019 season, but had five nice wins before that time including the 2018 Presidents Cup and the last being the Emirates Championship.

Crowley, in the saddle for both the horse's big wins last season, is again on board and said: *"Sunday's are probably his optimum conditions and we hope he will be thereabouts in what does look a strong renewal."*

Goshawke by Thoroughbred (US), trained by Abdallah Al Hannadi, stretched his legs just a week ago in the 2200m Group 1 Al Maktoum Challenge R2, winning on the Meydan dirt. Fifth in the prep, he will be having his seventh outing already of an increasingly busy campaign. The prep race went to seasonal debutant **Jaser** (Akim De Ducor), at the time rated just 82, and a revelation for trainer Younis Al Kalbani. He will again be ridden by Szczepan Mazur who said: *"Obviously it is a very strong race but he is a nice horse who think will run a big race."*

He was chased home on that occasion by **Abu Alabyad** (Akbar (FR) that this time has prime post position 1, and like Al Zahir, is seeking a second success in this illustrious contest. Owned by His Highness Sheikh Khalifa bin Zayed Al Nahyan, he will be saddled by Eric Lemartinel who won the race in 2012 with Nieshan. He has not visited the winner's enclosure since and has perhaps not been the easiest to keep sound but the 9-year-old was entitled to need that comeback run which should have put him spot on for this.

For the same owner, Lemartinel also saddles **Darius Du Paon**, (NO RISK AL MAURY (FR) sixth to Al Zahir in both this and the Abu Dhabi Championship last year. He beat Goshawke in the 1600m National Day Prep but was only fifth in the big race itself. That was at the beginning of December

and this has likely been his main target since the outset of the campaign.

Amwaj and **Shaheer** also represent the Al Asayl team of Sheikh Khalifa and Lemartinel. Jockey bookings suggest the fact Pat Cosgrave is aboard Abu Alabyad that he is considered the main hope.

Lemartinel said: *“This has always been the target for Abu Alabyad, this trip suits Darius Du Paon and Shaheer, while we think Amwaj is improving so, hopefully, they can all run well in a hot race.”*

Richard Mullen and Jean de Roualle combined with Lora a to win this in 2017 and will be hoping **Ziyadd** (Bibi De Carrere) gains revenge on Al Zahir that he chased home in this last year, though he was more than four lengths behind. The 7-year-old then won the Group 1 Al Maktoum Challenge R3 over 2000m on dirt at Meydan and is another who has clearly been targeted at this race having finished third, when penalized, in the prep. However, **Al Shamoos**, (No Risk Al Maury) seeking to become the first international winner of this contest, looks the one they all have to beat.

Representing France and Charles Gourdain, though actually owned by Sheikh Tahnoon bin Zayed Al Nahyan, she was victorious at ParisLongchamp on Arc weekend before, in November at Abu Dhabi, landing AED5 million Group 1 Sheikh Zayed bin Sultan Al Nahyan Jewel Crown. That French Group One victory was registered over 2000m, the longest trip over which she has raced, so the 2200m could be a query but, winner five times from just nine starts, the 5-year-old may just prove to be an exceptional mare.

Over 1400m, the Thoroughbred HH The President Cup carries Listed status and looks wide open. Ahmad bin Harmash has his team in great form and looks to have serious claims with **Rodaini**. A 5-year-old Exchange Rate gelding, four of his outings this season have been over 1600m on the Meydan dirt, starting with a second and a third before, over 1400m, gaining a deserved victory. **Legendary Lunch** could not have been any more impressive winning a course and distance handicap three weeks ago and he was a good second, over 1200m on turf at Meydan just last Saturday.

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