

Tony's speech – Gimcrack

**My President, My Lords, Ladies and Gentlemen,**

It is a huge privilege to be speaking to you all tonight having won such a prestigious race as the Gimcrack at this year's Ebor Festival.

Alongside my co-owner, Ian McAleavy, we have many people to thank for Lake Forest's success.

We'd gone home with our tail between our legs on the slower ground at Newmarket, having been beaten at 1-3, but the Trainer, William Haggas, always held Lake Forest in high regard. It was certainly a bold step to press on with the Gimcrack plan after that defeat, and we were absolutely thrilled to see William proven right when Lake Forest came travelling so strongly on the near side here at The Knavesmire back in August. So, our thanks to William for his belief in Lake Forest and for sticking by him.

We have a few horses with William now and have our hopes for The Reverend who won his only start at Newmarket and looks to have plenty of potential.

Getting back to Lake Forest's win and a huge amount of praise goes to jockey Tom Marquand for putting in a typical outstanding performance.

A big thank you to Lake Forest's groom Libby Roper, who has taken care of the horse so well this year, and whose contribution is an important reminder of how much hard work goes on behind the scenes and outside of the big race days. Thanks also to groom Inzar Alam who looked after Lake Forest on the day in The Gimcrack.

As we set our eyes on next season, we hope that the rain stays away in the spring much more than it has done in the past few weeks - and maybe the Commonwealth Cup at Royal Ascot could be a good target for Lake Forest, as six furlongs does look his optimum trip.

Many of you may know me more as owner and chairman of my boyhood football club, Brighton & Hove Albion, The Seagulls, rather than as a racing man. But I've been interested in racing from a young age and have always enjoyed both codes, Flat and Jumps. More than that, though. Just as with the Seagulls and my ambition to take them from the lower divisions all the way up to becoming an established Premier League club – and now playing in European competition for the first time in our history – I've always had high

ambitions in horse-racing too. I've always wanted to experience the excitement of winning the biggest races in the UK calendar. I'm delighted to say that some of those ambitions have already been met, and Ian and I are determined to pursue more successes on the flat in the near future. That will mean investing in more horses, expanding our stable and, through that, in our own way, making a bigger contribution to UK racing.

I also wanted to take this opportunity to thank York Racecourse and William Derby, not just for their wonderful hospitality tonight, but also for the magnificent and continued support they give to UK racing .... and, of course, a special thank you as an owner for the prizemoney they put up at the Ebor Festival!

In the UK, we have the world's premier racing product. We have the finest bloodstock; the best variety of racing; racecourses filled with history and character, where you never see the same race twice; and a calendar punctuated by the marquee festivals.

However, in reviewing such apparent strengths, I feel it incumbent to question whether more can be done to truly maximise our sport's appeal and reach, in particular to the fans of tomorrow. A clearer narrative is required to become more accessible to newcomers to the industry. The move towards premier racedays, with the aim that all stakeholders and media outlets join together in promoting a shorter, more impactful fixture list, will be much easier for new, lesser-committed racing followers to keep pace with.

Returning for a moment to my love for football. It's remarkable how, year after year, across every league and division, the start of a new season brings fresh enthusiasm, excitement and anticipation to everyone involved with a football club, and nobody more so than the fans. The short break between seasons gives everyone the chance to rethink, reassess and recharge. And we all emerge the better for it, ready to face the challenges of the new season.

However, I fear that racing's Flat and Jump seasons have come to be thought of as a single, continuous 12-month cycle. Without heavy lifting, it should be possible to install a 10-14 day break prior to the start of each season, which would be very helpful in terms of focusing attention and building anticipation.

Racing must have confidence that it is a great sport in its own right and not sell itself short by saturating every free moment with more racing. I was pleased to see that a former chief executive of the BHA is now a strong supporter of cuts

to the fixture list. It is to be hoped that subsequent holders of that office follow suit. As the saying goes, sometimes less is more. And I believe that a few tweaks to schedules here and there and a small reduction in the sheer volume of racing, will bring more and greater benefits to the sport as a whole in the UK.

As some of you may be aware, I'm not averse to the odd flutter now and again. Indeed, sports betting and poker are both passions of mine. In both, to be successful, I've learned to be disciplined and to trust my own decision making. In truth, people make decisions in life all the time. Even not making a decision is a decision and brings about a risk of sorts.

That element of risk is always something I've enjoyed. However, I know that, for some people, risk can be difficult to manage – the ability to balance things up and know the right risks to take at the right time in the right situations.

Nevertheless, it's undeniable that gambling is and always has been an intrinsic part of racing, and the two have co-existed successfully for many years. Indeed, I'd say that, of all sports, racing is the one that has the best relationship with betting - and we should be looking to further refine and improve that relationship.

I'm very much in favour of bringing in measures to promote responsible gambling. But, again, a balance has to be struck. It is important that the new legislation makes affordability checks as frictionless as possible. Otherwise, far too many people who want to bet, and do so responsibly and within their means, will be driven away from betting on horse racing, which will have broader ramifications for the sport and the industry as a whole.

What we all need to do in the racing industry is to work together for the greater good of British horse racing - to maintain its excitement and vibrancy and to ensure that it remains the best in the world.

Now may I ask you all to rise and toast British Racing as well as Lake Forest - The Winner of the Al Basti Equiworld Dubai Gimcrack Stakes.