

Can Munster really win by 15 or more?

ODDS-COMPILERS at bet365 and Paddy Power are anticipating a St Stephen's Day massacre at Thomond Park as Munster prepare to welcome Connacht in the RaboDirect PRO12.

The layers rate Tony McGahan's men as 14-point favourites to account for Eric Elwood's charges at 10-11 in the handicap market and 1-12 (bet365) to win the match.

The visitors are 7-1 with Paddy Power and also 10-11 with the 14-point advantage while the draw can be punted on at odds of 33-1 with bet365.

Even though Munster are currently in the midst of an excellent run of form, 14 points is still a huge margin to overcome especially when you take into account they have suffered defeat in three of eight games in the competition already.

The likelihood of

RUGBY BETTING

Elwood's Connacht causing an upset are obviously minimal, however they will be highly motivated to produce a performance of note against one of the top two provinces in the country so caution is advised to those expecting a landslide Munster triumph.

Connacht, with 11 tries plundered already in the competition, have proved they can breach defences at this level however their concession of 12 tries also indicates this match has the potential to be high scoring.

Punting on Scarlets with a 10-point head-start last week fortunately proved a profitable call, however no bet is recommended on this particular clash.

The Red Army will most likely cruise to a sixth success but how motivated will they be to win by 15 points or more?

Long Run is short odds at Kempton

SPORTINGBET.COM insist on sticking their neck out by offering a standout 11-8 that Long Run wins the William Hill King George VI Chase at Kempton on St Stephen's Day and punters should avail of those odds.

Last year's Cheltenham Gold Cup winner screamed of a horse that needed a run in the Betfair Chase at Haydock last month when defeated by Kauto Star however Nicky Henderson's star pupil should be on top of his game attempting to follow up on his victory in this race in 2010.

On Timeform Long Run is two pounds clear of 4-1 (Ladbrokes) Kauto Star and seven higher than third favourite Master Minded, on three-mile trip for the first time.

Trainer Paul Nicholls obviously feels he will get the

RACING BETTING

trip however even he won't know beyond doubt until the race is being run himself.

The rest of the field are at least one stone shy of Long Run and expect him to confirm such superiority over them.

In saying that, Kauto Star has a phenomenal record in this race and placing a few quid on the straight forecast may boost your returns as the duo should, on form at least, be there fighting out the finish of what promises to be a Christmas cracker.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Long Run to win the William Hill King George VI Chase, 2pts 11-8 sportingbet.com;

Long Run to beat Kauto Star in the William Hill King George VI Chase, 0.25pt best available return.



BETTING

BOLTON WANDERERS' third away victory of the Premier League season at Ewood Park on Tuesday night lifted them off the bottom-of-the-table.

And Owen Coyle's men can follow up with another positive result against Newcastle United on St Stephen's Day.

Bolton have won just once at the Reebok this term, losing their other seven home matches, however the psychological boost they would have gained from winning their basement battle with awful Blackburn will give them renewed confidence.

Newcastle were a team to keep onside at the start of the season however it is time to desert them now.

Paul Scharner's late winner for West Brom on Wednesday night condemned them to a fourth loss in six.

Newcastle have not won in the section since beating Everton 2-1 at home on November 5 and siding with Bolton in the draw no bet market at 3-4 is the way to go as is the case when Sunderland take on Everton at home.

Victory at Loftus Road for Sunderland represented a second win in three since Martin O'Neill took the reins and the goal-shy Toffees may come unstuck in the North East.

Sunderland can be backed at 8-11 with skyBET with the safety net of a returned stake if they fail to win but avoid defeat and those odds appeal.

Bolton's Nigel Reo-Coker battles for the ball with Blackburn's David Dunn in Tuesday's game at Ewood Park.



Also, have a small stakes win match double on Bolton and Sunderland.

Meanwhile, league leaders Man City are bankers at 4-9 to win at The Hawthornes.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Bolton Wanderers draw no bet (v Newcastle United), 2pts 3-4 Boylesports; Sunderland draw no bet (v Everton), 2pts 8-11 skyBET; Bolton Wanderers (6-4) & Sunderland (7-5) double, 0.5pt bet365, Victor Chandler, Paddy Power; Man City (v West Brom), 3pts 4-9 generally.

Bolton can get better of Geordies

● **LAST WEEK:** Backing Scarlets in receipt of a 10-point handicap betting buffer at 10-11 (1pt Stan James) for their clash with Munster at Thomond Park proved worthwhile. However, late equalisers for both Oldham and Huddersfield in npower League 1 denied us a further two winners. Charlton were advised at home to the Latics to win at 8-13 (3pts Victor Chandler)

and to win by two or more goals at 8-5 (0.5pt Paddy Power) while Sheffield Wednesday's — recommended at 8-11 in the draw no bet market (1pt generally) — concession of Jordan Rhodes' fourth goal meant our stakes were returned as the game ended 4-4 despite the Owls leading 4-2 deep into the second half. Overall things have gone quite well this year for us.

Packers are the big favourites for NFL glory

SUPER BOWL XLVI is nearly upon us, the showpiece event scheduled for February 5, 2012 and the layers are of the opinion the Green Bay Packers will be the eventual outright victors of the

NFL season.

The Packers' odds range from 6-4 to 15-8, the latter the best around with online firm bodog however there was a flood of money with a number of other online betting me-

AMERICAN NFL

diums such as betfair and BETDAQ for second favourite New England Patriots this week.

The Patriots are 4-1 but are currently slightly

shorter than that with the aforementioned pairing.

New Orleans Saints are next in the outright betting list available at 6-1 but there is then a significant gap to the fourth favourites Baltimore Ravens

who can be supported at 12-1.

The San Francisco 49ers (14-1), Pittsburgh Steelers (16-1), Atlanta Falcons (33-1) and Dallas Cowboys (33-1) then follow in the market.

Remember your nearest and dearest this Christmas

IT'S time again for our customary, cautionary Christmas tale. We begin at the old homestead on Christmas Eve. The soft thud of snow languidly assails its windows and a mantle of white cloaks the surrounding countryside.

In the distance the deep booming bell of the village church strikes 11 and it is but one hour until Christmas.

A comforting yellow glare shines from the house's windows, camouflaging the mood inside.

Old farmer Garcia holds a stool above his head and is about to smash it into the range when a peal of knuckles rattles the glass window pane of the front door.

The old widower mistakes the sound for the incessant snow and continues with the work he is doing, crashing the stool into the stove and flinging a severed leg into the corner, where a pile of broken furniture already lies.

Wiping the hot sweat from his brow the farmer hears the timid rapping this time and makes his way to the door.

On opening it, a hooded figure steals past him and rushes into the kitchen to settle beside the warmth of the old brick hearth.

When the farmer enters the kitchen he sees that the softness of a woman's face has decorated his home for the first time in 15 years. What is it she hides in her arms, the little bundle she has held tight to her breast to shield it from the falling snow? Can you guess, reader?

The farmer now looms over the woman and peeks down at the blanket in her arms. It begins to softly cry.

"Is that...?" he starts to ask.

"Yes," she answers.

"I saw it on the Toy Show the other week," he mumbles.

She holds out a ring connected to an end of string that emerges from the



THE LONGSHOT

blanket and offers him to pull it.

When he does, she looks at him with grateful eyes and says: "He's just done a poo."

"Are you selling them?" he asks her bluntly. "Because it's upholstery that I'm after, not dolls."

"Do you not recognise me Seamus?" The woman lowers her hood and a cascade of red curls are released.

"No."

"It's me, Vera."

The farmer offers no recognition.

"Your wife!"

Was it possible? The farmer would have sat down for the shock if he hadn't destroyed every seat in the house. His wife? This beautiful young girl, his wife? He remembered being married, but Vera had been a good 10 stone heavier and had blonde hair. If he hadn't smashed all the picture frames and burned the prints inside he might have had something to compare her to.

"Seamus, you never notice after I go to the hairdressers but surely you recognise me. I've only put in a few streaks."

Another knock came to the door. It was Shanahan, the town lawyer, who came over once a week for a glass of brandy and to shatter a vase or two.

"Shanahan," whispers Farmer Gomez, "tell me quick, do you remember what my wife looked like?"

"I never knew you were married," says the lawyer, eager to get his fist around the hot brandy.

But when Shanahan enters the warm glow of the kitchen he immediately identifies Vera as Gomez's long absent wife.

Vera drops the doll and rushes with open arms towards him and plants a kiss on his lips.

"Oh Bunny," she says. "I have missed you so much."

Old farmer Gomez collapses on the half of the chaise lounge that remains. The doll on the ground begins to wail and he brings his fist down on a folding card table beside him.

It all reminds him of a film he saw long ago. He had wondered then how you'd forget you were married to Richard Gere. He was a devilishly handsome fellow after all.

"Christmas," he thinks. "Bloody hell."

Recommendation: Somersby in the King George on Stephen's Day, each way at 12-1.