

Racing people

Focus on those at the heart of the action

►► Premiership player becomes pioneer

MANY a footballer enters the world of racing. Some become owners, a few become trainers, while others get interviewed by Derek Thompson at Chester.

Not, though, Jonathan Hunt, the former Premiership star now seeking to cement his place in the sport with a pioneering approach to treating horses.

What he does may be different, daring and far from conventional, but he knows it works because it has worked on him. Now he's making it work on horses.

In an award-winning football career, Hunt played two successful seasons in the Premiership for Derby County as well as a further three for Birmingham City.

There might have been more years on the pitch but for a serious back and pelvic injury that the 36-year-old released himself from thanks to somatics, a treatment that impressed Hunt sufficiently to encourage him to develop a new career using it to treat humans and horses.

"What I do can have an intense effect on a horse, and often you'll notice a difference in the first session," said Hunt, who has visited yards in Epsom and Newmarket to advertise his skills.

"Racehorses are subjected to high levels of stress, be that physical

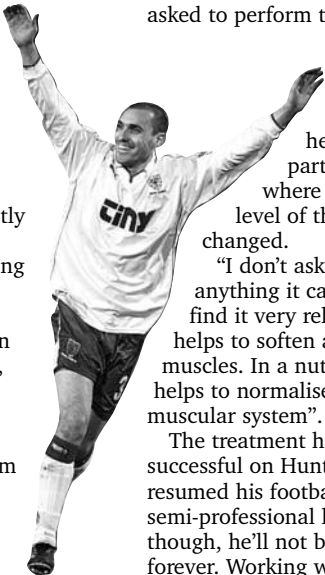
or emotional. They respond by contracting their muscles, and when this happens over a prolonged period, the muscles become chronically contracted. Because of this, a horse can no longer voluntarily relax their muscles, which end up constantly working, and a muscle that constantly works becomes sore and fatigued."

Hunt, whose work is highlighted on www.equinesomatics.com, adds: "I assess the way a horse stands, as seriously contracted muscles affect the alignment of feet, head, neck, spine and tail. I assist the horse with gentle movements that promote a contraction and slow release of tension-filled muscles. The horse is asked to perform the movements for

itself, with the voluntary nature of the movements helping to reach a part of the brain where the contraction level of the muscles can be changed.

"I don't ask the horse to do anything it can't do. The horses find it very relaxing, and it also helps to soften and lengthen muscles. In a nutshell, what I do helps to normalise the horse's muscular system".

The treatment has been so successful on Hunt that he has resumed his football career at semi-professional level. He knows, though, he'll not be kicking balls forever. Working with racehorses is the main future goal.



►► Sanders guests on A Question of Sport

THE cliff-hanging battle for last year's Flat jockeys' title, which resulted in a dead-heat between Seb Sanders and Jamie Spencer, took the sport beyond the confines of the racing pages of national newspapers, and an extension of that interest has resulted in an appearance on *A Question Of Sport* for Sanders.

The BBC1 show featuring

Sanders is scheduled to be shown on April 11.

The jockey joins ex-England rugby international Matt Dawson and athlete Marlon Devonish in duelling with former cricketer Phil Tufnell's side, which included West Ham keeper Robert Green and England rugby star Nick Easter.

Sanders is said to have thoroughly enjoyed the quiz, and to have done his bit for his team. The result? Well, that would spoil your excitement.

►► Armstrong takes in Caledonian test

JAMES ARMSTRONG, clerk of the course at Newcastle, is taking part in this year's Caledonian Challenge on June 14, to raise money for the Scottish Community Foundation.

Armstrong, alongside Camilla Millbank, Jamie Trotter, Henry Winter, Clare Twemlow and Charlotte Clements, will race from Fort William to Loch Lomond in 24 hours.

The 54-mile foot race takes in the

undulations of the Scottish highlands in 24 hours of continuous trekking.

The Scottish Community Foundation was set up in 1996 to provide funding for small charities and community groups, and the Caledonian Challenge is regarded as its flagship event.

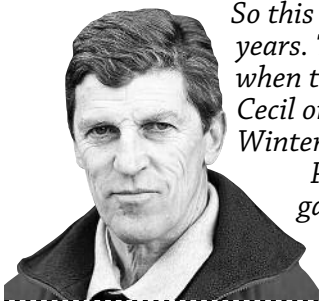
For further details, visit caledonianchallenge.com.



BROUGH

BORN TO BE THE GAME'S GREATEST WINNING MACHINE

Tony McCoy



So this completes a dozen people who have made great impressions down the years. The choice has been more reflective than selective. How could it not be when the list does not include Bill Shoemaker or Yves Saint-Martin or Henry Cecil or Jonjo O'Neill or Julie Krone? We started back in the 1950s with Fred Winter's gunslit eyes, Vincent O'Brien's mastery of Cheltenham and Aintree, Peter O'Sullivan's voice calling us to worship and the young Queen galloping up to the Ascot straight on the mornings of the royal meeting. We end it in different times but with exceptional people still coming through. And you may agree, the latest is not the least of them

SCEPTICISM can be a good thing in life – and especially in racing. It is not to be confused with cynicism, which can corrode the psyche. Scepticism is unimpressed with practically anything short of earth-shattering achievement. Then and now, there have always been a few sceptics around the subject of AP McCoy. The key to his record-breaking, 13-championship greatness, is that chief amongst them is AP himself.

Twelve years ago this January we were winging down to Wincanton via a schooling session with Paul Nicholls – remember the fuss when Tony later left that connection for Martin Pipe? A week earlier he had passed a hundred winners for the season for what was to be the first of 13 times. Only 16 months before, he had arrived at Toby Balding's yard as an unsung ex-Flat-race apprentice with just 13 winners to his name and not one ride in a steeplechase. "I am just very lucky to have the chances," he said as places like Amesbury and Mere flashed by. "But people will soon

rubbish me if I don't take them."

He was 21, tall and a bit spotty. He had grown an inch and put on 7lb in the last year, and most of us were only beginning to think that perhaps 'Toby's conditional' might be more than just another driven kid riding the crest of the wave.

Two days earlier a reluctant-looking beast called North Bannister had been compelled and cajoled home at Folkestone. "I looked at the way the horse got up," said super-agent Dave Roberts, "and had to ask myself, could Adrian [Maguire] or Norman

'At times he asked questions of horses almost as alarming as the demands he made on himself'

[Williamson] have done any better? Tony knows he has a bit to learn but he listens and is learning very quick."

Then as now, the jockey appeared to take no satisfaction in being told of such praise. He was neither dismissive of the compliments nor greedy for more. Indeed, the overwhelming impression at dinner with Toby and the late Caro Balding the night before was of a very correct politeness and an emerging sense of humour about the absurdity of those in the racing pond, very much including himself. But the central credo that drives him, and which today he can expound upon at deliberately gory length, was already there. "Winning," he said quietly at one stage the next morning, "is the only thing that counts. That's the whole fun, the whole point of it."

Almost all top jockeys have made that judgement, and those who haven't usually self-destruct. But no-one, in my experience, has made it as completely as McCoy, and the reason for its strength comes not in what he was doing a dozen years ago, but in the dozen that went before.