

Gaynor Rupert Takes Historic Race to New Level

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Gaynor Rupert will probably be unaware of it but - in her outstanding efforts to make the L'Ormarins Queen's Plate an unmissable racemeeting - she has followed the path of a quote from former US President, Barack Obama.

While the quotes and tweets of Obama got far less media coverage than those of Donald Trump, the two-term President did come up with one significant observation. He said: "Change will not come if we wait for some other person or if we wait for some other time."

In taking the historic Queen's Plate meeting to a different level, Mrs Rupert has certainly not waited for "some other time", but has surrounded herself with the best advisers to promote a race which has its 159th running on January 11.

Any mention of the word "Queen" will get the attention of England's long-reigning monarch, Queen Elizabeth, now aged 93. This again became apparent in her Birthday honours last June when Oscar actress, Olivia Colman, received the CBE for her portrayal of the Queen in netflix's "The Crown."

The Queen's advisers probably suggested that Colman's awards highlighted her role as head of the Commonwealth so perhaps their attention should be brought for an honour for Gaynor Rupert in regard to the historic Queen's Plate - a sport so close to her heart.

When it comes to her favourite pastime, racing wins hands down for the Queen. She was only 23 when one of her horses won in 1949 and she still uses the colours of her father and great-grandfather.

Presumably, a case for a place in the Queen's honours list has to be researched in some depth, but we don't need to call in top American lawyer, Rudy Giuliani, to present the case for Mrs Rupert.

If one googles some of the media interviews Mrs Rupert has given, what becomes apparent is her love of the horse and love of racing.

She said: "I love every aspect from breeding to racing - the Queen's Plate is a race with great history and the fact that it's a WFA race when the very best horse wins appealed to me as a sponsor. I believe everyone wants to see excellence."

In perhaps a reference to the difficulty racegoers have in placing a bet at the July or Met, she adds: "the intimacy of the day makes it special and everyone can enjoy it without being crowded and standing in long queues."

Mrs Rupert makes no secret that her high profile husband, Johann Rupert, much prefers golf to racing. However, she stresses that both she and Mr Rupert appreciate that the industry is a "high employer" of people.

"We need to find ways to employ more people in South Africa so the growth of our industry is paramount."

Mrs Rupert has modeled the Queen's Plate meeting on the famous Goodwood meeting held on the rolling Sussex Downs in England at the end of July.

Do not rock up to Goodwood in jeans and takkies - you won't get in. The same smart dress code is applied at the two-day Queen's Plate meeting with blue and white the prominent colours.

If the Kenilworth meeting has history - so has Goodwood. Sir Michael Stoute trained six winners at the meeting in 1989 and jockeys Lester Piggott, Johnny Murtagh and Kieren Fallon have all had the distinction of riding eight.

Back in 2010, trainer Richard Hannon and jockey Richard Hughes got themselves into the record books with a nine-race Goodwood haul - seven of them two year-olds.

That was the same year as Canford Cliffs - now standing at Highlands Stud - was Hannon's most important winner with his top-class miler running the race of his life to beat Aidan O'Brien's runner, Rip Van Winkle, by a neck in the Gr 1 Sussex Stakes. "I have never trained another like him," commented the winning trainer.

While the Queen never misses Royal Ascot or Cheltenham, it's fair to say she hasn't enjoyed great success as an owner. One of her rare big race triumphs in the past decade was Estimate's win in the 2013 Ascot Gold Cup.

With Hawwwaam, Do It Again, Rainbow Bridge and Vardy the principal players in the Queen's Plate, the 2020 running is unlikely to go to a horse bred at the Ruperts' Drakenstein Stud.

This will not matter one iota to Gaynor Rupert because - as she has pointed out - it is "excellence" that is important to her.

The Queen needs a nudge regarding a famous race which carries her name. Gaynor Rupert's efforts to take a historic event to another level should be rewarded. Yes, Gaynor Rupert CBE - it's got a nice ring to it.