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Hotelier who turns 'rough diamonds' into Grand National winners raises a toast after 'double' success. John Nallen said he was 'thrilled' with the performances of Minella Times and Minella Indo



John Nallen, pictured at his Clonmel farm, is a former owner of Minella Times and Minella Indo. Photo: Dylan Vaughan

Sean Ryan April 12 2021.

A Co Tipperary hotelier, who once owned Grand National winner Minella Times, was celebrating again at the weekend. John Nallen (58), co-owner of the Minella Hotel in Clonmel, specialises in buying what he calls "rough diamonds" and turning them into winning horses.

Last month, one of his former charges, Minella Indo, won the Gold Cup at Cheltenham. Now he has done the double after Minella Times won the Aintree Grand National with Rachael Blackmore on board.

Both of the horses are called after the hotel he co-owns with his sister, Liz Bowen. "We're very proud of the hotel and it's good to promote it, and we have some fun thinking of the names," said Mr Nallen. He said he was "thrilled with the result".

"Unbelievable. for Rachael to ride the winner, it's just unbelievable. "The McManus family, they're after supporting me so much and for them to win the National with him, I'm on cloud 77.

"After Rachael picking the wrong one at the Gold Cup she got the right one this time, it was brilliant. For her family and everyone in Tipperary, it's an unbelievable Tipperary story," he added.

Mr Nallen told how he bought Minella Times from his Westmeath breeder Cathal Ennis at a Tattersalls sale in 2013 for €31,000.

He says he has found that the best method of making money out of horses is by preparing them to win at a young age from his base in Lavally – and then selling them on. He is ably assisted in this pursuit by head man James 'Corky' Carroll and Seanie Bowen (14), a rising star of the pony racing circuit.

Speaking about his horses he said: "The only sustainable situation is trading the horses." He added: "It's not all roses but one good result can carry five or six unprofitable ones.

"Cheltenham sales are the Mecca, and it all revolves around public auction now. "There is no private market at all, people would very seldom ask to buy a horse from you at home. "Sales work because the trainers are protected by the agents, and the agents are protected by the auction house.



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'It's just a dream' Rachael Blackmore's family react to her becoming the first woman ever to win the Grand National.

Irish jockey Rachael Blackmore has become the first woman ever to win the Grand National at Aintree. Blackmore, 31, rode Minella Times to victory at odds of 11-1 at Aintree on Saturday in the 173rd running of the famous race. "I don't even feel human right now," Tipperary-born Blackmore said after her victory.

Blackmore told ITV Racing: "I just cannot believe it. He was an absolutely sensational spin. "What [trainer] Henry de Bromhead does with these horses, I don't know! I'm so lucky to be riding them, I just cannot believe I'm after winning the Grand National. This is unbelievable."

Charles and Eimir Blackmore cheered on their daughter from their home in Killenaule, Co. Tipperary this evening. Speaking to Paschal Sheehy on RTÉ this evening, Eimir said: "It's like dream time, it's absolutely incredible. We never expected something like this could happen. It's wonderful for her and it's wonderful for racing in general.

"You never think it's going to happen. You never think she's going to have a double whammy and have a really good Cheltenham and a really good Grand National. It's just a dream."

Her father Charles said: "I was talking to her for just about 40 seconds and she just said, 'You're talking to the Grand National winner'." Blackmore was full of praise for her horse, one of seven in the race owned by JP McManus - among them Any Second Now.

Blackmore added: "He was just incredible, he jumped beautifully. "I was trying to wait for as long as I could - when we jumped the last and I asked him for a bit, he was there. It's just incredible.

"I don't feel male or female right now - I don't even feel human. This is just unbelievable."



Rachael Blackmore holds the Grand National trophy.

Blackmore has broken down one of the biggest gender barriers in sports by becoming the first female jockey to win the gruelling Grand National horse race. Female jockeys have only been allowed to enter and race in the National since 1975, when the Sex Discrimination Act was passed.

She has become the new face of British and Irish horse racing in what has been a difficult time for the sport. Three weeks ago, she became the first woman to finish as the leading jockey at the prestigious Cheltenham Festival.



Rachael Blackmore celebrates her victory. Picture:

Blackmore led home a one-two for trainer Henry de Bromhead, with 100-1 Balko Des Flos following her home. The Irish jockey bided her time before challenging and leading two out en route to even greater glory at Aintree.

After the race, trainer De Bromhead said: "It's fantastic. Rachael is breaking all records. We're just delighted. "

It looked like Rachael had the race won at the last, but we all know how that can change. Any Second Now looked a bit unlucky with his passage and he started to come back at us and obviously Balko was staying on as well.

"Rachael got a great passage all the way round, a lot of luck on her side and he winged fences for her. It was brilliant." Blackmore also received congratulations from President Michael D Higgins, with a tweet from the President of Ireland Twitter account saying: "My congratulations to Rachael Blackmore on an historic achievement at Aintree. Today's win is both a personal and sporting success, and comes only a month after her groundbreaking wins at Cheltenham."



Blackmore previously encouraged young riders to follow their dreams, as she never imagined making it as far as she has. The 31-year-old was dubbed the 'Queen of Cheltenham' after winning six races, becoming the first female jockey to claim a Champion Hurdle and being named the leading jockey at the festival.

Speaking to RTÉ Radio 1's Morning Ireland last month, the Tipperary jockey said: "When I was in pony club I never thought I could be a Rachael Blackmore. "So, I think for all of them [young riders] they should just dream however they want to, it can be achieved. "If you work hard and you get the opportunities anything can happen."



Rachael Blackmore aboard Minella Times. Picture:

Blackmore has previously said she believes gender is irrelevant when it comes to racing, but said she is lucky to be in a sport where "gender isn't an issue". "I suppose when I came into racing Katie and Nina [Walsh and Carberry] had already broken that barrier for me and they never made a big deal out of it, so I

just continued on with their ethos," she said. "I feel inside racing it's not a big deal, maybe in the outside world it is but we are very lucky to be involved in a sport where gender isn't an issue or made any deal about, so I'm very grateful for racing in that sense."

The Tipperary native grew up on a dairy farm and her love of horses began here at a very young age. "I grew up on a farm surrounded by ponies and my parents trucked me and my brother and sister around the country to pony club events and hunting," she said. "I always loved horses and ponies, they have given me some of the best days of my life."

When asked if she is ever fearful while riding horses that are racing at incredible speeds, Ms Blackmore said "no", and if a jockey does think this way, it probably shouldn't be their job. "I think if you're a jockey and you're thinking about what could go wrong it's probably time to not be a jockey as your profession," she said. "Being fearful is not something you can have on your brain when you are doing our job."