

Wednesday March 4, 2009

TAB Odds

In-form Hawke's Bay shearer John Kirkpatrick has been made a hot-favourite to win his third Golden Shears open title, in the TAB odds announced today on the eve of the start of the 49th international shearing and woolhandling championships in Masterton.

Kirkpatrick, the winner of 13 open finals in 17 competitions in New Zealand this summer, has opened paying \$1.60, more than a clear point ahead of fellow two-times winner Paul Avery, of Taranaki, who opened at \$4.00, having won six finals in New Zealand since beating Kirkpatrick in the World Championships final in Norway in October.

Te Kuiti veteran and former New Zealand open champion Dean Ball has edged into third on the list an \$8-shot to win the coveted title for the first time, after winning the highly-ranked Pahiatua Shears title last Sunday, resulting in the TAB offering surprisingly lucrative odds on 47-year-old David Fagan, who after winning the Rangitikei Sports open last month and maintaining regular form among the top competitors, is a \$10 shot to win the title for a 16th time.

Kirkpatrick, 38, won the title for the first time in 2002, when he became the first person to beat Fagan in the 20-sheep Golden Shears open final since Southland shearer Edsel Forde won in 1989. Kirkpatrick won the title in an all-conquering season last year, beating Avery who had won in 2005 and 2007.

Te Kuiti showman Digger Balme, who has one win behind him this year, joins the only other former champion in the field, Napier shearer Dion King, and the South Island's leading hope, Invercargill shearer Nathan Stratford on the fifth line at \$15.

All will have to make it safely through three qualifying stages in the championships which start with novice and junior class events tomorrow (Thursday). More than 80 shearers will compete in the open heats on Friday, many aiming just make the cut of 30 for the quarterfinals that night. The semi-finals for the top 12 will be on Saturday afternoon, leading to the naming of international shearing's most elite six for the final on Saturday night.

Meanwhile, Stratford has opened a warm favourite for the PGG Wrightson National final which will also be shorn on Saturday night, the first time the TAB will have run pools on two events at Golden Shears.

It has gone with Stratford's place as the top qualifier among 12 for Saturday morning's national semi-final, after five qualifying rounds at Alexandra (merino), Waimate (long-wool), Christchurch (Corriedale), Raglan (lambs) and Pahiatua (second-shear). But no South Islander has won the National since 2004, despite a perception it favours the merino shearers of the south.

Stratford, who was top qualifier in the first two rounds of heats, starts at \$2.20, with last year's runner-up, James Fagan, who won the New Zealand Merino Championships final at Alexandra, second favourite at \$4. Kirkpatrick and Avery were given exemption from competing at the opening event at Alexandra because of their absence at the World championships, have both reached the National semi-final, but are not known for their expertise on the merino sheep which comprise half the sheep in the semi-final, while the final is over three sheep from each of the five wool types.

Ends

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