

The official publication of the **Irish Rugby Union Players Association**

# IN TOUCH

Autumn 2015 Volume 29



**IRUPA**

protecting player welfare



## forward momentum

**STEPHEN FERRIS**

REFLECTS ON HIS CAREER,  
AND HIS LIFE AFTER RUGBY

# The network that's all business



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IRUPA was founded in October 2001 by players from around the country and continues to receive the support of the players. IRUPA is the official Players' Union for professional rugby players irrespective of nationality in Ireland.

IRUPA is a non profit making organisation owned by the players for the players. IRUPA aims to promote and protect the welfare of our members by endeavouring to safeguard their futures both on and off the pitch.

#### OBJECTIVES

1. To promote and protect the welfare of its members, both during and after their careers.
2. To cater for the educational and welfare needs of its members, to ensure that they have sufficient preparation for the life after rugby.
3. To work in partnership with the IRFU to further the cause of Rugby Union in Ireland.
4. To be the representative mouthpiece for professional rugby players on issues of importance to the game.

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# CEO address

**Omar Hassanein**

**As the dust settles on what has been arguably the best Rugby World Cup in history, we reflect on all the great offloads, all the big tackles and all the magnificent line breaks leading to tries. Open free flowing rugby was the clear winner, with the global brand of rugby shining positively on the world.**



As the tournament rolled on, it became fairly evident that the team who was going to win the whole thing was going to be one that was prepared to attack the game rather than defend it. England's early demise came about from an approach that many including myself would regard as too conservative and unimaginative. This was proven to be in complete contrast to the philosophy of the eventual winners in backing their own abilities and attacking the game irrespective of the situation and circumstances they are in.

Over conservatism and complacency are areas that we all need to be conscious of, not just amongst those on the pitch or those in the coaching box.

We need to be bold enough to make strong decisions in our sport, to clearly and carefully map out our performance objectives and to invest time, money and energy in all the right places to achieve these objectives. We should never fall into the trap of saying 'well, we've always done things this way' or 'if it ain't broke then don't fix it'.

**The game is ever evolving with the front runners setting the pace both on and off the field.**

Athlete development programmes have evolved, the structuring of contracts has become more and more sophisticated in approach; and dynamic new ways of commercialising the sport have emerged.

Furthermore, the better operating countries are doing it in a more collaborative sense culminating in a stronger culture amongst stakeholders.

In addition to having the bigger pieces of the puzzle constantly refined, it is also the attention to detail that collectively makes the World Cup winning All Blacks structure so strong.

This approach that we must all aspire to is one that cuts across all people involved, whether that be players showing constant respectability to the brand; or whether it be the administrators developing and adhering to the smaller and seemingly insignificant systems that improve the functioning of the game.



**“We need to be bold enough to make strong decisions in our sport, to clearly and carefully map out our performance objectives**

**and to invest time, money and energy in all the right places to achieve these objectives.”**

From my own experiences, in the absence of proper structure and proper stakeholder engagement, quick fix solutions are often implemented in a reactionary way to cover up a crack. Rushing in Sam Burgess or sacking Phillippe Saint Andre are examples of this point – the evidence of these two examples being in their respective results. These decisions are often bred from the culture surrounding them – one which is often splintered and unstructured and lacking in a complete stakeholder engagement. In my own

humble opinion, a strong culture within a sport must be driven from the top down and should resonate through to all involved, thereby driving how people make decisions and why they make them.

As players we have an equal responsibility to set the tone of the culture within. It is in our interests to work as closely as possible with our respective governing body promoting structure that is fair, equitable and sustainable. We need to eliminate

internal resentment as best possible, as ultimately it is this collaboration and common intent of purpose that will drive the wider culture that we operate within.

**Omar Hassanein**  
*Chief Executive*





# IRUPA team up with Headway to help raise #ConcussionAwareness

**IRUPA have teamed up with the brain injury charity Headway to help raise awareness on the important issue of concussion. As part of this campaign IRUPA asked the provinces to get involved and to show their support by wearing their #Headucate hard hats and by spreading the word on social media.**



Speaking of the partnership IRUPA CEO Omar Hassanein said;

"There is a marked shift in the attitude towards concussion in professional rugby. We have come a long way in the past few years in terms of raising awareness of the dangers of concussion and protecting the short and long-term welfare of players. Our players rely on protocols that have been put in place to protect their wellbeing and are supported by medical expertise pitch side to ensure that decisions are made in the players' best interest."

"However", he continued, "we know that this level of support is not available for the thousands of players around the country who are playing at the weekends, in schools, colleges and local clubs. The IRFU have done great work highlighting the issue with their Stop, Inform, Rest, Return campaign. We would just like to reiterate the importance of educational awareness at all levels of our wonderful game. Therefore we are calling on athletes everywhere no matter what their sport to take any knock to the head seriously. The risk is too high otherwise. So use your head and come off until you can get properly assessed."

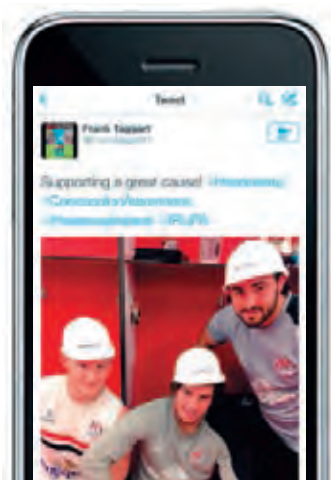
"We have teamed up with Headway who work with people suffering from acquired brain injury and are supporting their call - don't take a risk, sit it out and get checked out. Unlike a torn ligament or broken bone which would force players to come off the pitch, a physical injury to the brain is at risk of being ignored because it is invisible. Players cannot afford to be cavalier in their approach", he continued.

Speaking at the launch Kieran Loughran Chief Executive of Headway said,

"We are delighted that IRUPA are taking a leadership position in the area of concussion. Injuries happen in all sports but when you get a knock to the head you cannot afford to take chances. We only get one brain. As a player you need to be your first line of defence."

## More about Headway

Brain injury affects people, and their families, in ways that are often difficult, life-long and not always obvious to others. It can affect how someone thinks, feels and talks. Headway is a lifeline to these people. Our specialist rehabilitation staff assist people to rebuild their skills and their confidence, helping them, and their families, to get the most out of life after brain injury. For more information log on to [www.headway.ie](http://www.headway.ie)



## Grafton breakfast bites

**In the last couple of months IRUPA have teamed up with Grafton Recruitment to host several successful corporate events in Dublin and Belfast.**

In Dublin, Leinster duo Kevin McLaughlin and Isa Nacewa were the guests for a Networking Business Breakfast held at the magnificent 25 Fitzwilliam Place in the heart of the city. Corporate guests listened to the duo talk about various topics including leadership, the ability to think clearly under pressure and Ireland's chances in the Rugby World Cup. Ever increasingly businesses are seeing the benefits of delving into the minds of how an elite athlete thinks and the crossovers they can take back to their own office environments. The breakfast time setting allowed the guests to get a good flavour of content yet not bite into their working day too much.

The Grafton Teamroom to Boardroom event in Belfast provided a more intimate setting with which former Ulster and Ireland pair Stephen Ferris and Paddy Wallace shared their extensive wisdom around a boardroom table. Once again the guests were provided with insights into where rugby thinking and business best practice can align themselves.

IRUPA would like to thank Grafton Recruitment for their continued support and look forward to hosting more events around the country in the New Year.



# Sports professionals into business



**CORE-VISION Ltd who are based in Belfast, provides specialised management leadership and business training for both new and existing businesses.**



Earlier this year they used this experience to deliver 'Sports Professionals into Business' for the Ulster players.

Many players have successfully made the transition to a successful business career either as a self-employed entrepreneur or to a senior managerial role and experience as a team player capable of taking responsibility gained on the field of play is a definitely an asset.

This programme provided them with the opportunity to gain the knowledge and understanding of what it takes to start a business and to utilise and build on those skills, taking them to another stage in their career.

This programme recognises the challenge of the transition from the professional playing field to a new career – albeit one that can utilise the skills, experience, commitment and that determination to get over the line.

Emphasis though out the delivery was on the five pillars of business development and planning:

- the product/service offered and its feasibility and viability
- finance
- marketing
- business operations

- the people involved in the business (skills, resources, commitment, motivation and determination)

This was achieved through a series of workshops and one-to-one mentoring as required by those individuals taking part to address specific and personal aspects.

Some feedback from some of those participants' included:

*"It was brilliant; it gave me a lot of things to consider and think about in order to get a viable business up and running."*

*"Very useful way to look at questioning your idea!"*

*"Great practical knowledge with innovative ideas about business"*

The CORE-VISION delivery team is an experienced group of professionals with a wealth of experience and knowledge, gained over many years, in the delivery of business and management training.

They also have considerable experience as mentors interacting with all levels of businesses, start-up and existing and across many sectors. The team collectively also has an impressive extended network of business professionals who can be called upon for specialist input in specific circumstances to further enhance delivery.

Participation in this programme will help to lubricate the process of embarking on a career as an entrepreneur and those taking part can be assured of the support of the delivery team at CORE-VISION and IRUPA.

CORE-VISION will be running the same programme across all the Provinces. If you are interested please contact your PDM.

# Appointment of Lindsey Berne to IRUPA



**IRUPA is excited to announce the addition of Lindsey Berne to our staff as maternity cover to Kate Kirby. She will take over the role as Personal Development Manager to the Women's Sevens and Fifteens squad.**

As a former athlete, Lindsey represented Great Britain in the sport of modern pentathlon (fencing, swimming, horse-riding, running and shooting) with career highlights including individual bronze at the Junior World Championships 2003 and team gold at the Senior World Championships in 2006.

Concurrent to her athletic career, Lindsey successfully completed a BSc in Sport & Exercises Science and MA in Coach Education & Sports Development, both at The University of Bath.

Lindsey started out with Pentathlon Ireland in 2009 where she founded the High Performance Programme. As Performance Director, Lindsey has enjoyed much success to date including Olympic performances by Natalya Coyle (9th) and Arthur Lanigan-O'Keeffe (25th) in London 2012.

We're sure that Lindsey's unique experiences will stand her in good stead to continue advancing this role in Kate's absence - particularly given her specific experience in dealing with Olympic athletes. Additionally, Lindsey is married to former professional Leinster player Shaun Berne, further equipping her to understand the game of rugby and the demands involved.

## Heenan bouncing into business



**Connacht Rugby's Jake Heenan has launched a new business venture in Galway which promises to 'bump' him up the list of great things to do in Galway City!**

Bumper Football is an exciting new activity that combines elements of several sports to bring you a highly enjoyable, high octane experience. Speaking about his launch Heenan said;

"I first saw Bumper Football back home in New Zealand and was hooked immediately! When I saw a gap in the market to bring something similar to Galway I jumped at the idea. It's a safe and enjoyable way to spend any occasion whether it be a corporate day-out, stag or hen party or simply a load of friends wanting to have some fun together."

Bumper Balls are large inflatable balls that you can strap yourself into and run around in. They are designed to allow to bump, roll and flip, all while staying safe.

Bumper Football offers a wide variety of different games designed to suit you. During sessions we look to play a mixture of:

- Soccer
- British Bulldog
- Sumo Wrestling
- Capture the Flag
- Last Man Standing
- Bumper Tag

Operating out of Bohermore, it's ideally positioned in Galway city to cater for locals or weekend visitors at extremely competitive prices.

For more information check out their website [www.bumperfootball.co](http://www.bumperfootball.co) or call 083 4616682 for more details.

## Iconic Health Clubs group aim to keep rugby players healthy and happy

**Leading gym group Iconic Health Clubs have become the official wellbeing partner of IRUPA.**

The group will help to keep the players fit, healthy and happy as they make the transition from being full-time players and start new careers off the rugby pitch by providing them with full access to the group's health clubs in Dublin. Iconic Health Clubs comprises of three groups of gyms: 1escape, ICON Health club, and The Dartry Health Club.

Their modern gyms in Dublin have the latest, state of the art equipment and facilities, and the players will be able to use the gym of their choice as part of a structured wellbeing programme that aims to help them adjust to life after their playing careers.

Former Ireland and Munster player Alan Quinlan spoke about the partnership: "It's great for IRUPA to team up with

someone like Iconic Health Clubs. Player Wellbeing is at the forefront of every player who retires from the game so to have such fantastic facilities available for us to use is great for both the mind and body."

IRUPA see their corporate wellbeing programme as an effective and practical way of investing in the future of their players, and one that can help them to avoid some of the difficulties that former rugby players have had to face once they quit the game.

IRUPA CEO Omar Hassanein said: "Some of the health concerns experienced by retired players include having to cope with injuries sustained during their playing careers, and also experiencing stress-related issues due to a lifestyle transition."

Hassanein added that giving the players the opportunity to train regularly at



their choice of Iconic Health Clubs was an effective way of supporting them in their transition and reducing some of the factors that ex-players have struggled with in retirement.

Ciara Lefroy Sales and marketing director for Iconic Health Clubs said they were thrilled to become the IRUPA's official wellbeing partner and were confident that the players would appreciate the facilities at their gym and health clubs in Dublin.



# A financial education programme for current players



**Rugby has experienced a dramatic rate of growth since it became professional twenty years ago with an ever increasing amount of money entering the game. With the growth of the game there is increased onus on Players to manage their finances.**

It's become evident that Players must have the ability to make informed decisions regarding their finances and that they are more aware of key financial decisions that can impact their long term and short term financial goals.

It's not uncommon for Players to turn to Financial Advisors to help manage and advise on pensions, investments and insurances; whilst this is good practice, IRUPA are keen for Players to have more knowledge regarding finance and asset management so they are in a better position now and also in the future. We want to avoid the situation where players ignore this area of their life which ultimately, if not managed effectively can develop into a major distraction and stressor.

This applies to all Players regardless of income and being conscious of the difficulties experienced by professional athletes in retirement, IRUPA have partnered with the Smith & Williamson group who have offices in Dublin, Belfast and London. Smith & Williamson have created a financial education programme for current Players.



As part of the Smith & Williamson Group, Cunningham Coates, in consultation with IRUPA, have developed a Financial Education Programme that is specific to the needs of Rugby Players and one that will be relevant to players at all stages of their careers. The programme will comprise of three workshops introducing concepts such as 'personal balance sheet', 'wealth creation' and 'financial independence' with the objective that players become more aware of their financial position. This ensures they are able to put plans in place at the earliest opportunity to achieve their financial goals and plan ahead for.

This short series of workshops are starting in Ulster in September with plans to be rolled out through the other Provinces through the season. The following will be covered:

- Looking at your personal financial position
- Key decisions and things to be aware of that could affect your wealth
- Financial independence and how best to achieve it/things that risk it
- Your wealth building capacity
- Increasing returns on savings
- Post rugby planning
- Funding a child's education

If you are interested or would like to know more please contact your provincial PDM.

## More on Smith & Williamson

Smith & Williamson is an independently-owned professional and financial services group with around 1,500 people. The group is a leading provider of investment management, financial advisory and accountancy services to private clients, professional practices and mid-to-large corporates. The group has twelve offices.

## Contact Details for your IRUPA PDMs



### ULSTER PDM

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### LEINSTER PDM

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### WOMEN'S SEVENS AND FIFTEENS PDM

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### CONNACHT PDM

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# News from the Clubhouse

## THE IRUPA CLUBHOUSE EVENT

29th AUGUST

## IRELAND V WALES

**Once again MSL Ballsbridge's impressive car showroom was the backdrop for another hugely entertaining and successful Clubhouse Event held before the Rugby World Cup warm up game between Ireland and Wales.**

More than 200 guests were wined and dined with a three-course lunch followed by a Q & A session hosted by Irish legend Shane Byrne with guests, former Irish players Mal O'Kelly and Paddy Wallace. Shane proved that there is a career for him in the stand-up comedy business if he so wishes and had the crowd in stitches with a few anecdotes from the past and some friendly banter with his fellow Irish internationals.

The Clubhouse Event allows supporters intimate access to some of Irish Rugby's biggest stars both past and present in a location that is only a stone's throw away from the Aviva Stadium. One of IRUPA's core pillars is Personal Development so bringing together members of the business community and IRUPA members in an informal environment provides a great fit.

IRUPA would like to thank all of the guests who attended for their support and to MSL Ballsbridge for providing such a wonderful and unique setting. A big thank-you also goes out to Heineken Ireland for their kind support.

*If you would like to join the mailing list for future IRUPA events or would be keen to discuss becoming an official IRUPA partner, please email [keith.young@irupa.ie](mailto:keith.young@irupa.ie)*



**"When professional rugby careers finish everyone goes their separate ways so the IRUPA Clubhouse events provide a great opportunity to catch up with some old friends but to also to network"**

*Shane Byrne*







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CONCUSSION  
MANAGEMENT  
GOING FORWARD

# Tackling the







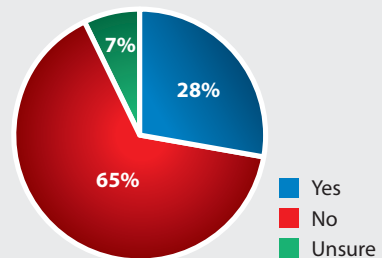
**In recent times and rightly so, the issue of concussion in rugby has become more and more widespread. Behavioural changes and cultural shifts are helping to educate players as was shown in our player survey from last year.**

All stakeholders will be looking forward to a season in which players, medical personnel and team support staff play their part in managing this important aspect of player welfare. Rugby is making significant progress in the detection and management of concussion and it will be important that other professional rugby competitions like the Guinness Pro12 move to adopt the standards set for Rugby World Cup 2015 (RWC). Rugby should not see the management of concussion as a risk, but an opportunity to demonstrate how far the game has come in recent times.

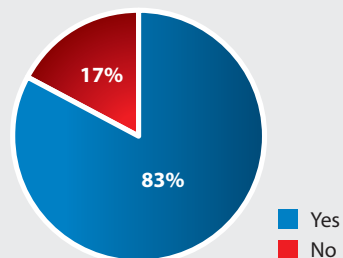
The IRFU and other key stakeholders are leading a real culture shift amongst professional players, coaches and medical personnel in relation to peer pressure to play. Recent statistics back this up. Research has underpinned the HIA process throughout. Prior to the temporary substitution trial, 56 per cent of players with a confirmed concussion remained on the field following their injury. Now that figure is less than 12 per cent (British Journal of Sports Medicine, 2014) and the hope is that following continued refinement of the HIA process we will see further improvement in 2015 and beyond.

#### IRUPA Members Survey 2014

**Do you think you have been concussed in the last 12 months?**



**Did you follow the return to play protocols after concussion?**



# Invisible

Effective from 1st August 2015 after a successful global trial period at elite level, World Rugby has now formally introduced a temporary substitution rule. This applies to any player who is removed from the field of play to undertake a Head Injury Assessment (HIA) when it is unclear if that player has a suspected concussion.

Having the ability to remove a player from the action and from the cauldron of a packed stadium, to undertake a thorough clinical assessment and video review of an incident, in a private controlled environment, makes good practical sense. Previously players in this situation would often go untreated, or be checked over briefly on field using questionable methods.

**A key point lost on many but one that IRUPA believes is fundamental to a conservative management approach is that a player is now removed once the attending medics confirm a diagnosis of suspected concussion.**

This takes the pressure off trying to make a definitive diagnosis of concussion during a high-pressured game. That does mean players will be removed who have not suffered a concussion, but better the conservative approach.

Thankfully the message is getting through and along with the IRFU's Stop,

Inform, Rest, Recover campaign, the games stakeholders are realising that it is not just the player's responsibility but its coaches, referees, and team support staffs obligation to step in if they suspect a concussion has occurred. Indeed IRUPA, in partnership with the IRFU, have produced an online concussion module that is compulsory for all professional players in Ireland to watch and complete.

Without doubt this needs to be continually developed and filtered down to the community game where awareness and education on the subject is not yet at the same level.

At the elite level, advancements in digital technology has most definitely assisted in the assessment of a potential concussion incident. The systems that were in place for the RWC were rigorous.

They include

- Compulsory education for all teams via online modules;
- Video replays for medical teams;
- Digitalisation of the respective HIA testing procedures and results;
- An independent doctor at every match who has the final say on whether a player should be removed from the pitch or be able to return to the game;
- A regulated return to play protocol that must be adhered to; and
- Medical specialist in concussion monitoring individual cases.

Additionally, IRUPA is very supportive on the work that is being undertaken on the laws of the game to ensure the risks of on-field instances that result in serious injury, including concussive events, are minimised.

So what of the future and in particular the debate of using new technologies to take human error out of the equation? One such advancement that may justify further research and refinement is the use of sensors to help aide team doctors with real-time data. It could provide insight into accelerations and forces that they may not have seen first-hand particularly where the player has either not recognised a head knock, chosen not to seek medical assistance or suffered signs and symptoms post game.

The sensor does not diagnose a concussion but rather provides accurate previously unavailable live information which combined with testing (HIA) and baseline data can aid in a clinical diagnosis. In the same way team support staff use other data like heart rates and GPS data, the sensor can provide data to assist medical personnel make informed decisions regarding concussion management.



## Online concussion module

**IRUPA has partnered with the IRFU to produce an online concussion module that is compulsory for all professional players to watch and complete. It features John Fogarty (right), ex-Leinster and Ireland player who was forced to retire because of concussion, Ireland captain Paul O'Connell and is narrated by Alan Quinlan.**







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# World Cup rollercoaster



19 SEPT  
Ireland 50 Canada 7



27 SEPT  
Ireland 44 Romania 10



4 OCT  
Ireland 16 Italy 9



11 OCT  
Ireland 24 France 9



18 OCT  
Ireland 20 Argentina 43

**Ireland were unfortunately knocked out by Argentina in the Quarter-Final stage again at the Rugby World Cup.**

The four weeks leading up to the loss had provided players and fans alike an unforgettable experience with the highlights undoubtingly being beating the French at the Millennium Stadium, Cardiff and being part of a Rugby World Cup Record attendance (89,267) for their game against Romania at Wembley Stadium.

For the Irish squad, the tournament cruelly dealt them a high level of serious injuries, most notably the one sustained by their captain Paul O'Connell. From a Players Associations' perspective, we want to wish them well in their recoveries and subsequent rehab programmes.



Points Scored	154
Average Per Match	30.80
Tries Scored	18
Average Per Match	3.60

Win Percentage	80%
Conversions	14
Penalties Scored	12
Red Cards	0
Yellow Cards	2





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IT'S COMING TO A HEAD



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# Qualifying for the Womens' The view from ins

August 22nd and 23rd proved to be another memorable weekend for Irish Women's Rugby, as the Womens' Sevens team secured their place on the coming seasons HSBC Women's World Series. Team member LOUISE GALVIN reflects.

12 teams descended on the rain-hit UCD bowl attempting to secure a top two spot, which would ultimately result in them achieving core status for the upcoming World Series. In the end, Cup Champions Japan ensured a World Series berth for the first time ever, with Ireland securing the second spot, following our one year absence from the tour.

Prior to the World Series qualifier, the summer had been quite busy for the squad, preparing for and competing in the European Grand Prix over two legs at the end of June; followed by the Olympic Repechage qualifying tournament in Lisbon in July. We finished as Plate winners (5th) in both legs of the European Grand Prix, the top team outside of current core World Series teams.

We could see how the top four (France; Russia; England; Spain) played the game at a faster pace to all other teams, from their regular exposure to the World circuit. We were well aware that to compete amongst this group we needed the same level of exposure, rather than settle for being "best of the rest".

Needing a top three finish in Lisbon to progress to the World Olympic Repechage Qualifier next June, we progressed to the final where we were beaten on the stroke of full time by a Spanish try. Goal one of the summer had been achieved: progress through the stages for Olympic qualification. Now for goal two, and we didn't need our passports for this one!

As an athlete, it is an immense honour to represent your country. To do that in front of a home crowd is really the icing on the cake. As soon as we were aware that we were hosting the WWSW Qualifier in UCD at the end of August, a swell of enthusiasm engrossed the squad.

Midsummer we suffered a blight of injuries, so much so we finished the first leg of the Europeans in Russia with nine players. Thankfully, many of these players were making a welcome return to fitness and form in time for selection for our World Series Qualifier.

This ensured seriously competitive training sessions throughout August, and a tense few weeks leading up to selection and announcement of the team. Our coach Anthony Eddy was faced with the most difficult selection dilemmas than he had been all season.

**As with all successful teams, it is incredibly important to have strength and depth in a squad. The team selected are what is visible to the public, but any team member will always point to the importance of the squad. That is more than evident in our Womens Sevens squad.**

Our official tournament began when we moved into our UCD accommodation on the Wednesday. One of the benefits of being the host nation is having more input into aspects such as access to training pitches; and in particular our

nutrition. It is imperative to have the correct type and amount of food in the run up to match days, and we were spoiled for choice in UCD. Over the previous weeks we had trained in the UCD bowl to familiarise ourselves with the pitch and surroundings. The pitch itself was in immaculate condition and is a credit to the staff that manage it.

As the weekend approached so did the inevitable nerves that come with playing international rugby. I was asked if these nerves were augmented by the prospect of playing in front of family, friends and a home crowd. However, I felt we had been so well prepared by our coaching staff, and improving immeasurably with each tournament, that we were more than ready for the games to begin. Saturday couldn't come quick enough!

We opened our account with a facile victory against Mexico. The game allowed us to kick any pre match nerves to touch, with players getting accustomed to the greasy ball. Hong Kong put up a stiffer battle in game two but the team adjusted accordingly to run out comfortable winners in the end. Our final game of the pool stages was against one of the pre tournament favourites South Africa.

Having just been on the World Series, we had done plenty of homework in terms of video analysis on the South Africans, and were confident going into the game. However, a sub-par performance with far too many missed tackles and reneging the physicality contest resulted in a loss and being seeded fourth for day two.



# Sevens World Series side the camp



The beauty of Sevens, we were reminded by our head coach, was that once the seedings were done, day one had very little impact on day two. As players, we were quickly able to reflect on where the game had been lost against the South Africans. Defence wins games, and we were poor defensively. In possession, we played into their hands at times, fronting up physically rather than using our hands and pace out wide to get them on the back foot. Aware our paths were destined to cross again in the last four, we were confident on exacting revenge.

China provided our quarter final opposition and were a team not to be taken lightly, as they had also been a core team on the most recent World Series. We were fully committed and

focused and secured the victory that allowed us progress to the semi final and a rematch with South Africa. Obviously, there is a lot to play for in any semi final. However, this one was different again, as the winner was guaranteed of their standing in the 2015/2016 Series.

**Buoyed by a largely partisan home crowd, we produced our best performance of the season in beating South Africa 26-14 in another physical battle.**

The elation at full time was palpable as the team and management celebrated together. Goal two achieved!

Recovering from the game our focus turned to the final where we would play Japan, an up and coming team in Sevens Rugby. They were unbeaten over the two days, and were an organised and skilful outfit. Before the final, we ran out to a huge cheer from our supporters who were still braving the elements to support us in the final, even the rain couldn't dampen their spirits. Singing the national anthem in front of that crowd encompassing family, friends and teammates was a moment I'll treasure for a long time. The match started off well and we commanded a 12-0 lead. However fatigue began to set in, and the Japanese finished stronger than us to kick a winning drop goal as the clock ticked over and claim a 13-12 victory.

The emotions after the game struck a stark contrast with those after the semi final victory. Although we had made significant grounds as a team this year, we have struggled at times to close out games and this is one area we certainly need to improve on next season. Japan stayed in the game after going two tries down and were rewarded for their doggedness. We will look forward to playing them in next seasons World Series, and hope to reverse the result.

As Sevens Rugby is tournament based, rather than 'home and away' like the Six Nations for example, I cannot reiterate enough the immense honour it was to play in our first (and hopefully not last!) home tournament. Personally, being a recent convert to Rugby from GAA and basketball, it was fantastic for my family and friends to witness firsthand



**With the inclusion of Sevens Rugby at the Olympics in Rio de Janeiro for the first time next year, its popularity will continue to grow both in Ireland and around the World.**

the speed, skill level and attrition that is Sevens Rugby!

As a traditional '15s' rugby nation, it was interesting to note the amount of people with strong rugby backgrounds who had seen their first game of Sevens, and were suitably impressed with one of the fastest growing sports in the world!

With the inclusion of Sevens Rugby at the Olympics in Rio de Janeiro for the first time next year, its popularity will continue to grow both in Ireland and around the World.

For the IRFU, it served as a 'dry run' of sorts for the Womens 15s World Cup which will be held at the same venue in 2017. All involved in organising

and running the tournament can be immensely proud of their efforts. Sevens' tournaments can be quite stressful to run I'd imagine, with time management, particularly adhering to kick off times, of utmost importance. The pitch itself was in excellent condition, especially considering the incessant rain over the two days. Speaking with our peers from opposing teams, they had nothing but praise for the tournament and officials.

The most encouraging aspect for me, besides the organisational structure, was the demeanour of each member of staff we encountered over the days leading up to and including the tournament. Everyone we met had a friendly smile and helpful manner, towards each nation, consolidating once again our tag as a 'welcoming' country. Thank you and well done to all, from the Womens Sevens Squad. Now if only we could've stopped the rain...

Where to next?

Following a two week break after the tournament in UCD, we were back to a six week block of pre season training. We are coming to the end of this now

faster, fitter and stronger and looking forward to a change of focus to more rugby specific skills!

There are six legs to the HSBC Womens Sevens World Series all over the world, which commences in Dubai in early December. Our aims for the coming season are to consolidate our position on the World Series for the following year, by finishing in the top 8 at the end of the season; and qualifying and competing in the Olympic Games in Rio de Janeiro 2016.

The final step for qualification for the Olympics, the pinnacle of every athlete's career, will be in June 2016. Although not directly linked to Olympic qualification, getting on the World Series allows us to compete regularly at the highest level, thereby preparing us as best as possible for this final qualification event.

A massive year ahead for the squad. Watch this space!

*Louise is a current member of the Irish Women's Sevens squad and is a qualified Chartered Physiotherapist. Twitter: @lougvalvin4*



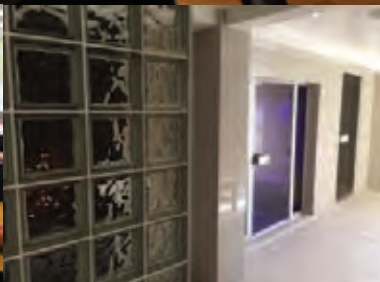
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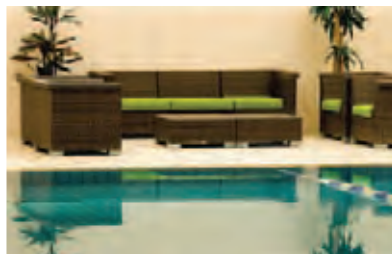
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**Bitterness or regret are words that simply don't go with Stephen Ferris. Having a glittering career cruelly cut short through an ankle injury that just wouldn't go away would cause many a person to feel some sort of resentment... but not this man.**

Indeed, conversely when I caught up with him I could hear an overriding sense of relief in his voice and gratitude towards a sport that gave him so much. Maybe that's the elite sportsman coming out? The idea that when one challenge comes to an end, the inner competitor demands an immediate shift in focus and formulating of new goals. For Stephen that's come in the shape of a few avenues that he's keen to pursue.

First things first though. He was always known as a physically intimidating figure with an incredibly explosive body frame so it will probably come as no surprise that when we spoke on the phone he had just finished a gym session. Weirdly enough a gym can sometimes feel like a lonely place for a retired rugby player. We're used to prescribed sessions, loud music and plenty of banter with your teammates so when Stephen had the chance to train with some of his mates, Ulster past players Chris Cochrane and Andy Maxwell he jumped at the chance.

"It's great to be able to still train with some of your old colleagues in a gym environment and to be able to still have a bit of banter about the old days."

After nine years of plying his trade as a professional rugby player with Ulster, Stephen unfortunately was forced into the decision to retire from a sport that had given him so much but in reality had so much more games, tournaments and potential medals to come.

"It was difficult to make but with my injury. It wasn't like I was injured for six weeks. I was out for fifteen months so

**With his glittering career cut short by persistent injury at 29, now there's a shift in focus for the Ulster, Ireland and Lions back row. He talks to MICHAEL SWIFT.**

# EMBRACING HEAD ON





UNDER THE SPOTLIGHT  
Stephen **Ferris**

**G THE FUTURE**



**“When you’re playing and in the moment you take it for granted. The 15 months out made me realise how much fun I had and how much I actually achieved, but let’s face it, it’s never easy when you retire.”**



during that time I have a lot of time to think about worst case scenarios. My head was coming around to the idea that I may never fully recover so when the decision was made to hang up the boots it didn’t come as a shock which is always a good thing.”

“I feel sorry for guys 2-3 months down the line who have their careers cut short prematurely. But for me of course it was difficult, everyone expected me to kick on especially after making such a good comeback in my return match against the Scarlets. But I knew deep down that I was in trouble and things weren’t right. I was still in a lot of pain.”

Listening to him speak reminds me of how most past players gloss over

serious injuries almost like it’s a male bravado thing or possibly a hangover associated with their playing days of playing down how bad an injury was. It’s that ability to always see the positives in a bad situation. A positive mind-set that separates possibly how an elite athlete thinks to those who have not experienced high level sport first-hand.

“As soon as I made the decision to retire I felt a sense of relief because everyone assumed I was now back with comments like “you looked great against the Scarlets”. The thing was though, as soon as I retired people immediately started to reflect and talk about the good old days and my good performances and not about my injury and my return so it was really refreshing and good for the soul. When I did retire I had a chance to reflect on my career a bit more.”

And what a career it was. Internationally he was capped 35 times for Ireland and represented the British and Irish Lions on two occasions scoring twice. Domestically he played for his beloved

Ulster 109 times with the highlights being reaching a Heineken Cup Final in 2012 and winning the Celtic League in 2006.

Yes his career was prematurely cut short through injury but by reflecting and celebrating on his past successes it has almost acted as a comfort blanket to help soften the blow. These fond memories have provided the fuel to drive him forward into the latest stage of his life.

“When you’re playing and in the moment you take it for granted. The 15 months out made me realise how much fun I had and how much I actually achieved during the 9 professional years that I played but let’s face it it’s never easy when you retire. Everybody asked me “What are you doing now? And my reply was listen I never thought I’d had to retire at the age of 29 but I’m trying to fit into the big bad world as best I can and so far so good, I’m enjoying it!”

“Everybody naturally thinks that as a retired player you want to get involved





into coaching. That's all well and good but I feel like I need a clean break right now. It could be forever, it could be ten years who knows but right now I don't want to be involved in a professional set up. Taking a step back to reflect is always good."

Many retired rugby players find that the transition away from such an ingrained existence as part of a professional team can be a daunting one. One way to negate such feelings is to remain in some way connected to their sport. For the big man from Portadown this came by way of TV commentating.

"The reason why I got into punditry was to keep busy. I'm working with BBC NI so I'm covering the 20 games this year as well as some of the Champions Cup games with BT Sports. It helps to keep my profile up especially after I've just finished my autobiography and I have a few business ideas that I'm going to pursue. At the minute it's just about enjoying retirement and still keeping myself involved in rugby but on the

other side of the camera."

Stephen mentions his autobiography 'Man and Ball' which was released last month and took over a year to produce.

"It took 14 months from start to finish. The minute the boots were hung up the phone starting ringing. I was a bit apprehensive and wasn't 100 % sure but speaking to the publisher Transworld they filled me with a lot of confidence so I thought why not and gave it a go. I'm really happy with the final product.

It was great to put your whole life down on a piece of paper and allows all the moments and life experiences to sink in a lot more. It was an experience that I thought would be hard work but the reality was that it was a lot harder than I had anticipated. If anybody's thinking about writing a book think about it long and hard. It takes a big commitment but hugely worthwhile."

As well as venturing into the publishing world, there is a determination in him to succeed in the business world, whether

that be through an organisation or self-driven as an entrepreneur. With the help of IRUPA, Stephen took part in a Sports Professionals into Business course delivered by Core Vision along with fellow Ulster teammates Callum Black and also recently retired player, Declan Fitzpatrick.

"It was a great experience and one that I would strongly recommend for other players to do. I gained knowledge and subtle skills that I've already been able to put into practice. I'm a guy who constantly wants to upskill and maybe do a little bit of work experience over the next while."

"To be honest public speaking has been the busiest part of my career post-rugby. I've been involved with motivational talks on how to sustain success in the workplace. I take inspiration from my own experience in a highly pressurised, highly motivated environment. That is definitely an area where players should take a lot of encouragements from the skill sets they obtain whilst playing.



A lot of businesses would give their right arm for employees with similar attributes that can be easily transferred into the office workplace.

"I'm also working for a Social Inclusion Programme in Belfast which tries to get people back into work. Last year it ran a scheme with the footballer David Healy and this year it was my turn. It's basically working with people 9-5 for a whole week and tries to encourage them to communicate more and to work as a team. It uses rugby as a tool to help them progress as they're definitely two traits that as rugby players we would be good at."

Stephen recently joined up with Paddy Wallace to take part in a Grafton Recruitment 'Teamroom To Boardroom' lunch. They spent time with business executives talking about the transferable skills rugby athletes can bring with them into a business environment and what makes them such an attractive employer proposition.

We ended our conversation talking

**"It makes a massive difference to have the support of a players association weighted behind you. It really took the pressure off me."**

about what makes IRUPA so important to members. Player Associations can be called upon by individuals at any time in their career indeed even after their career unfortunately comes to an end, as was the case with Stephen.

"For me contracts are a massive part of professional sport. During the middle part of my career IRUPA helped me sort out a lot of issues for players specifically up north. That was the start of our relationship I suppose. They helped to further my skills and help map out a career path. A year down the line you're that bit more qualified and it helped

me to get through some tough times during my injury. It helped me to take my mind off things and to help focus the brain.

"Then came the injury. They really helped me with my transition especially with insurance issues. It can be quite daunting and difficult to deal directly with governing bodies sometimes when it's just the individual player in communication. So it makes a massive difference to have the support of a players association weighted behind you. It really took the pressure off me. When your career comes to an end the last thing you want to do is start chasing up and making enquiries. It was great to have a cushion there to help you when needed."



*Stephen Ferris' book 'Man And Ball' is available now online and at bookstores nationwide.*





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# The Irish Rugby

OFFERING OPEN ARMS TO THE RUGBY FAMILY

## Matt Mostyn



### THE LOWDOWN

**Born:** Sydney, 1974

**Position:** Full-back/wing

**Teams:** NSW Waratahs  
Begles Bordeaux  
Connacht  
Newport

**Retired:** 2008

**Based:** Sydney, Australia



### Then:

After playing for the NSW Waratahs I moved to France to play for Begles Bordeaux in 1998. Under my Irish passport (Mum) I was privileged to be selected to play for Ireland on the 1999 tour to Australia, the World Cup lead up matches and ultimately the 1999 World Cup.

After leaving Begles Bordeaux I played for Connacht/Galwegians for the 1999/2000 season before moving to Wales to play for Newport for three seasons. I then returned to Ireland – Connacht/Galwegians to play for another five seasons before retiring at the end of the 2007/2008 season.

We loved our time in Ireland and I still keep in touch with many of the great friends we made over the years.

### Now:

I am a Director of my own company The Mostyn Copper Group and we specialise in Project, Development and Construction Management. Our key focus industries are the Commercial, Retail, Industrial, Educational, Residential and Hospitality sectors and we are currently managing in excess of \$100 million in projects across Australia.

The Construction sector in Australia is quite robust at the moment and is providing our company opportunities to grow and in turn broaden our ability

to service our key clients. Our industry is highly geared towards creating and maintaining relationships with reputable partners and clients which has been a significant component of our success to date.

It is worth noting that many of the relationships we have with our key partners and clients have in some way been connected to the great game of Rugby, the mateships formed during our playing days certainly facilitates opportunities later in life in the business environment.



# by Diaspora

## Seán Henry

### THE LOWDOWN

**Born:** Sligo, 1987

**Position:** Hooker

**Teams:** Munster  
Connacht

**Retired:** 2015

**Based:** Boston, USA



### Then:

When I was forced to retire I had all the usual reservations that anybody would have - what will I do next?, how will I adapt to such a different professional environment? In many ways I guess I was lucky with how the path to my rugby career transpired. I gained my first professional contract shortly after graduating from college and as a result I had my degree and a little bit of work experience behind me. Many people go from school into an academy and are faced with the challenge of balancing professional rugby and completing an undergraduate degree.

While having a degree is undoubtedly beneficial, from my experience

you need a little more than just an academic qualification. People in the rugby community are amazingly helpful in reaching out and providing opportunities but they are not automatically going to give you a great position because you have a degree and a few years of professional sport behind you. They are quick to recognise the fantastic habits mastered through professional rugby such as punctuality, work ethic and self-belief so a little extra on your CV can go a long way. To this end, something that I found beneficial was completing internships during long injury lay-offs. When you are injured you have a lot of time on your hands and gaining valuable work experience is a good way to keep busy and your mind off the injury. It is a flexible way make

connections within the industry and attain some up to date and transferable skills.

### Now:

I am currently working in an Analyst position with the MG2 Group, a property development entity based in Boston, USA. My main area of focus is new development, property transactions and debt structuring across a varied property portfolio mainly located in Boston and the surrounding New England area.

It is amazing what opportunities rugby presents you with. For me it has given me an enormous amount and continues to do so through relationships I have formed within the game. I hope this will always be the case.



# Career transition

Considering changing how you make a living? More often than not, as a professional rugby player this decision is taken out of your hands and forced upon you through injury or contracts not being renewed. Think hard, plan well and test your presumptions about that dream job! Top consultant Edwin O'Hara offers his expert insights into helping you to make a change.

Metamorphosis is hard to spell – let alone hard to do. Change frightens the hell out of people and changing career really is at the top of many people's lists of difficult life experiences BUT it can be done successfully.

In most cases (excepting a surprise redundancy or an injury) people have

some degree of lead-in time to a transition in their careers so they can think things through and do some planning.

**There can be huge benefit from breaking out to do something different,**

**something you think you would love to do or something that you would find truly inspirational, but you need to plan and organise this in advance; it's very unlikely to just 'fall into your lap'.**

At the heart of a lot of people's trepidation is the fear of who's going to pay the mortgage/car loan/groceries/credit card. This is a very real consideration and one that should always inform your decisions. The generally accepted advice is don't give up the day job until you have a credible alternative.



The corollary is also true – if you're in a role that you passively or actively dislike, how likely is it that you will achieve your full potential – both professionally and financially?

We've all heard the story of the person in a very well paid role who hates their job but they're earning so much they feel 'trapped' and couldn't actively consider alternatives – this must be a horrible place to be. It also illustrates how money is not the be all and end all. Job satisfaction is really important.

I think it was Confucius who said, "find a job you love and you'll never have to work a day in your life". It might sound twee but most people would agree with it.

There are a number of things you should do if you're considering changing career:

**1) Speak to someone who knows about it** – If you're interested in exploring your options, speak to somebody who's knowledgeable in the field. Park your pride, take advice and be open to input and challenge – you might be very passionate about a potential new career but how realistic is your end goal and how do you plan to get there?

**2) Be clear about why and where you want to move to** – Are you doing this on a whim or is it something you've had time to consider carefully and diligently? Your prospective new employer will want to know what your rationale is and, if you're starting your own business, the person approving your business loan will certainly want to know! Do this work early and develop your own personal clarity around what you want.

**3) Work on your message** – Make it easy for a future employer to see what you bring – some people associate the ability to articulate what you're good at with being a bighead or being overconfident. I don't agree with this. I'm not sure if it's a cultural thing but some Irish people (with some notable exceptions obviously!) seem to be particularly coy about

telling you what they're good at. EVERYONE IS GOOD AT SOMETHING.

**4) Concentrate on skills that are useful in all contexts** – It's arguable that if you've run a business unit or a department in one environment then you should be able to bring a lot of these skills to bear in another. Sectoral experience (that which you get from working in a particular business type) is the easiest to learn, competencies like managing people and good commercial negotiation are much harder to develop. Don't underestimate yourself!

**5) Make contingencies and plan** – You're unlikely to go from running a warehouse to being president, or from being a professional rugby player to the CEO of a large PLC. Transition takes time and planning and needs to be thought out. Get your finances in order and plan out what a number of intermediate steps might look like (could you do some part-time work?) on the way to your final goal.

**6) Experience a new environment** – In the event you want to get into a particular area then think about how you could experience that. For example, if you wanted to work in the charity sector, do some volunteering and see how it works for you. The 'perfect' job that we envisage because we haven't done our research may not actually exist!

**6) Back yourself** – There are plenty of opportunities to be knocked, criticised or just downright hacked off when you are looking to make a big change. Concentrate on what you are good at, what you are passionate about and work on your resilience. This takes a lot of persistence.

Like anything that's worth doing, career change is hard but if you plan honestly, professionally and carefully, are practical and dedicated and know what you want, it makes the whole thing much easier (and significantly less stressful!)



**By Edwin O'Hora**  
**Owner and Principal of OHORA Consulting**

*Edwin is a strategic senior professional with strong experience in building results focused human resource functions. He has expertise in the areas of organisational development, talent management, integration and the management of performance. Significantly he has experience in organisational restructuring, redesign and change management at all levels.*

## FIVE WAYS TO PREPARE FOR LEAVING PROFESSIONAL RUGBY

**1**

**TALK** to people about your thoughts and feelings surrounding this significant life change.

**2**

**INVEST** time building up your non-sporting identity by developing your confidence and self-worth/esteem in other areas of your life, personal and professional.

**3**

**DEVELOP** a non-rugby support network alongside your existing network, ideally in areas of interest.

**4**

**IDENTIFY** and develop your transferable skillset through personal development work with your own Provincial PDM.

**5**

**PLAN** by accessing IRUPA and other support networks available to ensure you have a career plan post rugby, and that financially, physically, mentally and emotionally you are as prepared as possible.

# The art of rugby

We talk to Munster's SHANE MONAHAN who is successfully mixing his love of art with a professional rugby career



**Handing someone a painted portrait of themselves isn't normally associated with your average Secret Santa gift but for Gloucester's Shane Monahan it was the moment that kick-started a whole new chapter.**

The Dublin-born winger was halfway through his first season at Gloucester when he picked out England rugby legend Mike Tindall in the club's annual Secret Santa.

"My dad was coming over from Ireland at the time, so I asked if he could bring over an Irish flag as a bit of a joke gift."

"He was more than happy to do so but actually ended up forgetting to take the flag with him, leaving me stuck without a present the night before we were meant to be handing them out."

With the moment of truth only 24 hours away, Shane was faced with the uncertain prospect of what to get the former England captain.

"I was completely stressed out and didn't have any idea at all what to get Mike in such a short period of time.

"After brainstorming and coming up with a few ideas, I thought to myself 'stuff it' and started to paint a portrait of Mike" After pulling an all-nighter to get it up to scratch, he finally had something unique to hand to him.

"It was just a quick portrait, using a photo of Mike as a guide and thankfully to my surprise it received a really awesome reaction from the lads."

Following that fortunate turn of events Shane found himself painting and portraying his then Gloucester teammates on a frequent basis, with the likes of James Simpson- Daniel, Jonny May



and Billy Twelvetrees all appearing under Shane's brush.

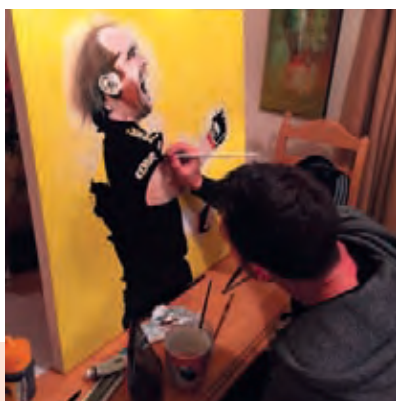
The 28-year-old uses imagery from recent rugby matches and then uses his own styles and designs to produce a striking and modern print.

"I'm a big fan of the graffiti artist, Banksy and also the fantastic work of pop art icon, Andy Warhol. So I tend to use these two as my inspiration and then try and add my own personal touch and style to each of my different prints. I like to mix and match which worked well for my 'Pop Art Players' series. I've recently done some more realistic portraits but still using dark lines and ink that are influenced by my love of pop art.

"I set up the company last year and so far it's been tipping along nicely. My business model is simple – I commission an original piece which I get signed by the subject. I then do a limited edition series which I also get the player to sign. Now that I'm playing with Munster I intend to get a few of the guys captured on canvas. I've found the response from both the players and the general public really positive and really open to it.

"Since my return I've painted Paulie (Paul O'Connell) which he's going to sign.





"I recently set up my own website to go with my Twitter and Facebook pages. It features all of my art and offers customers the chance to also search my range of t-shirts, hats and beanies.

"So far it's been a fantastic tool to publicly display the work I do and also draw further attention to future projects."

Looking back on the success of his venture, Shane says he first started to take an interest in art and design from an early age.

Shane could be seen for hours on end sitting down with a book in one hand and drawing and sketching various objects in the other.

"I used to go through one of my old World War II books and find soldiers that I could try and replicate in a drawing.

"I enjoyed it greatly and it always seemed to relax me and help me focus, rather than being distracted by the TV or other things."

While Shane was always considerably more interested in his rugby, he continued down the path of design and art with a degree in Product Design at the Dublin Institute of Technology.

The course focused around engineering but gave Shane the opportunity to sharpen up his sketching and drawing.

After completing the degree, Shane's rugby career soon took over and he spent a season at Leinster before moving to Connacht.

It was there that Shane soon found the reason behind forward thinking and planning for a future away from the game.



"Whether that's putting you in contact with potential employers, organising a networking evening or setting you up with work experience, IRUPA's always keen to help you succeed and complete your goals."

### **"The only way to do great work is to love what you do"**

While Shane's goals are starting to be fulfilled, he says players really need to take full advantage of the support and guidance out there for a career after rugby.

"Rugby is one of those sports which could end tomorrow, therefore it's so important to have something set in stone to go straight into. That's why it's so important to engage with your player association to help put pillars in place right now. Don't put it to the back of the pile of things to do – act now!"

"The advice I would give to young guys coming through is use your free time in rugby to try and find another avenue where you can get paid for doing something you love.

"Hopefully now, thanks to my artwork, I'm starting to build the foundations for a very enjoyable and successful life after rugby.

"If I could get involved with a publishing company that would be massive for me. Hopefully as a pro player and who I've painted will help me get a foot in the door in the industry. Art is so subjective. I know it's obvious but it's only worth what people will pay.

*If you'd like to learn more about Shane's art please check out his website [www.shanemonahandesigns.com](http://www.shanemonahandesigns.com)  
Facebook: Shane Monahan Designs  
Twitter: @shanemdesigns*

# UP AND COMING

# Academy stars

**GARRY RINGROSE** has been touted for a while now as a Leinster player to look out for in the future. Having featured several times for the senior team already this season, it seems that time has already arrived.



<b>Name:</b>	Garry Ringrose
<b>Date of Birth:</b>	26th Jan 1995
<b>Birthplace:</b>	Blackrock
<b>School:</b>	Blackrock College
<b>College:</b>	UCD
<b>Club:</b>	UCD RFC
<b>Height:</b>	1.85 m (6' 1")
<b>Weight:</b>	89 kg (13 st 13 lb)
<b>Position:</b>	Centre

#### Honours:

Has represented Ireland U20's on 17 occasions amassing four tries. Was shortlisted for IRB World Junior Player of the Year in 2014. Has already several times this season for the senior team

scoring a try in Leinster's win over the Dragons at the RDS.

**Nominated for World Under-20 Player of the Year** following his performances in the World Championships, Ringrose has been name-checked by Ireland captain Paul O'Connell and more recently by Tommy Bowe as a player to be aware of in the future.

#### *What are you studying at the moment?*

Business and Law.

#### *How have you found balancing your studies with your rugby commitments?*

It's been very challenging. Thankfully we train in UCD so I'm able to bring

anything I need for college into training in the morning and then grab a quick shower and head over to lectures in the afternoon.

#### *In terms of off field, what career would you like to pursue?*

I'm not 100% sure yet whether I want to pursue the business or the law aspect of my degree but I'm hoping I'll have a clearer idea in my head when I'm in my final year. It's good to put the hard work in now so that I'm prepared for whatever the future throws at me.

**"From my point of view, I'm not ignoring it (the hype) but I just stick to what I think I need to progress and stick to what I think my weaknesses and strengths are and get as much advice off the coaches."**

#### *What was it like to be nominated for World Rugby's Junior Player of the year?*

I was very surprised when I found out I had been nominated. The JWC in New Zealand was an amazing experience and I was lucky to be playing alongside such incredibly talented players.

#### *What advice would you have for those starting out in the Academy?*

Make sure to listen to the senior players around you. They're there for a reason and have 'walked the walk' for many years so take in what they say.

#### *What are your aspirations for the rest of the season?*

I will be working to hopefully get an opportunity represent and win games with the Leinster senior and Leinster A



team if possible. I will also be focused on trying to win the All Ireland League with UCD RFC.

***What advice would you have for those starting out in the Academy?***

I'd advise someone starting out in the Academy to take full advantage of the opportunity and leave no stone unturned. Work hard and also enjoy the experience.

***In five years time, where would you like to see yourself both on and off the pitch?***

In five years time, I hope to have completed a degree. Rugby wise I hope to be getting the opportunity to play and win games with Leinster.



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# IRPA update

IRPA IS THE **WORLD REPRESENTATIVE BODY** OF PROFESSIONAL RUGBY PLAYERS ON INTERNATIONAL ISSUES OF IMPORTANCE TO PLAYERS AND THE GAME OF RUGBY

## Sexton and McCaw champion global player welfare through IRPA Presidency



**IRPA have announced the appointments of Johnny Sexton and Richie McCaw as the inaugural President's for North and President South respectively.**

As two of the most recognised and respected players from around the world, both are seen as ideally placed to oversee and represent the collective voice of their fellow players from around the globe.

Both players are passionate about making a difference on issues of international importance to the players and the game. Sexton and McCaw will take an active part on various IRPA Player Advisory Groups and will use their expert opinion and stature to build on the collaborative relationship with World Rugby, the international Governing Body.



Speaking on their appointments the players said;

"IRPA represents the elite player's interests at a global level, it is fundamental to the success of the game that our playing environments and welfare provisions allow us to compete to the best of our ability. It is with this in mind that I am delighted and honoured to be the IRPA's President North. I congratulate Richie and look forward to working with him in the exciting year ahead."

**Johnny Sexton**  
– Ireland (President North)

"I'm delighted to be recognised as IRPA's first President South. To be invited to work alongside Johnny on behalf of the 4,000 professional rugby players throughout the world is a real honour. As players we are in a unique and privileged position to help mould the future of our great game. In doing this it is our responsibility to work with the administration of the game in an organised and professional manner, with the integrity of our sport and welfare of our people foremost in our minds."

**Richie McCaw**  
– New Zealand (President South)

IRPA Chairman Damian Hopley welcomed both appointments.

"IRPA believes that the game needs modern day professionals who are prepared to stand up for what is right for the welfare of their players and future of the professional game. I have no doubt that Johnny and Richie's leadership and standing in the game will make an immense difference in assisting and advising our organisation going forward. By sharing best practise across the member Associations, we will continue to strive to enhance the welfare and working conditions of players across the globe."



## Learn more about IRPA

**The IRPA Player Advisory Group is made up of 60 of your fellow peers. It represents every 'elite level' international team in men's, women's and Sevens rugby.**

Their involvement allows IRPA to target the most pressing issues that are currently facing you.

Did you know that as a member of IRUPA you're automatically part of IRPA?

The sum of this means that we have over 4,000 professional players spanning the globe who are part of IRPA – **YOU are one of them.**

### *We have a voice*

We work alongside international, national and competition governing bodies, to ensure there is player representation and involvement in the key decision making processes of the



game. We want to ensure that your voice is heard.

### *Prioritising mental health and wellbeing*

A key principle for IRPA and its member Player Associations is prioritising the players' physical and mental welfare as personal development both on and off the field.

### *We want to be fairly treated*

The players are a critical component to the success of the game of rugby, IRPA believes that it is fundamental to the integrity of the game that its players are treated fairly and valued as genuine stakeholders within the game.

### *Why do we do it?*

We all love rugby. Some of the IRPA and Member Associations staff played professionally, some have years of experience in the governance of the game but we all have the same clear goal:

**To ensure all players come together and take responsibility for contributing positively to the game's development.**

## Landmark partnership agreed between Samoa players and the SRU

**In what is seen as an historical step forward for a Tier 2 level team, The Pacific Island Players Association (PIPA) acting on behalf of their Samoan player members, have finalised their first ever Relationship Agreement with the Samoan Rugby Union (SRU)**

The agreement outlines how both parties will work together in the best interests of Samoan Rugby to help drive the team forward in what is an exciting time for Samoan Rugby.

When some of the global IRPA affiliated Player Associations met with the Samoan squad recently in Vancouver (see pic) there was a palpable sense of achievement in the room. It clearly shows the definitive value of when an initiative is player driven and has the backing of extensive peer to peer cross-communication and support. World Rugby is also to be commended for their huge efforts and constructive support throughout the entire discussion process.

Following the conclusion of this agreement it is hoped that similar Tier 2 teams like Fiji and Tonga will see the value in coming 'to the table' in a collective and structured way.



# Sheldon Coulter

**In this edition we continue our focus on past professional players, their experience of professional rugby and their transition out of the sport. We talk to former Ulster winger Sheldon Coulter about his rugby life and beyond.**



***When you were in school, did you have any idea what you hoped to do career wise?***

I was always into sport, from a young age my first love was football and this is what I ultimately wanted to do, play professional football. The school I attended didn't play football and I was persuaded by the PE Teacher at that time to participate in rugby. Now if it's rugby or football on television, I watch rugby every time!

***How did you embark on your rugby career?***

It was really at school after I made the change to playing rugby and had my first Ulster Schools trials that I was entered into the age grade system.

***Did you consider rugby to be a viable career option?***

I finished school in 1995 the same year the game went professional and having played age grade for Ulster and Ireland, with the hope of transitioning into the senior squads thoughts of a career came to mind. However I decided to head to University to study accountancy at Nottingham Trent and if the offer of a

professional contract came, to decide at that time.

***What third level education did you undertake and how did you balance study commitments with your training and playing schedule?***

I completed my first year at university combining studying with returning for match weekends with my club Ballymena RFC. I had the best of both worlds, now is a totally different environment for the young potential professional player straight out of school and having to choose the professional path via academies or 1st XV squads.

***How did your rugby career progress?***

During my second year at university I was offered the opportunity of being one of the first professional contracts with Ulster as Ireland entered the professional game. Looking back now I was very fortunate, I guess it was a dream being paid to train and play.

***Starting out, did you think rugby would play such a big role in your life?***

It was an enjoyable hobby but I had no idea the role it would play. It turned into an career that allowed me to travel, play competitive sport with and against some truly great players whilst gaining life-long friends at the same time.

***Do you think playing rugby has helped your off field career?***

I would say yes. The industry I'm in now has a lot of similarities and transferable attributes such as preparation, discipline, laws and execution. In rugby you have to have a desire within to succeed, this is also true in business.

***How was your retirement experience?***

Retirement can come as shock to the system if you are not prepared for it. I could have prolonged my professional career at other places though the knock

on effect would've been when the boots were eventually hung up competing against university graduates who would be a lot younger in the 'real world'. So when my Ulster career ended so did my professional career. Fortunately I can look back now and appreciate the years I played.

***Looking back what did you most enjoy about playing rugby and what do you miss most?***

I would have to say the moment you ran out on a Friday evening to a packed Ravenhill, the noise was deafening at times. The hairs on my neck still stand when I go there as a fan to watch, the memories come back!

Also I have to mention that special moment in 1999 at the Old Lansdowne Road, amazing how some 16 years later when we meet up it feels not that long ago. I suppose that's the defining effect rugby has, it bonds people.

I don't miss those first few weeks of pre-season when you've had that nice break before returning to endless beastings sessions with no rugby ball in sight!

***What piece of advice would you give young players starting out today?***

When I accepted my professional contract I continued my studies part-time at the University of Ulster. I understand in today's game time is precious and careers can sometimes be cut short. I am a firm believer in continuing education or vocational skills for life after rugby as it will come to an end and once you are gone people move on to the next star and the next squad, so it's vital a player can too. But at the same time enjoy every aspect of the journey.

***What are you doing currently?***

I now manage my own financial services practice Sheldon Coulter Wealth Management. I specialise in helping clients maximise and protect their wealth via holistic financial planning.



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# How would your business benefit from a commercial partnership with IRUPA?



**There are many different reasons as to why IRUPA's sponsors have created partnerships with the players' association but one thing that is evident throughout all of the partnerships is that there is a great sense of pride in supporting the professional rugby players of Ireland.**

IRUPA is a non for profit organisation and are continually looking to align and integrate with Ireland's leading companies in order to provide our members with all the resources that they require to succeed both on and off the field.

IRUPA pride themselves on delivering real value to their commercial partners, giving them and their clients' experiences that cannot be beaten. We create bespoke arrangements for each of our partners which allows them to achieve all of the objectives that they have set.

Working with our partners, IRUPA devise a year round plan so that it aligns with their strategic plan and where it will be most impactful for their staff or clients.

The use of player appearances and themed boardroom lunches, attending IRUPA driven events, business breakfasts

and advertising are some avenues where IRUPA can add great value to your company.

IRUPA values each of its individual partners with the upmost respect and are devoted to building long lasting relationships.

If you would like to hear more about IRUPA and the possibilities that there are for your organisation please contact Keith Young, IRUPA's Events & Sponsorship Manager on [keith.young@irupa.ie](mailto:keith.young@irupa.ie)



# Our partners and supporters

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## Supporters

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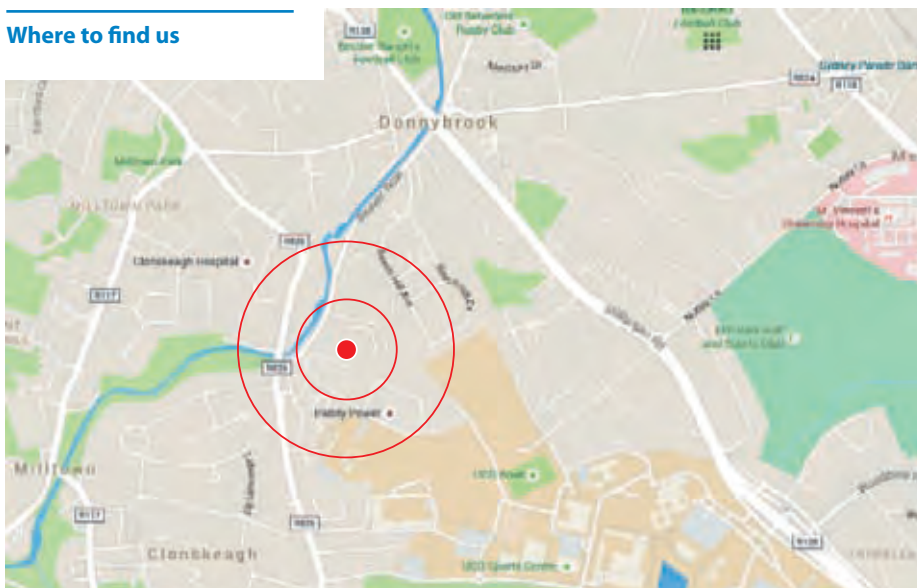
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# RUGBY PLAYERS MEAN BUSINESS



The skillsets of elite athletes are well recognised as being very transferable to the workplace. We believe that our members have a lot to offer potential employers.

Through the IRUPA Affiliates Scheme we are inviting businesses and organisations throughout Ireland to officially link with us in providing career support that specifically meets the needs and flexibility of current and/or former players.



## What is IRUPA looking for?

- Key contacts within organisations who have decision-making authority
- Organisations willing to provide structured externships for players

An externship is an experiential learning opportunity to give players practical experience in the workplace.

An externship can include one or some of the following elements:

- Internship
- Job shadowing
- Mentoring
- Graduate trainee programme
- Workplace visit
- Sponsorship
- Flexible employment
- Post career opportunities

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