



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

IN TOUCH



IRUPA

protecting player welfare

Winter 2015 Volume 26



STATE of the rugby NATION

IRUPA Members Survey

Mils Muliaina Interview / **The November Clubhouse** / Academy Star Jack O'Donoghue / **Player Externship Programme**



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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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Credits

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CEO address

Omar Hassanein

The recent IRUPA Clubhouse event in November saw two of the Clubhouse's more recognizable members in Stephen Ferris and Denis Hickie on stage. Whilst the banter with the lads was all in good humour, for me it was a further reminder of the challenge that guys like Stephen and Denis face – the challenge of developing and managing their newfound identity in the aftermath of professional rugby.



The term athletic identity is one sometimes used in professional sporting circles, referring to the extent to which the player identifies with the role of an athlete and how they perceive themselves. All of our professional rugby players in Ireland possess varying degrees of athletic identity – in most cases a very strong athletic identity is seen as pre-requisite to this level of success. Whilst research has demonstrated that a strong athletic identity can lead to improved athletic performance, it also shows that some athletes potentially have too strong an athletic identity, and may face negative psychological risk both throughout their career and afterwards – particularly if their career ends prematurely, or not on their own terms.

If we take the case of the current player for the moment, it is interesting to observe the way in which those with high athletic identity react to

injury. It has been shown that athletes with a higher athletic identity are more vulnerable to depression after experiencing an injury than those with a weaker athletic identity. Athletic identity was also shown to be a positive predictor of rehabilitation over-adherence, with research concluding that individuals with a strong athletic identity may feel compelled to expedite their rehabilitation and return to sport as quickly as possible in order to resume the activity that defines them. This in itself can often be fraught with negative consequences for both the player and the team.

Moving along to the transitioning player, it is important to understand the very real impact that comes about with retirement. For many of our players, their sporting career governs many of the choices that they make, the recognition that they receive from the media and the general public,

their income, their daily routine and consequently how they view themselves as individuals i.e. their identity. Suddenly having this removed creates a real and genuine impact as players struggle to adjust to the lack of structure and direction without sport in their lives.

For many retired players, life without sport is a grieving process and then a rebuilding process. The rebuilding process can take a long time for these professionals, particularly for those who were so attached to the concept of being an athlete that they struggle to develop a new form of identity that defines them. A recent IRUPA survey amongst its Clubhouse members quantified the extent of this challenge in Irish rugby, with 31% of retired rugby players claiming not to be in control of their lives within two years of retiring.

The cases of Denis and Stephen both highlight different stories of managing



“It is important to understand the very real impact that comes about with retirement.

For many of our players, their sporting career governs how they see themselves as individuals.”

identity. Denis is now seven years retired, yet still engaging in a whole lot of personal reflection as to where to take the next phase of his professional life. Possessing an abundance of positive attributes, Denis chose to go down the path of working in renewable energy since his retirement, however he is now in a period of further reassessment about what exactly his identity should look like in the coming years.

Stephen on the other hand is more recently retired, however a series of repeated injuries left him with a more immediate challenge – one of having to find and deal with his new identity very quickly. Despite having diligently put a number of the right markers in place throughout his career, Stephen's biggest challenge was realizing what his new identity would look like. Whilst managing to carve out a niche in the area of corporate entertainment over the past year, Stephen has now decided to

go off traveling for a few months in order to help discover his new identity.

In summary, players should be committed to their pursuit of professional rugby but not at the sacrifice of other pieces of their identity. Players who hold a very strong athletic identity need to make every effort to develop other interests and pursuits outside of their professional rugby. The IRUPA/ IRFU Player Development Programme ensures adequate support structures are in place to help the players mentally and emotionally prepare for post rugby and for the development of alternative identities.

From an administrative point of view, an understanding of the entire player experience in this regard is needed from the central governing body, the provinces; and also from those closest to the players themselves i.e. family, friends and spouses.

Not only do we want to maximise the productivity of our players whilst they are still playing, but it is also in Irish rugby's interest generally to make sure that the newspapers are filled with positive stories of players transitioning out of the game, rather than negative ones.

We need to remember that our players aren't superhuman, they are people after all who happen to possess special talents and thus live a unique lifestyle for a finite period of their lives. Developing and managing alternative identities is just one of the challenges that comes with such a unique profession.

Omar Hassanein
Chief Executive



News from the Clubhouse

The IRUPA Clubhouse is gathering pace with events taking place every quarter. The goal of the Clubhouse is to keep past professional players in touch socially through match day events but also to provide access to networking through dedicated Clubhouse hospitality events for corporates and the business community.



The Clubhouse @ Leinster v Munster



In what is becoming an annual fixture, past players from Leinster and Munster set aside their differences to watch Leinster take on Munster at the Aviva stadium in October in the Guinness Pro12 derby fixture. Clubhouse Caretaker, Simon Keogh was joined by Gary Brown, Reggie Corrigan, Andy Dunne, Alain

Rolland, Liam Toland and David Wallace to name but a few.

Despite the on-field rivalry, the atmosphere in the Clubhouse was jovial (most of the time!) and the former players enjoyed catching up informally whilst taking in the action. Although it is a social event, a key focus for the clubhouse is to keep past professional players engaged with the sport they have given so much to during their rugby careers.



Leinster and Munster Clubhouse members rekindle their rivalry at the Aviva Stadium

The Pre-Match Clubhouse @ MSL Ballsbridge



MC Michael Jackson gets the pre-match thoughts of guest panellists and Clubhouse members, Denis Hickie and Stephen Ferris

IRUPA hosted the annual Autumn Series Clubhouse at MSL Ballsbridge in advance of Ireland's match against Australia. Almost 200 guests attended the event which allows our Clubhouse members meet together socially but also network with members of the corporate community in a less formal environment.

After lunch, guests were treated to a Q&A with alumni members Stephen Ferris and Denis Hickie which was hosted by Michael Jackson in his own inimitable style. You can read more about the event on page 12.

If you are interested in hearing more about hospitality options at IRUPA Clubhouse events, please email: keith.young@irupa.ie

IRUPA Player Survey

Thank you to all our members who took the time to complete the IRUPA Player Survey which was managed externally by Accenture Analytics.

Overall we had a fantastic response rate of 85%, which was very pleasing and again thank you for your engagement. The survey has provided IRUPA with vital statistics across a range of key areas including medical, team environments, agents, finance and mental health to name but a few. The survey results will prove instrumental in allowing us to better represent our members' views and also helps IRUPA to plan services and programmes which will continue to improve and develop our player welfare offerings.

You can read about some of the key findings and statistics on pages 10 and 11.



Acknowledging our support team

As a player representative body, IRUPA often utilises players to assist in our discussions which is of huge value when collectively combined.

In addition to this, IRUPA has a strong support team who put a lot of time into protecting players' rights. Assisting Simon Keogh and Omar Hassanein are the following people whom IRUPA is extremely grateful to: Peter McKenna, John Treacy and John Hynes who each put in enormous amounts of time on a voluntary basis, along with Michael Costello and Ciaran Medlar of BDO.

As always we rely on member support and feedback, please channel any thoughts you have relating to your employment through your IRUPA Executive Board representative or otherwise through the other members of your provincial player representative cell (as detailed below).



Connacht's Eoin McKeon, Robbie Henshaw, Ronan Loughney, John Muldoon and Kieran Marmion with IRUPA's Omar Hassanein and Simon Keogh

CONNACHT	LEINSTER	MUNSTER	ULSTER	INTERNATIONAL
Ronan Loughney	Rob Kearney	Paul O'Connell	Andrew Trimble	Jonathan Sexton
Eoin McKeon	Gordon Darcy	Billy Holland	Iain Henderson	
Robbie Henshaw	Shane Jennings	Peter O'Mahony	Rory Best	
Kieran Marmion	Eoin Reddan	Felix Jones	Darren Cave	
John Muldoon	Rhys Ruddock	Tommy O'Donnell	Stuart Olding	
	Kevin McLoughlin			
	Isaac Boss			

IRUPA CEO Omar Hassanein appointed to EU Athletes Board



IRUPA is delighted to announce that CEO Omar Hassanein has been appointed to the board of EU Athletes, the European Elite Athletes Association.

As well as helping to shape player welfare policy at a European level, the role will see Omar assist in advancing educational and athlete focused initiatives for the betterment of Irish and European based players' associations.

EU Athletes is a federation of European players associations and athlete unions representing more than 35 national associations and 25,000 individual athletes across the continent and across sporting disciplines. Founded in 2007, the association acts as an advocate for the athletes' voice on various issues such as Anti-Doping, match fixing with a focus on education and good governance.

EU Athletes is a recognised stakeholder in the sport sector at the European Union, the Council of Europe and EPAS and is also integrated into the wider labour movement as a member of UNI Sport Pro, the professional sports sector of the international trade union UNI Global Union and its European branch UNI Europa.

See more at www.euathletes.org

IRUPA welcomes Créde Sheehy-Kelly to Leinster PDM Role



Créde Sheehy-Kelly joins the IRUPA team as Player Development Manager for Leinster. A Sport and Performance Psychologist, Créde brings significant experience to the role having worked with professional and elite athletes across a wide range of individual and team sports, notably rugby, hurling, boxing, rowing, soccer and golf.

Her role will be to oversee the development and delivery of all aspects of the IRUPA Player Development Programme to Leinster Rugby. Key aspects include career and education, personal and professional development and player wellbeing. She will be responsible for all senior and academy squad members as well as Clubhouse (alumni) members in the Leinster region.

With a first class MSc in sport and exercise psychology and a BA in psychology, Créde understands the demands of professional sport, an insight which will prove invaluable in the role. She is committed to learning from world leaders in peak performance and in the past year her work has taken her to Hawaii for the PWA Windsurfing World Cup and to Red Bull's High Performance HQ in California. Créde is a member of the Irish Institute of Sport, the British Psychological Society (BPS) and the Psychological Society of Ireland (PSI).

Créde's appointment continues IRUPA's commitment to delivering a world class player development programme supported by local expertise and knowledge. Each representative squad now has a dedicated Player Development Manager ensuring consistency across the programme for all our members.

Sara Jane English takes up IRPA Role



IRUPA is delighted to announce that Communications Manager Sara Jane English will also take up the same role for our International association, IRPA.

As with Simon Keogh, Sara Jane will operate a split between the two organisations. With more than 15 years' experience in strategic sports communication and public relations, Sara Jane is looking forward to bringing her experience to the IRPA role. Some of the core areas for development include the IRPA rebrand, devising a strategic communications platform and implementation of a dedicated communications plan including social media.

Sara Jane will continue in her role as IRUPA Communications Manager, with responsibility for the development and implementation of the overall communications strategy and approach for IRUPA. This includes the management of all communications channels for IRUPA to both internal and external audiences. She is the association's longest serving member of staff having joined the team in 2008.

IRUPA at the Oireachtas Joint Committee on Health & Children



CEO Omar Hassanein was invited to present to the Oireachtas Joint Committee on Health and Children last month where the focus was on concussion in sport.

Representing our professional membership, the IRUPA presentation focused on the educational drive amongst professional players and the resulting increase in awareness levels.

Extract: The education of players is critical in driving the overall cultural shift required. IRUPA works closely with the IRFU in ensuring that Irish professional players are well informed of the potential longer term consequences that can arise from

the mistreatment of head injuries. As an indicator of how productive these educational measures have been in the past two to three years, we can refer back to an IRFU survey carried out in the 2011/12 season. Of those players who said they suffered from concussion and remained on the field, 95% did so because they didn't think concussion was a serious issue. Only two years later and an IRUPA survey carried out in late 2013 amongst the same professional player group revealed that 80% of the players were now concerned about concussion – a statistical turnaround that was no doubt based on increased awareness campaigns in the sport both globally and domestically.

As well as promoting the right type of educational material, there must always be a focus on loud vocal messaging from the right type of people, so as to break down long standing attitudes. Over the past few years there has been significant gains in this respect – a process that has required not only medical advisors and player representatives being vocal but also leading and respected players themselves. In a tough physical sport such as rugby the attitude of 'tough it out' is one that must be totally disregarded when it comes to the treatment of head injuries. Players becoming vocal themselves is the quickest and most effective way of breaking this down.

The report is now published and available to view on www.oireachtas.ie

Congratulations to Jonathan Sexton



IRUPA would like to congratulate our Board Appointed director Jonathan Sexton on his nomination for World Rugby Player of the Year 2014. One of only five nominees for the prestigious award and the only northern hemisphere player, Jonny was nominated by the panel who reviewed 45 matches before determining the shortlist.

The full list of the 2014 nominees were: Willie le Roux (South Africa), Brodie Retallick (New Zealand), Julian Savea (New Zealand), Jonathan Sexton (Ireland) and Duane Vermeulen (South Africa). The award, announced after the Autumn Internationals was won by New Zealand's Brodie Retallick.

Jonny received his nomination from the World Rugby panel as a result of being deemed the stand-out player for Ireland in 2014 as they claimed the Six Nations title, a first series win in Argentina in June and the scalp of South Africa in Dublin. His control of the game at out-half and perfect record from the kicking tee earned the 49-test veteran the man of the match award against the Springboks.

The World Rugby Player of the Year 2014 nominees were selected by the independent Awards panel, chaired by Australia's Rugby World Cup 1999 winning captain John Eales. The panel, comprising Will Greenwood, Gavin Hastings, Raphaël Ibanez, Francois Pienaar, Agustín Pichot, Scott Quinnell, Tana Umaga and Paul Wallace, has deliberated on every major Test played in 2014, starting with the RBS Six Nations and culminating with the November internationals.

Ireland Womens' Sevens win Dubai Invitational Sevens

Ireland have captured the Emirates Airline Dubai Invitational Women's title after topping their pool at the tournament in early December.

Ireland opened their account with a 12-12 draw against Russian side Moscow region, they followed this up with a 48-0 win over Georgia before beating Wales on a 33-5 scoreline. In the last game of the day they took top spot in their pool and clinched a semi-final place by beating the Kenyan Lionesses 47-5.

The semi-final proved a tough encounter with Almaty RFC running the Irish women close in a 24-19 result. Ireland went on to capture the title with a 19-0 victory over Australian side Tribe7s, who included a number of Dutch World Series players. Tries were scored by Alison Miller, captain Jenny Murphy and Martina McCarthy, with Claire Keohane adding two conversions.

The invitational tournament runs alongside the top tier World Series and this win is an important step for the team as they pursue their goal of qualification for the Olympics in Rio 2016.

EU Athletes Exchange Programme

Following on from hosting Player Development Managers from the French basketball and football Associations during the summer, IRUPA welcomed a representative from the Cricketers Association in England (PCA) as part of the EU Athletes Exchange Programme.

The initiative is aimed at sharing best practises amongst European Players' Associations, areas for knowledge sharing included transitioning from a professional sporting career, health and safety issues, education and career topics and protecting mental health.

Matt Wood representing the PCA shared his experiences and both associations traded invaluable lessons and initiatives from their respective player development models.

Professional Business Lunches

IRUPA has commenced a series of business lunches in partnership with our players at each Province.

The concept is to connect players with local business leaders and provide networking opportunities to assist in furthering their off field development. The initiative also aims to bring local businesses and organisations closer to the players and the game. The first event took place in Belfast in conjunction with Grafton recruitment who hosted the inaugural lunch at their offices in the heart of Belfast City. IRUPA player representatives, Andrew Trimble and Iain Henderson attended as well as IRUPA CEO Omar Hassanein and Ken Belshaw representing the IRUPA Ulster Player Development Working Party.



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STATE of the rugby NATION

IRUPA Members Survey

In October 2014, IRUPA members participated in a comprehensive and wide reaching survey across every aspect of their involvement in the game in Ireland.

Completely confidential, the survey was conducted independently by Accenture Analytics, based in Dublin's docklands. The survey provides IRUPA with significant data to help better plan for the future of the association and protect the welfare of all our members.

The survey topics sought to provide feedback and information on all aspects of the game and players' development both as rugby professionals on field and the impact rugby has on their lives off field.

Some of the topics covered in the survey include:

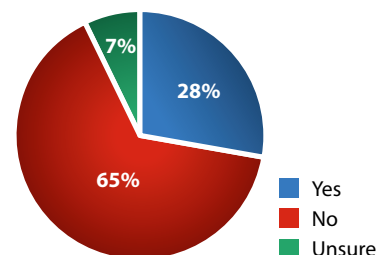
- *Contracts*
- *Employer relations*
- *Playing environments*
- *Medical and injuries*
- *Concussion*
- *Mental health*

- *Education and player development*
- *Player movement*
- *Player welfare*
- *Agents*
- *Gameload and season structure*
- *Integrity*
- *Image rights*
- *Commercial and sponsorship awareness*

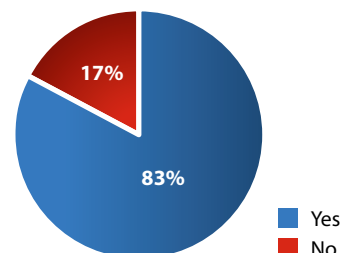
Whilst the final numbers and statistics are still being crunched below is a snapshot of some of the topics covered by the survey. It is worth highlighting that the survey achieved a total response rate of 86% and a minimum of 80% was achieved at each of the four provinces. This response rate, coupled with the fact that the survey was completed anonymously online makes the survey findings the most representative of our entire membership to date.

Concussion

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



Did you follow the return to play protocols after concussion?



Accenture Analytics

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- 35% of professional rugby players in Ireland claim to have been concussed or unsure if they have been concussed in the past 12 months.
- Players demonstrate a good general awareness on concussion and return to play protocols with 92% on average having a fair – excellent all round understanding in relation to this.
- Just over 3/5 players admit to having a good understanding of IRB guidelines on concussion
- 93% of players admit to having a fair-excellent understanding on the 'Return to Play' protocols however only 83% of those who were concussed admit to adhering to these protocols.

Mental Health – a snapshot

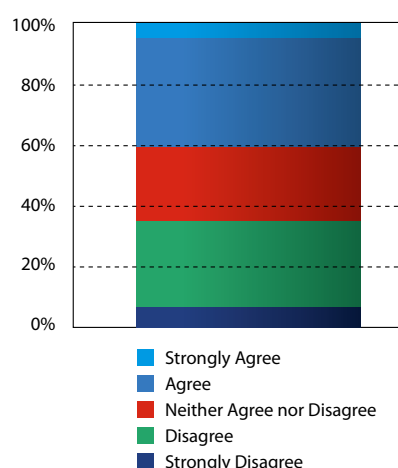
In terms of mental health the players were asked numerous questions to gain a picture of their understanding of their mental health. The questions ranged from a number of factors including excessive worry, lack of sleep and depression.

- Playing performance is the most common factor to contribute to excessive worrying for players with 67% of respondents admitting to regularly/always spending time worrying about playing performance.
- 74% of players have admitted suffering from excessive lack

of sleep due to worrying about playing performance.

- Out of the players who admitted to suffering from depression, 12% have concerns about their mental health and 53% would use a dedicated anonymous counsellor if available.

Does rugby affect your relationships negatively?



- 40% of players strongly agree or agree that rugby has a negative effect on their relationships outside of the game.

Player Development Programme

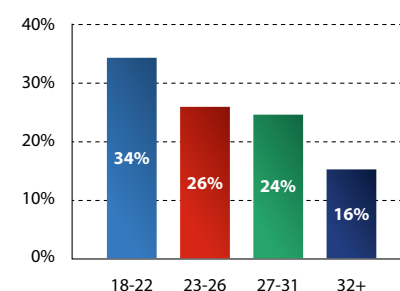
- 70% of players are actively working to develop a career outside of rugby however only 39% feel that they would have options if their career ended tomorrow.

- 65% feel that non rugby career development should be compulsory for all players and should be dedicated in their weekly timetable.
- 85% of players feel that pursuing an interest outside of rugby benefits their game.
- 60% of players agree that their management teams support non rugby career development

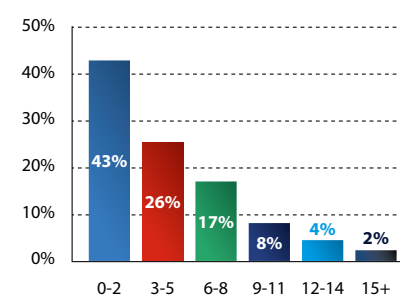
Respondents and Demographics

Respondents: 204

Age



Years as a playing professional



The November Club



Clubhouse

Ireland v Australia



IRUPA
Clubhouse
Past Player Alumni

IRELAND v AUSTRALIA NOVEMBER CLUBHOUSE EVENT

A car show room is not the first place you think of when hosting match day hospitality but when IRUPA planned their November Series Clubhouse event, the idea was to provide guests with a unique and individual experience and the Clubhouse at MSL Ballsbridge did not disappoint.

Hosted in advance of the Ireland v Australia match on November 22nd, the event provided ample opportunity for guests to mingle and chat before sitting down to lunch and a special match preview with a panel of former greats of the game. Guests were welcomed by IRUPA CEO Omar Hassanein who, as an Australian working with Irish rugby players weathered the good natured jibes from the assembled guests with grace and aplomb.

More than 200 guests including current and past players attended the event which saw the showroom at MSL transformed into a premium dining experience. The location just inside the match day cordon meant guests could make the most of the day before taking a leisurely stroll to the ground to see Ireland take on the Wallabies.

The highlight of the afternoon was the Q&A, ably hosted by MC Michael Jackson who was joined onstage by Clubhouse members, Stephen Ferris and Denis Hickie

- 1 An attentive audience for the match preview
- 2 IRUPA CEO Omar Hassanein with Ulster Player Development Manager, Pamela Gilpin, David Jameson and MC Michael Jackson
- 3 Clubhouse member, Stephen Ferris
- 4 Stephen Ferris and Denis Hickie present the signed Irish jersey to raffle winner, Clare Johnston



4



who treated guests to a preview of the Ireland v Australia match as well as giving their expert insights into Ireland under head coach Joe Schmidt.

After some questions from the audience, there was just enough time for the draw for a framed jersey signed by the Irish squad, there were whoops and hollers from the delighted winner who had travelled from Belfast for the match that morning. As well as the lovely piece of memorabilia, the winner also was presented with the prize by Stephen Ferris and Denis Hickie.

The concept of the Clubhouse – a now annual event following its launch in November 2013 – is to bring members of the business community closer to IRUPA members, both past and present in an informal environment.

IRUPA would like to thank all our corporate guests for their support and we hope they enjoyed the Clubhouse experience, we would also like to thank MSL Ballsbridge for providing the venue and Heineken Ireland for their kind support.

If you would like to join the mailing list for future IRUPA events, please email: keith.young@irupa.ie

- 5 IRUPA CEO Omar Hassanein welcomes the Clubhouse guests
- 6 A transformed MSL Ballsbridge
- 7 Simon Zebo scores the first try of the game
- 8 Robbie Henshaw wins in the air against Bernard Foley
- 9 Denis Hickie and Stephen Ferris are put through their paces by MC Michael Jackson

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Interview by
Jonathan Bradley



Olding's new

Sandwiched between notable victories over South Africa and Australia, Ireland's comfortable win against Georgia last November seems set to become something of a historical footnote, but, for Stuart Olding at least, it is a game that will live long in the memory.

The young Ulster centre earned his second Test cap against the eastern Europeans that day – his debut having come against the USA in 2013 – but it was his first appearance in green since rupturing the anterior cruciate ligament of his right knee while representing the Ulster Ravens back in November of 2013.

So when, in the 74th minute of the Test at the Aviva Stadium, the 21-year-old crossed the line for his first international score, the unbridled joy was there for all to see and it was pictures of his beaming face that adorned the back pages of the next day's newspapers.

Recalling the moment, Olding said: "I'm generally a pretty happy person but you could tell I was delighted with that. I always dreamed of scoring for Ireland so it was great.

"One of the goals I wanted to achieve coming off the injury was to play for Ireland again as quickly as I could

and thankfully I was able to do that in November.

"It's been great even just to get back into the environment. You know that when you're going down to camp, even if it's just for a few days during the week, that you're going to learn a hell of a lot.

"With the quality of players, and the success that there's been over the last year or so, it just gives everyone a huge drive to try and be involved as much as you can."

His quick ascension back to Test level is a testament to the hard work Olding put in during his lengthy spell on the sidelines.



Out of the fold for ten months after the unfortunate night at Deramore Park in Belfast, he was Ulster's best player on his return to action – in the season-opening draw against the Scarlets back in September – and has resumed his career with a new perspective on the sport.



ambitions

"I'm just delighted to be back playing rugby," he enthused.

"For something that serious to happen so early in my career, there was always going to be a lot to get through to get back on the pitch.

Maybe before it's the kind of thing that you take for granted but now I just want to play as many games as possible.

"It was frustrating not being able to play in games or train with the guys but I basically had to take it as a challenge. I wanted to come back bigger and better. With all the rehab stuff that the Ulster medical guys up here gave me to do, and the S&C coaches helping me all the way, I was confident that I was going to be able to do that."

His return to fitness has left him well positioned to nail down a spot in Joe Schmidt's plans for this year's World Cup, a competition he has dreamed of being involved in since watching on with admiration as Jonny Wilkinson secured the Webb Ellis Cup for England back in 2003.

Having played against potential rivals for a squad place in all three of Ulster's inter-provincial derbies to date this season, Olding is under no illusions that the competition for spots is already heating up.

"Playing in the interpros over Christmas there, I definitely thought there was more of an edge and that's just from guys fighting to be involved in the Six Nations. If you play well in the Six

Nations, then you'd probably be involved in the training squad and then you just take it from there.

"It's massive. Once every four years, it's just a thing that you have to be involved in. It's a must for an international rugby player really. If you miss the boat this year, then you have to wait another four years so everyone will just be putting their head down, training well, hoping to play well, and then crossing their fingers that they get the call-up."

Should that call come from Joe Schmidt this summer then, given all he was went through over the previous year, you get the feeling that few would begrudge Olding his chance on the biggest stage of all.

Irish Women's Sevens Update

Souston Sevens, Biarritz

IRUPA's player development manager with the Irish Women's Sevens, Kate Kirby, travelled to France in November to see the team in action at the Souston Sevens.

As well as looking after the lifestyle needs of the squad off the pitch, Kate's background in sport psychology also qualifies her to play a role in developing the mental skills of the players on the pitch. The competition was seen as a warm-up tournament on the road to Olympic qualification next year. A number of the World Series teams brought strong panels with them and Ireland faced a tough group, including England, Spain and Wales who finished ahead of Ireland in last summer's European championships.

Ireland's travelling squad included Jenny Murphy and Ashleigh Baxter, making their first return to competitive rugby since their heroics at the 15s World Cup. The tournament also marked Lucy Mulhall's international debut. The Wicklow player, who has a Gaelic football background, came through the Talent ID programme during the summer and progressed into the Ireland Sevens senior squad in July when she centralised.

Ireland started the day brightly with a 33-7 win over Wales. St. Mary's flyer

Martina McCarthy scored a brace of tries in the tournament opener, while Katie Fitzhenry, Shannon Houston and Hannah Tyrrell also touched down. Ireland came up against a strong England side in their second game and were beaten 24-5, with Tralee's Siobhan Barrett scoring their only try. Next up was World Series team Spain and a thrilling victory ensued with Ireland running out winners by 17-7. Claire Keohane added one conversion to tries from McCarthy and Barrett (2).

This earned the girls in green a shot at the 3rd/4th place play-off where they came up against England again. The final score of 38-7, with Fitzhenry crossing for the girls in green, belied an excellent first half performance from the Irish squad, who were visibly tired in the second half.

The tournament marked a significant step up in performance for the players since their last competitive outing in July, when they were well beaten by both Wales and Spain. Clearly, the many weeks of hard physical and technical training are paying dividends, and with the continued professionalism and commitment from this group of players, the future of Irish Women's Sevens Rugby looks bright.

Ireland Women's Sevens Squad

(France Women's Sevens Tournament, Biarritz, Saturday, November 15):

*Siobhan Barrett
Ashleigh Baxter
Nicole Cronin
Katie Fitzhenry
Shannon Houston (capt)*

*Claire Keohane
Martina McCarthy
Lucy Mulhall
Jenny Murphy
Elaine Ryan
Hannah Tyrrell
Laura Lee Walsh*

Sevens Challenge Matches v Tribe7s

On their return from Biarritz, the Sevens squad took part in a day of challenge matches where they took on touring side, Tribe7's.

Ireland had 2 sides playing, an "A" team and a development squad, both of which played 2 games each during the day which was held on the back pitches at the Aviva Stadium. The day presented an opportunity for the entire squad to get some match practise with all members getting some game time. It was a clean sweep with the Irish women being successful in all four games.

Tribe7's are an invitational touring squad who give young cross-over athletes the opportunity to play with and against some of the best Sevens players in the world. Established in Australia in 2013, the concept is to develop future Olympians, the touring squad who played Ireland was made of international players from several countries including Australia and Holland.



Women's Seven Visit IRUPA HQ

Following their very successful open day, IRUPA hosted the full Sevens squad for dinner and informal networking at IRUPA HQ in Clonskeagh.

The event gave the squad the opportunity to meet IRUPA staff and supporters of the Sevens PDP programme including BNY Mellon Managing Director Arlene Allen who was presented with a signed Ireland Sevens jersey as a token of appreciation from the squad and management for their support. Former coach Jon Skurr outlined their plans for the coming months and thanked IRUPA and Women's Seven PDM Kate Kirby for the work undertaken supporting the women in their training.

IRUPA members, Shane Jennings and Rhys Ruddock also dropped by to meet the squad.



Social Media Guidelines Presentation

One of the five core areas delivered under the IRUPA Player Development Programme is Player Image which covers media skills, brand awareness, social responsibility and leadership.

As part of this development, IRUPA Communications Manager Sara Jane English delivered a presentation on Social Media guidelines to the squad and management at their training base in DCU. The presentation focused on the current IRFU and IRUPA agreed guidelines around social media and offered practical examples and advice as to how to best utilise social media and how to avoid common pitfalls.

Working Party

Eleanor McEvoy, Chief Executive of Budget Energy has been appointed to the Women's Sevens Working Party. Eleanor is the founder of Budget Energy, an electricity supply company based in Northern Ireland.



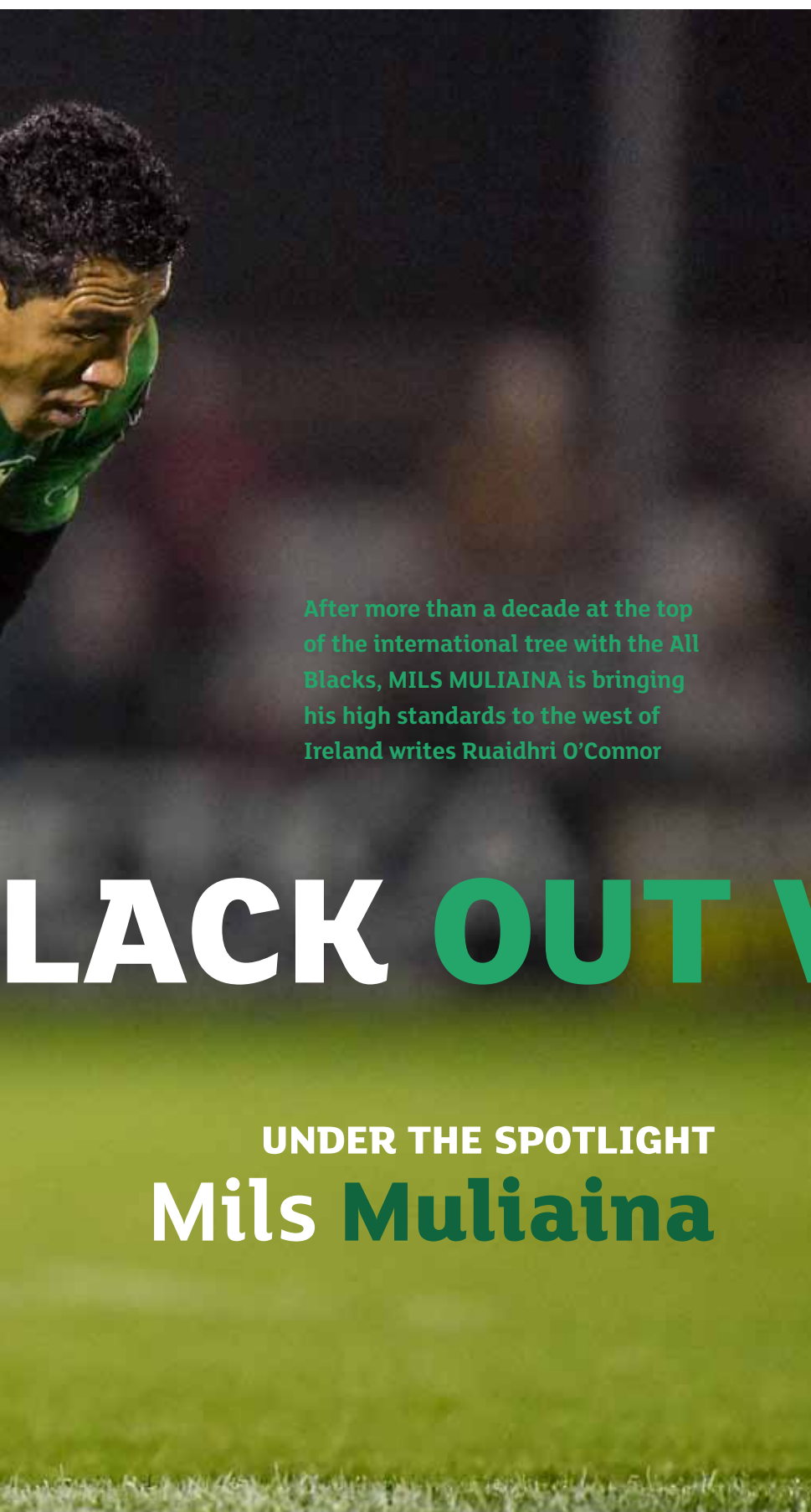
With her vast business experience Eleanor is an invaluable addition to the working party and her contacts and networks throughout the business community along with her business acumen will be a fantastic asset to the programme.

Founded in 2009 by Eleanor McEvoy, Budget Energy supplies electricity to domestic and commercial customers across Northern Ireland, the company commenced trading in 2011 and now has over 40,000 customers.

Before launching Budget Energy, Eleanor McEvoy built and sold two other successful businesses, Pembroke Distributors, a food distribution and vending company which she sold in 2001, and Phonecard Warehouse, sold in 2006 with a net turnover of €50 million.

Eleanor and Budget Energy were nominated for the EY Entrepreneur Of The Year in 2013.





After more than a decade at the top of the international tree with the All Blacks, MILS MULIAINA is bringing his high standards to the west of Ireland writes Ruaidhri O'Connor

LACK OUT WEST

UNDER THE SPOTLIGHT
Mils Muliana



Interview by
Ruaidhri O'Connor
Irish Independent
@ruaidhriOC

THE sight of All Black centurion Mils Muliana wearing the green of Connacht takes some getting used to but the full-back himself is settling in well in Galway.

So much so that he's even picked up a little bit of the local lingo. He and coach Pat Lam may have the same Samoan roots, but every morning they exchange a greeting as Gaeilge as part of the former back-rows attempts to bring Connacht's standards up by reforming the culture at the province.

Capturing the experienced campaigner was the transfer coup of the summer by Lam and so far it is going well. The westerners are riding high in the Guinness Pro12 and on track for the top six finish they aimed for last at the start of the campaign.

Muliana spent most of the first part of the season on the sidelines watching on due to an elbow injury, but his dual role as a mentor as well as a player meant his influence was already being felt by youngsters like Darragh Leader, Jack Carty and Robbie Henshaw.

He wants to be known for his good play, primarily, but he has found the team culture to be strong at his new club.

"People don't probably realise the importance of it, if you create the right culture it goes from there," he explains.

"I've been in teams with the best players around talent-wise but the culture's been no good and that affects how you play, I've been in other teams that wouldn't



“Now walking into the Connacht dressing-room it’s about having guys follow your lead, leading by example – not only on the pitch but off it”



Years of experience earned playing in the world’s most famous jersey have helped him settle quickly.

“The young Mils would probably come in a bit hesitantly and follow the ways of the older guys, but now walking into the Connacht dressing-room it’s about having guys follow your lead, leading by example – not only on the pitch but off it. To drive the things we want to get better at off the field,” he says.

“That’s probably been my biggest thing since I’ve been here, there’s a lot of young guys and it’s about helping them get the best out of themselves. I don’t want them thinking, ‘here’s Mils walking in now and we can’t say this or that’ – it’s not about that, I’ve never been that sort of a person no matter how many games I’ve played.”

He understands that the young players need some help because he has been there himself and it was Munster legend Doug Howlett who was there to help him along the way.

“My mother and older brother helped me a long way, kept me out of trouble I suppose, seeing a bigger picture,” he recalls.

“It wasn’t until I got to Auckland and hung out with Doug Howlett a heck of a lot and I looked up to him, he was playing on the wing and we hung out quite a bit, he’d share things like some of the lines I could better run, some of his secrets I suppose that made him an All Black.

“When I became an All Black he kept feeding me more and more things, so when I look back on it now he played a big part in making sure I did the right things at the right times, making sure I ticked all the right boxes and he was a big help.

“I grew up in a small little city and making the grades and getting into provincial sides at U-14s and stuff, I don’t think I actually realised my full potential until I left Invercargill and went to Auckland.

“That’s where it all started, it wasn’t at an early age it was when I was in my early 20s when I started to realise I could make a profession out of this.

“I think it was a benefit, being down in a little town you’re a big fish and it wasn’t until I got to Auckland where there was so many talented people up there that could easily make a national team and you have to find out yourself what are the extra things I needed to do to be better than those other people.

“It excited me, it challenged me to drive myself to be better at the things I needed to be better at, to train a bit harder and I suppose I strove to become a better footballer.

“As I started to make the NPC teams, the Super Rugby teams I got a taste of it and I wanted more and more, being an All Black the expectation is that it is often harder to keep your spot than to gain it and I loved that expectation – that was something that was always a part of me.

“That hasn’t changed, even though I’m here my expectation is to always play well and I love being able to have that expectation to be the best I can be.”

have had the same ability in terms of the players, but the culture has been strong and that’s improved them.

“Pat’s installed that here, going back to your roots and learning about where the guys have come from.

“It’s about creating that culture where you learn a bit about being out here in the west and appreciating the people. Every morning we say ‘dia dhuit’ now because Pat wants us to embrace that, it’s really good and it’s shone out in the tighter games that maybe they’d lose in the past.

“That culture has brought us a long way to believing that we can win those tight games and certainly we have in the last three or four weeks.”



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Professional Development UPDATE

With the vast majority of players engaged in education, the focus for the coming season is that of professional development.

Key to this is the continuation of the Mentoring and Networking Programme delivered through our partnership with the Institute of Directors (IoD) and IoDNI and the short upskilling courses provided by professional partners. This season will also see a major new development through the establishment and roll out of a Player Externship Programme (PEP). The PEP initiative will proactively match and place players in a relevant workplace to give them hands on experience of the working environment and projects through shadowing. (See page 27 for more on the PEP)

In addition players can also gain Board experience and build on their governance skills through the IRUPA Board Placement Panel, an IRUPA driven initiative which matches players onto the Boards of charitable and non-profit organisations.

IRUPA has always recognised the transferrable skills that players can bring to an organisation, and thankfully business and industry leaders are now taking note. Professional rugby players have already tasted success and proved their ability in a highly professional environment. They develop skills important to business such as goal setting, achieving targets, recovery from setbacks, communication under pressure and the pursuit of success.



The skills that are developed during a professional rugby career make our members a highly desirable group for recruiters. When combined with inherent traits such as leadership, commitment, motivation, team ethos and work ethic which are directly transferable and highly valued and relevant to the workplace it makes a professional rugby player an ideal choice for future employers.

Professional Development Initiatives to be delivered across 2015 include:

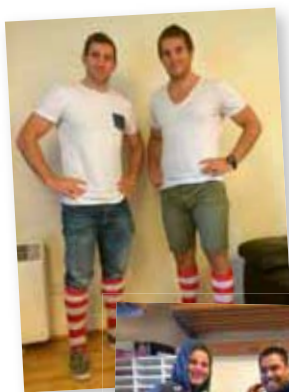
- Player Externship Programme
- Board Placement Panel
- LinkedIn workshops
- Mentoring Programme
- Upskilling Workshops
- CV Building skills
- Networking Opportunities

Board Placement Panel

The Board Placement Panel initiative is a bespoke programme being developed by IRUPA to assist in placing our members on the Boards of charitable organisations and associations.

The initiative allows our members gain governance and board experience whilst also learning more about the organisation in which they are placed. Having already placed a large number of players through associations with Boardmatch and Business on Board, the IRUPA Board Placement Panel is earmarked for delivery from early 2015.

One of the great success stories is that of Leinster's **Shane Jennings** who joined the Board of Trustees of Ronald McDonald. Shane is also a very active ambassador for The Ronald McDonald



House and visits the House regularly to meet with families.

Through Shane, the provinces of Munster and Connacht came together with Leinster to promote the Ronald McDonald House Charities (RMHC) Ireland nationwide. Johnie Murphy (Munster) and Jake Hennen (Connacht) as well as members of Leinster Rugby donned the iconic stripy socks as part of the RMHC 10th anniversary celebrations.

Working Party Updates

IRUPA is delighted to announce a number of new appointments to the various National and Provincial working parties.

In Connacht, **Eoin McKeon** has been appointed as Player Development Representative to the Connacht Working Party where he takes over from Eoin



The National Player Development Board meet in December

Griffin following his move to London Irish. Eoin is a native of Galway and plays in the back row. He recently qualified from NUIG with a degree in Mechanical Engineering. Eoin joins Tim Allnutt (Senior Team Manager), Nigel Carolan (Academy Team Manager and Irish u20's coach), Breandan O'Callaran, PDP Board Member and IRUPA Player Development Manager for Connacht, Deirdre Lyons.



Following the appointment of Andrew Trimble to the IRUPA Executive Board, **Iain Henderson** has been appointed as the Ulster Player Development Representative.

The Womens' Sevens Working party is delighted to welcome **Eleanor McEvoy** who joins the player representative Laura Lee Walsh, team manager Gillian McDarby and IRUPA PDM Kate Kirby.

IRUPA Staffing

Former IRUPA chairman Marcus Horan has unfortunately had to finish up his employment with IRUPA.

Marcus would love to have continued in his role of Player Development Manager (PDM) to Munster Rugby, however was

unable to give it the full attention it deserves with his study commitments for his Masters at Setanta College.

IRUPA would like to pay tribute to Marcus who served admirably as a PDM for nine months, adjusting to the specifics of the role very capably whilst also fitting into the IRUPA culture seamlessly. I'm sure you'll join us in wishing Marcus the best of luck in his future challenges.

We would like to welcome on board **Derval O'Rourke** who will take over from Marcus as the Munster Player Development Manager.

IRUPA is delighted to welcome **Créde Sheehy-Kelly** to the team where she will take up the role of Player Development Manager for Leinster Rugby.

National Player Development Board

A meeting of the Player Development Programme National Board took place in December.

The meeting which directs policy and direction for the Player Development Programme was chaired by Ken Belshaw; a member of the Ulster working party and attendees included: Roger Downer, a member of the Munster Working Party and President Emeritus at the University of Limerick; Breandan O'Callaran, representing the Connacht Working Party; entrepreneur Eleanor McEvoy representing the Womens' Sevens Working Party; IRUPA CEO Omar Hassanein; Brian O'Driscoll, representing the players and the five IRUPA Player Development Managers.



IRUPA Player Development Managers Deirdre Lyons and Derval O'Rourke with Munster Rugby graduates, Doug Howlett and Donnacha Ryan

CIT HELPS IRUPA MEMBERS EXPAND THEIR OFF-PITCH DEVELOPMENT

Recognising a need to develop the skills of rugby players outside the sport, particularly in the area of business, Cork Institute of Technology, IRUPA and Munster Rugby, developed a "Certificate in Enterprise Potential" to promote and protect the welfare of their members by endeavouring to safeguard their futures, both on and off the pitch. The first graduates from the programme were presented with their certificates at a ceremony at CIT in November.

IRUPA approached CIT to develop an enterprise and business focused course. CIT's School of Business designed, developed and delivered a 30-week, 20-credit, Special Purpose Award called "Certificate in Enterprise Potential". The aim of the course is to provide participants with the skills to understand how an enterprise operates and the steps involved in turning an idea into a business opportunity. On completion of the course, participants are sufficiently well informed to consider self-employment as a career option.

According to Dr Breda Kenny, Head of CIT's Hincks Centre of Entrepreneurship Excellence, CIT adopted a flexible approach in order to cater to the distinct needs of the players. "The CIT setting for this programme allowed the players to plug in to the wider entrepreneurship eco-system and provided access to entrepreneurs and support staff in, for instance, the Rubicon Centre, and lecturers and specialists in all the relevant subject areas to provide the right balance between theory and practice.

We have used the programme as a basis for a research study of the broader issue of the entrepreneurial learning needs of professional athletes in career transition and believe that while the Certificate in Entrepreneurship Potential was a tailored programme for professional rugby players, we now have a proven model that we plan to expand to other sporting cohorts, such as GAA players, Golf, Athletics etc."

CIT School of Business delivers courses and research in a number of areas including accounting, information systems, management and marketing. The School of Business is a constituent school of the Faculty of Business and Humanities.



Graduations in Connacht

IRUPA would like to congratulate Connacht Rugby players, Eoin McKeon and Darragh Leader who both recently graduated from NUI Galway.

It is a fantastic achievement for both men from Galway who worked hard to balance their hectic rugby training and playing schedules with the demands of a university degree.

23-year-old McKeon graduated with a degree in Mechanical Engineering while Leader, 21, collected his BComm degree in the same week he received his first call up to the Ireland training squad for the 2014 GUINNESS November Series.

Local Enterprise Office (LEO), Galway offer support to players interested in starting their own business

Breda Fox from the Local Enterprise Office (LEO), Galway visited Connacht Rugby in December and spoke to the players about the supports available to people interested in starting their own business.

Many players express an interest in working for themselves once their playing careers have ended, and indeed a few enter into business while they are still playing. LEO is offering the players practical, one-to-one sessions with Breda to better understand their needs. LEO is also offering players who have a business idea places on its Lean Launch programme, where the players would mix with other budding entrepreneurs to generate ideas and business plans. LEO is also hoping to run a business ideas workshop for players who would like to start their own business but as yet do not know what type of business they would like to work in, or are suited to.



IRUPA Player Externship Programme

The IRUPA Player Development Programme will be focusing on delivering further professional development opportunities during this season. As part of this IRUPA is delighted to announce the launch of a major new initiative through the establishment and roll out of the IRUPA Player Externship Programme (PEP).

The PEP will proactively match and place players in a relevant workplace to give them hands on experience of their preferred working environment, company or organisation.

What is the PEP?

The purpose of the Player Externship Programme is to give players an insight into, and the practical experience of, the business and commercial worlds.

How do players benefit?

The aim of the PEP is to provide valuable career insights into the day-to-day operations of a business or organisation. These career insights and experiences can help players decide upon career options for the future and help populate a more comprehensive CV and portfolio over a number of years. This is especially relevant in the current climate where a generation of players have now progressed in to rugby straight from school, college or university.

Do Players have the time?

All externships will be organised to fit with training and playing commitments. Companies can be flexible but we anticipate week long blocks to be more successful than individual days spread over weeks. A likely time would be during autumn and spring Internationals plus any other pre-identified breaks from training. This remains flexible and will reflect the players' schedules.



What will Players be doing?

Players and companies will be matched according to what job sectors, skills and experiences players need in order to develop as a person. It is likely that there will be shadowing of key people within the business, tasks and projects will be assigned and their development over the Externship will be mapped and recorded.

Through the IRUPA PEP players will...

- Have access to individual post-playing career planning
- Gain industry-specific experience
- Have access to relevant networks both local and international
- Develop skills outside of rugby

Players across all provinces have been signing up to the PEP. The initiative is designed to give them the opportunity to be part of a company or business in



a specific job they would like to pursue post rugby and to help develop skills players know they will need in the future. Players should contact their Provincial PDM for more information on how to get involved.

Are you a company interested in participating in the PEP, do you have the time and resources to provide training, shadowing and an insight into your business? If you would like to get involved, contact: info@irupa.ie



Derval's Diary

Derval O'Rourke *Munster PDM*

I started working for IRUPA in October. My role is player development manager (PDM) and the province I look after in this role is Munster. In this piece I will talk a little about the work I've been doing and how I'm finding the change from running to rugby!

From the start of the job I noticed that everyday can be really different. I split my time between Cork, Limerick and Dublin. My role is part time, 3 days each week, this means plenty of time spent in my car. I know the best routes between Cork and Limerick almost as well as the players at this stage! I'm also very familiar with the Cork to Dublin road.

When I'm in Cork or Limerick I normally have individual meetings with players at their training base. The meetings are a relaxed chat that revolves around different off pitch topics. These can range from college to work placements to charity work to budgeting and so on.

So far I've been really impressed by the players. Being a professional rugby player is a full time job and seeing the work that many players do off pitch is impressive.

My background is in an individual sport and the difference is massive. I was able to set my own schedule which meant off track commitments were far easier to work out. Being in a team sport is

definitely more of a fine balancing act.

I get sent the players' schedules each week and figure out from these when is best to arrange meetings. Some days are so packed that I know the players will not have any free time to meet me, whilst others offer a good opportunity to catch up. One of the first things I noticed about the schedules is that each training day the kit to wear to training is specified, for example it might read 'Tuesday black training kit'. It makes sense but it's something that would never happen in running. If you told a bunch of runners to wear the same kit to training they would probably do the opposite! I think runners are a far more stubborn bunch than rugby players.

Most weeks I go to Dublin to spend time in the main IRUPA office and catch up with the other PDM's. It's really beneficial



who is the PDM for Connacht identified a need for part time work options for the academy players and got a contact to connect them with an event management company. She shared this information with me and then I did the same for the Munster academy players.

In recent weeks some of the academy players

have been volunteering with the Irish Guide Dogs. Volunteering is an activity that I feel strongly about. I volunteered in the DSPCA for a year whilst I was training for the Olympics. It gave me a real appreciation of the work that is

done by lots of very selfless people. It's great to see the lads getting stuck in and making a difference. I'm looking forward to branching out to a few more organisations and even more volunteering in 2015.

2015 will be an exciting time in IRUPA with lots of new projects in the pipeline. One of which is a big push for player work experience and this is being done through the Player Externship Programme. It's a great chance for players to add to their CV and make business contacts. I'm looking forward to a busy and productive year in the PDM role.

to sit down and have meetings with the other staff. Often there are similar situations in all the provinces and talking these through with the other PDM's makes finding a solution far easier. An example of this is with part time work for the academy players. Deirdre Lyons

MUNSTER PDM

Derval O'Rourke

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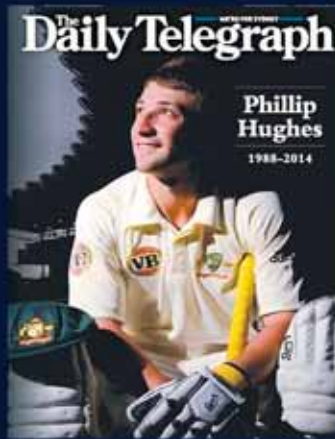
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By Adam D'Arcy

No easy way

The sudden death of Australian cricketer Phillip Hughes has had a profound impact on the lives of many across the globe.

Residing in Sydney myself, the city in which Hughes created many milestones on the pitch as both an Australian and New South Wales batsman, I've witnessed first hand the outpouring of grief and shock from members of the local community.

The overwhelming response at what can only be described as a freak accident, has come from within the Australian cricketing fraternity, as well as those outside the sporting circle, those unaware of Hughes' status in what is our country's national game.

The reason for such a widespread response, is that the tragedy occurred playing sport. Sport is meant to be enjoyable, challenging, and rewarding. We want our kids to play sport, it teaches them the values of teamwork, respect and loyalty.

Incidents like this shouldn't happen.

He was wearing a helmet.

He had protection.

People get injured playing sport, they recover and return. They don't die.

He was just enjoying the game he loved with some of his closest mates.

As I said, a freak accident.

The recent tragedy has brought back memories of the death of my good friend Nevin Spence, a team mate whilst I was at Ulster. I didn't know Hughes personally, but in a lot of ways, hearing about him through the tributes from his



fellow cricketers, friends and family, his story sounds a lot like Nevin's.

Well liked by everyone, a promising future ahead of him, they both had a character that would light up the room, and both were taken away from us far too early.

I can remember back to that night when I heard the news about Nevin, and to this day, like Australian captain Michael Clarke said in his eulogy of Hughes, I still expect to see him pop his head round the corner, recite one of his terrible jokes with that goofy grin, then get back to training as hard as he could.

It only seems like yesterday that I heard the news of Nevins passing. I remember back to feeling empty, trying to come to terms with how and why this could happen to such a tremendous human being.

I was injured at the time, but questions were being asked around the Ulster camp about what do we do next? Do we train tomorrow? Should we play this weekend? How can we help his family?

There was no right or wrong answer.

I want to focus on the impact tragic events like this have on the playing group in particular. It's what we went through at Ulster, and it's what the South Australian and Australian cricket team are going through right now.

A professional sporting team is very much like a family. You spend almost every day together training and playing, so when a



**family member is lost,
it impacts severely on
each individual and
collectively as a whole.**

The first thing to remember is that every individual will react differently and have their own personal way with dealing with the loss. Some might want to go straight out and play the following day, continue on as normal. Others want to get as far away from the sport as possible, it's the last thing they want to think about.

Both these reactions are absolutely normal, neither is right or wrong. At Ulster we postponed our fixture the coming weekend after Nevin's passing, like the Australian cricket union has pushed back the upcoming tests against India.

This was, and is the right call, as the immediate days following are consumed with shock, emotions and feelings that need to be given time to sink in.

Conclusion – life goes on, it's what they would want us to do- doesn't mean we are not thinking about them. First and foremost the focus was on what we could do as a playing group for his family, as they were the ones that were hurting the most. Rugby was put aside as players who were close to the family visited the house and spoke to his sister and mother. Just being there meant so much to them.

Players must also remember that there is always someone to talk to. Be it the team chaplain, a councillor, a staff member or even a fellow team mate. Some individuals will choose not to speak to anyone, and that's ok as well, but personally I found that the more I was around others, and was active, how much more it helped me through.

Senior members have a crucial role to play at this time also. They act as a shoulder for the younger players to lean on, as they look up to them for guidance and an understanding at why something like this has happened.

I remember our captain Johann Muller was fantastic around the time of Nevin's death.

He gave everyone their own personal space and time to grieve, and then when they were ready, be it one day or three weeks, choose to return to training.

In returning to Phillip Hughes, the difference between his case and Nevin's, is that it occurred whilst playing his chosen sport. In no way is this less or more devastating than what happened to Nevin, but the impact it has made, particular on the younger generation has been huge.

What do we tell our kids that are scared to play rugby or cricket because they think that the same might happen to them?

Unfortunately we risk injury every time we walk out our front door, let alone onto the rugby pitch.



I can't remember how many times I saw Nevin put his head into rucks with no thought of his safety, and there's that image of him head standing on his neck after going over for a try against Bath at the Recreation Ground.

Just like Phillip Hughes loved smashing bouncers for six each time he was at the crease, I'm sure he would disagree with the calls to outlaw the dangerous ball from cricket.

Its how he played the game, and how the game is meant to be played, hard, fast, tough.

I'm sure Nevin and Phillip wouldn't want it any other way. And it's our tribute to them to keep playing that way.



The author Adam D'Arcy is congratulated by his Ulster teammate, the late Nevin Spence

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Upcoming International windows are greeted with mixed emotions. I'm sure this year's Six Nations Championship will be no different.

These periods mean different things for the different parties involved and can even have an impact on players still trying to get their foot in the door of provincial sub-academies. Established internationals will set their sights on trying to emulate the Irish success of last year. They will hope to play their part in another successful campaign. For those on the fringes, the announcement of the extended squad will be greatly anticipated. Particularly in a World Cup year, they will be conscious of trying to make as strong an impression as possible. Their goal is to be called upon in the event of an injury and to book their place on the plane to England in September.

What I am going to discuss is the effect that this movement of personnel has on the provincial sides. Naturally, a side's best players being unavailable for an extended period of time presents difficulties. However, this also presents many positives which are sometimes overlooked by supporters and the media.

It is simplistic to assume that the only focus for teams is surviving these weeks, almost holding their breath when it begins and exhaling when their internationals return.

One group who will be licking their lips in anticipation are those on the fringes of their provincial sides. International campaigns present many players with the first and only opportunities they will get to showcase their ability in a given season.

From their point of view, the more players in their position involved in Ireland, the better.

A good example of this in action is the

case of Tadhg Furlong. The involvement of both Mike Ross and Marty Moore in last year's Six Nations presented the highly rated tighthead with his first competitive starts in a Leinster jersey. Far from surviving, Furlong impressed with his performances.

This provided the platform from which he has launched himself to fourteen appearances for the province so far this season, including five starts. Despite this, it would be fair to argue that this window of opportunity may not have come as quickly were it not for Ross and Moore's involvement with Ireland.

Needing a bit of luck is an idea that is often thrown around professional rugby circles. In most cases, this refers to an injury to one teammate which allows another to step in and make an impression. As Furlong's case illustrates, luck can come in the form of an international call up for the man in your way.

From a coach's point of view, staring down the barrel of six weeks without many of your key players would cause many to sweat. Understandably so. However the staunchest believer in picking the same faces each week knows that rotation is essential. In rugby, refusal to engage in the process will be the rock you perish on.

Like all professional sport, this is a results driven business. Supporters expect results. This puts pressure on coaches to select their strongest side. Therefore, the inability to select more experienced players means there is an opportunity (or necessity) to see others in action. Coaches surely see the positives of this. Given the frequency of serious injuries in the modern game, it pays to know that those on the fringes are capable of stepping in and performing without breaking stride.

Take John Ryan for example. Although John made his first European start for Munster against Clermont some weeks ago, this was his fourteenth start for his province. He had made over forty

appearances in total. When you are hit with a situation where two internationals in the same position are sidelined, it must be a relief to know that someone with such experience is waiting to step in.

The training environment can also change somewhat when a number of people are in national camp. As a general rule, internationals tend to be the more experienced members of the provincial squad. They also tend to be larger personalities. Adjusting to their absence can be an unusual process. The gym is quieter and the familiarity of dominant voices on the training pitch is missing. What this provides is an opportunity for other members of the squad to show their leadership qualities and drive standards.

Earlier, I made reference to how international periods can have a knock on effect on people in sub-academies. This is very true. These are the weeks when you get a text on a Monday evening to say that you'll be participating in your first senior squad session the following day. This is a huge deal for a player in that position and a milestone which is nearly always overlooked. I remember being almost as nervous before my first senior session as I was before my senior debut.

These knock on effects can be quite amusing when examined in detail. I remember how Rory Best's injury at the 2011 World Cup effected the substitute hooker for the UL Bohs U20 side. Best's injury meant that Mike Sherry was called to join the squad in New Zealand. This meant that Sean Henry went from playing for Bohs to being involved with Munster. This in turn meant that Bohs' substitute hooker would start and the U20 hooker would be on the bench for the senior side as a result.

This year's Six Nations Championship promises to be a very closely contested one. I look forward to seeing if Ireland can repeat the success they enjoyed last year. I'm also very interested to see how all the provinces, including my own, perform without their internationals. I'm sure many others are as eager as I am to see what new talent raises its head this February and March.

UP **AND**
COMING

Academy stars

IRUPA represents all academy players across all four provinces. In this edition of In Touch we catch up with Munster Academy member, **JACK O'DONOHUE.**



Name: Jack O'Donoghue

Munster Academy: 3rd Year

School: De La Salle College, Waterford

College: University of Limerick

Club: UL Bohemians

Jack O'Donoghue has already achieved a lot in his rugby career. With honours at every representative level, the Waterford native is a natural leader, honing his leadership abilities as captain of his club side Waterpark before captaining the Ireland Under 18's and leading out his country at the Junior World Cup in New Zealand last year. He is captain of the Munster A squad for the 2014/15 season and made his Munster Rugby PRO12 debut coming off the bench for Robin Copeland against Zebre in Thomond Park in September 2014.

Leadership is just one of the many transferable skills that Jack brings to his game and his off field pursuits. Currently studying for his final year at the University of Limerick, Jack has brought skills from the training round and applied them to his studies. Areas such as goal setting, time management, work ethic and recovery from setbacks

have assisting in growing his game and also his off field career.

What are you studying at the moment?

I am currently in my final year in University of Limerick studying for a Bachelor of Science degree in Pharmaceutical and Industrial Chemistry.

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

It wasn't so bad initially and I coped well during first and second year but I found it quite difficult last year and more especially this year as I have a very time consuming final year project to complete as well as four modules. I'm managing though and getting through it with the help of some late nights in the library.

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

I haven't really thought about that as such, but I guess it would have to be something related to my college degree.

What was the Junior World Cup experience like for you?

It was a great experience and being in New Zealand was really something

special. To experience and get an insight into the rugby culture there was truly amazing. Everywhere you went there was rugby on. Even though the JWC was on the same time as the FIFA World Cup you could walk into a shop or bar and there was an U20 match on.

You captained your country for the 2014 JWC and are captain of the Munster A squad for this season, how do you find the leadership role?

It is always an honour to captain a team, especially your province or country. I've been lucky enough to get the opportunity to do both. It can be challenging at times, but a great learning experience and something I quite enjoy.

What are your aspirations for the rest of the season?

I've been lucky enough this year to have exposure to the senior stage and have learned a lot from this. My goals for the rest of the season are to continue to work on my areas of weakness and to progress in our B&I Cup campaign. I will also continue my studies and complete my final degree year.

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IRPA update



Andrew Trimble, Victor Vito, Rachael Burford, Kyle Brown, Lynne Cantwell and Lee Williams

Lynne Cantwell & Andrew Trimble attend Rugby Athletes Commission

The world's top male and female players have participated in the inaugural Rugby Athletes' Commission (RAC) during the World Rugby ConfEX. The commission is a partnership between IRPA and World Rugby and will provide a formal and more structured forum through which players can have their views channelled into Rugby's decision-making processes. Lynne Cantwell and IRUPA Board Member Andrew Trimble are player representatives on the RAC.

Chaired by World Rugby Committee Chairman John Jeffrey, the RAC focus is to identify and discuss issues facing the Game, to make observations and recommendations, and to assist in better informing World Rugby and IRPA in the pursuit of their respective objectives and initiatives. With Rugby enjoying rapid global growth, the commission will advise the World Rugby Committee in

key areas including player welfare and laws of the game.

The structure of the RAC includes elite players representing IRPA. These nominees are representative of the high performance and professional levels of the game and have the mandate and confidence of the players having been elected by their respective national players' associations.

The representatives are: Victor Vito, Benjamin Kayser and Andrew Trimble (Men's Fifteens); Kyle Brown and Lee Williams (Men's Sevens) and Rachael Burford and Lynne Cantwell (Women's). The Commission will be supported by World Rugby and IRPA executive staff and relevant Council and Committee members as required.



Hougaard wins IRPA Try of the Year Award 2014

Francois Hougaard's spectacular score in South Africa's win over New Zealand in The Rugby Championship has been named as the International Rugby Players' Association (IRPA) Try of the Year 2014. The Springbok scrum-half, who scored the first try of the match in Johannesburg in early October, becomes the third South African to win the award

after Jaque Fourie in 2009 and Bryan Habana in 2012.

Samoa's Seilala Mapusua, former All Black Jeff Wilson, Ireland's Alan Quinlan and Dan Parks of Scotland formed the panel of judges who opted for Hougaard's effort ahead of the four others shortlisted in Jamie Roberts (Wales), Cornal Hendricks (South Africa), Magali Harvey (Canada) and Jonny May (England).

Hougaard brought the Ellis Park crowd to its feet when, in the 12th minute, he dived under the posts to finish off a move that had begun deep in South Africa's half and involved all of the backline as the Springboks. South Africa went on to win 27-25 and end a losing run against New Zealand.

IRPA Executive Director Rob Nichol: "With so many great international tries during 2014, involving both individual brilliance and collective effort, it is never an easy process to settle on one try. However, when it came down to it, Hougaard's try stood out for the judges due to the high level of skills involved by different players, and, most importantly, the teamwork required to make it happen."

Previous winners

2013 – Beauden Barrett (New Zealand)
New Zealand v France

2012 – Bryan Habana (South Africa)
South Africa v New Zealand

2011 – Radike Samo (Australia)
Australia v New Zealand

2010 – Chris Ashton (England)
England v Australia

2009 – Jaque Fourie (South Africa)
South Africa v British and Irish Lions

2008 – Brian O'Driscoll (Ireland)
Australia v Ireland



dialogue facilitate an urgent and collaborative positive resolution to the players' concerns.

The Samoa players outlined their concerns following their frustration at what they feel has been a significant period of substandard administration and governance within their National Union. The players believe that they were left with no other course of action in order to ensure positive change for the benefit of Samoa Rugby.

During the week of the England v Samoa match, a social media campaign #SamoaUnited went viral with rugby teams, players and fans from around the world showing their support for the Samoa players. IRPA and World Rugby are continuing to work towards a positive outcome for Samoa Rugby.



The IRPA Strategic Planning Conference

IRPA Strategic Planning Conference

Members of the IRPA Executive Board and personnel gathered for a strategic planning conference to outline the key areas of focus and priorities for 2015. Unlike previous conferences which aim to share best practise and knowledge, this gathering took a more global view of player welfare issues and the priorities facing the game and players across the rugby playing nations.

The assembly was very productive

and highlighted areas such as player representation, establishing players' associations and associate membership for nations without an established players' association.

#SamoaUnited

IRPA has been working with the International Samoa rugby players to ensure a positive outcome for Samoan rugby. On October 27, Samoa international Rugby players raised serious concerns with the International Rugby Board (now World Rugby) and the International Rugby Players Association (IRPA) regarding the governance and management of the Samoan Rugby Union (SRU). Members of the squad indicated that they would withdraw from their Test against England on November 22nd if their concerns were not heard.

The proposed action was withdrawn after agreement was reached between the Samoan players association PIPA, IRPA, the IRB and SRU to engage in



Medical Commission Conference

The annual World Rugby Medical Commission conference was held in London in November. IRPA delivered a wide ranging presentation across medical issues in the game, as well as representing players at all the working groups including Sevens player welfare, medical science and research and developing nations player welfare. Executive Director Rob Nichol presented and took part in the Head Injury Assessment panel discussion.

Derek Hegarty

In this edition we continue our focus on past professional players and their experience of playing professional rugby and their life thereafter. In this edition we look at Derek Hegarty who embarked on his rugby career at the dawn of the professional era.



"I went to school at Terenure College as did my dad, my brothers, my cousins and my uncles on both sides. All of us played rugby for the school so rugby was a huge part of both my family life and my school life. The game was just turning professional as I was leaving school in 1994 so for the first time a career as a professional rugby player started to become a possible option and this very quickly became all I wanted to do. I didn't entirely disregard career options outside of rugby and I went to college to study Commerce but this was very much of secondary importance to me which probably reflects the pure excitement for the game that I was feeling at the time.

Although rugby was very much my focus, I studied part time throughout my playing career and completed a Commerce degree and a Masters in Economics at UCD. It was always challenge balancing study with playing and training and like most players who study while they're playing professionally

my college life was very different to that of my classmates. My days were spent shuttling between training sessions and lectures and I didn't do a huge amount of socialising when I was in college but I loved what I was doing so I was happy with the balance.

When I was starting out rugby was the most important thing in my life but I was aware that factors like injury and luck were likely to have an impact on my career so I made a decision early on to try to treat every season like it could be my last. I think this helped me prepare for my life after rugby but I also think it helped me enjoy my years as a professional player as they were happening.

Every player's career has its own unique trajectory but all players' careers contain highs and lows and mine was no different in this regard. I spent the first four years of my career with Leinster during which I was lucky enough to play in some great European Cup matches

"The experience of dealing with pressure that I got as a player has probably been the greatest benefit to me in my off field career to date."

and to tour South Africa with Ireland. I moved to Munster in 2001, which for me as a Leinster lad was a very unexpected but nonetheless hugely enjoyable experience. After spending a season with Munster I moved on to play with Leeds in the English Premiership for the 2002/2003 season which was another great experience. I returned to Leinster in 2003 but I picked up a serious knee injury early that season and I retired in 2004.

When I retired I certainly missed rugby but I always understood it was a temporary job and I took some time out to do some travelling immediately after retiring. I started a legal apprenticeship straight after I returned from travelling and spent the next three years qualifying as a solicitor so I kept myself busy all the time which helped a lot. I think playing rugby has helped my off field career in lots of ways but the experiences of operating under intense pressure and having my work subjected to detailed analysis that I got as a player have probably been the greatest benefits to me in my career as a solicitor.

I have two pieces of advice for a player starting a rugby career. Firstly, they should be aware that a professional rugby career won't last forever so they should make some plans for what they will do after it ends but secondly and most importantly they should understand that they have the greatest job in the world so they should enjoy every day of it".



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Find out who will be the 2015 Hibernia College IRUPA Player's Player of the Year, the Nevin Spence Young Player of the Year and other coveted titles. The much loved Q&A session will round up the evening with a special World Cup theme this year so this once off session should not be missed.

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