

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

# IN TOUCH

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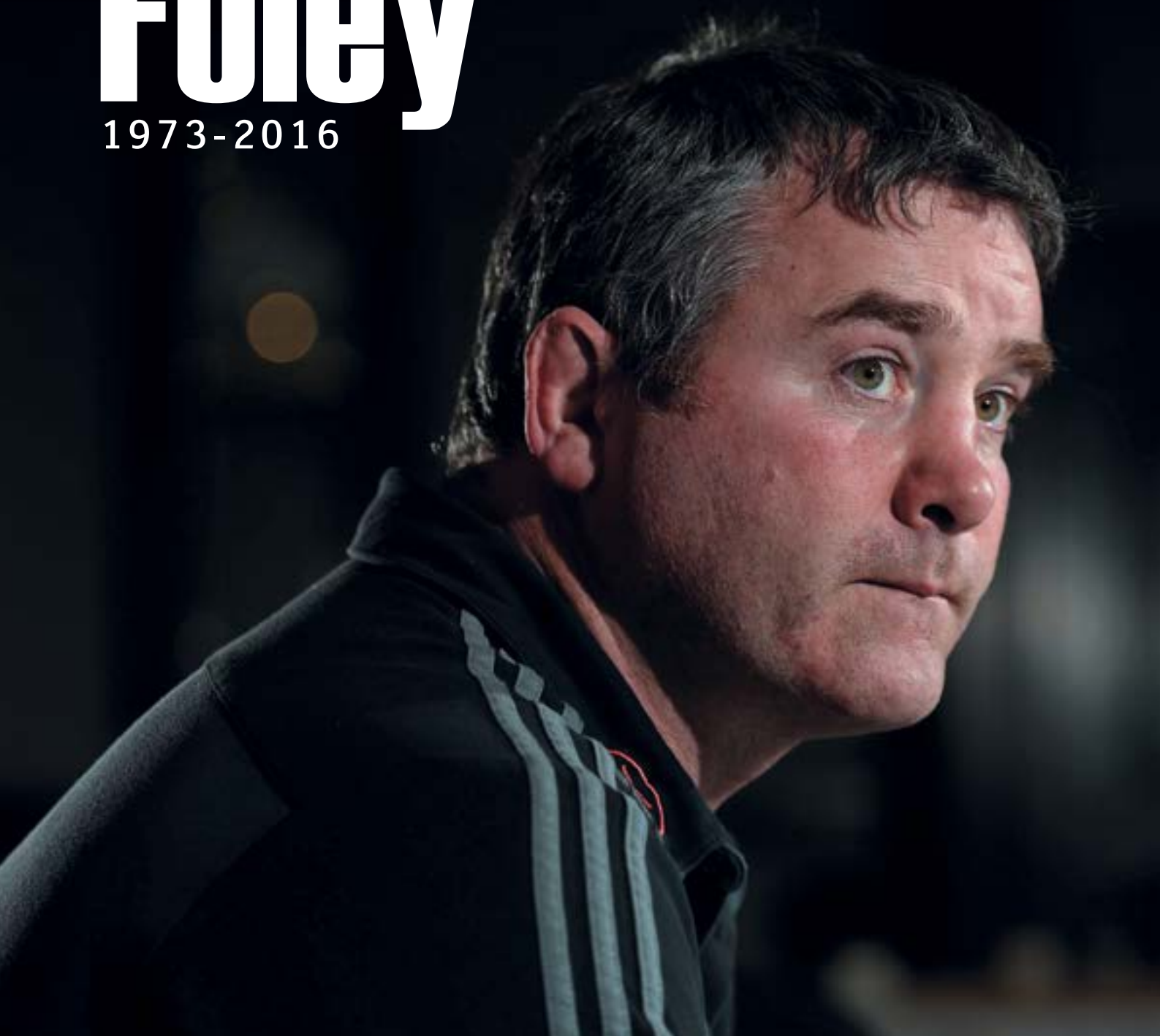


**IRUPA**

protecting player welfare

## Anthony Foley

1973-2016





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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.

## Credits

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# CEO address

**Omar Hassanein**

It is with great sadness that I write this report, merely hours after hearing of the passing of Munster coach and former captain Anthony Foley. With the entire rugby community struggling to come to grips with such a tragedy, it is impossible to feel anything other than sadness and shock at this point in time.



At only 42 years of age, Anthony tragically leaves behind a young family – one which no doubt has so many experiences ahead of them in life. As a 39 year old father myself, it certainly makes you think about the volatility of life and how we really must never take for granted the special times that we have. We are once again reminded of the old adage of ‘living life to the full’, despite the fact that it should be inherent in our everyday attitude.

Arising out of such a tragedy however, one thing has become very apparent – the solidarity and support of the rugby community both in Ireland and abroad is immense, once again coming to the fore in such

difficult times.

**The feeling of emptiness and loss is like a ripple effect across the sport, through players, management, fans and general supporters of rugby from around the globe.**

The President and Taoiseach were amongst the many who paid tribute to Anthony, which for me highlights not only the influence of the man himself but also the place that rugby holds as a sport in Irish society.

Sadly, this isn't the first unexpected tragedy we've experienced in the Irish rugby community in recent times. Four years ago, the tragic death of Ulster

player Nevin Spence hit us all very abruptly, particularly Nevin's teammates in Ulster. Yet out of this we were provided with another example of the rugby community coming together as one in a time of hardship.

For everyone involved in the game in Ireland and in particular in Ulster, Nevin was seen as part of them and the loss was felt hard.

I will never forget attending the service of Nevin and his brother and father in Ravenhill back in September 2012. The sense of brotherhood was strong and profound. Sport in general provides this in a way that is so unique, with rugby being one of the closest knit groups amongst them all.

Aside from the solidarity that is very evident in rugby, what is also very



**“Arising out of such a tragedy however, one thing has become very apparent – the solidarity and support of the rugby community both in Ireland and abroad is immense, once again coming to the fore in such difficult times.”**

evident to me is the solidarity that exists in Munster Rugby as a group. As an Australian living in Ireland, the fierce sense of provincial loyalty is something that has always struck me in a positive way.

**To hear the fans singing the ‘Fields of Athenry’ outside of the stadium in Paris is something that is hard not to become emotional about.**

Following the announcement of Anthony's passing, Tyrone Howe very aptly described this tribalism and

how this is no more prevalent than in the province of Munster.

In Tyrone's words “The four provinces try to beat the living daylights out of each other on the pitch, but it's a big family. And there is no team where the sense of rugby family is stronger than in Munster: the connection between the players and the fans is so close. They've celebrated and suffered together over the years.”

Out of all of this, life must go on and rugby must continue to be played. With the scale of such a tragedy coming out of this tight knit group

it is the players who will feel it most. To Pete O'Mahony and the group of players down at Munster, please know that we are all by your side.

**Omar Hassanein**  
Chief Executive





ANTHONY

FOLEY

# Anthony Foley

1973 – 2016

When Anthony Foley raised the Heineken Cup aloft in 2006, few in Irish rugby begrudged him of his special task. Munster were finally the European champions – a victory made all the sweeter because it was so hard gained. Such was the enormous outburst of emotion on that day that for a little while, especially for those outside of the Pale, the realities of life seemed not to matter.

No doubt many decent rugby men and women dipped into their imaginations in recent weeks and said that they were there. And they were.

They may have been away down in Ventry where the football fields were empty or taking a break from setting the spuds in Carrigaline – but they were all in Cardiff as Axel led Munster to belated glory.

Television cameras were scarce when Anthony Foley first set off on an odyssey with Munster in 1995. The back rower was part of an exceptionally strong side of part-timers competing in their maiden European Cup fixture. They duly dispatched of a professional Swansea unit that day, yet he could have walked down many a street in the province without being recognised.

But as he departed this field of play on October 16th, an entire nation stood shoulder to shoulder to salute one of the great High Kings of Ireland.

Trawling through archival footage of the great man's feats, one might easily assume that his bow came just a fortnight after Munster sidestepped between mythology and fact by conquering the All Black's and spawning a rugby religion in 1978. While 350,000 have also hinted at being in Thomond on its most famous afternoon, Anthony's father Brendan can justifiably claim to being one of them. Munster then, was in the Foley blood.



Throughout his childhood, Foley was steeped in the Munster way of life and its cultural quirks. Some say he was christened in the red garb. Taking to the field on that unremarkable Wednesday evening in November 1995, Foley fulfilled a lifetime ambition and embarked on a mission that would see Munster rise from tales of folklore into a formidable rugby power.

Upon the retirement of the IRUPA Hall of Fame inductee in 2008, the landscape of the game in Ireland had changed dramatically. Yet while money, stardom and success had burrowed into focus, Foley retained an innate understanding of what it was to play for club and country. Having emerged at a time of great uncertainty, he led them both to unprecedented heights and paved the way for those who were to follow. In so doing, he represented a tangible and spiritual link between a rich past and an even richer present.

Surrounded by supreme physical specimens towards the latter stages of his career, Foley appeared to have quantum leaped out of a bygone era ("Domino's offered free pizza to whoever scored first in the new Thomond Park... Foley got a hat-trick," recalls Keith Wood). But what he may have lacked in athleticism, he made up for with an awesome rugby brain and a motivation borne out of an undying love for his team, be they in red, green

or blue.

When Foley first toggled out on the international stage, his experience contrasted starkly with that of his time with Shannon. Despite scoring a memorable try against England on his debut, Ireland clearly lacked a unity of purpose and retained a sense of barbarism that would struggle to survive in the encroaching professional era. Ten years and 62 caps later, Foley took his leave of a side that was primed for Grand Slam glory.

But while we will always be able to reflect on Axel's myriad of accomplishments from the base of a scrum and lasting impact on the game at large, it was as a human being that he transcended the rugby community in Ireland. Liked by all, followed by many, his twinkling eyes and glowing smile touched many lives.

**If there is any solace to be found amidst this tragedy it is that Anthony Foley died carrying out the duty that he was born to serve. He was the heart and soul of Munster rugby, and in that guise he will always remain.**



# Remembering Axel

Heroes get remembered. **Legends never die.**



“It is with great sadness that I heard of the sudden death of Anthony Foley, the Munster rugby team's head coach and one of the great figures of Irish sport in the modern era... He was regarded with great respect and deep affection not just among Munster rugby fans but by all those interested in Irish sports and those with whom they interacted abroad.”

**Michael D. Higgins**



“Felling numb and alone with only thoughts of this remarkable man. My protector on the field, I will miss you forever Axel.”

**Peter Stringer**

“Blessed to have shared so many great memories with Axel. A man who gave me my first shot at this. Thank you for everything.”

**Conor Murray**



“He was a man who loved sport. He was shy, but sociable. Driven beyond all belief from as early an age as I can remember. He was a one-club man. He played for Munster for his whole life and that is pretty extraordinary.”

**Keith Wood**



“Absolutely everyone who played with him or against him understood his value to a 15 man game. He was a gentleman off the field. Always the first to shake your hand and congratulate you. He took defeat on his very broad shoulders in the way you would hope you could educate your children to do. That's the sign of a truly, truly great sportsman. I hope his family know and understand that he was greatly respected, admired and loved by the rugby community across the world.”

**Will Greenwood**



“Anthony was the embodiment of Munster Rugby and dedicated his life to the game he loved. From St. Munchin's to Shannon, Munster and then Ireland, Anthony was a true rugby great.”

**Garett Fitzgerald**



“Anthony 'Axel' Foley was everything you'd want your son, your brother, your father to be.”

**Liam Toland**



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## IRUPA ROADSHOWS

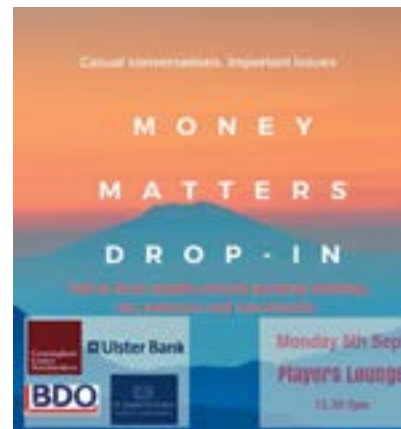
The IRUPA staff hit the road over the past three months using pre-season as a chance to visit each provincial squad.

During these roadshows each PDM ran through the five pillars of the IRFU/IRUPA Player Development Programme and gave an update on the Tackle Your Feelings campaign. Omar and Simon talked through recent negotiations with the sport's governing body, upcoming IRUPA events and the Protect Integrity programme. We would like to thank all our members for attending the roadshows and for their continued support. A special thank you to the Ulster players, past and present who joined us for a meal in Belfast later that evening.



## MONEY MATTERS

Kingspan Stadium welcomed representatives from BDO, Ulster Bank, Cunningham Coates and St James Place in September. With a relaxed and informal approach local experts were at hand to offer advice across a range of areas including tax advice, personal banking, wealth management and financial planning.



Ricky Lutton was one player to take advantage of the services on offer. "With a busy training schedule it can be difficult to make time to look after those small financial matters that actually can have a big impact. With having the likes of BDO onsite, I was able to drop in and speak to someone within a matter of minutes about something that I've been

trying to sort for weeks now. Having local experts all in one room means whatever the financial question, there's someone who can help.

## TACKLE YOUR FEELINGS VIDEO LAUNCH

The second round of the Zurich partnered Tackle Your Feelings videos were launched at the end of last month.

Connacht Ambassador Jake Heenan spoke about his history of teenage anti-social behaviour and how it has taught him the need to reach out to people. Recently retired Leinster & Ireland Shane Jennings shared his experience of retiring from professional rugby and the uncertainty and stress that that caused. Both videos can be viewed, along with those of our other Ambassadors Jack McGrath, Hannah Tyrrell & Cathal Sheridan, on [www.TackleYourFeelings.com](http://www.TackleYourFeelings.com). To read more about the launch and the Tackle Your Feelings Public Panel Discussions that have taken place in Munster, Connacht & Ulster turn to page 16.



## MEDIA TRAINING

Kieran File from Reactive Sports Media recently delivered tailored workshops in Ulster and Connacht. Kieran, a Senior Lecturer at The University of Warwick has worked with Player Associations across the globe providing such services to help sports professionals master media interviews.

In Ulster, the Academy players really enjoyed and valued the chance to practice in front of the camera as well as experience a press interview first hand. A vital part of the workshop looked at the use of social media and its use in building your personal and your Clubs brand.

Michael Lagan, IRUPA's Ulster Academy Rep said that "as a young player trying to break into senior professional rugby you need to spend time developing off-pitch skills that are vital in today's game. Even at this early stage in your career you don't think you have any real profile in the media but Kieran was able to demonstrate that what we do put out there, as in with Twitter, Instagram, Facebook, really does matter!"

Workshops delivered covered basic reactive media training to ensure that both Senior and Academy players were confident and fluid in answering questions. The following were also addressed in the workshops:

- Dealing with nerves
- Displaying good body language
- Engaging the listener
- Deflection tactics
- How to prepare for interviews
- Understanding context and awareness of bigger issues within the game
- Avoiding loaded words or phrases and throwaway comments
- Building on the team message through personal points
- Show good knowledge and analysis of the game





## CONNACHT RUGBY AT THE PORTERSHED

**IRUPA and the Portershed have teamed up to inspire the Connacht rugby players to think how they can maximise their opportunities now to innovate, network and plan for their future careers.**

The Portershed is Galway's first Innovation District, a cluster of Galway city's entrepreneurs, start-ups, incubators and accelerators. Led by David Cunningham and Mary Rodgers, the Portershed/IRUPA initiative, offers players a space to develop ideas and collaborate with entrepreneurs, growth companies, large multinationals, educational institutions, the local Galway Chamber, state agencies and local government.

The first evening session saw Tom Deely (serial entrepreneur) and Enda Collieran (Boston Scientific) speak openly about their experiences and emphasise how important it is for players to take full advantage of the networking and business opportunities that being a professional rugby player can offer them. The second session included insights from Cathal Greaney (Irish Apps) and Maricka Burke Keogh (AltoCloud) on app development and digital marketing. An additional two sessions are proposed over the next month, and following these initial introductory sessions, it is hoped that



meaningful mentorship, networking, work experience, job shadowing and new business opportunities and investments can be arranged for players.

Speaking about the Portershed / IRUPA partnership, Connacht player Eoin McKeon said; "The Portershed has

become a place where players can express ideas and concepts. It has given us a platform where we can go from a simple idea to starting and growing a successful business. This is a crucial service provided for IRUPA members and is proving to be a successful and engaging partnership."

## CONGRATULATIONS TO ICONIC

**IRUPA's wellbeing partner Iconic Gyms have made it into the Guinness Book of Records!**

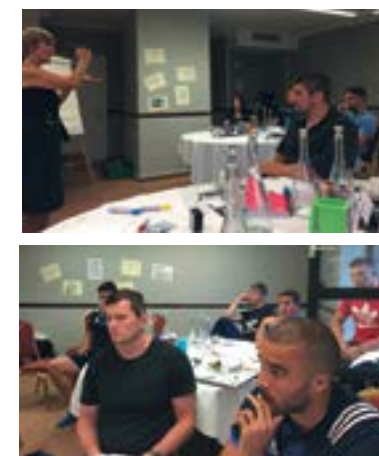
The event took place at Smithfield Market with IRUPA Clubhouse member Alan Quinlan just one of the 433 participants who took part in the largest exercise ball demonstration/class in the world. The event was open to young and old and to raise money for MS Ireland. Congratulations to everyone who took part.



## PROTECT INTEGRITY WORKSHOPS

**In partnership with EU Athletes and funded by the European Commission, IRUPA carried out upskilling presentations to each of its members to educate them on their obligations in maintaining the integrity of Rugby as a sport.**

The regulations on gambling and anti-corruption are set out in World Rugby Regulation 6, players are encouraged to complete the educational module "Keep Rugby Onside" to refresh them of their commitments and the serious implications of falling foul of the rules. Players were reminded that they are prohibited from betting on all Rugby anywhere in the world.



## THE BUSINESS OF FOOD

**While many players are interested in the idea of setting up their own café or restaurants the realities of the food and beverage industry can be far removed from the dream.**

In September IRUPA members in Munster were given an opportunity to learn from the best with two 'Business of Food' workshops run by industry expert Blathnaid Bergin. With over 25 years' experience in the catering and hospitality industry, Blathnaid covered areas such as managing suppliers, breaking even and quality control. Using real life examples the players were made aware of pitfalls and mistakes that can be detrimental to many new business. Feedback was hugely positive. If you are interested in a 'Business of Food' workshop, talk to your PDM.



## IRUPA STAFF JOIN FORCES WITH GPA & IOS FOR MENTAL HEALTH FIRST AID TRAINING

**Mental health first aid is the help offered to a person who is developing a mental health problem or who is experiencing a mental health crisis, until appropriate professional treatment is received or until the crisis resolves.**

In October, staff members from the GPA, the PFAI, the Irish Institute of Sport and IRUPA participated in a two-day course offered by MHFA Ireland, designed to meet the needs of player representative bodies.

Originally developed in Australia, MHFA is now internationally recognised in over 23 countries, with over 1 million people worldwide trained in Mental Health First Aid Skills.

Throughout the course, participants were given an insight into the signs and symptoms of mental health problems. All were provided with a framework for communication, advised on how best to offer and provide initial help, and how to guide a person towards appropriate treatments and other supportive services.



## IRUPA SUPPORT HEADWAY #CONCUSSIONAWARE CAMPAIGN



Headway, the brain injury services and support organisation has teamed up with Ireland's leading player representative bodies to launch Concussion Aware, a campaign in association with Iaya healthcare and LifeStyle Sports. Backed by Seamus Coleman, Johnny Cooper, Luke Fitzgerald

and Donegal Ladies footballer Kate Keaney, the initiative encourages coaches and athletes of all levels and ages to put health to the fore and to remember, "If in doubt, sit it out."

Although there have been significant developments in the area from a professional perspective (see page 26), there remains plenty of work to be done on the ground level. Speaking at the launch on October 18th which was attended by Omar Hassanein on behalf of IRUPA, Kieran Loughran, CEO of Headway commented: "There is still a huge lack of awareness amongst the general public when it comes to concussion. 1 in 2 of those surveyed as part of our research admit they would not recognise the signs of concussion – this needs to be addressed."

"It comes down to knowing the signs of concussion and looking after your teammates and yourself," Irish footballer Seamus Coleman added. "If a player is concussed, they may be in a confused state, so they will be relying on their teammates and coach to recognise that something isn't right. If there is a shadow of a doubt, it's vital that they come off the field of play and sit it out."

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## FERGUS MCFADDEN

### *Next Step Prep*

Despite just turning 30 years of age during the summer, it seems as though Fergus McFadden has been on the Irish rugby scene for quite some time. Although there remains plenty of unfinished business, the Irish international winger is mindful of the fact that at its height, a rugby career will only span a limited period of time. While the game remains his priority, McFadden has also kept an eye on his future. To that end he has recently completed a Diploma in Marketing, Sales and PR from Griffith College, Dublin.

It's not McFadden's first college experience. Notwithstanding his key-role alongside Rob Kearney as Clongowes Wood College made their way to the Leinster Schools' Senior

Cup final in 2004, McFadden could do little to prevent an early exit the following year as his team crashed out at the first hurdle. However, such was his growing repute in the game that UCD came calling with the offer of a scholarship.

It was whilst studying economics and geography at Belfield, that McFadden's rugby career began to blossom. "I was playing well with UCD and got picked up by Leinster but I began to find it hard to fit in training and lectures and I tended to let the latter slide. UCD did all that they could to try and accommodate me but as far as I was concerned, I had a good chance of making it in the game so something had to give."

Having opted to leave his studies to

one side, McFadden concentrated on his increasing presence in the Leinster squad – a decision that has led to several European and domestic titles in addition to 32 international caps. There should be plenty more to come, but given the unpredictable nature of the professional game, nobody knows what lies around the corner.

**As Earl Monroe, a member of the NBA Hall of Fame, once stated: "Sport is the only profession I know that when you retire, you have to go to work." Accordingly, one of the main functions of IRUPA's Player Development Programme is to encourage players to recognise the importance of dual career preparation.**



Through this system, players have been able to explore the options available to them, whether that might be in the form of trades and skills or short professional qualifications.

"Sales was always an area that I had an interest in and wanted to develop" McFadden stresses. "But with my Leinster commitments taking up most of the day I was never in a position to focus on college as a normal student. IRUPA knew that I wanted to press on with my studies so they put me in contact with Eilis O'Leary in Griffith College."

The reality of rugby training and match schedules can make it difficult for players to attend lectures and complete assignments, yet they are becoming increasingly aware of their

responsibility to themselves: learning represents a lifelong investment. But while education at Griffith College is of the utmost importance, they have been cognisant of a professional rugby player's unique circumstances.

"Of course sport is the priority," Eilis O'Leary admits. "These people have a commitment that goes beyond the careers of our typical part-time students. Many have dedicated their young lives to their sport. We try to encourage them to find a balance. Once they are able to manage their time and set out a plan with reasonable goals then there's no reason for them not to have a positive learning experience with us."

McFadden was particularly complimentary of Griffith College.

"The staff couldn't have been more accommodating. Eilis as our co-ordinator was especially helpful. I did the course on a part-time basis, which sat well with my schedule. There was the inevitable conflict but Eilis did everything she could to support us. Sean Cronin and Sean O'Brien were enrolled at the same time and when our exams clashed with a game at the end of the year she was able to facilitate us."

As most players will have pursued their careers vigorously, few will have given their education much thought.

**"They are so preoccupied by their sport, that professional sportspeople often don't know what it is they want to do beyond their career," O'Leary acknowledges. "We've found that while many of them would appear to be supremely confident and capable individuals, they can find the classroom overwhelming and experience difficulty in transitioning into education. We show them that they are very attractive employees with many transferable skills. Afterall, they are driven and committed team players."**

Therefore, alongside IRUPA and the Institute of Sport, Griffith College has developed a programme that is specifically tailored to existing playing careers. The Certificate in Dual Career Development (Sport) has been purposely designed to address the needs of high-performance athletes in areas of professional development and transition management. "By the end of term they show themselves to be accomplished students," O'Leary adds.

**For more information on the Certificate in Dual Career Development (Sport) or for any further information on courses being offered by Griffith College please contact Eilis O'Leary: [eilis.oleary@griffith.ie](mailto:eilis.oleary@griffith.ie).**





# Tackle Your Feelings

## Fronting up to Mental Health

**One in four Irish adults will experience mental illness at some point in their lives. Research conducted by IRUPA as part of the Tackle Your Feelings campaign, in partnership with Zurich, demonstrated that although 90% of Irish adults understand that they have the ability to influence their own mental wellbeing, more than a quarter (27%) of Irish adults believe the information available on how to take care of their mental wellbeing is not personally relevant to them.**

Tackle Your Feelings seeks to emphasise the importance of preventative measures in maintaining good mental wellbeing. Last year, Leinster front-row Jack McGrath, Munster's Cathal Sheridan and Irish women's player, Hannah Tyrrell came forward to speak about how they coped with some of the issues they have faced off the field. The second year of the campaign, which launched in September, features Connacht's Jake Heenan and former Ireland and Leinster flanker Shane Jennings.

Speaking about the initiative, Jake Heenan, said, "I'm really delighted to be involved and to help break down stigma around mental wellbeing in Ireland. Although I never directly experienced mental health problems I did go through a tough time as a teenager. It took a while to realise that my feelings of anger

were actually stemming from fear and uncertainty about where I was going in life. But it's OK to be afraid and that by looking to other people for help and talking it's possible to find a way through."

To accompany the launch, several public panel discussions took place in each of the provinces. The panels explored the importance of mental wellbeing and how Ireland needs to be more proactive in resolving emotional challenges before they escalate into a crisis. The discussions were another step towards achieving the vision of a society that embraces emotional vulnerability.

At the Connacht Public Panel Discussion, held at the G Hotel on September 27th, Pat Lam opened the evening with an interesting insight into the reasons why he became a coach. He would have been particularly impressed by the maturity of one of his own charges as Heenan candidly articulated the difficulties he faced as a youngster growing up in his native New Zealand. The panel also included Sheridan, Michael Swift and Dr. Eddie Murphy.

Lam, who offered Heenan a pathway out of trouble, explained his ethos: "I see young people enter the game as rugby players, but I see them exit as better people. That's the reason why I want to coach," explained Lam.

Subsequently, on October 4th, Tommy Bowe, Hannah Tyrrell, Bryn Cunningham

and Dr. Murphy joined IRUPA CEO Omar Hassanein on the Ulster Panel. Bowe, who has been struggling with an injury he sustained in last year's World Cup highlighted that with increasing importance being placed on the mental said of the game, "it's important to work at trying to keep yourself on a level playing field, so that you don't go too high when things are going great and you don't go too low at the other end."



**Anthony Brennan Zurich CEO, Finola Roache IRUPA, Hannah Tyrrell TYF Ambassador, Michael McLoughlin Insurance Broker**

### Bringing TYF to Zurich's Brokers

IRUPA were delighted to get the opportunity to work with our Tackle Your Feelings partner Zurich at their recent pension conference for brokers at the Intercontinental in Ballsbridge, Dublin 4. IRUPA and Zurich staff joined forces with TYF Ambassador Hannah Tyrrell to talk to over 240 attendees from the Leinster area and Zurich employees about the campaign. Feedback from the event was hugely positive. If you want to learn more about the campaign just visit [www.tackleyourfeelings.com](http://www.tackleyourfeelings.com)

# TAKE POSSESSION



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## SAILING TO A SILVER LINING

**Annalise Murphy didn't know whether to laugh or cry after banishing the pain of missing out on a medal at London 2012 by claiming silver in the final race of the women's Laser Radial in Rio last August. Growing up in an avid sailing home, an Olympic medal was always Murphy's ultimate dream.**

To an extent, IRUPA has accompanied her on that journey to the podium, with Dr. Kate Kirby at her side in her role as a sports psychologist. "My time with Annalise actually stretches back to 2005 when she was identified as a Development Athlete, so that medal was the culmination of over 10 years

work," Kate informs us while speaking at Huddle Dublin at the Aviva on September 29th. "But she was so driven in her own right that it turned out to be one the easiest jobs I've ever done!"

Joining the IRUPA team in October 2012, Kate had already gained extensive experience in a variety of fields. Having attained both an MSc and PhD in sports psychology, she has provided consultancy services for a number of sporting bodies including the Irish Olympic Sailing and Modern Pentathlon squads. Her work with IRUPA has primarily seen her work with the Irish Women's Sevens squad in a player development capacity.

"Since I first joined IRUPA, it is clear that the organisation has taken much more of a foothold in the game. We have much more of an influence and are held in higher esteem. I would

put this down to two things: visibility and manpower. When I started out we offered general services but now we can give the individual greater attention."

"A big part of our role," Kate continues, "is helping a retiring player to transition out of his or her rugby career. Unfortunately we can't prevent the fall, but we can help to soften the landing quite significantly. It is therefore so important that players take the time to engage with us. To provide the best service possible we need to get a feel for them as people with their own character, passions and goals."

"In the past the most difficult part has been trying to secure time in front of the players. We had no allotted schedule space and had to work around their diaries. With all their on-field training, gym work, physio

sessions and team meetings, we had to try and squeeze in where possible. But with the work that we have been doing, I think the provinces are really seeing the fruits of our efforts and they facilitate us wherever possible."

Working with an Olympic athlete however has brought different challenges to the table. "In IRUPA, much of our work is of an off-field dimension in that we help to develop the players from an educational and career perspective. With Annalise, it was a very hands-on, results based experience. In the beginning we had to work on her all-round skills, from how she packed her bag to how she managed her logistics. We did everything in our power in an effort to help maximise her performance levels. But as she matured and grew into the sport, the work changed. We then became more focused on her mental



skills and the consistency of her racing."

Having been at London 2012, Kate had acquired the requisite knowledge base to assist the 25 year-old manage her Olympic experience.

**"While she performed well in London, our work in the interim was about developing greater self-awareness and exploring how she responds in certain situations. We had established our working environment but Annalise would be the first to admit that she became frustrated by it and drifted. In Rio she appreciated what she had to do and she got on with it."**

"Before we made the trip out there we reflected on London, the successes and

mistakes. It was clear that whatever framework we established would be crucial to achieving her goal. For instance, I stayed with Annalise in an apartment nearby the sailing centre. In London we didn't spend as much time together and as a result our work became a bit rushed. Furthermore, Rory Fitzpatrick, her coach, lived elsewhere. This was a deliberate move designed to promote fresher interaction."

Any success is grounded upon strong mental preparation and Murphy, with Kate by her side, perfected her approach to Rio 2016. To bounce back from such disappointment and spend the next four years planning to put things right takes an enormous amount of dedication and drive. It hasn't been an easy journey, but as Murphy crossed the finish line every sacrifice she had made along the way became worthwhile.



**There was an old saying I came across before: “It’s six o’clock and there isn’t a cow milked or a child washed.” I’d strongly suspect that it applied throughout Connacht on the morning after last season’s Pro12 final.**

Nobody could claim to have been around when Queen Méabh led the warriors of Connacht into battle to claim the most famous bull in Ireland in the Cattle Raid of Cooley. In time, legend will record that it was actually Pat Lam in charge that day.

I remember being aghast at the dinner table as Kerry’s Maurice Fitzgerald split the uprights from the sideline to force a replay with Dublin in the 2001 All-Ireland Quarter-Final. I took a break from work to watch Tony McCoy rally

his horse to take the lead yards from the line for his 4,000th career win in 2013. I was still dismissing Dundalk’s chances until Robbie Benson raced clear to secure a 3-0 win over Bate Borisov in the Champions League last August.

These are all moments that have become part of Irish sporting folklore and last May another was added: Where were you when Niyi Adeolokun chipped over the Leinster defence to help seal Connacht’s first ever Pro12 title in Edinburgh and shake up the old provincial order?

“I’ll never forget it but it hasn’t quite sunk in yet. It’s all a bit surreal,” Adeolokun admits. “It just felt like any other game though, no different to when I scored for De la Salle or Trinity, but I’m sure that in time when I look back and reflect upon what we did throughout the season, the significance of that moment will hit me.”

Having arrived in Terenure as a 10 year old from Nigeria, Adeolokun’s sudden rise in Irish rugby has taken an unfamiliar route. A talented

sportsman, Adeolokun may have been toggling out for Dublin against Mayo had he remained with the Templeogue Synge Steet GAA Club. Shelbourne FC also harboured his talent before his rugby prowess was unearthed.

**“Sport was my life. I threw my hand at everything at De la Salle Churchtown – usually to get of class! But when I was cut from Leinster U19 Development squad shortly before the inter-pros began I was more disappointed than I might have imagined. I was about to start 6th year so I made a conscious decision to cut down on everything and focus on my rugby... and studies!”**



# It's Easy being Niyi-zee

The Rise of Niyi Adeolokun: **Connacht's Unlikely Hero**



Lorcan Balfe, Adeolokun's principal, then brought the speed merchant to the attention of Tony Smeeth, the Director of Rugby at Dublin City University. "I had four brilliant years under Tony but he knew that professional rugby was in my sights. He played his part in making that happen, sending out my highlights reel to a few of his contacts in the game - one even went as far as Bernard Jackman at Grenoble! But it was Nigel Carolan who acted on it and set up a trial at Connacht."

An opportunity for Adeolokun to showcase his ability was first presented in a game against Russian side Enisei in April 2014. Following a comfortable 54-21 win, Pat Lam wasted little time and invited the winger to join up with the side. "It was a very easy decision to come out west. I would have gone anywhere to play professional rugby but when Connacht expressed an interest I was delighted because it also meant that I could stay in Ireland and remain close to family and friends."

**Within a few weeks of his professional debut, Adeolokun had signed a three-year contract and his momentum continued to build thereafter. His impressive early season form has seen him sign a further extension that will see him remain at the Sportsground until at least the summer of 2019.**

While Adeolokun's personal aspirations are being fulfilled, Connacht's fortunes have hit something of a setback. With the team languishing in the lower end of the Pro12 table, they faced an uphill battle to return to the heights of last year.

"It was always going to be a hard ask to try and live up to what the championship winning team achieved. We are now the team that everyone wants to beat. But I'm sure that



whatever the season brings, Pat is experienced enough to handle it and we can have another successful season at Connacht.

"Regardless of what happens, Pat Lam has had a huge influence on all of us. Obviously, he gave me the chance to play at this level but off the pitch he is equally significant. He invests his time in making you a better person and places great emphasis on what is important to you. He knows exactly what makes each player tick and so all any of us want to do is our best for him."

Once the cows were finally milked and all the children washed, the party continued across the City of the Tribes as the victorious side returned home. But despite the fanfare there was to be no postponing of the Galway Senior Football Championship. Life kicked on, the only difference being that all the youngsters in Pearse Stadium wore the green of their province and cradled a rugby ball. Few would have thought that a boy from the Nigerian town of Ibadan would be instrumental in bringing about that change.

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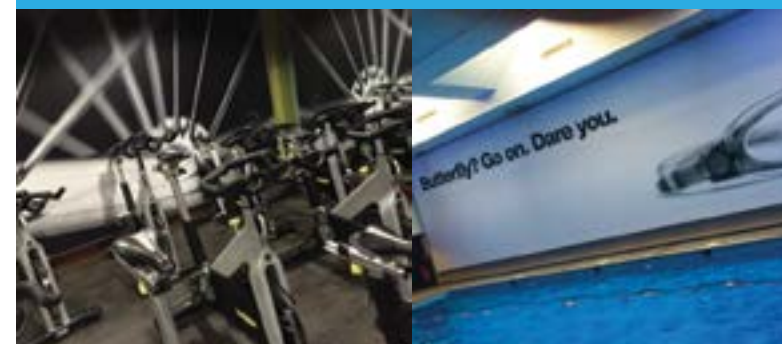
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# Players hit the Fairway

## IRUPA Golf Classic 2016



Rory Best and Andrew Trimble gratefully obliged.

Many thanks to all the support we received from companies and businesses who participated in the tournament, to our partner Powerscourt Resort and Spa, all the team at the Powerscourt Golf Club and of course all our members for their support.

**The IRUPA Rugby Players' Golf Classic was a great success as participants turned out in force for an eventful day of competition, hosted by the breath-taking Powerscourt Hotel and Golf Club Resort. Despite the rain, 22 teams took to the flawless East Course for a four-ball scramble tournament.**

The IRUPA members hoping to show off their golfing skills included Chairman Rob Kearney, accompanied by his brother Dave, Irish captain Rory Best, their international colleagues Cian Healy and Andrew Trimble and many more. The IRUPA Clubhouse members too exhibited great talents on the greens, represented by Liam Toland, Reggie

Corrigan, Malcolm O'Kelly and Gordon D'Arcy amongst others.

As in previous years each team taking part in the tournament was joined by an IRUPA member to complete their fourball scramble side. After braving the torrential down pours, teams made their way to the hotel for a gourmet buffet to refuel and relax.

Prize giving, hosted by former international Andrew Dunne, revealed our tournament winners. Third placing was claimed by the Ulster Bank team of Philip Russell, Ken Tyrrell, David Branagan and former player Denis Hickey. Second place was awarded to the William Fry team of David Maughan, Alan Geraghty, Niall O'Brien and international player Andrew Trimble. First place was awarded to a second William Fry team of Michael Quinn, David Dunne, Declan Taite and Leinster player Dan Leavy. Longest Drive was awarded to Denis Hickie and Closest to the Pin to Alan Carley. The awards were followed by a Q&A session in which

**Nearest Pin:**  
*Alan Carley 40"*

**Longest Drive:**  
*Denis Hickie*

**3rd Prize:**  
*Ulster Bank –57  
Robert Lynch, Enrique Curran,  
Denis Hickie, Mal O'Kelly*

**2nd Prize:**  
*William Fry Team 1 – 57 –  
countback back 3 holes  
David Maughan, Alan Geraghty,  
Aiden Joyce & Andrew Trimble*

**1st Prize:**  
*William Fry Team 2 – 54.9  
Craig Sewman, Ivor Banim,  
Dave Dunne & Dan Leavy*





# More Education means Better Decisions

**In September it was announced that Nathan White is to retire from professional rugby based on medical advice following a concussion injury. The Connacht and Ireland prop arrived in Dublin from his native New Zealand in 2012 to join up with Joe Schmidt at Leinster before moving onto Connacht the following year. Prior to his injury against his former employers last March, White had established himself as a valued squad member in Schmidt's Irish squads, garnering 13 caps in the space of 8 months following his debut in August 2015. Sadly, he will not be adding to that tally.**

The attritional nature of the professional game may be a joy for the public to behold but it has come at a cost. Between 2006 and 2012, Leinster duo Bernard Jackman and John Fogarty were the only professional rugby players to retire through concussion. However, in the past three years alone, Craig Clarke, Declan Fitzpatrick, Kevin McLaughlin, David McSharry and now White have all suffered a similar fate.

When this is considered in isolation, it may seem that concussion is far more prevalent in the modern game. However,

due to better education on the topic and heightened awareness of its signs and symptoms, players are now more likely than ever to take a sensible approach when dealing with brain injuries.

The rise in players retiring or taking long periods out of the game to recover from head injuries is a direct result of a more accepting culture within the game whereby players feel empowered to make the right decision for their health. Given the consequences of such trauma, rugby can no longer embrace those who make a heroic return to the field

following a severe blow to the head. However, steps need to be taken to ensure that players are protected on a weekly basis and over the long term.

To get a better understanding of the players' views on concussion, IRUPA has worked on a number of initiatives to determine the best means of further educating its members. Over a sixteen-month period between 2014 and 2016 the incidents of concussion amongst IRUPA members rose by 3.7%. The common perception may be that the increased physical nature of the sport



has been the most significant factor, yet it must also be considered that there is a growing acceptance amongst players and coaching staff that concussion is an injury which needs to be taken seriously.

In an IRUPA survey carried out in October 2014, 13% of players who were concussed admitted that they were not confident that their head injury had cleared when they returned to play. In February 2016, the same question was asked of IRUPA members with this number reducing to 10%. Although this figure remains high it nevertheless represents an improvement of players' concerns over a short period of time and an unwillingness on their part to take risks when it comes to brain injuries.

In 2015, IRUPA in partnership with the IRFU, developed an online training course highlighting the signs, symptoms and effects of concussion. This module was made compulsory for all professional players in Ireland. It was designed to offer the players an interactive learning experience whilst providing real case studies of head injuries and testing their knowledge of the issue with a series of questions. This education tool, allied to World Rugby

Concussion Management resource, has helped to provide players with the requisite insight to make informed decisions on the field of play.

In order to establish how effective, the education drive had been in the period, IRUPA followed up with direct questions on players' understanding of Head Injury Assessment (HIA), symptoms of concussion and the Graduated Return to Play protocols (GRTPPs). The below statistics represent the changes in players' awareness from the IRUPA survey carried out in October 2014 to February 2016:

## 87.2%

players had a good to excellent understanding of HIA - + 14%.

## 96.9%

players had an excellent to good understanding symptoms of concussion - + 9.9%

## 90.8%

players had a good to excellent understanding of GRTPPs - + 8.8%.



These results provide a direct correlation between the heightened awareness and understanding on the back of educational initiatives. Although it is recognised that knowledge of concussion has progressed amongst its membership, IRUPA will continue to look for innovative ways to improve its methods of education to ensure players are making decisions with all the necessary information at their disposal.

**As Omar Hassanein, CEO of IRUPA states: "Players must take responsibility to protect their health and well-being even in the heat of the moment. There has been a marked shift in the attitude towards concussion throughout professional rugby, but while we have made progress in raising awareness of the prospective dangers associated with concussion and its long-term effects, there is further ground to be made."**

To that end, the introduction of the Head Injury Assessment and its subsequent introduction into World Rugby's regulations is seen a huge step in the right direction for the welfare of the players. Whilst this is certainly an improved position it should not be the final stance. IRUPA will continue to welcome developments in the processes, protocols and technologies that will improve the treatment and recognition of concussion.





## Affiliates Programme

**Research has shown that over 70% of players in Ireland are actively seeking to develop a career outside of rugby. Through the Affiliates Scheme, businesses and organisations are invited to link with IRUPA on an official basis to provide career support that specifically meets the needs and flexibility of current and/or former players.**

Given his vested interest in fashion lines, Tommy Bowe sought further experience in the branding and marketing world. Richard Ryan of Drinksology, a premium liquor supplier in Northern Ireland, presented such an opportunity through Drinksology Creative, an award-winning design, branding and marketing bureau specialising in the world of drinks wherein they have created artworks for some of the world's most famous names.

"Tommy's time at Drinksology was spent with our designers and artisan producers on the ground witnessing first hand how we typically bring a new

product and concept from early stage development the whole way to product launch," Ryan informs us. "There is no doubt that the skills needed in this trade can be applied across many different industries. From an employer's point of view it's great to see the self-motivation and drive that sports people bring to every aspect of their life, on the pitch and off."

As IRUPA's Player Development Manager for Ulster, Pamela Gilpin is well versed in helping players find a suitable path in anticipation of their inevitable retirement. "A vital aspect of our role is career development. When a player decides that he needs to start looking beyond his rugby career, we will explore core values, motivators, personal strengths, interests, passions and personal aspirations moving forward. We then have a better idea of what potential careers might fit their particular skill set and gain a clear picture of their knowledge or skills gap. Work placements are essential tools in this regard, as exposure to certain aspects of a business can help to determine what fills the gap."

Former Ulster lock Neil McComb is another beneficiary of the affiliates scheme. Having eschewed several development contracts whilst he pursued

a degree in psychology from Dundee University, McComb returned to Ulster in 2009 but found his playing opportunities limited. Retiring recently, McComb is now pursuing a career in property with the established Simon O'Brien in Belfast. However, before settling into his current position, McComb sought the help of IRUPA in determining where his future lay.

Nick McCullough, General Manager for DFDS, Europe's largest shipping and logistics company, felt that there was tremendous value in the scheme. "It was a great experience having Neil here with us for a week. We are a large, established company and have a lot to offer when it comes to different departments having to work closely together to continually meet high customer expectation and demands.

A lot of our work involves developing and maintaining relationships both internally and externally, planning ahead, free flowing communications between departments and the ability to set weekly, monthly and longer term business targets. I think Neil really valued his time at DFDS and realised the transferable skills that he has developed from his time in rugby are highly valued and needed in business."

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# Irish Women's *Rugby Update*

## Career Workshop

IRUPA works hard to assist the players in establishing balance in their lives on and off the pitch. Along with high performance rugby, these players face the same process of developing their working careers. In order to give the players a practical approach to career development, a career workshop was held in Lansdowne, in association with the Noel Group, which gave the players a step by step guide on how to develop their CV, prepare themselves for interviews and sell their qualities and skills to find the perfect job opportunities for their career of choice.

The girls were shown how the skills they have developed and learnt over the years through their participation in rugby can translate into the working environment. The players were informed that teamwork, leadership, dedication and time management are all skills that can apply to their careers. IRUPA is determined to support the players in the various paths they choose by facilitating them with expert advice and information when the need arises.



## Work/Rugby Balance & Employment Support

With the start of the new season kicking off and the World Cup in Ireland firmly fixed in the diary, there is plenty for those involved in women's rugby to consider over the coming weeks and months. Between work and rugby there is plenty of juggling ahead, but as Roy Keane once stated, "fail to prepare, prepare to fail."

Prior to her departure to Australia, Lindsey Berne, as PDM for women's rugby, drew up a document to assist with the management of a player's respective commitments.

Outside of the rugby environment, work is the most consuming aspect for the majority of players in the squad. IRUPA is acutely aware that the amateur status of the XV's squad means that players often forsake annual leave to represent their country on the pitch. This often puts individual players at risk of stress and potential burn out which could have repercussions on both the player's ability to be productive in work but also have

implications for rugby in terms of illness and/or injury.

To this end, Lindsey suggests that each player devises a plan for both the week and entire year ahead, to include all of their commitments, be they club matches, work dates or international obligations. Once this is down on paper, it will be easier to see where demands may be particularly pressing in good time. It would also be a useful document to share with one's employer.

While it is important to be mindful of work colleagues, to facilitate a successful career in the game it is necessary to be positioned in a manner that best fits with playing obligations. Not everybody has the opportunity to play for their country on an international stage. Consequently, where possible this should not be compromised.

Therefore, it is important to have open lines of communication with work management and establish a transparent

relationship, with regular feedback and information. Furthermore, employers can provide a range of supports while as an international representative, there are a number of qualities that players can offer the workplace in return. However, it is important to establish a transparent relationship and provide regular feedback and information.



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# Derby Day

Prior to the introduction of the Celtic League in 2001, interprovincial clashes mattered little to those other than the hardened supporter. Played in the depths of winter, not even those charged with covering the sport bothered to give the fixtures due attention.

Given their ambivalence towards an 'All-Ireland' league, Ulster engaged in the series with added impetus, Munster and Leinster put up a token challenge, while Connacht's endeavours were deemed largely irrelevant. Indeed, according to Edmund van Esbeck, the westerners only managed to claim 22 victories over their three rivals between 1946 and 1999.

Connacht's recent resurgence however, embodied by their bonus point win over Pro12 leaders Ulster in October, ensures that the provincial weekend continues to provide all that a rugby fan desires.

## LEINSTER 6-30 MUNSTER Heineken Cup Semi-Final, Lansdowne Road – 23 April 2006



This was the one that broke new ground. Amidst all the fanfare surrounding Leinster's heroics in Toulouse, it was Ronan O'Gara who led the nearly men of Munster into the Heineken Cup Final.

In the days leading up to the contest much was made of O'Gara's impending rendezvous with the mercurial Argentine, Felipe Contepomi. However, buoyed by a sea of red, Munster targeted the hotheaded Puma while O'Gara handed-off Malcolm O'Kelly to sum up what was a miserable afternoon for Leinster.

## CONNACHT 7-6 LEINSTER Pro12, Sportground – 26 March 2016



To many it was just a matter of time

before Connacht slipped up in their quest for Pro12 glory. Despite an inauspicious start to their campaign, Leinster were a coming force again and expected to trail a blaze to the season's end.

However, when Kieran Marmion stole over for an opportunistic try after 13 minutes prompting a defensive masterclass by his Connacht side, suddenly the rugby world sat up and took notice.

## Munster 16-22 Ulster Heineken Cup Quarter Final, Thomond Park – 8 April 2012



In what was the first meeting between the two sides in the Heineken Cup, Ulster became only the second side to come away from Thomond Park with a victory in 17 years.

Despite going behind early in the game, Munster controlled much of the fixture but weary legs proved to be the undoing of Paul O'Connell's aging side and Ulster held on for a famous win.

## LEINSTER 20-12 ULSTER Magners League, Lansdowne Road – 31 December 2006



This was the afternoon when Brian O'Driscoll pulled off the original selfie. Making as if to pass to Denis Hickie on the wing, the Irish captain sensationally popped the ball over his teammates head and sailed past a floundering Tommy Bowe.

Losing 12-5 at half time, Leinster scores from Owen Finegan and Jamie Heaslip - the last try ever scored at the old Lansdowne Road - secured a satisfying comeback.

## Munster 6-25 Leinster Heineken Cup Semi-Final, Croke Park – 2 May 2009



When Felipe Contepomi pulled up with injury, many Leinster fans looked on anxiously as a young pretender entered the fray.

But with Rocky Elsom to the fore, Leinster dominated their rivals in every aspect of the game, including from the pivot where Jonathon Sexton announced himself on the European stage in kicking and steering his rampant teammates to a 25-6 victory.

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## Playing on in a Different World

### Conor O'Loughlin

**At just 28 years old, Conor O'Loughlin was forced to retire from the game in 2011. Having sustained a hip injury whilst playing for Connacht, O'Loughlin exhausted every medical avenue before acceding to advice that he should no longer continue his career as a professional rugby player.**

Following his involvement with Michael Bradley's Ireland U21 side, O'Loughlin was drafted in by Eric Elwood at

Connacht and made his debut against London Irish in August 2003. He would score his first try for the province a week later against a Munster team featuring the likes of Keith Wood and Paul O'Connell. O'Loughlin went on to earn 97 caps for the westerners and also represented Ireland A, retiring as one of Connacht's longest serving players.

Speaking at a recent networking event as part of IRUPA's partnership with the Institute of Director's in Ireland (IoD), O'Loughlin described his transition from the pitch to pitching.

"Rugby had been my life ever since Connacht approached me while I was a student at UCC. But when it was recommended that I hang up my boots, I decided to take some time out. Having

been firmly entrenched in the rugby bubble, I was suddenly on the outside looking in. In that respect I felt a little isolated. It took me quite a while to get my head around not being part of that structure and playing rugby again but eventually I began to face up to the reality of the situation and look to my next challenge."

Competitive and ambitious, O'Loughlin wanted to recreate the highs and lows of his rugby days albeit from within an altogether different environment. Having completed his degree in Business Information Systems in Cork before studying for his Masters in Finance from the UCD Michael Smurfit Graduate Business School, O'Loughlin already had one eye on his future.

"I engaged with IRUPA and they managed to get me into a number of internships. This was extremely beneficial in that it helped me to tick off what it was that I did or didn't want. They also surrounded me with several mentors who became reliable sounding boards as I took my first steps into the business domain."

With great enthusiasm, O'Loughlin promptly set up three companies and hoped one at least one of them would take off in what was "probably my first mistake." Nevertheless, during this time the Galway man happened upon an idea that has shaped his entrepreneurial career. Glofox, a business management software development company that services gyms and fitness studios, now comprises 16 full-time staff and is used by over 430 studios worldwide, with further expansion into the United States imminent.

Whilst Glofox continues to grow (they are targeting a €1.5m turnover in 2017 and revenues in excess of €5m by 2018), O'Loughlin admits that he was faced with several challenges at the outset. "Personally I encountered some difficulties. As a rugby player you can't help but become a little institutionalised. Everyday is mapped out for you and there is an inherent pattern and structure to your career. You have to adapt your entire lifestyle. But my biggest test was in dealing with the different personalities



and tapping into how they work, and gaining an appreciation of what motivates other people."

**"That being said there are a number of similarities between the driven and competitive nature of both worlds. For instance, I didn't fully appreciate how much the traits you develop as a rugby player can be so transferable outside of the game. As a professional rugby player, I had developed good communication and decision-making skills in addition to the discipline that had been instilled in me from being in such a professional environment."**

"All of these stood to me in the transition. What was also interesting was that I had developed quite an analytical mind through the tactical information we used to process and I found that I could use this to good effect when applied to business."

O'Loughlin provided plenty of advice throughout the evening and was not hesitant in suggesting that players

make the most of the contacts that they have established through the game. "I underestimated the power of networking when I started out. For many businesses there is huge value in hiring an ex-professional. Therefore any potential link-up can be mutually beneficial. I would strongly recommend that players give serious thought to their post-playing careers in good time to give them every chance of succeeding in their new career."

There were a number of Leinster players in attendance at the St. Helen's Radisson Hotel to hear both O'Loughlin and Mark O'Donnell, a partner at Amrop, specialists in top level and executive recruitment. Mike Ross was one who felt that the evening was of huge value: "Conor's presentation provided a great insight into how he managed the life changing experience of retirement and how he was able to use his skillset in other meaningful ways. It has given me plenty to mull over as I consider my own direction into the future."

President of the IoD, Mr. Des Lamont added: "knowing what you are and who you are is the most important part before you go looking for work. There is a role for everyone, whether they might be a finder, minder or grinder! Just remember that if you're interested in something, there is a business somewhere out there with that association."





# Up & Coming

As Ulster took to the field against Northampton in their last pre-season fixture, one name was at the tip of everybody's tongue. Charles Piutau took up his position at fullback and duly whetted the appetite for the season ahead with some nice touches and electric breaks. But while it was a promising start for the All Black, it was the performance of a young winger from Donaghcloney that intrigued the Ulster faithful.

On his first start at the Kingspan stadium, Rob Lyttle's first piece of

action was a delightful sidestep and offload to his Kiwi colleague. Within a few moments Lyttle was demonstrating his defensive prowess, while it was his pass that put Louis Ludik away for the game's first try.

As the youngster sized up the subsequent conversion, Dan Tuohy, commentating for Ulster Rugby remarked that he "didn't know he [Lyttle] could kick," to which Tommy Bowe replied: "that boy can do everything."

Not even a first senior appearance in the opening round of the Guinness Pro12 appeared to faze the youngster. Amidst all the fanfare surrounding Ruen Pienaar, Lyttle emerged from

the bench as an early replacement for Craig Gilroy to seize another chance in the senior side with aplomb. In claiming two tries, Lyttle inspired Ulster to a 29-8 victory over Newport Gwent Dragons. Lyttle has since featured in all of Ulster's Pro12 games to date.

A former student of Royal Belfast Academical Institution, Lyttle made the controversial decision to move to fierce rivals Methodist College Belfast for his final year of school in 2015. As fate would have it, RBAI ultimately prevailed that year but Lyttle's star was already on the rise. Progressing through the underage representative ranks, the youngster was inevitably

picked up by the Ulster Academy.

At just 18, Lyttle featured prominently in the British and Irish Cup for Ulster 'A' last year. Despite his tender years, the quality of his performances saw him drafted in as the 24th man for the Pro12 on several occasions. He was simultaneously to the fore as Queen's University sought promotion from Division 2A of the Ulster Bank League. Given his form, Lyttle was naturally disappointed not to make the U20 Junior World Championship panel in June. However, the Irish 7's Development squad duly came calling.

With the likes of Piutau, Bowe, Ludik, Gilroy, Jared Payne, Andrew Trimble, Stuart Olding and Jacob Stockdale all potentially vying for places in the back three, Lyttle faces a stern challenge to become further established at Ulster. But after such a blistering start, he has certainly made his mark.



## "THAT BOY CAN DO EVERYTHING."



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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

## IRPA backs changes to the Disciplinary Processes and Sanctions

Players throughout the world were given the opportunity to provide feedback, through a short survey on the proposed changes to World Rugby's Regulation 17.

There was an excellent response from twelve different nationalities playing across thirteen different territories. Feedback mainly concerned the fact that players feel that they will get fairer sanctions if they are judged by individuals who have an understanding of the game and of how decisions are made in real-time on the field of play without necessarily punishing a player by a strict interpretation of the laws. The players also felt that the ability to enter an early guilty plea in the knowledge of what the sanction will be could result in significant efficiencies and alleviate the need for many hearings. The survey results were submitted to World Rugby for consideration.



## USA, Canada and Scotland find their Voice

Following the establishment of the Japanese Rugby Players' Association earlier this year, IRPA have been assisting players around the globe to engage with their national unions.

In recent months the USA national players have taken a step closer to establishing their own association following positive discussions with IRPA and USA Rugby. The Canadian and Scottish players have looked to the services of IRPA to support them in their initial negotiations with their respective national unions.



## Women's Rugby Review

The international Rugby Players' Association carried out a survey through its national associations and player representatives to establish the players view of the women's game and what direction the game needs to take to ensure a strong international women's game.

The study included players from both sevens and fifteens game with a large proportion playing in both codes. The 116 respondents to the survey went into great detail about their views of their domestic and international experiences. Some key points:

- The development of the game begins with establishing a stronger grassroots game amongst young girls both in the club and school's system with the knock on effect of creating greater standards of international rugby.
- The promotion of the women's game globally needs to improve with a concerted effort needing to be made by all stakeholders to provide mediums for the increased coverage of the women's game to encourage more participation.
- More fixtures at senior level in both sevens and fifteen would lead to an improved standard and give the women a greater opportunity to showcase their sport.
- By coupling up the women's games and competitions with the men's, a wider audience will be spectating.
- Having a clear, well planned women's calendar with



sufficient fixtures will give national unions and players alike to prepare and promote the fixtures.

- Emphasis must be placed on the standard of coaching and resources supplied by the national union together with the training of refereeing to ensure the standard of preparation for games is as high as quality on the field.

The results of the findings were presented by IRPA's player representative Rachael Burford to World Rugby's Women's Review Group in Buenos Aires.

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# Mossy Lawler

In this edition we continue our focus on past professional players, their experience of professional rugby and their transition out of the sport.



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

Rugby was all I ever wanted to do and being a pro player was the goal even from a young age. Did I ever think it was going to happen??? I wasn't sure but I did everything I possibly could to give myself the chance.

*How did you embark on your rugby career?*

I came through the age grade system in Munster the same way that the kids do now but there were no provincial academies in my day. There was just the one - the National Academy. I was disappointed to not make it at the time but it never got in my way of reaching my goal. I played with the Irish 20s for two seasons, captaining them in my second year. I was offered a development contract with Munster after that and the road began

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

Yes, because at the time it was my only option.

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

I never studied before turning professional which was a massive mistake on my behalf. I went into the game early and never fully prepared myself for the aftermath. I eventually got sense in my later years and I started to study while still playing. The balance is all about time management and it can all be done if you can organise your life properly. There is so much help available now through IRUPA to help players balance their commitments. There are no excuses anymore.

*How did your rugby career progress?*

I played with Munster from 2000-2009. I also spent a season with London Wasps but had to finish my career that year through injury. Rugby gave me my best years of my life but it was a mental battle

rather than a physical one!

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

Very much so! If nothing else rugby gives you discipline, teaches you how to manage your time, and to have the utmost respect for your colleagues, friends and family. These are all traits that employers look for in an individual.

*How was your retirement experience?*

It was something that I was dreading because I loved the game so much. Jokingly, I had always said that I would play some sort of rugby until I was 40. But, when the time came I was ready. I was in a good place physically (sort of) but mentally I just had enough. I had already delved into the coaching world so I was ready for the next step.

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

I suppose the biggest thing I missed was the lads. You spend so much time with them every day both on and off the pitch that they really become an extension of your family. When it's all over they are suddenly cut from your life. Yes, you have made friends forever and don't get me wrong, it's not like you will never see them again but that day to day connection, that suiting up on a Saturday together, that joy of victory together is gone.

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

Get an education – Have RESPECT for all – Hard Work pays off!

*So Mossy what are you doing currently?*

I am working for Connacht Rugby as an EPDO. My day to day duties are coaching the Academy and TIP groups around the regions. I am also Head Coach of the Connacht Eagles. Rugby has given me everything past and present!

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