

# RUGBY PLAYERS IRELAND

THE OFFICIAL PUBLICATION OF  
RUGBY PLAYERS IRELAND  
SUMMER 2019

## NEW APPOINTMENTS TO EXECUTIVE BOARD



**STILL  
GROWING**  
JAMES RYAN

**ZURICH IRISH RUGBY  
PLAYERS' AWARDS 2019**  
WINNERS ANNOUNCED!



**RUGBY PLAYERS  
IRELAND**



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# CEO ADDRESS

**SIMON KEOGH**

**They say if you don't change, you don't grow. Over the last 20 years, Irish teams have evolved with every passing year. This evolution has reaped the rewards at both national and provincial level. However, even in times of success there is always a need to develop and change as competitors look to close the gap and march ahead.**

If the achievements of recent times are to be sustained, it is imperative that we are innovative and open to change so as to stay ahead the chasing pack. This also applies behind the scenes where Rugby Players Ireland are constantly striving to develop as an association.

In April we were delighted to appoint Louise Galvin, Ciara Griffin and Greg O'Shea to our Executive Board having been elected by their teammates. We also welcomed Maura Quinn in the capacity of a Non-Executive Director. CEO of the Institute of Directors in Ireland, Maura brings a wealth of experience particularly in the area of corporate governance. With her knowledge we will endeavour to ensure that as we grow as an organisation with the right structures in place.

The four appointments reflect the ongoing change at Rugby Players Ireland. In the past year, the necessary amendments have been made to our constitution to allow for the association to formally represent the Women's XVs and the 7s programmes. Through discussion and collaboration with the IRFU, we have been able to grow our membership to provide these groups with



representation, personal development services and corporate engagement opportunities. A dedicated Player Development Manager has also been assigned to assist the player groups.

The appointments of Louise, Ciara and Greg have allowed us to diversify and promote an all-inclusive environment recognising the growth of the game in Ireland. We are delighted to be able to recognise their huge contribution to the game and to provide a platform to discuss the issues they may face.

Our new Board members were all in attendance at the Zurich Irish Rugby Players' Awards at The Clayton Hotel on the Burlington Road in May. Each branch of Rugby Players Ireland was represented on the night with players from across the provinces and respective rugby programmes taking to the stage to receive individual or collective accolades.

For the second year in succession the night was televised. This is an important step for Rugby Players Ireland as it provides a platform for us to celebrate the achievements of our members on and off the field, whilst showcasing what we do as an organisation to those who underpin the game in this country.

It was particularly pleasing to welcome a strong cohort of our past players on the night. Our alumni have become increasingly influential through our work as the association grows. The initiatives and studies carried out with our past players have helped to provide direction as to how best we engage with our current members.

It was fitting that amongst the gathered alumni was former Leinster and Ireland hooker Shane Byrne, who received the Zurich Contribution to Irish Society Award. For as long as I have known him, Shane has worked across a wide array of charities, while he was instrumental in the establishment of the annual Ireland v England Legends series which has accumulated over €1m for various rugby related charities. For the past number of Legends fixtures, the team at Rugby Players Ireland has helped Shane and Len Dineen to bring the event together. We have been delighted to do so, as the event also serves as a great outlet to reconnect with those who have taken a new direction.

The transition out of professional rugby is one of the biggest challenges any player will face. Therefore, having a network of past players who are keen to support them provides comfort. Through regular engagement at business breakfasts, networking events and socials, Rugby Players Ireland has developed a strong link with those who have stepped away from the game.

Players, both past and present, have and continue to give us so much joy on the rugby field. Working alongside the IRFU, we will continue to grow as an organisation and further develop the supports our players deserve as we look to fulfil our vision of making Ireland 'the best place in the world to play rugby.'





# RUGBY PLAYERS IRELAND NEWS



ZURICH IRISH  
RUGBY PLAYERS'  
AWARDS 2019



Our congratulations to all those who were recognised by their peers at the Zurich Irish Rugby Players' Awards

**ZURICH IRISH RUGBY PLAYERS'  
PLAYER OF THE YEAR**

James Ryan

**BNY MELLON WOMEN'S XVS  
PLAYER OF THE YEAR**

Ciara Griffin

**BNY MELLON RUGBY PLAYERS  
IRELAND HALL OF FAME**

Conor O'Shea

**VIRGIN MEDIA SPORT SUPPORTERS'  
PLAYER OF THE YEAR**

Jack Carty

**VOLKSWAGEN TRY OF THE YEAR**

Jacob Stockdale  
(v New Zealand)

**ZURICH CONTRIBUTION  
TO SOCIETY**

Shane Byrne

**DRUIDS GLEN HOTEL & GOLF  
RESORT MOMENT OF THE YEAR**

Ireland v New Zealand  
17 November 2018

**NEVIN SPENCE YOUNG  
PLAYER OF THE YEAR**

James Ryan

**AIB CORPORATE BANKING MEN'S  
7S PLAYER OF THE YEAR**

Terry Kennedy

**VODAFONE MEDAL FOR  
EXCELLENCE**

Darren Cave

**IZEST MARKETING WOMEN'S 7S  
PLAYER OF THE YEAR**

Amee-Leigh Murphy Crowe



## EXECUTIVE BOARD

Maura Quinn, the Chief Executive of the Institute of Directors (IoD) in Ireland, has joined the Rugby Players Ireland Executive Board as a Non-Executive Director with immediate effect.

Maura's appointment coincides with the appointments of Irish Women's XV captain, Ciara Griffin, Irish Women's 7s player Louise Galvin and Irish Men's 7s player Greg O'Shea, to reflect the growing remit of the players' body in light of the continued growth and development of professional rugby in Ireland. The four new appointees join fellow players Rob Kearney (Chairman), Darren Cave, Eoin McKeon, Peter O'Mahony and Johnny Sexton on the Executive Committee and existing Non-Executive Director, Peter McKenna.

A membership organisation for Ireland's professional rugby players, Rugby Players Ireland was established in 2001 following the advent of the professional game. Its remit was extended in 2018 to include the Women's XV International programme and both the Men's and Women's 7s teams.

Rugby Players Ireland is driven by its objective to make Ireland the best place in the world to play rugby. Its work includes representing the interests of the players in all aspects of the game, the design, development and administration of its world-class player development programme and harnessing the collective power of their members to contribute to social good through their mental well-being programme Tackle Your Feelings delivered in partnership with Zurich.

Speaking at the announcement, Rugby Players Ireland, Chairman, Rob Kearney said: "We are delighted to welcome Maura, Louise, Ciara, and Greg to the Rugby Players Ireland Executive Board. The appointments reflect the continued growth and development of professional rugby in Ireland. It is also particularly pleasing to have an individual of the calibre of Maura Quinn joining the Executive Board and providing her expertise as we focus on the delivery of our strategic objective to ensure that Ireland is the best country in the world to play professional rugby."



Rugby Players Ireland, CEO, Simon Keogh added: "I look forward to working with our new Board members at what is a very exciting time for the development of rugby in Ireland with the continued growth of the women's game, the recent success of the 7s programmes alongside really positive performances by each of the four provinces this year. The new additions will bring different experiences, expertise and skills to the Executive Board that are reflective of the broad remit and impact of Rugby Players Ireland within the game."

Maura Quinn also said that the recruitment of a Non-Executive Director from outside the world of rugby was illustrative of Rugby Players Ireland's recognition of the need for an external perspective, which will help to ensure effective corporate governance and board management.

## WORLD PLAYER DEVELOPMENT CONFERENCE 2019

In March, our Player Development Managers (PDMs) were in Amsterdam attending the World Player Development Conference. Hosted by FIFPro, over 100 player and personal development experts were invited to share their experiences of working in various elite athlete environments.

The three-day conference in The Netherlands was preceded by a meeting of global PDMs in rugby, facilitated by International Rugby Players. Player Development Programmes from New Zealand, Australia, South Africa, Ireland, England, France and the Pacific Islands were all represented.

"This was a great opportunity for PDMs to share best practice in the area of player transition," said Dr Deirdre Lyons, who heads up the Player Development Programme in Ireland and helped to bring the conference together. "The energy and passion in the room was evident as PDMs discussed how we can best support our current and past players, as well as each other."



## ENTREPRENEURSHIP AND NETWORKING EVENT

Starting your own company can be a daunting venture, but an extremely exciting one! This was something that all of our members in attendance took from our Entrepreneurship and Networking Event that was held at the InterContinental Hotel in Dublin.

A most sincere thank you to current Irish women's international Sene Naoupu and former players Barry O'Mahony, Darragh Fanning and VitHit founder Gary Lavin for their honest insights which were drawn out by former Irish Team Manager Mick Kearney!

In the weeks following the event, O'Mahony's fintech start-up Umba, which facilitates micro-loans to emerging economies in Africa, closed a funding round with two leading Irish venture capital firms that will pave the way for the company to lend up to €1 million a month.



## TACKLE YOUR FEELINGS AUSTRALIA

Tackle Your Feelings is going global! Led by former Cavan footballer Nick Walsh, the campaign is being supported by Zurich, the AFL Coaches Association and AFL Players! It is great to see Tackle Your Feelings take on an international agenda! Sending all involved our best wishes!

Meanwhile, with planning for Phase Two of Tackle Your Feelings in Ireland well underway, the campaign is waiting to kick-off once again in earnest! In the meantime, our members still continue to carry the message. Led by members of the Irish Women's 7s squad, Railway Union RFC will carry the Tackle Your Feelings message throughout their busy 7s schedule this summer!



## O'MAHONY AND NEVILLE JOIN THE ARK!



Ronan O'Mahony and international referee Joy Neville have been announced as ambassadors for the Children's Ark at University Hospital Limerick. O'Mahony, who recently retired from the game, acknowledged the role rugby players have to play in their communities.

"The ability to bring a smile to a young person's face is a powerful thing, especially when they are unwell. I am delighted to be taking on an ambassadorial role with the Children's Ark, which has been facilitated by Rugby Players Ireland. By strengthening this link, I hope to bring some light into their lives at a time when they need it most!"



## OUT AND ABOUT

It may have been the busiest time of the rugby season, but our members have continued to lend their profiles to worthy causes!

It was a busy few weeks for our Ulster Rugby members. Ian Nagle, Matthew Rea, Craig Gilroy, Stuart McCloskey, Kyle McCall and Will Addison were at the Marie Curie Hospice in Belfast to help out with a bit of DIY work. Meanwhile John Andrew, Alan O'Connor, James Hume, Greg Jones, Tom O'Toole and Marty Moore spent an afternoon at Dogs Trust Ballymena making a few new friends!

In Limerick, Sam Arnold and the Irish Blood Transfusion Service (IBTS) have been urging people to give blood, revealing that his sister receives regular donations for a rare genetic disorder. Arnold's fellow Munster Rugby players Diarmuid Barron, Sean O'Connor, Luke Masters, Craig Casey and Jonathon Wren visited the Milford Care Centre while BJ Botha has been raising awareness for Epilepsy Ireland by taking on the Absa Cape Epic – the largest full-service mountain bike stage race in the world!

In a much colder climate (despite the April date), Leinster Rugby's Will Connors, James Tracy and Joe Toman took to the streets of Dublin's city centre with the Feed Our Homeless team as temperatures in the capital plummeted. Then, in the early hours of May 11th, the Irish Men's 7s squad whipped on their active gear and joined Darkness into Light in the Ringsend area!

Finally, Kathy Baker, Audrey O'Flynn, Deirbhile Nic a Bháird, Ashleigh Baxtyer and Amee-Leigh Murphy Crowe dropped by Our Lady's Children's Hospital in Crumlin to raise the spirits of the patients. The above image was even featured by The Irish Times as their 'Image of the Day' on April 2nd!



## CLUBHOUSE

It was great to have several former players join us at the Institute of Directors in Ireland's Spring Lunch in Dublin. Joining Marcus Horan were Bernard Jackman, Niall Woods, Derek Hegarty, Paul Wallace, Joe McVeigh, Daragh O'Shea and Mike Ross, while Executive Board Member Louise Galvin was also in attendance.

During Career Transition Week, we also caught up with some old friends over breakfast in Belfast to see how they are getting on!



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# STILL GROWING

The Zurich Players' Player of the Year is only just beginning

JAMES RYAN



It is easy to forget that James Ryan is only 22. An Irish international before making his provincial bow, Ryan spent his breakthrough season amassing league titles, European Cups and Grand Slams. It was a ridiculous way to embark on a senior rugby career.

Before he played against the USA in June 2017, Ryan had long been earmarked as a special talent. The superlatives were justified when he captained the Irish U20s to a famous victory over New Zealand. However, by now most compliments are already well-worn. The standard set by the Dubliner ever since has been unprecedented.

Remarkably, it took a full year before Ryan experienced a loss on the senior stage as Ireland and Leinster both enjoyed all-conquering seasons. Understandably, many felt that a repeat of such success was nigh on impossible and it was anticipated that the latest influx of young talent in the Irish ranks, including Ryan, would have to contend with 'second season syndrome'.

But if anything, he has got better.

"I'd like to think that I've made progress since last year and there are still lots of things I can get better at, but I'm happy enough with where I am at the moment," Ryan says when asked to reflect on the season.

It would seem that his peers are too. Following on from being voted Leinster Rugby's Players' Player of

“Ultimately the respect that you're looking for is from your peers, the lads you play with, as opposed to anyone else, so yeah to be nominated for two awards was humbling. To win both, well, I'm blown away by it!”



the Year, the lock was also deemed to be the Zurich Irish Rugby Players' Player of the Year at the annual awards gala. As if that wasn't enough, Ryan was also named the Nevin Spence Young Player of the Year. A busy night!

"It's always nice to win awards, but tonight has been particularly special in that I am being recognised by my teammates and opponents.

"Ultimately the respect that you're looking for is from your peers, the lads you play with, as opposed to anyone else, so yeah to be nominated for two awards was humbling. To win both, well, I'm blown away by it!" he says.







Beating off competition from the likes of Tadhg Beirne, Jack Carty and Peter O'Mahony is a remarkable feat in itself given how well each have performed this season. O'Mahony's performance against New Zealand in November was one for the ages, while Tadhg Beirne required little time to settle into his new surroundings following his summer move to Limerick from Scarlets.

It was also a season to remember for Jack Carty. The Athlone born out-half marked his fine form with an international debut in the Six Nations before going on to become Connacht's record points scorer in the PRO14. His efforts were not lost on anyone and he took home the Virgin Media Sport Supporters' Player of the Year.

"Pete, Tadgh and Jack have all enjoyed excellent campaigns too and it has been a pleasure to share time with them in Irish camp," remarked Ryan, who is the first Players' Player of the Year from Leinster since Rob Kearney in 2012 and the first to claim both Players' Player and Young Player titles. "I am loving it. Obviously last year was great. This year has been different. There have been some lows but plenty of highs too.

"We mightn't have won the European Cup or the Grand Slam, but I'll definitely look back on the season with plenty of fond memories. Obviously beating the All Blacks in November was one of them and we've had some big wins with Leinster including the PRO14, but there were valuable learnings and I will take them with me into the future," Ryan, a keen student of the game adds.

"My set-piece work is always something I'm driving. My lineout work, whether that is with or without the ball, it's always something I'm looking to get better at.

"With my scrum work as well, I do a lot of work with Fogs [John Fogarty] to make sure my shape and my entry into the scrum is where it needs to be so certainly set-piece is an area I look at."

"I'm focusing on making little improvements along the way and hopefully they add up. I'm happy enough with where I am at the moment but definitely by no means the finished article."

A scary thought.



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# WE'RE GOING TO NEED A BIGGER BOAT!

After the highs of Hong Kong, the tide is turning for Greg O'Shea and the Ireland Men's 7s

GREG O'SHEA

Two years ago, Greg O'Shea was in an entirely different boat to the one in which he sailed around Hong Kong island recently. Sipping on beers as he basked in the glory of World Series qualification, O'Shea doesn't forget that the outlook wasn't so sunny in June 2017.

A lacerated Achilles tendon while on holidays in New York back in 2015 threatened to wreak havoc with O'Shea's prospects at Munster Rugby. While he recovered to take the field within 6 months, as a sprinter of international quality he knew that his body was nowhere near where it needed to be. Especially when having to oust the likes of Simon Zebo, Keith Earls and Darren Sweetnam.

Nevertheless, Munster Rugby and their medical staff gave him time at a crucial juncture, one that might otherwise have seen him fall out of the sport altogether. His family also gathered around to help him through a difficult period. While it ultimately failed to work out, O'Shea's hard work and evident abilities in Munster red soon came to the attention of Anthony Eddy.

"It could easily have been like putting down a horse, 'your leg is gone'," O'Shea exclaims. "But they [Munster Rugby] gave me another year which, hand on heart, was so nice of them. Now look, I'm in the 7s team and the world is our oyster."

Every cloud and all that.

O'Shea was undoubtedly disappointed as he joined Rory Burke in heading for the departure gates. However, both have seen an upturn in fortune of late. Following a stint with Nottingham Rugby, Burke will join Connacht Rugby this summer while O'Shea's transition into 7s rugby has finally begun to reap the rewards.

"It was difficult at first. There was a lot of high intensity running and it took a bit of getting used to. I kept blowing my hamstrings and groins, so I had to give my body time to adapt and absorb the volume. I wasn't involved as much as I would have liked, but I kept at it and this season it has all worked out nicely!"

Having been voted onto the Executive Board at Rugby Players Ireland, it is clear that his teammates admire and respect O'Shea's work-ethic and attitude. Although he has never captained a side in senior rugby, his competitive nature and willingness to drive standards has marked him out to be a natural leader.

"There was plenty of big characters in the squad when I joined up and with my injuries it took me a while to establish myself. We lost a few guys after Hong Kong last year. Jimmy O'Brien went to Leinster and it's great to see Robert Balacoune doing so well up at Ulster. We all had to step up.

"But it's such a small squad that each of us leads in our way. Billy [Dardis] is very focussed, smart. Then there's Harry [McNulty], John [O'Donnell] and Fitz [Ian Fitzpatrick]. Everyone pushes towards the same goal. There's no room in there for anyone who might hold us back."

While any number of players could have been expected to represent the group capably, O'Shea has been handed the mantle. A Law graduate out of the University of Limerick, his teammates have given him an encouraging nudge, one that he is happy to grasp with both hands.



"I'm like a sponge. I can't wait to get involved and learn. I plan to become a solicitor and so this experience of being on the Board, representing my teammates, can only help in that context. I want to be a focal point for the group. Having the platform to raise important 7s issues alongside Louise [Galvin] is a massive step for our game.

"With the calibre of people on the Board... I mean, Peter O'Mahony is a Lions captain, Rob Kearney – how many European Cups does he have? Guys like Eoin McKeon and Johnny Sexton have been established senior players for a long time. They bring really intelligent experience to the table. My hope is to benefit from the conversations they might have been having five or six years ago and bring their learnings into the 7s."

There was a strong turnout from the 7s squads at the recent Zurich Irish Rugby Players' Awards, itself indicative of the respect the players have for their association, a relationship that has only been established in the past 12 months.

"When we approached Simon Keogh to have Rugby Players Ireland represent us last year, I don't think we realised the extent of support for us. Initially, we were simply relieved to have them on side as it was hard to approach our coaches and have the difficult conversations that needed to be had.

"More generally, it probably took a while for the lads to buy into it. But as we got to know the staff, we could see that they were across everything we are doing in our lives. It made us sit up and realise that there are massive opportunities for us here. Over the coming months and years, that relationship and respect is only going to grow.

"What has really impressed us though is the support structure that is in place for those who aren't in the game anymore. As rugby players, we all know plenty of guys in that bracket and it has been great to see them having someone to turn to. Whether it is lads still in the game, or beyond, Rugby Players Ireland have become a bigger part of the conversation and everyone is buying into it.

"It's an honour for Louise and I to now be involved in this way with such a progressive organisation. Let's see where we both bring the 7s game to!"

“Whether it is lads still in the game, or beyond, Rugby Players Ireland have become a bigger part of the conversation and everyone is buying into it.”



# #TRYWITHPRIDE

In June, Europe's biggest LGBT+ and inclusive tournament takes places in Dublin

**Union Cup Dublin 2019, Europe's biggest LGBT+ inclusive rugby tournament took place in early June at DCU with over 45 teams from 15 countries participating. For the first time, the Union Cup also hosted a dedicated women's tournament.**

International referee Nigel Owens took charge of the final. In the lead up to the competition Owens was joined by his fellow compatriot Gareth Thomas, Minister Katherine Zappone and well known Irish rugby names Lindsay Peat, Gordon D'Arcy and Rory Best in standing shoulder to shoulder in support of inclusive rugby.

Peat stresses it's important to have gay women's teams to help people accept their identity. She says that the Union Cup is absolutely essential to that.

"Gay teams are to cover the people who are really struggling with their identity, to help them to become accepting of themselves and their sexuality, whatever they may feel they are. People live in many different situations. We are trying to build frameworks and avenues for them to become comfortable, that is all.

"Sport definitely helped me to become more comfortable in myself and you don't understand that unless you're from the LGBT community.

"Ireland sent out a huge message in 2015 when we voted for marriage equality, it reverberated around the world. I have a three-year-old and a wife and I need this to continue so that it is the norm for him when he goes to school, that he can possibly be a straight man with two women as his parents and that is passed off as the norm.

"It's huge for me because Ireland is driving a standard and breaking barriers for gender equality internationally. It's important for diversion, inclusion and equality in sport."

The Emerald Warriors, as tournament hosts, invited everyone to Ireland, not just the rugby community, to #TryWithPride and enjoy the family-friendly festival, as international teams battled it out on the pitch.

Dr Katherine Zappone, Minister for Children and Youth Affairs, added: "Sport is the lifeblood of Ireland. For players and followers alike it sparks excitement, passion and joy. Nobody should be excluded from this. Sport and Rugby are for everyone. By hosting the Union Cup, the Emerald Warriors are leading the way and I am thrilled to see the entire Irish rugby community row in behind them."



## WHY IS THE UNION CUP IMPORTANT?

- **17%** LGBT+ are members of a sports club or team\*
- **55%** of LGBT men, **56%** women not active enough to maintain good health (compared to 33% / 45% general population)\*
- **84%** of gay men, **82%** gay women reported experiencing homophobic insults while participating in sports\*

*\*Sport, physical activity and LGBT report 2016 - Sport England*



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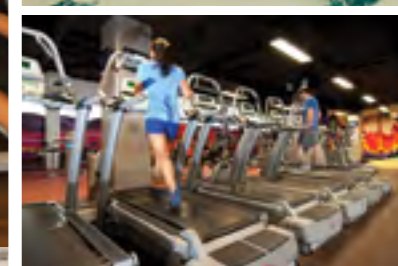
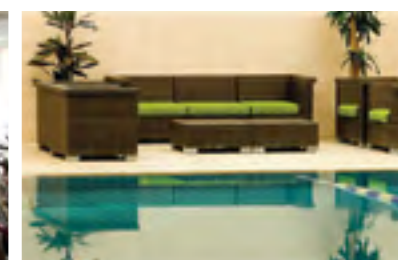
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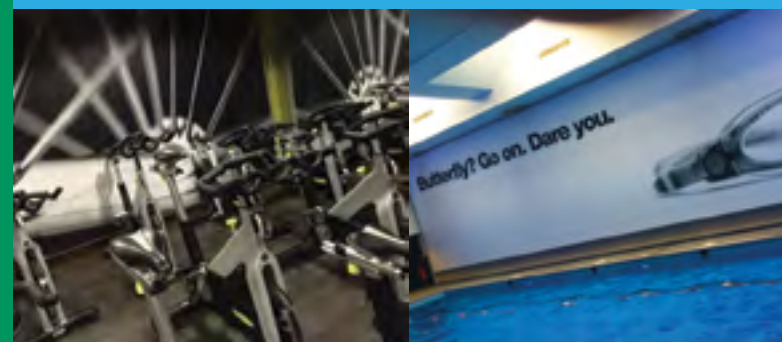
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# FROM LITTLE ACORNS GROW...

John Treacy has been a member of the Executive Board since 2012 and has seen how Rugby Players Ireland has grown in that time

JOHN TREACY

John Treacy popped by the Rugby Players Ireland HQ recently and he couldn't help but remark how far the organisation has come in recent years. The game in Ireland was operating in a different space when Treacy joined the Executive Board in 2012 at the invitation of Omar Hassanein. However, since that time he has seen a new aspect of growth at almost every turn.

"I remember one of my first meetings with Omar was in the basement of a Georgian Building on Leeson Street," Treacy recalls. "At that stage there were just two people on the staff. Now we have twelve really dedicated people working for the players, and about twice that again on our different boards and committees. We also have a huge range of specialisms on the team now, from psychologists to barristers.

"I step in every so often and get a snapshot and I have to say that I find our progress and growth hugely satisfying. Rugby Players Ireland [formerly IRUPA] really has been a key player in the success story of modern Irish rugby."

Treacy has been a valuable addition to the Executive Board throughout his tenure. In addition to setting up Treacy Consulting in 2004, he has amassed over 20 years of consulting experience in the EU, North America and more recently in Japan, specialising in areas such as analysis, strategy, change management and communications, all of which have been utilised by Rugby Players Ireland. Furthermore, John and his business partner Stephen Treacy own and manage Tribe101.com, a new Diaspora Engagement and Management Platform which helps people learn more about their roots and connect with their regions of origin around the world.



"I knew Peter McKenna down at Old Belvedere RFC where I was Honorary Secretary. He brought me along to a few IRUPA events. At that time, the likes of Denis O'Brien, Pádraig Ó Céidigh and Ken Belshaw were all on the Board. However, it would understandably take time for Omar to get meetings with them, and he wanted to get things moving so I guess I was in the right place at the right time."

Niall Woods put the foundations in place and awakened a dormant association before Hassanein moved from Australia to take IRUPA to the next level. Having his own experience of top players' associations, including a stint as interim CEO at the Rugby Union Players' Association in Australia (RUPA), Hassanein quickly identified what was needed in Ireland. However, he also needed the right people around him to get there. Treacy was one to whom Hassanein turned.

"In fairness to the players there was a huge appetite to have a strong association. There was a growing realisation that if we wanted to be seen and respected as a top tier rugby nation, we had to show that we were as serious about the game as our competition. Off the field, we were well behind the likes of Australia, England, South Africa and New Zealand, and that said a lot in many ways before our players even stepped onto the field.

"In my first year we pulled focus groups together. It was important that the players had input from the start. We had our Board and guys like Jamie Heaslip, Brian O'Driscoll, and Eoin Reddan come in to explore ways to improve everything from our team's skill mix to our employer/employee relationship. We also looked at our sponsorship model and it became clear that as more sponsors came on board could tread our own path a little better and become a little less reliant on the IRFU."

While it was clear that Ireland was some way behind our peers, those in control knew what had to be done. Gradually, the people with the requisite skillsets were pulled in. Former Leinster player Simon Keogh was appointed Operations Director & Head of Legal Affairs, while Dr Deirdre Lyons and Pamela Gilpin joined a growing Player Development team.

"Coming in as he did from RUPA in Australia, Omar could see what we were missing, and with a new team we worked out the smartest sequencing of our growth. You can see it now once again with his work with International Rugby Players. I think Omar led us from 'the AIL' to 'the Heineken Cup' as an association, without losing our core culture and values. He also made some great signings along the way.

"Then Simon came in and put his own stamp on things, pushing innovative sponsorship deals and taking our financial and governance systems to even higher levels. For instance, the addition of



“There was a growing realisation that if we wanted to be seen and respected as a top tier rugby nation, we had to show we were as serious about the game as our competition.”

Maura Quinn, Ciara, Louise and Greg to the Board is a huge moment for Rugby Players Ireland. I am really proud that we are now leading the way on rugby gender balance at our Board level.

"But there have been other big developments during my time involved. We now have greater involvement with the academies beginning with the Rookie Camp each season; the establishment of a growing, vibrant past-player network; our Agent Registration Scheme; the 7s and Women's programmes; the legal side of the house. Crucially, we think about the player in 360 degrees and life-long terms, and we have one of the best Player Development Programmes in world sport.

"That being said, I don't think we're the best association in the world. Not just yet. However, we are certainly the most progressive. How the other associations and national teams look at us now compared to just a few years ago are worlds apart. For example, I was delighted last November when the New Zealand coach, Steve Hansen, said Ireland is probably doing the best on player welfare when it comes to game time.

"We have always said we have to play to our size, but we can be innovative and try new things. The players see these developments and so their engagement has improved drastically. We can preach all we want but that has come from within. So, when you have people of Brian O'Driscoll's stature reminding players of the importance of Rugby Players Ireland, you know you're doing things right."

Having given seven years of service to the association, Treacy will now step aside. However, he will remain on in an advisory capacity to ensure that it keeps moving forward.

"I'm already working alongside Simon on a number of things and I am delighted to do so. Rugby Players Ireland has been a big part of my life and indeed rugby has given us all so much over the years. It is only right that we do our utmost to protect the game that we love and enjoy.

"Oh, and I still play by the way!"



# FIGHTING HER CORNER

A TALENTED ATHLETE, LOUISE GALVIN HAS HONED HER BATTLING QUALITIES ON THE PLAYING FIELDS

LOUISE GALVIN

**As Louise Galvin gracefully enters a room, you tend to assume that she is a gentle and timid character. Graceful she is, but timid she is not. One need only watch her on the World Series stage to know that she will fight her corner even as the lactic acid in her legs becomes unbearable.**

Galvin is intelligent and hardy. Above all, she is wary. She needs to be. As her profile continues to rise, she has fewer places to hide. But with profile comes the power to influence and Galvin acknowledges that she has an opportunity not afforded to many. Now, in joining the Rugby Players Ireland Executive Board, Galvin is putting her head above the parapet once again.

"A few years ago, I started to realise, almost reluctantly, that I was a role model for girls in sport," Galvin begins. "When you see the glass ceilings that have been there, it's nice to break through and show that you can do something that you didn't think was possible or achievable."

Kicking a football about in North Kerry during her youth, Galvin could hardly have expected to one day be counted amongst the most influential rugby voices in the country. However, had she remained happy to stick within the expected confines, her career would not have enjoyed the remarkable trajectory that now sees her as one of the most recognisable sportspeople in Ireland.

"I suppose I am a rugby personality, but I have a diverse background. I have a different perspective

having played amateur sport to a high level, an awareness of different cultures and dynamics. I believe that can be a point of difference on the Executive Board. Obviously, my gender is another, but I don't consider myself to be a female athlete. I'm an athlete."

By now, Galvin is a long-serving member of the Irish 7s squad. A former Kerry footballer and Irish basketball international, she was also part of the Irish squad for the Women's Rugby World Cup in 2017. A practicing physiotherapist, she has also taken on various ambassadorial roles with charities close to her heart, including Cystic Fibrosis Ireland. She has plenty of life experience to offer.

"I feel a sense of responsibility for some of the younger girls coming through the 7s system," Galvin explains. "Your whole life suddenly turns upside down. I've been there. Most have to move away from home, often into the city and have a new college course to contend with. I think Rugby Players Ireland play an integral role in that whole process and transition.

"I want to help players like Dorothy Wall and Megan Burns become the best rugby players they can be, but at the same time I have a massive understanding and belief that there should be a parallel life. Every player should have a career pathway underpinned with the requisite social skills. I have benefitted enormously from Rugby Players Ireland and so this role on the Board marries a lot of loves for me."

**"I suppose I am a rugby personality, but I have a diverse background. I have a different perspective having played amateur sport to a high level, an awareness of different cultures and dynamics."**







Galvin continues to work out of the Beacon Hospital in Sandyford and admits that at times the scheduling is difficult to juggle. A day off now and then is hard to come by. Nevertheless, she sees herself in an exciting place in her life and thinks little of a bout of fatigue now and then.

"I enjoy being a physio. When I took up the contract with the 7s, it wasn't because I wanted to get out of it, rather I wanted to test myself as an elite

athlete. Obviously, having a job has helped financially too but, more importantly, it also gives perspective.

"I'm fully aware that rugby is not the be all and end all, but for the moment it has to come first. Rugby is what has me here in this position, with this opportunity. It won't be forever more. There's only a small window where I can maximise my potential as a rugby player. So sometimes I have to take a step back and make sure that my priorities haven't been confused."

While the demands of the Executive Board will add to her workload, Galvin is delighted to have been elected by her teammates. Her appointment, alongside that of Maura Quinn, Ciara Griffin and Greg O'Shea has been widely heralded. Galvin believes rightly so.

"It's a huge statement. Rugby is not the big boys club it once was. The game is massive in this country at the minute, especially with the Rugby World Cup around the corner. But it is wider than the four provinces and that has been reflected in the appointment of representatives from the 7s and women's games. I'm not hooping and hollering. We are here on merit and we're not overawed or out of place."

As on the rugby field, Louise Galvin is ready to get stuck in.



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# PUTTING WELLBEING FRONT AND CENTRE

Rugby Players Ireland’s Tackle Your Feelings Campaign is one in which role models within the sport have come out to talk openly about mental health challenges they have faced

It has been an important stepping stone towards greater openness about the problems that affect too many young people and now it is being extended to schools and the business community.

The campaign is funded by the Z Zurich Foundation, the charitable vehicle funded by Zurich Insurance.

Rob Hartnett of Sport for Business sat down with Gary Shaughnessy Chair of the Z Zurich Foundation to learn a little more about what they do and why Ireland features on their radar.

“The Zurich Foundation was originally a small charity within Switzerland. It is funded by Zurich but it is independent and its purpose is to make contributions to areas that are important within the communities where the company operates,” said Shaughnessy in the comfortable surroundings of the Intercontinental Hotel.

“Of late we have focused on a couple of key areas where we feel we can make a difference, and which have a relevance to what the company does.

“The first of these is in flood relief. We are now working to support 130 projects in 10 countries around the world.”

## Wellbeing

“The second key area is in wellbeing, particularly mental wellbeing.”

That’s where the Irish connection comes in with local management having brought the idea of Tackle Your Feelings to the Foundation for funding and support.



“There is a link to our core capabilities as an insurance company but there is also a benefit in every way to prevent things from going wrong in the first place.”

Sometimes companies can be accused of doing things purely to ‘buy’ favour from the market, but this is no box ticking exercise.

“The important thing is what the driver of a company’s involvement in a ‘good cause’ actually is.

“I do believe that companies have a responsibility to help make the society in which they operate a fairer society, a better society and a more successful society.

“That should be the driver behind any investment and that works for the people within the organisation for whom it is also important to be seen to be making a difference.

“Of course, there is a benefit in simple terms for the company. People feel more engaged and stay longer with the firm so there are positives from a business perspective, but the most important thing should be the need for assistance within a society and how we can in some way meet that.”

## Local leadership

“The nature of the way the Foundation works is very much embedded in each of the countries we are working in. Local leadership teams have to be invested in a programme to get it off the ground.

“The way we work is that we have a global campaign on flood relief but we also have at the moment 25 areas where we support projects that have been brought to us by local management teams.

“It comes from a local recognition of a need and then we share the things that work so that others might be inspired to do something similar.”

The initial funding for the Rugby Players Ireland initiative came through the Foundation and it is a programme which they have been closely monitoring. Some elements have been replicated in Australia where a similar set of challenges to young people’s mental health was identified and they were able to join a few dots from up here to down under.

The first phase of reaching out to players is now being expanded towards schools and the corporate sector.

“We asked what was the problem we were looking to solve. Young people not feeling they can talk to people about the pressures they are under was a key part of where we started,” continued Shaughnessy.

“That same problem exists beyond sport. I work on an EU group looking at the area of pressure in the workplace. One in six people will at some point be diagnosed with a mental health issue. That impacts on people’s lives and also on companies in terms of how they manage the stresses that are placed on people in their workplace and their lives.

“We used role models that you might not have immediately been obvious to peel back the fact that problems can arise in so many different circumstances.

“Recognising that you have an issue is the first step. That’s not a weakness.”

Shaughnessy faced his own challenges in 2015 when he was diagnosed with Parkinsons Disease, a degenerative neurological condition.

“The diagnosis was something which I had to consider carefully in terms of my own wellbeing but also my career. When I spoke to my employers the level of support I got was fantastic.

“People will often worry about that but in many ways, they will be surprised by the level of support, on a human level, that people will give them.”

## Supportive

“I faced it fairly early. I was in line for a promotion and I felt it would not be right to say nothing. I got a really supportive response. It was longer before I stood up in front of colleagues but when I did people recognised it for what it was and dealt with it. It did not change the way they looked on me as a person.

“How we deal with these challenges is often down to our own choices. I chose to run. There is strong evidence to suggest that physical fitness is good for the condition. I’ve done 19 Marathons so far, including the Connemara Marathon, where the wind and rain was pretty tough.

“The support of my wife, saying the right things at the right time, has been really important and the longer I can poke Parkinson’s in the eye the better.

“Running works for me but for others, it might be painting or reading or dancing. Whatever works for you as an individual.”

Coming back to the Tackle Your Feelings campaign the important thing is clearly the passion and the drive coming from management and staff here in Ireland.



“We are good at recognising where links to the political system across the EU can be of benefit to a campaign, and in identifying online tools that can improve capability so we help beyond the funding but the real strength comes from local leadership.”

## Personal

“If people don’t see it as a personal project then it will rarely work to best effect.

“Anthony Brennan in Ireland has been such a strong supporter, alongside other members of his leadership team and throughout the organisation.

“It’s not just a campaign that sits in its own box. It impacts on lots of different areas within the business.

“Leisure, arts and linking with people’s passions is important across the 25 programmes. Sport is not particularly dominant but there are other campaigns, in Malaysia through football as an example, where we encourage childhood activity to combat obesity.

“Sport does create a great opportunity for people to get comfortable in the emotion of sport and how that can be extended to other areas of life and business.”

Shaughnessy is an impressive individual. He recognises where the international touch can help to make local projects work and is obviously a key influencer on the Tackle Your Feelings campaign.

The world will be a better place the longer he keeps poking his finger in the eye of Parkinson’s.



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# CONTRIBUTION TO SOCIETY



At the Zurich Irish Rugby Players' Awards in May, Shane Byrne was presented with the Zurich Contribution to Society Award. While Byrne was the 'winner' on the night, there are numerous members of Rugby Players Ireland who consistently make meaningful contributions to their communities through their own initiative. Here are some of those who continuously make an impact.



## JAMES TRACY

Leinster Rugby's James Tracy has been an ambassador for MS Ireland for some time, stemming from his sister Sara-Jane's diagnosis with the disease in 2015. An Irish international, James uses his growing platform to voice his support for initiatives such as 'Kissing MS Goodbye'. James also supports Organ Donation, Our Lady's Children's Hospital in Crumlin and LauraLynn.

A co-owner of Hawk & Blade, a barber shop in his hometown of Naas, James has also been known to bring his finest barbers to the Peter McVerry Trust so the people who avail of their services could benefit from a fresh haircut and shave. James has never shied away from charitable roles and has become a key point of contact for Rugby Players Ireland with regard to charity initiatives in the Leinster region.

## CHRIS HENRY

In 2014, on the morning of an Irish International match, Ulster Rugby flanker Chris Henry suffered a mini-stroke at the team hotel. He was 30 years old and had an undiagnosed hole in his heart. A swift response from his roommate Rhys Ruddock, the expertise of the medical staff and unbelievable self-determination resulted in the Ulsterman returning to the field of play within four months. Since then Chris has dedicated himself to supporting the Northern Ireland Chest, Heart & Stroke charity.

Chris retired with immediate effect in November whilst in the midst of his testimonial year which includes a number of events in aid of NI Chest, Heart & Stroke. Fundraising efforts include the 'Testimonial Trek' later this year, an Ulster Legends game while Chris will be joined by his former teammates Tommy Bowe and Craig Gilroy in climbing the highest mountain in North Africa, Mount Toubkal. Chris is also a Patron of Newforge Taggers, a tag rugby club for those with learning disabilities.



## ULTAN DILLANE & JAMES CONNOLLY

In 2016, Saba Meurnargia and Jamie Dever paid an impromptu visit to the Galway Hospice. Although Meurnargia and Dever were to pursue their rugby careers elsewhere, Ultan Dillane and James Connolly subsequently developed a strong affinity with patients and staff at the Renmore campus. The duo are regular visitors and often call with their Connacht Rugby teammates in tow, to chat, mingle and assist staff wherever a need arises.

When Connacht Rugby announced that they were looking for a new charity partner, James and Ultan campaigned for the Hospice. The partnership, which will continue until the end of 2020, sees players and staff from Connacht Rugby helping to promote and increase awareness of fundraising projects undertaken by the Galway Hospice and of the vital contribution they make to the community.



## DARREN CAVE

An Executive Board member at Rugby Players Ireland, Darren Cave is a player who has taken the lead when it comes to engaging his (now former) Ulster Rugby teammates with local charities and causes. Recognised for his outstanding commitment to the game on and off the field by being named the Vodafone Medal for Excellence winner, Cave has paved the way this season for team visits to the Children's Cancer Unit in Belfast, a Cash4Kids warehouse sort and the Simon Community NI.

Darren also sits on the board for Disability Sports NI, Northern Ireland's main disability sports charity who work to improve the health and wellbeing of people with disabilities through sport and active recreation. Darren has also shown his dedication to people with disabilities by volunteering with the Malone Tornadoes, Ulster's first Mixed Ability Rugby team.



## DAVID WALLACE

Upon retiring from professional rugby in 2012, former Munster, Ireland and British & Irish Lions flanker David Wallace teamed up with his brothers Paul and Richard for a week-long charity cycle to raise money for CROSS, a cancer research and patient care charity. Journeying from Malin Head to Mizen Head, the brothers were joined by fellow past players and members of the public. It was such a success that the Cross Cycle has taken place every year since with rugby legends such as Gordon D'Arcy, Mike Tindall, Doug Howlett and Shane Williams all taking part.

David is also a Board member of Special Olympics Ireland and sits on the Board of the Rugby Players Ireland Foundation. The Foundation, which supports past players with any health costs incurred as a result of rugby injuries, can also count Shane Byrne, Simon Best and Ruth O'Reilly amongst its Board members.





## JOHN COONEY

John Cooney has always been proactive when it comes to engaging with causes he believes in. Upon moving to Ulster from Connacht in 2017, he quickly reached out to a number of organisations to lend his support. One campaign particularly close to his heart is 'Friends of the Elderly' a charity that supports elderly people suffering from loneliness. John has volunteered with them for the past year.

As well as being a spokesperson for Action Cancer NI, John has also supported Cash4Kids, the Simon Community NI and joined his teammate Darren Cave in hosting training sessions for the Malone Tornadoes Mixed Ability Rugby team. John has also been a vocal advocate for the Tackle Your Feelings campaign.

## SENE NAOUPU

The New Zealand born Samoan Sene Naoupu moved to Ireland with her husband George in 2011. Sene has played international rugby for the Irish 7s, XV's and Touch Rugby squads. Voted amongst the Top 30 Most Influential Women in Ireland in 2017 by The Irish Times, Sene sits on the Rugby Athletes Commission, the International Rugby Players Council and is the Rugby Europe representative on the International Olympic Committee. Through these roles she is helping to lead rugby's global agenda for the commercialisation of women's sport.

Sene holds qualifications in Sporting Performance, Bachelor of Commerce, Holistic Lifestyle and Exercise Coaching and has a Masters in Science Sports Management. She is also an advocate for mental health and is a trustee on the Board of Bodywhys, an eating disorder charity having suffered from anorexia in her past. In 2018, the centre became an advocate for the Irish language, touring schools to encourage students to love their native language for a TG4 documentary. A 20x20 #IWD2019 supporter, Sene also regularly works with Leinster's charity partner, MS Ireland.



## SHANE BYRNE

Former Leinster and Ireland hooker Shane Byrne first spearheaded the Ireland Legends v England Legends in 2009 and has led out the Irish team on every occasion thereafter. The fixture, which is hosted annually on the eve of their successor's Six Nations matches, quickly caught the imagination of rugby fans and has raised over €1m for rugby charities in both countries.

In the weeks leading up to this year's game at the RDS, Shane carried out his pre-season training by climbing Mount Killimanjaro in aid of the IRFU Charitable Trust alongside Marcus Horan, Stephen Ferris and Mike McCarthy. With an insatiable appetite for helping people, Shane is also a Patron of international humanitarian agency GOAL, an ambassador for Fighting Blindness and has raised funds for numerous causes including Temple Street Children's Hospital and Our Lady's Hospice.

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# A NATURAL LEADER

CIARA GRIFFIN IS USED TO TAKING ON RESPONSIBILITY

## CIARA GRIFFIN

According to ancient Irish folklore, the River Maine in southern Kerry burst into life during the reign of Fiachu Labrainne when he was High King of Ireland. As she ambled by the same waterway near her Castleisland home in the aftermath of the Six Nations, Ciara Griffin no doubt wished that the floodgates would one day open for the Irish women's side during her captaincy.

"It has been a tough campaign, that's for sure!" admits Griffin, who was voted Player of the Year by her Irish teammates at the Zurich Irish Rugby Players' Awards. "You go out to do a job for every match and put everything into that jersey. It didn't go the way we wanted, but every single one of my teammates played with great heart.

"Of course, it was challenging. We didn't set out to perform as we did," she adds categorically. "But we all gained valuable experience from what we went through. Every year throws up something different. Personally, I've started to read the game a little better. It gets a little harder as you get older: the hits, the carries, getting up and going again. But I don't need to hit every ruck or get stuck into anything that moves. My energies can be better used elsewhere. I can read that now.

"I have so much more to learn though. You're never the complete player and if you begin to think you are, you're in trouble. I can't wait to learn more and keep developing. It's something that I love about playing rugby."

There is no doubting Griffin's passion on the field. Neither can it be questioned off it. Recently appointed to the Rugby Players Ireland Executive Board, Griffin brings an extensive skillset to her representative position. A teacher by day, Griffin is a part-time farmer while she has also set about establishing a Strength & Conditioning business.

"I'm a very dedicated person," Griffin says. "I keep going until I get the result that I want. It's a work-ethic that has been instilled in me since I was young. I hope to apply myself in the same way on the Board. I think it's important that everyone has a voice so that if any issues are to arise, we can solve them as best we can both for those involved and for the game going forward."

Since her interest was first piqued as a 14-year-old in Ballymac, Griffin has seen the women's game grow considerably in Ireland. Now, girls across the country not only have aspirations to play the game, but to do so at the highest level. This was something Griffin first realised in the 2016 Six Nations. Less than two years later, Adam Griggs looked to 'Junior' following a disappointing World Cup.

"I think that my ability to lead is something that I've always had, without realising it. I would put it down to my farming background. From a young age you are given responsibilities on the farm and have to throw your hand to different jobs. You bring that with you in life - I'm not afraid to take on a role.

"I don't think about it too much on the field, it's just the way I play. You're not going to expect somebody to put their head in a ruck if you won't do it first. The same applies to the Executive Board: if I'm not going to do it, then why should I expect someone else to?"



**"I think that my ability to lead is something that I've always had, without realising it. I would put it down to my farming background."**

Griffin's relationship with Rugby Players Ireland has developed considerably over the past 12 months. Earlier this season, Griffin was named as a recipient of the Goodbody Personal Development Bursary which is to aid the development and progression of her off-field career. Despite being based beyond the usual rugby hubs, she has been able to avail of the plentiful services on offer.

"To be honest, I didn't really know where Rugby Players Ireland sat in terms of my own requirements. But from my experiences and the vantage point I have now, I can see all that is going on behind the scenes. They have given me advice on a number of different issues, there are endless opportunities and supports.

"Now that we are being assimilated into Rugby Players Ireland more and more, less worries come to the fore. In the past, if an issue came to light from a players' perspective, a group of senior players would sit around and try to think of what to do. It can take away from your performance because these things can weigh heavily on you. Now we can go to Simon and his team, share our concerns and put the appropriate steps in place.

"I hope to take some of my own learnings from it too!" Griffin confesses. "There are some big hitters on the Board. You have Peter O'Mahony in there, Rob Kearney, Johnny Sexton and now Ciara Griffin! They have years of experience and so it will be useful to get a player perspective on things they might have already come up against. I'm looking forward to what lies ahead!"





# LIVING IN THE MOMENT

JACK CARTY HAS UNLOCKED ANOTHER DIMENSION IN HIS GAME

## JACK CARTY

**The pull of the Roscommon Junior Football Championship Football was peculiarly strong for Jack Carty last summer. A former inter-county minor, the Connacht Rugby out-half has retained a love for the game that sees him regularly stop by his old GAA haunt at St. Brigid's in Kiltoom.**

The parochial sense of duty is strong, and many rugby players have answered the call over the years. With a new Head Coach due in Galway, Carty was eager to maintain his fitness levels and impress at the earliest opportunity. However, some pragmatism

prevailed, and the Athlone man decided against turning out with some of his friends once again.

The fact that St. Brigid's came into his sights at all demonstrates how keen Carty was to do whatever he could to correct a disappointing season in Galway. Yet, with a clean slate awaiting him under Andy Friend, it was time to go back to the drawing board.

"I was always a hard-working player," Carty told Joe Molloy as he accepted the Virgin Media Sport Supporters' Player of the Year Award, "but it was about being smart, so I needed to have that proper, honest chat with myself.

"Just over a year ago now, my cousin passed away. Before he died, I had a good conversation with him about wanting to play for Ireland. He asked me: 'well, are you doing everything you can do?' That really resonated with me after he passed.

"I didn't want to have any regrets. So, I sat down and put some targets down on paper – win player of the year and get an Irish cap. Somehow I've managed to do both in one season!"

In a year that has seen Carty win the admiration of the public and his peers, he acknowledges that it has been a season beyond comparison. The stats back it up. His kicking game has become a massive strength, while he has also been a potent threat in the loose, cementing his position at the top of Connacht's points charts. Or so we all thought.

"There was a bit of a mix-up with that one actually!" Carty admits. "It didn't take Eric Elwood's amateur days into account and he was there for about 800 years before me! But it's ticking over and to get my kicking to a place I'm happy with has given me confidence in other aspects."

Having lined out alongside Robbie Brady and Jeff Hendrick for the Republic of Ireland U15 side, Carty's footballing ability has always been a key attribute. When they met at the start of the season, Friend challenged him to bring that weaponry to the fore. His kicking game needed work, but there was much more to Carty's talents than eyeing up the posts.

"I have been working with a focus coach in Galway. There's a lot in it, but essentially when you're taking a kick at goal you want to block out conscious thoughts. You don't want to be thinking about the next play or what's for dinner this evening. It also ensures that the processes are the same whether you're training at the Sportsground or in the Six Nations at the Aviva.

"I used to think the 10,000 hours rule was how I was going to master my craft. But when you play at Connacht, you can't plan how your weekend will look. 30/40kph winds can suddenly come in and it can be pissing rain and the ball comes back through the sticks to you. Kicking isn't always a practical option.

"By training my mind to be in the moment when I'm over the tee, I have unlocked an extra few percentages. That can make a world of difference at this level. It's also allowed me to turn my attention to other aspects of my game. Now it's all about quality over quantity right across the board."

In terms of his performances, Carty has spearheaded Connacht's return to form that has seen the province earn their place in the Heineken Champions Cup next season. He is reticent to take too much of the acclaim and instead points to the wider cultural changes in Galway.

"We have been playing with real confidence at Connacht. There is real clarity in what we're trying to do. Players know what is going to happen in certain parts of the field. There's also room for some eyes up rugby, a more pragmatic approach.

"Off the pitch, we're all enjoying each other's

company. Friendly and the backroom team, they're obviously our coaches but they're good blokes too, so we all enjoy working with each other. It's a nice place to be.

"JB [Jarrad Butler] deserves a huge amount of credit too. He faced a massive challenge stepping into John Muldoon's shoes, but he came in with new ideas and, alongside the leadership group, he has been driving standards. They have a quiet word with you if something isn't up to scratch, but equally, if something is done well, they'll make a big deal out of it."

With the Rugby World Cup looming large on the horizon now that the domestic season has wrapped up, Carty knows that in some senses, the work is just beginning. He will take a short break but will aim to hit the ground running when Joe Schmidt convenes his players in the coming weeks. Surely, as a nominee for the Zurich Players' Player of the Year, he is bound to feature in those plans?

"I don't think the coaches pay too much heed to it," Carty muses. "Personally, in terms of my own confidence, it's class. There are a number of both men's and women's players who have enjoyed terrific seasons so to be counted amongst them and to be recognised by my fellow players is particularly nice.


"I had a good Six Nations, but that's in the past now. Joey is back, Ross Byrne has been playing extremely well. There are three or four of us who are vying to start for our country, not just to be a back-up for Johnny. One or two of us will be disappointed come September, so everyone is trying to make sure it's not them.

"What I have done this season will give me confidence going into the national camp. I just have to keep doing what I'm doing!"

**"I have been working with a focus coach in Galway. There's a lot in it, but essentially when you're taking a kick at goal you want to block out conscious thoughts. You don't want to be thinking about the next play or what's for dinner this evening..."**





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## O'SHEA JOINS ILLUSTRIOUS HALL OF FAME LIST

**Conor O'Shea has joined a host of iconic Irish rugby heroes in the BNY Mellon Rugby Players Ireland Hall of Fame. Voted for by retired Irish rugby professionals, O'Shea joins the likes of Keith Wood (2004), Anthony Foley (2009), Ronan O'Gara (2016), and Brian O'Driscoll (2018) in an illustrious list of previous inductees.**

The current Head Coach of the Italian national side, O'Shea retired from the game in 2000 due to injury. He is perhaps best known for a five-year stint at London Irish, with whom he won the Zurich Players' Player of the Season Award in 1999. Incidentally, the Lansdowne man was contracted to the London club from 1995 but returned home to play for Leinster in the inaugural Heineken Cup that season, scoring the province's first ever try in a professional European tournament against Milan.

O'Shea won 35 caps for Ireland, making his debut against Romania in 1993. Aside from a brief absence following his move to England, O'Shea was a regular feature at international level throughout his career. He played in the Rugby World Cups of 1995 and 1999, in addition to being part of the first Irish side to win at Twickenham since 1982 during the 1994 Five Nations Championship. He scored six tries for his country.

Upon hearing of his induction, O'Shea said: "The landscape of rugby has drastically changed since I first became involved. It has been a pleasure to have played my part and see it grow at first-hand into the global game we see today. I have many great memories from my playing career that I still cherish. It was a privilege to play for my country and in so many great sides alongside people that remain my friends to this day.

"Having hung up my boots almost 19 years ago, it is very humbling to be remembered and recognised by the Irish rugby community in this way," O'Shea added. "I chose to pursue my professional ambitions in England, and I am immensely proud of what I achieved in my career there. But as an Irishman, it brings me great pleasure to see how the game has grown in this country. Having my own experience of rugby elsewhere, it is abundantly clear that organisations such as Rugby Players Ireland are an invaluable asset to the game here. Their work off the field, helps to ensure that Irish rugby continues to thrive on it."





# THERE'S NO BETTER TIME TO GET MOVING...

Former rugby player and founder of Vit-Hit, Gary Lavin was shown one door but opened another

GARY LAVIN

**After a handful of appearances for Leinster at Donnybrook, Gary Lavin upped sticks and landed at Harlequins in London. As far as he was concerned, the world was at his feet. A professional rugby player in one of the greatest cities in the world. Nothing seemed impossible. But then disaster struck.**

"I hurt my knee and it was like the end of days," Lavin says as he speaks to the assembled group of budding entrepreneurial rugby players at the InterContinental in Dublin. "Dick Best, who was the coach, handed me my walking papers. At that time, it wasn't as formal as it is now. There was no insurance, not even a proper contract. And I remember asking myself: 'well, what am I going to do now?'"

Firstly, Lavin resolved to never put his future into anyone else's hands again. At just 23, he decided to turn his back on rugby and take ownership of his life. Born into a business-minded household, he had a fair idea what his calling was. He began by selling on supplements to his rugby pals. Twenty years later, his drinks company VitHit has a revenue of up to €40m as its sales surge across the UK and Ireland.

"There is no such thing as a happy injury, but I have to say things turned out pretty well. Nevertheless, as a rugby player in my early twenties, all I wanted was to play rugby for Ireland and become a superstar. While I might only have ever been a journeyman, the inherent confidence of the rugby player within was shattered."

Yet it was this sporting confidence that Lavin believes stood him in good stead as he embarked on new path. Rugby players, he maintains, are good communicators, disciplined, make swift decisions and are used to failure. But above all, they have been at the top of their field and know what it takes to get there.

"To survive in an elite environment, you have to really rate and back yourself," Lavin says. "There will always be those to begrudge you and go 'who does your man think he is?' and you might wish you were where they are, but they have never been where you have."

"I have known guys who have played at the highest level and then gone into a company at the lower end. They inevitably rise to the top. They're used to making decisions and doors open quicker for them. But ultimately, if I was to put a gun to their head and told them they had six months to create a healthy chocolate bar, they will get the job done."

Lavin admits that there is a challenge to convince players of the merits in getting their ducks in a row. With a healthy income, players have little incentivisation to put their efforts to anything other than their rugby. The temptation will always be to spend their free hours in the week playing video games and meeting for coffees. However, those who choose not to put things off until tomorrow will reap the rewards.

"Victor Costello is a great example. After a game he'd be straight into the front room, chatting to CEOs and powerful people while the rest of us gathered round and slagged him off. He used what rugby gave him and pushed himself into what wasn't always comfortable terrain. He has built his career off the back of it."

"There's no better time to get moving on it than when you're young," Lavin adds. "At 25 years of age you have nothing to lose in most circumstances. You don't have dependents and you'll never have three hours in the day again. It isn't difficult to get a business up and running, making money is."

Lavin reveals that there have been plenty of troughs among the peaks. In the early stages he was on the cusp of financial ruin. Some of his contemporaries told him to get off his high horse and pack it in. Even when he became established as a market leader, other products came on stream to threaten his share of the trade.

"They key was that I never accepted defeat," Lavin says resolutely. "I had a firm belief that my product was great. I also had a competitive spirit. Of course, there were difficult times. I remember sitting outside the cinema one day, distraught and broke. But I was also dropped plenty of times as a rugby player... and they were the very moments I learned my greatest lessons."

"One thing I learned was to do something that scared me. I used to hate cold calling people. I found it very difficult. I went to an interview with an insurance company once before with a friend from the rugby world. The first thing I was told was to pick 20 people I know, ring them and sell them insurance. It wasn't for me. My friend got the job, ended up running the company, sold out, set up his own company and retired at 48!"

"As rugby players, you're used to doing something you love every day and getting paid for it. You know you're really good at it. But there will be parts of business that you won't like and if you don't address it, you won't survive. It's almost like skipping leg day!"

"When you're at the top of your sport, you think there's nothing you can't do. Players need to bring that frame of mind with them into the working world. Back yourself and you will convert the chances that fall to you."

**I have known guys who have played at the highest level and then gone into a company at the lower end. They inevitably rise to the top. They're used to making decisions and doors open quicker for them.**





# INTER NATIONAL RUGBY PLAYERS



**Former Irish centre and Sevens captain David Quinlan has joined the staff of International Rugby Players.**

Quinlan, 41, joins the global players body after spending 10 years at law firms in London where he specialised in the commercial and sports sectors. Prior to working in the legal profession, he played professionally with Leinster in Ireland and Northampton Saints in England, where he captained the club on several occasions.

"I'm really excited about joining the team at International Rugby Players in Dublin," said Quinlan.

"I'm joining at a massive moment for the game, with player welfare issues more topical than ever along with the need for a strong global player voice."

David studied at University College Dublin and Cambridge University before qualifying as a corporate lawyer with Freshfields in London in 2010.

He has focused more recently on the commercial and sports sectors, including secondments to the legal teams at the London 2012 Olympics and Rugby World Cup 2015. He has advised a wide range of clients including AB InBev on Budweiser's sponsorship of The FA Cup, London 2017 Ltd on the delivery of the London 2017 IAAF World Athletics Championships and Major League Baseball on the 2019 MLB London Series.



David won a rugby blue at Cambridge University in 2000. He returned to Ireland to play professionally with Leinster from 2001 and during that time he served on the Executive Committee of IRUPA (now Rugby Players Ireland) before moving to Northampton Saints in 2005.

He represented Ireland at every level and captained the Ireland 7s team at a number of international tournaments. He toured twice with the Ireland senior squad, earning two caps in the summer of 2005, but retired from the game due to concussion issues in 2007.

"As well as the legal experience gained over the past 10 years or so, I bring a passion for the game and a particular interest in the proliferation of injuries, especially after retiring myself from the effects of repeated head injuries.

"It's a challenging but exciting moment for our sport right now and it's great to be a part of the global players body – an organisation that is becoming more relevant and important to the game than ever," he added.



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# RUGBY ROCKS BELFAST

RUGBY PLAYERS, SUPPORTERS AND LEGENDS TURN OUT IN GREAT NUMBERS FOR CHRIS HENRY’S TESTIMONIAL

Rugby supporters gathered at Malone’s Gibson Park to raise money for the Northern Ireland Chest, Heart and Stroke foundation as part of Chris Henry’s testimonial match.

Proceedings kicked off at 1pm with Malone U14s hosting a touring side from Scotland with the visitors winning comfortably. The second match featured Malone Women who lost out to an Ulster Select XV. Malone Tornadoes then entertained Sunday’s Well Rebels in the first mixed ability match on the island of Ireland.

Organiser of the match, and a Malone Tornado player, Tim Craig said: “We were looking at what teams in Scotland have been doing, what our Welsh colleagues have been doing and building on it.

“We wanted to introduce it to Belfast because it’s been going for about four years in Cork through our competitors, Sunday’s Well Rebels.

“With mixed ability rugby we’re about inclusion – promoting everyone’s ability rather than disability. We want to see rugby played in its true spirit. It’s like all sports – it’s about bringing people together and I think we had a great afternoon of rugby played in right spirit.”

“He [Chris Henry] is a wonderful servant to Ulster and Irish Rugby. I’ve been involved with Newforge Taggers Tag Rugby club and Chris has been our patron for a number of years. I can’t sing his praises enough and I hope the day went very well for him.”



The final match of the day saw an Ulster Legends side featuring household names such as Andrew Trimble, Paul Marshall and Andy Maxwell defeat an Ulster Barbarians side led by Henry as well as Paddy Wallace in a thrilling high scoring affair. Henry scored the opening try before defending became optional for both sides as the Legends ran out 48-46 winners.

The match was played in front of a great crowd at Gibson Park and was watched by Chairman of the Ulster Rugby Supporters Club, Jonathan Bill:

“Chris has been a local player and he’s put a lot in not only at the elite level but also at a local level.

“I think it’s very appropriate that he’s had this festival of rugby where he’s brought in grassroots; the ladies game; mixed ability; youngsters and the more household names at the end. It’s fitting that he managed to bring in about 45 former Ulster players along today.

“I’ll always remember the battle-scarred face as Chris left the pitch after matches. There was always blood on it and you always felt he had put in 100% to the cause and knew that he was playing for the badge.”

Battered and bruised from a gruelling match, Chris found the time to speak to the Front Row Union shortly after the game:

“We didn’t know how many people would turn up today, but it’s been awesome to see so many people out. It’s great to see so many old club mates and friends come together. The match goes to show that regardless of your age you’re always competitive.

“It’s very special to finish my career at Malone in an Ulster jersey. I’ve always had a big connection with the club and to put on something like this, which hasn’t been done before, is the start of something every year.

“I was playing for the Irish Legends against the English Legends and thought we could do something like this. Sometimes when you stop playing you lose the buzz in the changing rooms and the craic with your teammates so it’s an excellent excuse to get back out on the pitch.”



**Our friends at The Front Row Union were at Malone RFC.**  
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