



Wasteland: The desert road leading up to the stadium in Al Khor, Qatar

# BURNING ISSUE

We need to face the fact that mega sports events are fuelling climate crisis

**T**HE wonder is that Gianni Infantino didn't compare himself to a flood victim in Bangladesh or someone living through drought in Somalia during his bizarre and grotesque 'I am disabled/I am gay' diatribe which kicked off this strangest of World Cups.

If the FIFA chief uttered 'I am the overheating planet' in his monologue, it would simply have been in keeping with everything else he said.

So much has gone on in the first eight days in Qatar - from two of the great World Cup shocks to the controversy over the One Love armband - that the environmental effects have been conveniently pushed to one side.

However, climate change, the most pressing issue facing humanity, remains the largest elephant in the room.

Amid this genuine existential crisis for our world, FIFA have brought the tournament to one of the hottest places on earth, complete with fully air-conditioned stadiums.

The treatment of migrant workers and LGBTQ rights understandably took centre stage prior to the World Cup, but there is no avoiding the effect on our planet, especially as FIFA and the organisers have claimed that this will be a carbon-neutral World Cup - although those charged with delivering the competition have made plenty of other empty promises.

The BBC hasn't ducked any of



the more unpleasant aspects of this World Cup, and at half-time of France's entertaining opener with Australia last Tuesday we were shown a report that suggested that what is happening in Qatar will be 'the highest carbon-emitting event of any kind - apart from a war - that humans have ever staged'.

Kevin Anderson, who is a climate expert, told viewers that 'we need to send a message to FIFA that we are not prepared to sacrifice the wellbeing of our own children, let alone other people around the world' while Norway midfielder Morten Thorsby claimed that the tournament was 'an absolute disaster in terms of its environmental footprint'.

Given that they had to build an entire new infrastructure in the desert, it is almost too much to consider the true - and needless - carbon footprint of what's taking place in the Gulf.

The idea that it will be carbon-neutral has been shown up to be the absurdity that it is, with Greenly - a French company that measures carbon footprint - estimating that there will be at least six million tonnes of CO2 emitted during the tournament, almost double what FIFA and the

organisers had promised. And while Qatar has committed to carbon credits to offset the environmental damage, it is believed that only three of those projects - which tend to be tree-planting - were approved in the week before the tournament, and they only represented five per cent of the total emissions.

At the end of the BBC report, Gary Lineker, in his most solemn tone, suggested that 'football has to face up to this issue.' Of course, it was pointed out that he was presenting the show from Qatar and that the Beeb had flown Lineker, a number of pundits and a production team halfway across the globe when they could have easily done the show from London. Which is true, but at least they didn't shy away from the crazy ecological cost of the event.

As much as we were thrilled by some of the football we watched last week, it is all being played out to the backdrop of the existential threat to humanity that is the climate crisis. And despite Qatar's attempts to greenwash the tournament, environmentalists haven't had to work too hard to dismiss their claims of carbon-neutrality.

Of course, the question must be asked if there will remain a place for these mega-sporting events as we move into an increasingly uncertain future.

The Tokyo and Rio de Janeiro Olympics as well as the Winter Olympics in Sochi all scored pretty badly when it came to environmental sustainability, as well.

Think about a World Cup or Olympics, the amount of lighting, water and air conditioning needed at venues. The large number of

athletes, officials and media travelling while, by FIFA's own study, almost 70 per cent of carbon emissions associated with the event will be fans - Qatar has laid on 500 shuttle planes a day to offset the lack of accommodation in their small country.

One recent study found that in the last 50 years, the World Cup and Olympics have grown more than 60-fold in terms of the number of athletes, officials, journalists and supporters. That is simply no longer sustainable, unfortunately.

Climate change has affected every aspect of our lives, and large-scale sport is no different.

**"Environment issues have been pushed aside"**

All you have to do is recall how record-breaking rain showers in Melbourne disrupted the recent T20 World Cup, which was deeply troubling even if Ireland did benefit in their win over England. The skiing World Cup season has got off to a truncated start with a couple of events cancelled as there wasn't enough snow around the Matterhorn.

It's in winter sports that the effect of what is happening the planet is most telling. A recent paper produced by the University of Waterloo concluded if 'global emissions of greenhouse gases are not dramatically reduced,

only eight of the 21 cities that previously hosted the Winter Olympics will be cold enough to host the games by the end of this century.' A terrifying conclusion but, given that Beijing had to import snow for the last Games, it is something that we might have to get used to.

Play was suspended in the 2020 Australian Open for a time because of the poor air quality around Melbourne from the unprecedented bushfires that were raging across the country at the time. It even forced some players to withdraw from that tournament. It is not likely to be an isolated incident.

Sport needs to play its part, but as we are all enthralled by the drama in the Gulf - and we are all watching - one has to wonder if it is doing enough. The BBC got a proper kicking on Twitter following the three and half minute segment, with some saying they want to watch the football and forget about the news.

But the thing is that football is part of the news. This World Cup has dominated the news cycle for a whole host of reasons. And will do so for the next few weeks.

As important as it has been that all of those issues are highlighted, perhaps the most problematic aspect of this event is the severe environmental cost. And that has been a little lost in all the other controversies.

Kudos to the Beeb for bringing it to our attention, even if most people had forgotten about it by the time Kylian Mbappé was weaving his magic in the second half against Australia.

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## WHAT TO WATCH THIS WEEK...

**TODAY**  
World Cup: Portugal v Uruguay, RTÉ 2, 6.30pm  
With Luis Suarez and Cristiano Ronaldo on the pitch, there is likely to be some drama.

**TUESDAY**  
World Cup, RTÉ 2, 6.30pm  
Final matches from Group B where Iran v USA promises to be a politically and emotionally-charged event.

**WEDNESDAY**  
World Cup: Poland v Argentina, RTÉ 2, 6.0pm  
Could this be the final World Cup match of Leo Messi's career?

**FRIDAY**  
URC: Edinburgh v Munster, TG 4, 7.30pm  
Graham Rowntree's men prepare for Europe with this jaunt to Scotland.

**SATURDAY**  
WSL: Man United v Aston Villa, Sky Sports Football, 12pm  
The WSL getting plenty of coverage with no Premier League.

**SUNDAY**  
NBA: Boston Celtics @ Brooklyn Nets, Sky Sports Arena, 11pm  
Controversial Kyrie Irving will be back against a Celtics team that are flying.

# FIFA and UEFA really need to mind the gap



By MARK GALLAGHER

**A**S impressive as RTE's coverage of the Euro 2022 tournament has been, we couldn't help but think of the late Jim Bowen as we watched the group stages.

The ebullient presenter of Bullseye, that staple of sitting rooms in the 1980s, was famous for telling devastated contestants 'let's have a look at what you could have won' when they failed to claim the Grand Prize.

And it seemed to happen in almost every show. A desperately disappointed pair of contestants would have to stand there and be told they missed out on a two-week holiday to Crete (it was the eighties) or a speedboat or a mobile home.

Watching the likes of Austria and Belgium give an excellent account of themselves in England might have been just like Jim Bowen whispering in the ear of Ireland players 'this is what you could have won.'

Their qualification campaign came apart at the seams during a bizarre game in Kiev, although it is clear that they have channelled that disappointment in the most positive way, given their splendid performances in Helsinki and Gothenburg during the World Cup 2023 qualifiers.

Ireland manager Vera Pauw suggested a few weeks ago, prior to her side's turkey-shoot in Georgia, that the pain of failing to qualify for the Euros is there every day for her and her players. But if that's the case, they are doing a wonderful job of disguising it in the RTE studio.

The likes of Louise Quinn and Aine O'Gorman have been delivering incisive analysis while Pauw herself has also been an impressive contributor.

Pauw had a discussion with Lisa Fallon last weekend about some of the issues that face women's football as it grows in popularity and how UEFA and FIFA need to be doing more to help middle-tier nations, such as Ireland, raise their standards so they can catch up with the powerhouses.

The identity of this week's four semi-finalists is no surprise. England, Sweden, Germany and France are probably the four most powerful nations in Europe – with Spain, the Netherlands and Norway just behind them.

Even allowing for how Austria and Belgium were able to frustrate Sweden and Germany for long periods in their quarter-finals, there is still a gap between the top and the next tier.

And even though Belgium received a lot of plaudits in the RTE studio for their rearguard



Safe pair of hands: Belgium goalkeeper Nicky Evvard (right) clears her lines in her team's quarter-final defeat to Sweden

action against Sweden, the Swedes had 33 efforts on goal before their last-minute winner.

Northern Ireland's Julie Nelson was part of the RTE coverage of England's quarter-final with Spain, arguably the best game of the tournament so far.

While the North found things difficult in a group that contained the hosts and an improving Austria, Nelson did feel that just being part of the summer party will have a profound effect on the women's game in the North.

'We showed that we were able to compete and we put in some decent performances,' Nelson said. 'The likes of your England, Germany and Spain, they are slightly ahead of the developing nations like us but we are trying to close the gap. And part of that inspiring the next generation.

'Part of the belief within our team is that we are inspiring the next generation to pull on that green shirt, inspiring young girls to take up football and so that they see it as a viable option for them to have a career in. But we need investment. Need more investment, need more coaches. With numbers increasing, we need more coaches.'

And that's the thing. The standard of football played by the likes of England and Spain in this tournament has taken years of investment and hard work – as well as the exposure to Champions League football, as Pauw pointed out on RTE last Saturday.

To avoid the top nations disappearing off in the distance, UEFA should heed Pauw's words and do more to develop the teams in the second tier.

Painful as missing out on the summer jamboree has been for Pauw and her players, RTE's coverage of the event is certain to add to the momentum that has gathered behind the women's national team.

The hope is that young girls around Ireland will have watched Georgia Stanway's wondrous winning strike in extra-time against Spain and dream of one day that being them.

Better yet if it was Denise O'Sullivan or Katie McCabe they were watching, but that may come in the World Cup next year.

Since demolishing one of the game's great powers, Norway, in the group stages, there has been a sense of destiny about this England team and their coach, Sarina Wiegman, who led her native Dutch nation to the Euros title

the last time out. All the English players seem to respond to her. After the sideshow surrounding Phil Neville's time in charge during the last World Cup – and his unfortunate tendency to sound like David Brent – the Dutch woman has transformed an under-achieving English side into one of the game's great powers.

'That's the 100th goal they have scored under Wiegman and they have only played 18 matches,' commentator Darragh Maloney marvelled after Stanway's goal.

'And they have only conceded four goals in that time too, not bad going,' Stephanie Roche added. It is a remarkable turnaround in fortunes.

It will be tested against Sweden tomorrow night, though. The mighty Swedes, pre-tournament favourites in their own minds if nobody else's, have looked pedestrian at times.

They grew increasingly frustrated against a Belgian side who sat deep in a very low block and depended on an inspirational performance from goalkeeper Nicky Evvard, whose summer sideline in renting out bouncy castles has been making plenty of headlines in the past few weeks.

Evard's display against the Swedes is just the type that will

## "Sweden are capable of spoiling their hosts' party"

inspire a few prospective goalkeepers around Ireland.

And that is what is meant by skin in the game.

Sweden always raise their game against better sides, and they have some of the best players in the world, as Ireland discovered in Tallaght and Gothenburg.

If the veteran midfielder Caroline Seger makes a return from injury, they are more than capable of spoiling their hosts' summer party.

Reaching the point where we can talk about games as if it was the men's Euros just illustrates how far women's football has come. Given the skill levels of the players, and the fact that it is the world's most popular sport, it was always likely to explode in interest once UEFA and FIFA accorded it due respect. Build it and they will come.

Granted there are issues, not least with the widening gap, as Pauw pointed out last week.

But the feeling is the women's game will only grow. We will hopefully see that when Finland come to Tallaght Stadium on September 1, when there should be a sell-out for a game where, if they avoid defeat, Pauw's side can plan for a World Cup play-off.

So, rather than Irish players looking at the Euros and thinking 'this is the prize we should have won,' they should probably view it as 'this is where we want to be regularly, going into the future.'

## WHAT TO WATCH THIS WEEK...

### TODAY

#### Tour de France na mBan Beo, TG4, 1.15pm

As the men finished up in Paris yesterday, the inaugural Tour de France Femmes got under way.

TG4 provides live coverage all week.

#### The Galway Races, RTÉ2, 5pm

Hugh Cahill is joined by Barry Geraghty, Jane Mangan and Ted Walsh

for coverage of the annual racing festival. The Galway Plate is on Wednesday.

### TOMORROW

#### UEFA Women's Euro 2022: England v Sweden, RTÉ2, 7.30pm

Stephanie Roche joins George Hamilton in the commentary box in this mouth-watering semi-final between two of the favourites.

### WEDNESDAY

#### UEFA Women's Euro 2022: Germany v France, RTÉ2, 7.30pm

Second semi-final live from MK Dons stadium as two powerhouses clash.

### SATURDAY

Women's League of Ireland: Sligo Rovers v Shelbourne, TG4, 6.30pm

Hoping to capitalise on the hype around the Euros, this is the first of 10 live women's league games shown by TG4.

### SUNDAY

#### Peil na mBan Beo, TG4, 11.30am

Live coverage of the three All-Ireland ladies football finals from Croke Park, with the senior decider between Meath and Kerry at 4pm.



**E** OIN MORGAN wore the uncertain, pained expression of someone who didn't know whether to laugh or cry. It was hard to blame him.

Here he was, the Dubliner who had led England to a World Cup, being forced to dissect another of those great upsets that has become an Irish cricketing speciality.

'You look back on the upsets in Irish cricketing history and this is right up there,' Morgan proclaimed from the Sky Sports gantry. 'You talk about the English team that they are playing against, one of the most talented and versatile England T20 teams we have ever put out.'

'This is a hugely significant win for Andrew Balbirnie and his team. They completely out-batted and out-bowled England. They turned up on a huge occasion and they delivered.'

As talented and versatile as this England team supposedly are, more than one commentator did point out that they missed Morgan and his steady leadership in Melbourne. But, as was pointed out just as quickly, Ireland have been missing Morgan for more than a decade. So they now know how it feels.

Maybe, Wednesday's shock result can be considered a form of reparations for the loss of Morgan, Boyd Rankin and Ed Joyce at various stages over the past 15 years.

There is nothing like getting one up on the auld enemy, though. And while it didn't have anything like the fireworks of Kevin O'Brien's century in Bangalore, it was an impressive and mature performance from a team dogged by inconsistency.

It also gave us the absurd situation of Irish people wishing for a heavy rain shower — as a friend texted at 8.47am on Wednesday morning: 'Here I am, cursing the rain outside my window and praying for rain all the way over there!' Indeed. Great sporting stories come every which way.

Scores of us also understand the Duckworth-Lewis Method is not simply a delightful Neil Hannon side-project, but a complex scoring system that ultimately helped us put one over on the English. Melbourne was wetter than Galway most of last week, so Balbirnie and his players couldn't build on the win as Friday's game with Afghanistan was called off.

From one venerated sporting cathedral in the MCG, Ireland now go to another in The Gabba, where they face the hosts this morning.

The Irish sporting public love nothing more than a bandwagon, so let's hope there were plenty of



Still the king: Virat Kohli celebrates after India beat Pakistan

# Beating your neighbour is ultimate high

alarm clocks set this Bank Holiday morning, and that the Fionn Hand appreciation society can grow even further.

As wonderful as it was to start Wednesday morning with all that singing in the Melbourne rain, the highlight of the World Cup so far occurred a couple of days earlier when Virat Kohli reminded us he is still the King — and a genius when it comes to a run chase.

Kohli's heroics were also in the MCG but the atmosphere was just a tad more febrile, with more than 90,000 rabid devotees packed in the ground for the latest chapter in one of sport's most intense rivalries.

There aren't many sides out there who have the disdain for each other that India and Pakistan have. Think Tyrone and Derry in the Ulster Championship, but if they had nuclear

weapons pointing at each other over the Sperrin Mountains. Or Brazil and Argentina, if Iguazu Falls was a warzone. And you'd be about halfway to the hatred between these two.

**A**S two of the handful of weird countries where football isn't the most popular sport, last weekend was to them what the World Cup final will be to most of the globe. Everyone watched and what they saw was a master at work. Kohli dragged India off the floor, scoring 82 off 53 balls, including an insane final over that included two wides, and a no ball, as well as the customary six from the King. 'I have no idea what just happened,' the Indian icon smiled into the camera moments

after the victory as millions celebrated in Mumbai, Kolkata and Chennai.

Even if Kohli's stardust becomes the defining characteristic in leading his country to this World Cup, and he maintained his form against the Dutch, this will be the memory that most Indians will keep from the tournament. As we would discover just a few days later, there is nothing quite like beating your oldest enemy and nearest neighbour. It's just that the stakes seem so much higher when it is India and Pakistan.

Cricket chiefs are constantly fussing and fretting about the future of their sport. As life becomes more fast-paced, it is increasingly difficult for a five-day test match to find a place.

At its best, the 50-over game can be quite the spectacle, as O'Brien's quickfire century in

Bangalore proved, but this past week has shown that perhaps the game's traditionalists are fighting a losing war against the shortest version of the game.

People demand immediacy in this day and age, as the ECB accepted in constructing The Hundred. Pesky rain aside, this T20 World Cup has been marvellous. We witnessed Ireland's mauling of the West Indies that saw the two-time winners exit before things even got going.

New Zealand chalked up their first win in Australia for more than a decade in another neighbourly battle. And Pakistan, still reeling from their collapse to their nemesis, went down to Zimbabwe just a few days later. In the shortest form of the game, the old power divides are blurred.

Like it or not, T20 has taken over the game. During the summer, the latest broadcast rights for the Indian Premier League (IPL) sold for a mouth-watering \$5.5 billion, which kind of puts the GAA's recent media rights deal in perspective.

The IPL is just behind the English Premier League and the NFL as the most lucrative sporting competition on the planet — and it is fast catching up with those two behemoths. And they know that they hold all the power.

## 'Irish heroes are going to have plenty of opportunities'

There is a rumour that players will be given all-year contracts with the IPL, meaning that the top cricketers may soon have to choose between their country and the franchise giving them a nice big cheque.

Its annual player auction rivals the drafts of the NFL and NBA for razzmatazz and glamour.

Next year, there will be new T20 tournaments in South Africa and the Middle East, which will have a tie-in with the IPL.

There are also successful leagues in the West Indies, Bangladesh and Pakistan.

In other words, there are plenty of opportunities for those new Irish heroes to parlay their newfound fame and respect within the game into a bit of cash.

It was understandable that Morgan followed Joyce and Rankin in wanting to play for England because test cricket was the absolute pinnacle. The ultimate.

It is why Ireland lobbied so hard and long for full membership. But that was then.

Watching the action in Australia, it is hard not to escape the feeling that the mayhem of Pakistan's final over against India, and Virat Kohli running around with his hands in the air, is where the true future of this grand old game lies.

## WHAT TO WATCH THIS WEEK...

**TODAY**  
T20 World Cup: Australia v Ireland, Sky Sports, 7.30am

After not being able to take the field against the Afghans, Ireland will be looking for a big scalp when they take on the hosts in the Gabba.

**TUESDAY**  
Champions League:

Liverpool v Napoli, RTÉ 2, 7.30pm  
RTÉ will be showing the action from Anfield, although the bigger game is probably in the south of France where Spurs, with Matt Doherty, need a point in Marseille.

**FRIDAY**  
T20 World Cup: Ireland v New Zealand, Sky

**Sports, 4am**  
Ireland's final Super 12 game against the impressive Black Caps in Adelaide Oval.

**Ireland A v All Black XV, Virgin Media 2, 7pm**  
A chance for the future Irish stars to test themselves against a Kiwi selection in the RDS.

**SATURDAY**

**Championship: Sheffield United v Burnley, Sky Sports Football, 12.30pm**  
Interesting match from an Irish perspective, with John Egan and Josh Cullen coming up against each other.

**Ireland v South Africa, Virgin Media 2, 4.30pm**  
The first of the three autumn internationals for Andy Farrell's men and a

testing one against the world champions.

**Racing from Down Royal, RTÉ 2, 1.15pm**  
Hugh Cahill presents coverage of the racing festival from Down Royal alongside Jane Mangan and Lisa O'Neill.

**SUNDAY**  
Evoke.ie Women's FAI Cup final, RTÉ 2, 2.30pm

Marie Crowe is joined by Megan Campbell as Athlone Town and Shelbourne meet in Tallaght Stadium.

**Premier League: Tottenham v Liverpool, Sky Sports Main Event, 3.30pm**  
Traditionally, this is a free-flowing, high-octane fixture, but Antonio Conte will probably have other ideas.