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SOMEONE LEFT THE CUP ON JOHN'S DOORSTEP IN THE DEAD OF NIGHT

LEGEND: Kerry great John Egan

SILVER LINING



Párl NOLAN
REPORTS

ON AUGUST 31, 1983, the Cork Examiner reported that it was “in a box wrapped in brown paper”

Well, better late than never. Some six weeks after Tadgh Murphy scored the last gasp goal to deny Kerry a record nine-in-a-row in the Munster final, Cork would finally be presented with, or more accurately given, the trophy that captain Christy Ryan ought to have hoisted in Páirc Uí Chaoimh on July 17.

John Egan had captained Kerry to their eighth provincial title on the spin 12 months earlier and so the cup was linked to him more than any other individual, but it was hardly his responsibility to trace its every movement and come Munster final day in 1983, it was nowhere to be seen.

A random trophy had to be sourced from the Páirc Uí Chaoimh board room and presented to Ryan to limit the embarrassment, but there was still great unease on Kerry's part, particularly for Egan, who was a garda stationed in Kildorrery, Co Cork at the time.

Then, mysteriously, the cup materialised in that box on the doorstep of Egan's parents' house in Sneem on Sunday night, August 28.

“At first we thought the cup was left behind due to an oversight and while we cannot remain blameless, we didn't realise at the time that it was missing,” commented then-Kerry chairman Frank King in the Examiner at the time.

Effort

“We've made every effort to track it down in the past few weeks and I've had some strong words with the people responsible for its safety.

“It's degrading for the GAA for such a thing to happen and it's certainly caused embarrassment. Also, it's very hard on the captain of the winning team not to have the proper trophy at the presentation.”

So, what happened to the Munster Cup?

Sean Kelly, GAA president from 2003-06, was Kerry vice-chairman at the time and while he can't give a definitive answer, he puts it down to interference in the county towards a trophy by which their year is never measured.

with Kerry football, the Bishop Moynihan Cup that is presented to the senior county champions, vanished, and hasn't been accounted for to this very day.

A replacement was sourced by King but once he became chairman shortly after, Kelly moved to address the matter.

Status

“When I became chairman I said the (replacement) cup wasn't reflective of the status of the county Championship.

I went up to Kilkenny to the silversmith up there, who is still working by the way, by the name of Des Byrne and Des and I designed the Bishop Moynihan Cup.

“The following year Croke Park gave him the contract to produce the new Sam Maguire and I think he also did the new Liam MacCarthy, but it was after the Kerry county Championship senior cup disappeared, never to be found again, that I decided that we should go and get a cup made rather than buying a cup.

“It's a beautiful trophy and it's there ever since and never gone missing!”

You could say that they learned the hard way.



BATTLE: Tim Kennelly looks on as Kerry concede a point in the 1983 Munster final



THE WAY WE WERE: Mayo player and Irish Oympan sprinter Sean Lavín leads a march at the Tailteann Games in Croke Park in the 1920s; (right) the 1924 Galway team

MAYO'S GUBU MUGGING

DID you hear the one about the All-Ireland final that no-one knew was an All-Ireland final?

The All-Ireland final — or was it an All-Ireland final? — where a spectator is alleged to have kicked a point.

It happened in October 1925. Mayo travelled to what they and everyone else thought was the Connacht final to face Galway in Tuam.

This bit though is scarcely believable. A Galway referee, Stephen Jordan — a leading administrator at the time — was placed in charge, with no objection from Mayo GAA.

That is only the start of the story and if it wasn't for the research and writing of Western People editor James Laffey in his book 'The Road to '51,' which charts Mayo football from 1916 until their most recent All-Ireland victory (1951), it may've been lost.

The finer detail of it certainly would have been.

At the time it wasn't just the 1925 All-Ireland at stake, the prize was an even bigger one — to become the first Connacht county to take the Sam Maguire west of the Shannon.

“I didn't know anything about it until I went researching it,” says Laffey. “I put a lot of time into researching it. Not just the local papers, but the



Karl O'KANE
REPORTS

national papers as well.

“It was quite a convoluted and drawn-out Connacht Championship in particular — and All-Ireland Championship. Mayo were the last team standing.”

“There was no question that the game played in Tuam was the Connacht final.

“The most incisive comment is that if it was an All-Ireland final, it would have been played at Croke Park and Central Council would have got some or all of the proceeds of it.

“But the fact it was played in Tuam, and it was the Connacht Council who got the proceeds suggested that it was the Connacht final and everyone saw it as a Connacht final.

Argue

“You could equally argue that Mayo weren't worthy of winning that All-Ireland either because they only won it by default. They beat Wexford (All-Ireland semi-final) fair and square, but then they didn't play any final at all.

“At that time (2011, researching the book) I would have spoken to people whose parents would have been on that 1925 team and the general view was

there was no winner and that it should have been a null and void Championship.”

A new GAA rule allowed players based in Dublin to line out for their own counties and the background to this was concerns around the strength of the county due to migration and after their All-Ireland three-in-a-row (1921-23).

They'd also been in five finals in a row (1920-24).

On top of this, the Connacht Championship was a mess, with a raft of replays (five) taking place between Roscommon and Sligo — and the Rossies objecting to “everything from changing facilities to spectator incursions.”

It also took three games to separate Galway and Leitrim in the Connacht semi-final, with the Tribe side featuring 1998 and 2001 All-Ireland winner Michael Donnellan's grandfather Mick.

With all the subsequent delays, the GAA at central level were keen to push ahead with the All-Ireland series.

So Connacht GAA — none too displeased with the financial windfall from seven replays — nominated their reigning champions Mayo to go ahead and represent the province.

It was actually suggested by the same Galway delegate Stephen Jordan that refereed the game in Tuam.

At the time, Connacht GAA

President Sean T. Ruane — a Mayo man — said they had “never had a state of affairs so successful and, at the same time, so troublesome in the history of football in Connacht.”

It was about to get a lot worse. Mayo shocked Wexford in the All-Ireland semi-final, but the final was never played.

Kerry defeated Cavan in the other semi-final and the Breffni launched an objection, with the Kingdom countering. Both were thrown out of the competition.

Confusion

That left Mayo ‘the last man standing,’ although there is confusion over whether or not Central Council ever awarded them the All-Ireland title, with no record of this in the minutes of meetings.

At the time the Western People labelled it, “a bloodless victory.”

The Tuam match was hugely controversial with Galway ref Jordan awarding a penalty to his county which was hotly contested and vital in the end.

And it gets even better: “Mick Mulderrig was adamant that his father had told him that one of the supporters kicked a point in a pitch invasion,” says Laffey. “It's quite possible that could have happened.”

On October 23, Central Council made a decision to award the All-Ireland title to Galway but

the GAA didn't tell anyone.

The Connacht Tribune had the story a week later, but it didn't fully emerge until November 7, with the accompanying Irish Independent headline, ‘A Curious Decision.’ That was one way of putting it. As Laffey says in his book, Mayo were the victims or “a boardroom mugging.”

The details of that meeting are sketchy with Mayo's Connacht President Ruane — and some other delegates — heading west around midnight.

The press followed them out

fused to play and Galway went on to defeat Cavan in the final, to officially claim the title.

Laffey found some annoyance with relatives, including the late 1950/'51 boy wonder Mick Mulderrig, whose father played in the 1925 team.

Laffey explains: “There was a sense of grievance over what had happened with Galway.

“When the book was published the amount of people that mentioned to me that they couldn't get over that story

fact it was declared an All-Ireland final.

“Mick Mulderrig was a key person in a sense of giving me a steer on what happened in that Championship. He put me onto it. Without him saying, ‘You need to research that 25 Championship. What happened there was totally wrong. My father was always talking about it.’

“It was fortunate in its timing. Within a few years a lot of those guys had passed on and I felt somebody needs to record it here and put it down — there is a great story here.

either. It was nobody's Championship. The four-team Championship at the end was just a bit of face-saving by the GAA to say ‘well look, we better do something here’, but it wasn't really the Championship proper either. Equally you could argue, what Mayo had been involved in wasn't the Championship proper either, in terms of beating Wexford after being a Connacht nominee.

Dubious

“The whole thing was a debacle. Galway are in the record books as claiming it. There is a view it's a dubious Championship. They won it on the basis of that four-team tournament more than on the basis of the Connacht title in Tuam.

“I don't think anybody in Mayo would have claimed that Championship. I did find a reference to them being All-Ireland champions in the Connacht Tribune, but it was very much All-Ireland champions by default more than anything.

“The grievance was the Connacht final that turned into an All-Ireland final when it wasn't.

“There was a lot of chicanery that went on behind the scenes. The GAA didn't come out of it looking very well. It was a Championship that reflected poorly on the GAA at the time and it kind

of ended that era of serial objections to all sorts of things.”

Commenting on the entire Championship, the Irish Independent talked about “an epidemic of false evidence” and “overlying falsity and deceit.”

They added: “While matters continue thus, is it any wonder that the GAA is fast becoming the laughing stock of Ireland.”

It was also the last hurrah for a Mayo team that reached the 1916 All-Ireland final.

“A lot of those guys had been knocking on the door,” says Laffey. “They got to a final in ‘21. A lot of those matches were delayed because of the War of Independence and the Civil War. Their careers were interrupted. “They were very close in a couple of semi-finals and finals.

“John Eddie McEllin — later a senator — Bernie Durkan and quite a number of them retired after ‘25. It was the last throw of the dice and they were very serious about finally winning this All-Ireland. They brought in Tommy Maloney, an army guy

“There were big bragging rights to be the first team from Connacht to win the All-Ireland title. That's maybe where some of the chicanery came in when Galway saw the opportunity to be declared champions. Having beaten Mayo, they weren't going to say no to it.

“Mayo didn't win Connacht again until 1929, so it was the end of an era for that group.”



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IT was like an episode of Minder mixed with Mrs Brown's Boys.

You had cameo appearances from Ireland's most controversial pundit, U2's drummer, a comedian and a disgraced Bishop.

But the story isn't about them. Instead it is about a mystery man called George the Greek and ticket money that went missing from the FAI during their 1994 World Cup campaign.

That's where this story begins, with Eamon Dunphy striding across the lobby of the Hilton Hotel in Orlando, past U2's Larry Mullan and Mrs Brown's Boys writer Brendan O'Carroll.

Yet their celebrity status was dwarfed by the size of the next personality Dunphy saw.

Bishop Eamon Casey had left the Diocese of Galway two years earlier following the biggest sex scandal of the decade. A secret father of one, he ended up in Ecuador. Now he was here, searching for World Cup tickets, the sweat dripping down his beetroot face.

Dunphy shook his head in disbelief, muttered the words 'for f*** sake' and walked across to the elevator.

The bell boy asked which floor. "Seven," Dunphy replied.

A minute later there was a knock on the door.

"Ah Eamon," the man who answered it, replied.

"What can I get you?"

The journalist-come-pundit was looking for four tickets for Ireland's World Cup round of 16 match against the Netherlands.

"Here you can have these ones for free," replied the man, flashing a toothy smile.

Gigantic

"I'm not taking them without paying," Dunphy declared.

"I've the money here for you."

With that, the man opened a gigantic suitcase and Dunphy stared into a thick pile of tickets. Across the carpeted floor of the man's hotel room were dollars. Dunphy rolled his eyes and left.

An hour later, Brendan Menton knocked on the same door of that seventh floor room.

At that stage of his life Menton was a member of the FAI's Council. Two years later, he was its Acting General Secretary, the footballing equivalent of a backbencher rising to become Taoiseach.

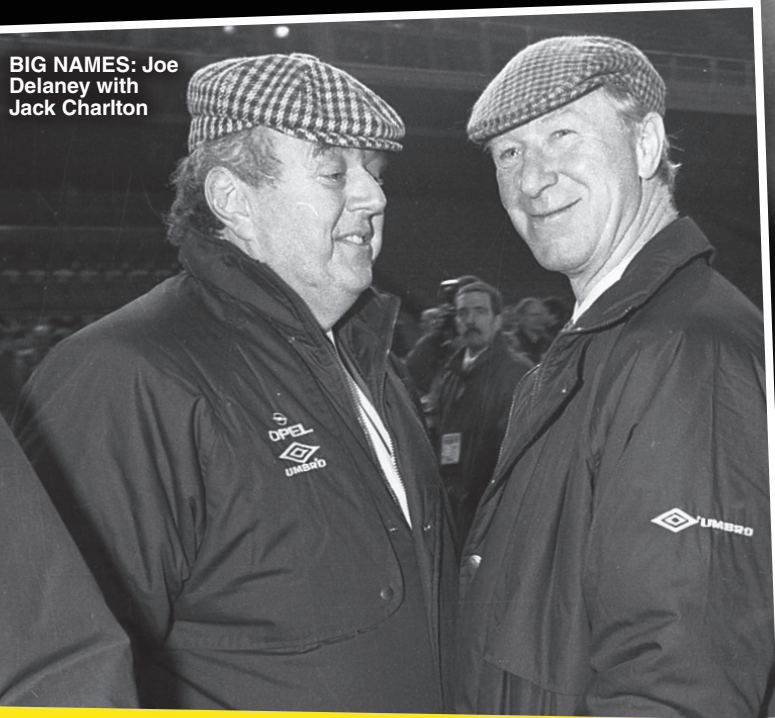
Menton recalls: "The room was a mess, thousands of tickets lying around, cash all over the place.

"I offered to pay for my two tickets by visa, even offered to get a visa machine brought down from New York, from a pal who was working there, to help them process the tickets.

"Politely I was told it was okay, that they were happy dealing in cash. The scene was pure and utter chaos.

"That week, during the FAI's time staying there, the hotel safe got broken into and robbed. Seriously, it was like an episode of Only Fools and Horses."

Even the characters involved in the story had names that would fit into the sitcom with a cast featuring Joe Delaney, the man with the tickets in that seventh floor room, the man who had



BIG NAMES: Joe Delaney with Jack Charlton

FAI'S GREEK TRAGEDY

George The Greek? I don't even know if he exists



Garry DOYLE REPORTS

sorted Dunphy, Menton, Mullan, O'Carroll and Bishop Casey.

In one sense it was comedy gold but two years later no one was laughing because by now Ireland's most famous journalist was following the money trail.

Veronica Guerin was best known as a crime reporter, fearlessly going into Dublin's underworld to expose the drug overlords who were ripping her city apart.

She was also a football fan and something about the FAI's ticketing arrangements left her asking questions.

Menton and her became friendly: "Once she was on a story, she was never going to let it go. She was intense. After I became Act-

WHO WAS THE WORLD CUP TICKET TOUT THAT NEARLY SUNK FAI?

ing General Secretary, in 1996, she'd frequently call, looking for clarity on information she had obtained. Her sources were exceptional. I found her approach straightforward and honest.

"We were due to meet the week before she died. She cancelled because that was the same day that Garda Gerry McCabe had been murdered and she was on her way down to Limerick to cover that story."

Stories

"Next week," she suggested.

If only.

Before Guerin and Menton got to meet, she was murdered, taken out in a gangland hit.

One of the last stories she wrote was about a man called George the Greek, the faceless

tout at the heart of the FAI's ticket scandal at the 1994 World Cup.

Nearly three decades later, not one picture of George the Greek has ever emerged. He remains a man of mystery, with many people, including Dunphy, wondering if he is a mythical figure.

"I never met George the Greek," says Dunphy. "Nor did anyone I know. That day in Orlando, there were a number of touts outside the team hotel. All sorts of celebs were there, too. But George the Greek? No, I don't even know if such a person exists."

Come March 1996, though, George the Greek had an identity, Joe Delaney naming him as Theo, who the then-FAI Treasurer had negotiated with in order to secure tickets for Ireland's

matches in that 1994 World Cup. Up until the Holland game, that had gone well.

Words

Then Ireland lost 2-0 to the Dutch and all of a sudden, the FAI's Treasurer had — to use his own words — 'arrived in a situation where we (the Irish team) were returning home and I had surplus tickets' (for the World Cup quarter final between Brazil and Holland).

Delaney, in a statement released in 1996, explained: "Had we qualified for the quarter final in Dallas, these tickets would have been used but now they were non-returnable to FIFA and worthless if brought home.

"I then took what I considered at the time to be a calculated risk, but one which I now bitterly regret: I gave the tickets to Theo (aka George the Greek).

"I received assurances from him that all the monies due to the FAI would be paid on or before the FIFA settlement date in November."

Now bear in mind the FAI had already messed up bartering tickets at Italia 90, when future FAI President Louis Kilcoyne had been arrested by Italian police outside the Brazil-Argentina game after trying to offload a batch of tickets.

Worse again, the FAI made a loss of around £130,000 at that tournament.

Now they were repeating those errors.

This is Dunphy's take on those events: "The FAI guys weren't touts. They were stupid, for sure. But they weren't touting.

"It was just the classic Irish thing of trying to curry favour, get a pal,

or a celeb, a ticket out in Orlando, in the hope that maybe one day they'd get you a ticket or do you a favour some place down the line.

"The real touts were outside the hotel. I genuinely think the FAI guys were trying to do good by people, trying to accommodate as many fans as possible. They were definitely not making money for themselves."

Yet Menton remains more angry than bemused by the events of that 1994 World Cup. He says: "Football associations exist to develop the game. The idea that it was the FAI's job to supply absolutely every Irish fan with a

ticket is bizarre. For sure, grade A matches, like Ireland against Italy in Giants Stadium, had demand.

Tournament

"But there wasn't the same demand for Ireland versus Norway in that tournament. Nor was there for Ireland against Romania in 1990. You couldn't give tickets away that day. Nor could you give them away for Ireland against Italy in the World Cup quarter final that year.

"Remember the FAI made a loss in 1990. Yet in 1994, they were sourcing tickets again and bartering with touts. That made absolutely no financial sense."

Guerin sensed this when she started digging into the issue in February 1996, revealing in The Sunday Independent that 'a London-based ticket agent absconded with STG £210,000, which was revenue from tickets relating to the 1994 World Cup.'

Guerin also revealed how the shortfall was repaid by two cheques, one for £140,000 and another for £70,000 'in the name of a senior FAI official'.

That turned out to be Joe

Delaney, who repaid the money owed to the FAI in November 1994, 14 months before the scandal became public.

Guerin later wrote that the 1994 World Cup shortfall came about because of 'a ticket sting by two international ticket touts, who claimed that they had been left with unpaid bills by the FAI from a previous ticket transaction.' As for Joe Delaney, he released a statement in March 1996, his attempt to clarify the issue.

He wrote: "On several occasions I went to London to try and secure the remaining funds without success. Despite many deadlines and further assurances no monies were forthcoming.

"At this stage I considered myself responsible for the debacle and decided to bridge the outstanding monies to the Association. I did so in two credit transfers ... as in the early months of 1995 it became

SPOTLIGHT: Joe Delaney feels the pressure at an FAI press conference and (below) Veronica Guerin and Eamon Dunphy

'We were trying to get to the bottom of it all'

PAUL LENNON was reporting on the 1994 World Cup in Orlando for the Irish Daily Star when he spotted Joe Delaney across his hotel lobby. Ireland were preparing for their last-16 clash with the Netherlands and Delaney had one thing in mind — securing more tickets for the travelling Irish support.

As Delaney approached, briefcase in hand, Lennon had no idea what would unfold.

Two years later came the 'Night of the Long Knives', a crisis FAI meeting at the Westbury Hotel, which signalled the end of Delaney's time in Merrion Square.

That summit followed revelations over the FAI's ticket allocation for the '94 World Cup and the involvement of 'George the Greek'. Lennon recalled: "Joe was the FAI's ticketing and security officer at the time of the 1994 World Cup.

"I remember sitting in our hotel bar in Orlando with Charlie Stuart having a drink at around seven in the evening and Joe came out of a lift across the lobby."

"He was waiting for a taxi, so he came over to us and we got talking."

"He told us he was off to try to buy some tickets for Ireland fans for the game against Holland. He said he would be doing a bit of bartering and swapping of tickets.

Offload

"Joe sat down, and very quietly and unobtrusively he opened up the briefcase that he had, and inside it there were tickets for every remaining game in that World Cup.

"He had tickets for all the second round games, the quarter-finals, semi-finals and final. He was flying to New York, he said, and was going to meet a few people to try to offload and do swaps for our game that Monday."

"He was doing it for the right reasons, to try to get more tickets for Irish fans. There were still a few thousand who travelled over and those numbers were swelled by the American- and Canadian-based Irish fans."

"But I think that's where the problems began for Joe and the FAI."

"This wasn't the first time that an FAI official had attempted to offload tickets during a World Cup. The uncertainty of where Ireland might



Mark McCADDEN REPORTS

play their last-16 game in 1990 meant that the Association had to purchase tickets for four venues, including Genoa, where Ireland faced Romania, and Turin, where they might have met Argentina.

Unable to return the Turin tickets to the local organising committee, Louis Kilcoyne stood outside the Brazil-Argentina venue in an effort to swap tickets for the Genoa fixture a day later.

Kilcoyne was detained for hours by local police, who suspected he was touting the 400 tickets.

Losses

At the time, however, many other associations were in the same boat — stuck with tickets that they could not get rid of.

As for Delaney, who became FAI treasurer shortly after the 1994 World Cup, he ended up paying just over €200,000 of his own money to cover losses accrued during the US tournament.

And two years after working in the heat of Orlando, Lennon found himself standing outside the Westbury, as a different type of heat was coming on some of the FAI's top officials.

"We were trying to grapple with how much was owed, and the FAI were trying to grapple with that problem as well," he recalled.

"Trying to get to the bottom of it was very difficult from a journalist's point of view, but the FAI were in the same boat."

"Obviously you had to be wary of what you said or printed, but it was a massive story at the time."



RARE INSIGHT: Paul Lennon covered USA 94 and the George The Greek saga

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LASTING LEGACY: Jack Charlton won a complicated race to become Ireland boss

'86 vote change and Paisley snub altered Irish football history

THE tale of Bob Paisley and Ireland? Now there's a story. What many don't realise is that there were actually two attempts to give him the job.

Paisley had stepped down as Liverpool manager after the 1982/83 season and a discreet approach was made. He turned it down.

The FAI persevered with Eoin Hand but the 1986 World Cup qualifiers were disastrous. The mood for change was everywhere. After hitting a brick wall with first choice Brian Clough, Des Casey and Dr Tony O'Neill were given the task by the FAI of drawing up a list of possible candidates.

Casey was a Dundalk man and the club had strong ties with Liverpool, so Paisley was sounded out. He had been acting as an advisor to Liverpool player-manager Kenny Dalglish and that had whetted his appetite to get back into the game. He told Casey that he was interested.

But Casey and O'Neill were keen to assess a wide range of candidates. Given Ireland's lowly stature at the time, they came up with a hugely impressive list of football men who wanted to be considered.

As well as Paisley, it included World Cup winner Jack Charlton, Manchester City boss Billy McNeill, and previous Ireland managers John Giles and Liam Tuohy. Mark Lawrenson, only 28 and still at the height of his playing powers, applied, but wasn't considered. Hand also reapplied for his old job but his application was rejected.

Travel

Tuohy had a great line whenever he was asked about that time — "it was a two horse race and I came fourth".

The vote took place on the night of February 7, 1986. Paisley had been told to stay by his phone. He was assured that he was a shoo-in.

In typical FAI fashion, though, another blazer had told John Giles the same thing. Fran Fields told him to travel from Birmingham, so that he could be unveiled at a press conference.

"It turned out that I was only brought in so that other people who had also applied for the job could be considered. I wasn't that keen about it so, to be honest, there was a feeling of relief when I heard that Jack had been appointed, because I didn't have a hunger for the job and it would go to somebody who was really up for it,"

■ Kieran CUNNINGHAM

said Giles.

A meeting with City chairman Peter Swales made it clear to the FAI that they'd have to cough up compensation for McNeill. He was out.

At the start of the FAI executive meeting on February 7 the members were of the understanding that two candidates were left — Charlton and Tuohy. Casey then told those present that Giles had rung to say he wanted to be considered. Casey had another bombshell, saying he would be putting forward Paisley's name too.

A secret ballot was called. There were 18 members and half of them voted for Paisley. Tuohy, Charlton and Giles got three votes each. But an absolute majority was needed. Paisley was still one short of the quota of 10 votes. It was decided that a vote would be taken to eliminate one of those on three votes, and Tuohy was the fall guy.

Ballot

So a second ballot: Paisley stayed on nine votes, Charlton got six, Giles was on three. Giles was eliminated.

In a straight shoot-out between Paisley and Charlton, surely Paisley's advantage from the earlier vote — plus his far more impressive CV — would get him over the line.

But the FAI is always full of surprises. The final ballot saw Charlton take 10 votes with Paisley on eight.

When the details of the meeting became public, there was a huge deal of interest. Who had changed their vote?

Given what happened under Charlton, it was one of the most pivotal moves in the history of Irish sport. It would have been deeply sad if Paisley had got the job as, in the next couple of years, he started to show the symptoms of Alzheimer's.

Most of those involved in the drama that led to the arrival of Charlton as Ireland manager have passed away, including O'Neill, at just 53 in 1999. He is widely regarded as one of the great reformers, a man who did Irish football huge service at different levels. Enquiries to a number of well informed sources also throw up the most significant part of O'Neill's legacy.

It was he who changed his vote from Paisley to Charlton 39 years ago. Nothing would ever be the same again.

FROM A SPY THRILLER

A break-in, a burglary, stolen files, one intercepted urine sample — Olympic saga was one of Irish sport's strangest episodes

IF IRELAND win an Olympic gold medal and there's no-one around, did it really happen?

Of course that wasn't the case on August 27, 2004 at the Markopoulo Equestrian Centre in Athens.

But it sure felt that way. The venue was 20 miles away from where the Irish media were staying — not a huge distance, but it had been a long and grim fortnight.

It was such a dismal Olympics for Ireland that John O'Donoghue changed his plans to head home a few days early. When a Sports Minister does that, you generally know the jig is up.

We were two days out from the closing ceremony and running on fumes. A couple had headed to the Markopoulo but most of the Irish media posse were busy writing post-mortems about Ireland's Olympic failure.

One bored hack was listlessly strolling around the Main Press Centre, looking at the screens showing various sports, when he stopped in his tracks.

He stood slack-jawed in front of the feed from the showjumping. It wasn't that Ireland had one medal contender in the mix — they had three, Cian O'Connor, Kevin Babington and Jessica Kurten.

He raced back to the rest of us and we scrambled to watch. Babington was the leading Irish qualifier but he dropped out of the running and finished eighth.

We focused on Kurten, who had a share of the gold medal position going into her final round but she dropped to 20th.

It was down to O'Connor. He was 24, the youngest of the team, and not the most popular figure in Irish showjumping, as he later told the Irish Times.

"Showjumping is a small pool. You had people pitching for the same places, the same horses, trying to fish in the same pot to try and find owners and backers," he said.

Connections

"And I guess with the connections I had and my own brashness and cockiness — which have since been knocked off me, I'd like to think — you didn't realise you got up people's noses or stepped on toes."

Waterford Crystal jumped like a dream under O'Connor and he got his podium moment. That was many Irish journalists' first experience of seeing Ireland win an Olympic gold while being at the Olympics but many were miles away in an airconditioned press centre...

These days, the Olympic Federation of Ireland has an efficient and well-staffed press operation. Back then, it was the Olympic Council of Ireland, and the hard-pressed Jack McGouran had to do it all on his own.

Never happier than when kicking



Kieran CUNNINGHAM REPORTS

back to listen to his beloved jazz, McGouran had a thankless job — given the Irish trend of things going pear-shaped at the Games.

But he was on the ball that Friday, arranging a host of interviews over the phone with the newly-crowned Olympic champion O'Connor.

He had a great back story. The godson of Tony O'Reilly. The grandson of another rugby icon, Dr Karl Mullen, who captained Ireland to their first Grand Slam in 1948.

Within weeks, though, we were writing a very different story. Waterford Crystal tested positive for a human psychotropic drug.

The drama didn't end there. Waterford Crystal's B urine sample went missing somewhere between a lab in Paris and a lab in Newmarket in England.

Emerged

It emerged that someone had intercepted the delivery, signed for it and disappeared. Then there was a break-in at the HQ of the Irish Equestrian Federation in Kill, Co Kildare and a file related to the positive test of another of O'Connor's horses was stolen.

This file was then faxed to Charlie Bird of RTE. It was like something from a spy thriller.

In his only interview where he was asked about these events, O'Connor made it clear he had no clue what had happened.

Nobody else does either. The identity of the man who intercepted the delivery in Newmarket or those who broke in to Kill remain a mystery.

O'Connor has an Olympic medal that no-one can take from him — a bronze from 2012 and has represented Ireland successfully for many years.

No-one even expected O'Connor to be in London, as the places on the showjumping team went to Billy Twomey and Denis Lynch.

But, on the eve of the Games, Lynch was out due to his horse, Lantinus, being disqualified for hypersensitivity at an event in Germany.

And no-one expected to see O'Connor in the Greenwich Park arena for the final either.

He hadn't qualified for the final but, instead, was first reserve but Sweden's Goran Bengtsson's horse fell ill and O'Connor got his chance.



SHATTERED CRYSTAL

21 years on, what happened after Athens remains a mystery

THE Cambridge Constabulary contact was pleasant and helpful, but also pretty bemused.

"Just out of interest, why are you revisiting the case?" wrote the contact this week. "No specific reason, I'm just curious."

It's over 20 years since the curious case of Waterford Crystal, the stolen urine sample and the gold medal that was and then wasn't.

Ireland has won 22 Olympic medals in the last five Games — including a record seven medals in Paris last summer — but it used to be a different story.

Until Cian O'Connor's intervention, the Irish team in Athens looked destined to draw the eighth medals blank since first Ireland's debut Olympic participation in 1924.

A few Irish reporters on the ground in Greece sensed a medal story in the making at last on the third last day of action when the trio of O'Connor, Kevin Babington and Jessica Kurten qualified for the Showjumping final.

And so this writer was among those who scrambled out to the Markopoulo Equestrian Centre near Athens Airport on the evening of Friday, August 27. O'Connor, who was 24, produced a fault-free final round and it was enough to secure the equestrian team's first ever Olympic gold medal.

He punched the air in delight. "Normally I'm not stuck for words but this time I am," he said. "I'm absolutely delighted my horse won. He jumped fantastic. I couldn't have asked for any more."

Moment

Ireland had his moment in the sun, even if the controversy involving the dancing priest Neil Horan, who tackled the lead marathon runner Vanderlei de Lima in the final event of the Games, soon dominated the headlines.

Six weeks later, however, O'Connor and Waterford Crystal were splashed across every front page once again.

A dope test on the horse in Athens showed traces of two antipsychotic drugs, luphenazine and zuclophenithol — both used to treat schizophrenia in humans.

O'Connor and his vet James Sheeran protested that the drugs were in a sedative used on Waterford Crystal five weeks before the Games for a fetlock injury.



Michael SCULLY REPORTS

Equestrian sport's governing body, the FEI, had warned competitors that their testing procedures had improved. In Waterford Crystal's case, the sedative hadn't totally washed out of its system.

O'Connor felt that the B sample would work in his favour but all hell broke loose when, on October 21, the FEI was informed that a sample portion was stolen from the Horses Racing Forensic Laboratory in Newmarket.

Police in Cambridge only learned of the crime five days later. They investigated, as did police in Lausanne, where the FEI is based. It emerged that an unknown person signed for the delivery of the sample.

Avril Doyle, the Equestrian Federation of Ireland president, was at a loss — she had been told by the FEI that the sample was en route to Hong Kong, not split between Cambridge and New York.

The controversy deepened when a break-in at the offices of the EFI in Kill was discovered by cleaners early on the morning of November 1. Doyle described the incident as "sinister".

A file on another of O'Connor's horses that had tested positive

that summer, ABC Landliebe, was the only thing stolen. A page of that file was sent by fax to RTE's Charlie Bird. O'Connor insisted at the time that he wasn't responsible as he already had the information on the file.

In an Irish Times interview almost five years ago, he addressed that period.

"I didn't know anything about it at the time, I still don't know anything about it," O'Connor said.

"People who didn't really understand the story obviously pointed the finger. But we knew there was a blood sample to come and we already had our own copies of the documents that were in the federation."

Gained

"There was nothing to be gained for us when those things happened. It was compared at the time to a Dick Francis novel and it was a mad time, definitely."

"It gave different dimensions to it and it meant there was more intrigue around it in the public. But there were factions around who would have gone to any lengths to be against me."

Former Ireland chef d'Equipe Tommy Wade also weighed in. "The motive is to blackmail Cian O'Connor," he said.

"Why? Certain people want Cian O'Connor pulled down. It's the police's job to find those people and

they're not very hard to find." The blood portion of the sample was tested in New York and O'Connor was stripped of the gold medal the following March following a hearing in Zurich.

He went on to win bronze at London 2012 and Paris 2024 was his fourth Games.

Meanwhile, the perpetrators of both robberies have never been found. The Cambridgeshire Constabulary and Naas Gardai haven't closed the cases.

"A comprehensive investigation occurred at the time led by Naas District Detective Unit," said the Garda Press Office of the FEI office break-in.

A Garda investigation into the burglary remains open at this time.

In Cambridge, CCTV footage was checked and phone call traces made to DHL's customer services division on the day the same was stolen.

And, from the Cambridgeshire Constabulary corporate communications office, came this statement this week: "An extensive investigation was carried out, including interviewing the courier who delivered the sample, analysing phone data and taking fingerprints from various items."

"The case was eventually filed pending further investigative opportunities coming to light."



GLORY: Cian O'Connor and Waterford Crystal celebrate with the gold medal they won in the 2004 Olympics

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THE HORSE, MYSTERY

IT'S an Irish mystery stretching back more than 40 years — but it still fascinates people around the world.

And, even though it happened four decades ago, gardai have told The Star: "The case is still open."

Late in the evening of February 8, 1983 a masked IRA unit broke into a house in rural Ireland and held the terrified occupants at gunpoint.

It was a common tactic of the Provos at the time: they would often hold families hostage in their own homes while they used their car to mount a gun attack on the British army or RUC.

But this hostage situation was different.

For a start, it was near Newbridge, Co Kildare — more than 200kms south of Belfast, the epicentre of the Troubles at the time.

And there was also the small fact that the terror gang was actually after a horse. And a special one at that.

The gang had just forced its way into the home of Jim Fitzgerald, head groom at the Ballymany Stud, 2.5kms south west of the centre of the Co Kildare town and owned by the Aga Khan, one of the world's richest men.

While his family were herded into one room, Fitzgerald was forced to bring members

The horsenapping of Shergar still fascinates 40 years on



Michael O'TOOLE
CRIME AND DEFENCE EDITOR

of the gang to the stable that housed what they were there for: Shergar.

The four-year-old horse had only raced in Ireland in 1980 and 1981, but had been hugely successful.

Of the eight races he ran in those years, he won six, came second in one and fourth in another.

Races

The races won included the Irish and English derbies, as well as the King George VI and Queen Elizabeth Stakes.

The Aga Khan then retired the horse and sent it to stud in Kildare — but only after selling shares in the beast worth a cool €37 million in today's money.

And that's why the IRA were so interested in the animal.

They needed money to fund their campaign against the British.

Two years earlier, the Provos kidnapped supermarket tycoon Ben Dunne and had only

released him after a ransom of £1.5m (€6.3m today), was paid. And the IRA thought Shergar would be even more valuable.

The Provos quickly identified the right horse, bundled him into a horse box and drove off into the night — after telling Fitzgerald the Aga Khan would have to stump up a ransom of £2 (around €7.5m today) to release him.

News of the sensational kidnapping emerged the next day — and went around the world.

Gardai mounted a major search operation for the horse, as did the RUC north of the border.

The same day, the kidnappers got in touch with the stud to demand their £2m ransom.

A few days later, on February 12, they provided photographs of the horse to show he was still alive.

But then all communication ceased and there was never any trace found of the horse.

Gardai have intelligence that the horse was shot dead as it was being moved from Kildare to the north west, where the gang planned to hold him pending ransom negotiations.

The strongest theory is the kidnappers simply did not know how to handle the horse and he was shot after a bizarre struggle saw him injured.

One of his legs was broken and the Provos knew enough about horses to tell he was doomed — so they shot it.

It's now believed the remains of the horse were buried near Ballinamore in Co Leitrim.

There was a significant level of support for the IRA there at the time and gardai have always suspected that the horse was secretly buried on farmland in the area.

It would not be the last time Ballinamore would feature in the annals of the Troubles.

Less than a year later, on December 16, 1983, gardai converged on the village in a desperate search for businessman Don Tidey, kidnapped by the IRA in south Dublin 23 days earlier.

Hide

A joint Garda-Army search party was combing Derrada Wood near the village when they found the hide in which the Provos were holding Tidey.

He was rescued after a fire-fight — but recruit Garda Gary Sheehan and Army Private Patrick Kelly were shot dead in the confrontation.

The IRA never acknowledged any involvement in the taking of Shergar — but gardai and republicans both accept they were behind it.

And in 1999, former IRA member turned British agent Sean O'Callaghan went public to claim the Provos' leadership, or Army Council, sanctioned the kidnapping.

They saw it as an easy fundraiser. But while the outside world may have obsessed about the horse for years and even decades, within the republican movement, the kidnapping appears much less important.

Sources say the issue was rarely talked about at grassroots level within the IRA.

Irrespective of who kidnapped Shergar or what happened to it, one thing is certain: the Garda probe is still open, even though it was 42 years ago next month.

A Garda spokesman confirmed to us the case had not been closed.

And he made a fresh appeal for anyone with information to contact Newbridge Garda Station.

Open

"Shergar is an open investigation," the spokesman said.

"Anyone with information should contact Newbridge Garda Station on 045 431212."

It's understood there has been no new information given to gardai for years — but officers do periodically review the case.



FULL FLIGHT: The 10/11 favourite Shergar, ridden by Walter Swinburn, winning the 1981 Epsom Derby by 10 lengths, the largest margin the race has seen; (left) Shergar with the Aga Khan after the horse won the Irish Derby

'HE GOT REGULAR PHONE CALLS CLAIMING TO KNOW WHERE SHERGAR WAS'

MY DAD and my grandfather were locked in splendid isolation with only their words for company, as they both called Shergar home.

Early ripples of excitement from the stands in a race are easily drowned out by silence when you've noise-cancelling headphones clamped on and a mic in hand.

But as the excitement on the track reaches a crescendo entering the final furlong, so too can the commentator, even if the result is well beyond doubt.

"He's winning it so easily! It's Shergar first, and the rest are nowhere," was the line my grandfather Michael O'Hehir coined as he commented on the 1981 Irish Derby.

RTE's commentary box was at the top of the Curragh grandstand, the highest vantage point possible at the Kildare track from which to observe flat racing's new star enhance a glowing CV.

Directly below him on the next level down, my dad Tony O'Hehir was providing the course commentary for those at the track, as Lester Piggott eased Shergar to victory.

"That was Shergar's only race in Ireland as the rest were all in England," says Tony.

"Looking back on it now, yeah, it's nice to say you commented on that one! "He was a high class, brilliant horse but he wasn't, strictly-speaking, an Irish horse."

"He wasn't trained here and had made his name in England, even though his owner, the Aga Khan, had big stud involvement in Ireland."

Shergar's victory in the Irish Derby came three weeks after his scintillating success in the Epsom Derby, by 10 lengths.

That was in the hands of



Paul O'HEHIR
REPORTER

regular jockey Walter Swinburn — and remains the biggest winning margin of the Derby since it was first run in 1780.

But Shergar wouldn't just make headlines in the racing pages. He became national and international news but for altogether more sinister reasons.

The horse was famously kidnapped two years later from Ballymany Stud in Newbridge, just a four-minute drive from the scene of that Irish Derby success.

Shergar's owner — others also had shares in the horse once it went to stud — never did pay the £2m ransom demanded by the captors, widely believed to be the IRA.

My dad Tony was appointed as Irish correspondent of the Racing Post when the newspaper launched in 1986, so wasn't on the daily news beat in 1983 as such.

Established

But as an established commentator at the time, and contributor to various print publications, he was well-placed to appreciate the impact of the events.

"It sent shockwaves through the racing industry and became one of those rare racing-related stories that made front page news," says Tony.

"It led the TV news bulletins here and in the UK for a long, long time, with all sorts of conspiracies and false dawns over where Shergar was and who took him."

"My father (Michael)

regularly got phone calls to the house, claiming to know where the horse was.

"They would be along the lines of 'Go to such and such a pub and meet this fella who will give you the lowdown on it'."

"It's hard to remember all the ins and outs of it now, 42 years later, but I know he went out to meet a few of these callers in good faith."

"It even made the newspapers of the time that my father was getting these phone calls and supposed tip-offs. People would often ask him about it at GAA matches too."

"But Derek Thompson, a racing colleague of ours in England, was centrally involved," he adds of attempts to negotiate with the kidnappers for Shergar's release.

"It soon became very obvious that it wasn't horsey people that took him because what would the purpose of that be?"

"You couldn't stand him at stud elsewhere. It was clear pretty quickly that there was a dark element to it, and whoever took him thought they would get a fortune."

Chief Superintendent James Murphy, nicknamed Spud, became the face of the public enquiry in the days after the dramatic seizure.

"I remember his hat!," laughs my dad. "He wore this big trilby that really stood out and set him apart,

but Murphy became a presence in living rooms all around the country."

Such was the enormity of the unfolding story, it was taken on by news reporters, crime reporters and investigative journalists rather than racing hacks.

Tony says: "A lot of racing journalism would focus on the here and now and when you think about it, Shergar wasn't actually a racehorse at the time."

He was retired, and standing at stud.

Achieve

"He only served one season as a stallion when he was stolen."

"He sired 35 foals and of them the only one to achieve anything really significant was a horse called Authaah."

"He was owned by Sheikh Mohammed and trained by David O'Brien, Vincent O'Brien's son, who had a very successful if short training career."

"Authaah won the Irish St Leger in 1986, Christy Roche rode him. I remember he dashed off in front and was soon a long way clear and they never caught him."

"But Authaah didn't do a huge amount in Ireland or Europe after that but was sent to Australia and won two of their big races over there."

"Shergar sired other winners too, but Authaah was easily the best of them."

"But when Shergar was stolen, the story had gone beyond the racing journalists, it was that big."

SHERGAR... THE OTHER THEORIES

There have been numerous possibilities put forward as to what exact fate Shergar met with — and who was behind his kidnapping.

COLONEL GADDAFI

LIBYAN leader Colonel Gaddafi found himself at the centre of one theory. The speculation was he'd made a deal with the IRA where they'd receive weapons in return for taking the horse on his behalf. Gaddafi's thinking was driven by a personal belief that he should be at the forefront of the Islamic world rather than a descendant of the Prophet Mohamed, such as Shergar's co-owner the Aga Khan.

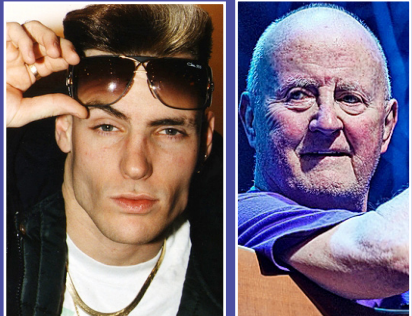


THE MAFIA

JEAN MICHEL GAMBET'S was another story that did the rounds. The Frenchman is said to have taken money off the New Orleans mafia in order to buy a horse from the Aga Khan but still went through with spending the dough after the deal fell through. The talk was that the Mafia still wanted a horse and was the ones who decided to take Shergar. Gambet was later found dead in Kentucky.

SHERGAR... IN POP CULTURE

'SHERGAR was ridden by Lord Lucan' sang Christy Moore in 'Lisdoonvarna'. The tale of Shergar has reached every corner of culture both here in Ireland and across the world. The saga has been covered wide and far by TV shows, movies and podcasts — one narrated by Vanilla Ice — and the Shergar Cup is held annually at Ascot. It remains one of world sport's great mysteries.



KEN O'CONNOR

CAUSE CELEBRE: Chief Superintendent James Murphy at a press conference outside Newbridge Garda Station where he gave details of the suspected 'horsenappers' of Shergar to the international press who were covering the case

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