



Shane McGrath

CHIEF SPORTS WRITER

shane.mcgrath@dailymail.ie

THE QUIP was barbed, especially for 7.40 in the morning.

'What do you think persuaded Tom McKibbin to join the lucrative Saudi-backed LIV golf?' Gavin Jennings asked his sports anchor on Morning Ireland this week.

The Mrs Merton inspiration was obvious, and there will have been many among the hundreds of thousands that tune in to the show who will have appreciated its meaning.

McKibbin has followed the money. That has been the start and end of most analysis following this week's confirmation of weeks of speculation.

He is the brightest talent in Irish golf in years, from the same Hollywood club in Down as Rory McIlroy.

McKibbin enjoyed a brilliant two years on the DP World Tour, winning the Porsche European Open in Hamburg as a 20-year-old in June 2023, and then last year taking one of the 10 precious PGA tour cards available through the Race to Dubai. There was talk at

**'THE REAL
ISSUE IN GOLF
IS POWER AND
WHERE IT WILL
BE YIELDED'**

the end of last season of McKibbin as a viable challenger for a Ryder Cup place.

Then came the LIV rumours – and some advice from McIlroy, who had discussed McKibbin's options with the younger man.

'Personally for me it would be a little disappointing if it were to happen,' said McIlroy who stressed that it was up to McKibbin to do what he felt best.

But he added a kicker. 'At the same time, I feel like he's giving up a lot to not really benefit that much.'

It's an opinion that has been widely shared this week, but it wouldn't be the first contradictory commentary on an aspect of the LIV schism from McIlroy.

This, after all, is the man who has been central to discussions of a peace deal between the two established tours and LIV, and who in recent days has been talking again about the likelihood of an agreement.

This is a cold war that has been getting chillier with every passing month.



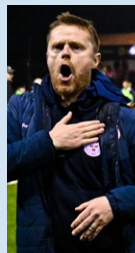
UNFAIR: Tom McKibbin has been criticised for joining the LIV tour

Please, spare us the pious bleating over LIV

Money will ensure that a deal is struck

■ DAMIEN DUFF (right) gave a reminder this week that he is a priceless asset to the domestic game, and the belief that the League of Ireland is enjoying a time of rich potential grows among advocates.

It needs to be tempered by realism too, though, and the reaction among some supporters to news of a TV deal with Virgin Media was silly. Spinning the story as one in the eye for RTÉ was an unconvincing take, and a reminder that over-selling should be avoided as much as selling a product short.



John Rahm and Tyrrell Hatton were welcomed at the Dubai Desert Classic last month, just as speculation emerged that their appeals against DP World Tour sanctions for joining LIV won't be heard before September – convenient timing for the Ryder Cup and the certainty that both will

CONTRADICTION: Rory McIlroy

be selected on the European team. This is how the deal is being done, slowly, piecemeal and with money governing all.

It will be an arrangement true to the elemental importance of cash to the sport.

With all this manoeuvring, objections to McKibbin joining LIV are exposed as pious bleating, and nothing more.

Some tut-tut because he has

chosen the barrowfuls of cash on offer from the Saudis over the more modest millions he would have earned on the PGA tour this year, as if there is a moral dimension to his decision in a sport defined by money.

That fallacy has obscured this story from the outset.

LIV is a way of sportswashing the reputation of Saudi Arabia, and in that it's every bit as repugnant as what Abu Dhabi have done through their ownership of Manchester City.

If that is repellent to outsiders, within golf the issue has not been sportswashing, though, but rather power, where it lies and how it might be wielded in the future.

There is an urgency to those questions in light of some alarming statistics around viewing figures. The season opener on the PGA tour, for instance, was the

Managerial whinges are a good sign

OF ALL THE laudatory noises made after the first weekend of action played under football's new rules, Jim Gavin and his reformation men should have been most heartened by grumbles. It is specifically complaints about frees being advanced for a number of offences that can best be categorised as impetuous, that should please the Football Review Committee.

'Disproportionate' has been the word thrown about. The claim is that a manager mouthing off at a referee shouldn't be punished in a way that might make him think about his actions.

Failure to hand a ball to the nearest opposition player when you or your team is punished is being criticised too, as is the years-late decision to address widespread backchat from players by applying the same sanction.

The complaints are nothing more than whingeing, and this is the rule change that can bring about transformative change in a culture desperately in need of it.

We sometimes mourn the lack of respect for officials, but in many cases, it's more accurate to describe it as an absence of respect. It's a scourge and one that directly nourishes the toxicity that finds disastrous expression in assaults on referees at grassroots level.

Some observers have long argued that poor behaviour is best addressed by appropriate sanctions, and the early whingeing suggests taking the problem seriously is having an effect.

Sentry Open in Hawaii at the start of January. The TV audience was down 35 per cent on last year, and this comes after repeated complaints from viewers in the US about the standard of coverage.

Golf's demographic is lucrative but narrow, and broadening it will not happen with the game split by a very public feud.

That's why a deal is inevitable, and it will be borne of a pragmatism that should end for once and for all cheap moralising of the sort now aimed at McKibbin.

McIlroy, remember, speculated that the re-election of Donald Trump could help hasten a deal.

This is not about lofty principles; it never has been.

That can be regretted, but it should be remembered before anyone is cast as a money-grabber.

Money will eventually bring a grubby peace.

