

All of us who've battled cancer can only feel disgust for DJ

The scale of this man's betrayal is unrivalled

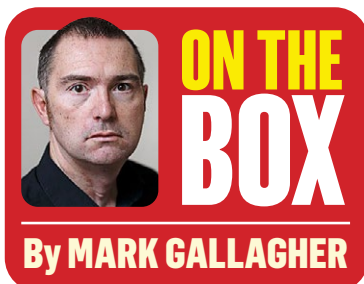
REMEMBER No Frontiers? Nor did I to be honest, until a clip from the holiday show popped up on our telly the other night. As a television show, it was very much a child of the Celtic Tiger. A smidgen of style and no substance. Tropical destinations and train trips through the Swiss Alps were sold to us by faux celebrities that were usually found in the RTE canteen, all with Sophie Ellis-Bextor singing 'if this ain't love' in the background.

As we were reminded a few minutes into last Tuesday's Prime Time on RTE 1, DJ Carey was one of its guest presenters in 2004. Along with his then-partner Sarah Newman, he told us all about their South African safari – there was an accompanying cover piece in the RTE Guide, where the couple went public on their relationship.

Watching the segment through the prism of what we now know, it seems even more gaudy. Carey is praising Sun City, the exclusive casino resort that had such a nefarious association with Apartheid, and the optics of their silver service dinner being served by a black waiter didn't look great – but I imagine it wouldn't have looked particularly great when the show originally aired, either.

The thing is, that nobody batted an eyelid when one of the best hurlers in the country, who played for Kilkenny of all teams, appeared on the national broadcaster's travel show to big up a place that was well out of the financial reach of most of the loyal supporters who cheered him on in Nowlan Park and Croke Park. It just seemed normal, because it was such a crazy time. The Taoiseach was appearing on RTE's Premiership show, after all, and offering his opinion on Ruud van Nistelrooy's movement in the box.

As has been well told at this stage, Carey and Newman became a poster couple for the Celtic Tiger. The house in Monkstown, the chalet in Switzerland. Mount Juliet, the K Club. They were



bitten by a bug, as so many were. But not all.

Despite the late Brian Lenihan's assertion, not all of us partied. Only some did, even if all of us did have to eventually pay for it. But all of us have been impacted in some way by the dreadful disease that Carey used to dupe and trick people so that he could try and maintain the lavish lifestyle to which he had become accustomed when this country was awash with cheap credit.

◀ We digested in disbelief the sordid details of Carey's fall from grace ▶

We might not have all partied, but everyone in the country has been affected by cancer, in one way or another. And that's why beyond bewilderment or shock, it has been anger and disgust that most of us have been feeling as we digested in disbelief the sordid details of Carey's fall from grace over the past week or so. I wasn't the only one who watched Prime Time or read Eimear Ní Bhraonáin's excellent new book, *The Dodger: DJ Carey and the Great Betrayal*, who has had to deal with this disease, but it does mean that Carey's criminal behaviour was viewed from a different angle.

Because there is nothing like sitting in a consultant's room and hearing those six letters. Even with the advances in medical science, it remains terrifying. But it is worse for those closest to us. When my cancer came back, it was during Covid and what I remember from those days is the worried look in my wife's eyes as she drove me to Beaumont for radiation treatment. We had our son by that stage, so the uncertainty revolved around him. It's the people around you who are most vulnerable and that's why of all the terrible things that Carey did, tapping up Ger Kirwan is perhaps the most horrific.

Kirwan's wife Mag was diagnosed with multiple myeloma in her bone marrow in 2021. Kirwan had been working with Kilkenny development squads for a decade, and it was during a training session for them that Carey began his deception, telling him that he had the same cancer as Mag, talking about being zapped in the neck, casually throwing in the mention of the Fred Hutchinson Centre in Seattle and even offering to ring Mag to give support. A few weeks later, the call came to the Kirwans that DJ needed stem cell treatment in the Fred Hutch centre and needed €5,000 until his health cover came through. The decency in the Kirwans kicked in, and while Mag was going through her own treatment, they transferred €4,000 to Carey.

It wasn't the biggest amount of money he conned out of people – does anyone believe the €430,000 that has been uncovered by investigation is all the money that Carey took? – but the despicable thing was that not only did DJ prey on the Kirwans' compassion, as he did for everyone, he also preyed on their vulnerability, and you never feel more vulnerable than when you are going through treatment for cancer. Carey knew that.

There were some shocking aspects of the Prime Time report,



3 TO WATCH THIS WEEK

TODAY
FAI Cup final: Shamrock Rovers v Cork City, RTE 2, 2.30pm
Can Rovers do the double?

THURSDAY
World Cup qualifier: Ireland v Portugal, RTE 2, 7.0pm
The campaign hangs by a thread.

SATURDAY
Ireland v Australia, Virgin Media One, 7.30pm
The return of Joe Schmidt to Aviva.

hurling's first superstar, the biggest GAA personality during those mad years of the Celtic Tiger. When Tiger Woods, at the peak of his powers, came to Ireland to play in the World Golf Championship in 2002, it was DJ he played with during the pro-am. That was the scale of his fame. He transcended the game of hurling – and Gaelic Games itself.

As a rule, this country doesn't like to hear anything bad about hurling. It is one of the fastest team sports in the world and is uniquely ours. Even those of us who didn't grow up in the game's strongholds – and that is the vast majority of the population – take a strange kind of pride when we hear an American, German or Australian proclaim at a wedding or some such social occasion that they went to watch hurling at Croke Park before marvelling at the courage, the speed and the skill. Of course, in those situations, and we have all been there, someone is bound to pipe up how the players are not being paid, that the goal-scoring corner-forward and tenacious corner-back were standing in front of a classroom or patrolling the streets the following morning.

In the days since his bewildering fall from grace, some have speculated that his criminal behaviour may be rooted in resentment over the fact that thousands came to Croke Park to luxuriate in his talent and he didn't get a cent for it. That he gave so much to the game, by dint of his rare gifts, and it gave him so little back. Maybe there is something in that. But he was DJ Carey, he could have got a cushy sales job where no work was expected and had a comfortable enough existence. But that was never going to be enough.

So now, we are left to make sense of it, that one of the greatest ever to play this uniquely Irish sport is a conman, someone who faked cancer to swindle decent people out of money. The lowest of the low.

I think of all the wonderful staff at the Mater, Beaumont and St Luke's who helped me through both bouts of this awful disease (and we didn't even mention his yarn about the pay-out he was awaiting from James's), I think of all the cancer patients I met in those three hospitals, feeling uncertain about their future, many of whom marvelled at Carey's talent on a hurling field. We all should feel betrayed.

such as the A4 pages of notes, scrawled apparently in DJ Carey's hand, that listed medical terms relating to cancer as well as terms relating to blood test results. As was speculated, DJ was like a student cramming for an exam, trying to absorb all he could about multiple myeloma. There were also the fake letters, on Fred Hutch Centre letter-headed paper, outlining Carey's 'battle' with the disease.

As it was all laid bare, you were left to wonder, why bother doing it at all? This was DJ Carey,