

# SUNSPORT ALWAYS GIVES IT TO YOU STRAIGHT

# PARTNERS INTIME

## System for awarding grants for sports facilities would benefit from collaboration

**LAST** month, the deadline passed for completing a survey into the operation of the Sports Capital and Equipment Programme (SCEP).

It was part of a review by the department that challenges you to say its full name without pausing for breath.

That Sport finds itself competing for the attention of a Minister also responsible for Tourism, Culture, Arts, Gaeltacht and Media is worthy of a review in itself.

Because the potential for sport to help the overall well-being of the nation is almost limitless but invariably undervalued.

And things could be done so much better, whether helping sport as a whole or targeting those where the biggest need exists.

Since 1998, more than 13,000 projects have received over €1.15 billion through the SCEP. The current programme for government commits to 'prioritising investment in disadvantaged areas'. For the most recent round of applications - a new one is expected this year - this element had a third of the overall weighting attached to six criteria.

That is progressive but there are other considerations that, by accident or design, discriminate against those in poorer areas.

For example, the more you can provide of your own funding, the more you get in return.

Clearly, a club in an affluent area with members with more disposable income should be able to stump up more than one in an area of socio-economic disadvantage.

If a club owns the lands or has a registered lease with at least 15 years left, it can apply for up to €150,000 for capital works.

If the lease has between five and 15 years remaining, a capital grant application over a five-year period is capped at €50,000.

There is an obvious logic to try to avoid money going to waste.

But a GAA, rugby or soccer club in a leafy suburb or rural parish is far more likely to own its own grounds, or have a long-term arrangement in place, than a boxing club using an inner-city hall.

Similarly, the requirement to pay upfront for works, and recoup part of the cost through a grant, is not realistic for some.

Bridging loans may be readily available for those who can either put up a facility as collateral or ask a member to go guarantor.

Volunteers at less privileged clubs have, at times, needed to be discouraged from going to money lenders in desperation, with a residual suspicion of authority also making some reluctant to provide financial and other information.

Sinn Féin spokesperson Chris Andrews told SunSport: "While the Sports Capital Programme provides much-needed support to clubs, I do feel that it needs reviewing and updating."

"Clubs that do not own their own grounds face a huge disadvantage. Multi-sport facilities that were developed have had such a positive impact on communities and provide

a diverse range of sports. But they received no extra scoring for funding despite the wider use they have.

"The National Sports Policy 2018-2028 called for prioritising projects which develop multi-sport use, but we have not seen this policy reflected in the Sports Capital Programme."

The SCEP scheme is not the only one that is open to all but can favour one cohort over another.

In January, the €15m Shared Island Sports Club EV Charging Scheme was launched with the stated intention of supporting 'the roll-out of publicly accessible, fast-charging

for sports clubs and communities'. After looking at the requirements around parking and facility ownership, the IABA's club development officer James Geraghty concluded that only one of the 260 boxing clubs in the Republic of Ireland would qualify for the SISC scheme.

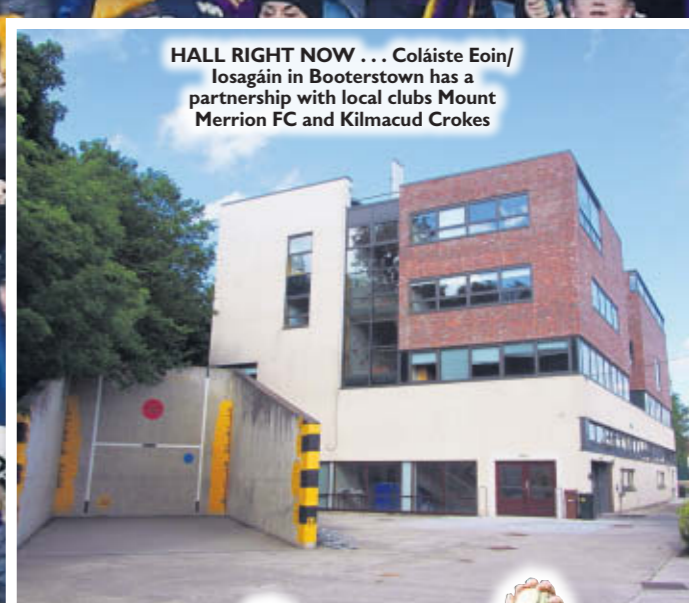
That the three large field sports receive preferential treatment is not just perception but reality, given the funding stream available to the GAA, IRFU and FAI not open to any other national governing body.

Last year, the GAA received €2,369,653 with €2,250,843 going to the IRFU. As part of the FAI's financial rescue deal, €5.8million in



# Neil O'Riordan

CHIEF SPORTS WRITER



**SHADOW BOXING . . .** inner-city boxing clubs often find it difficult to fulfil funding criteria for government grants

**HALL RIGHT NOW . . .** Coláiste Eoin/ Iosagáin in Booterstown has a partnership with local clubs Mount Merrion FC and Kilmacud Crokes

**CROKES SPARK . . .** Kilmacud Crokes fans show their colours ahead of January's All-Ireland final as their club reaps the benefits of access to top-class shared facilities



SCANLON . . . happy

## All-island comp to be held

By NEIL O'RIORDAN

AN all-island competition for women's football will be held this year.

All 11 teams from the SSE Airtricity Women's Premier Division will take part, along with five of the eight sides in the NIFL Women's Premiership.

It takes place during the League of Ireland's mid-season break ahead of the Women's World Cup.

No league matches are scheduled ahead of the finals in Australia to aid Vera Pauw's preparations.

But this cross-border competition will allow clubs to keep ticking over with meaningful games.

Unlike its male equivalent, the NIFL Women's Premiership is a summer league and starts in April.

But it has drawn up its fixture list to facilitate this new tournament.

The 16 teams will be split into four groups of four, with matches taking place on June 18, June 25 and July 2.

The group winners will progress to the semi-finals on July 9, with the final a week later. All games will be on LOITV.

League of Ireland director Mark Scanlon said: "We are looking forward to working with the Northern Ireland Football League to create what should be an exciting new competition that will be an additional test for our clubs."

"Finding the right time to host these games was always going to be the main obstacle."

"We have identified a bloc in June when preparations for the World Cup will be ongoing and our colleagues in the NIFL have worked the dates into their schedule."

"We believe this competition will be a brilliant start to a historic summer for women's football in Ireland."

"Along with introducing the President's Cup this year, this competition is ensuring that our clubs are competing in top quality games and will strengthen our league."

Northern Ireland Football League chief executive Gerard Lawlor said: "This is a ground-breaking season for women's football with the introduction of professionalism."

"Therefore the challenge of competing against new opposition is hugely positive and exciting for the growth of our game."

The clubs involved will be Athlone Town, Bohemians, Cork City, DLR Waves, Galway United, Peamount United, Shamrock Rovers, Shelbourne, Sligo Rovers, Treaty United, Wexford Youths, Cliftonville, Crusaders, Derry City, Glentoran and Linfield.

funding was to be made available for its development programmes.

With the odds as they are, the chances of any sport escaping 'minority' status to become one of the big players is slim. Kenny Carroll has a better perspective than most on how the current system operates.

A keen football fan, Carroll was both a cricket and hockey international. He worked as a cricket development officer and now performs that role for the Leinster region for Hockey Ireland.

He has sent several proposals to the Department of TCAGSM, Sport Ireland and the Federation of Irish Sports in recent years.

The feedback was underwhelming, but his observations deserve serious consideration.

Firstly, the only tax relief on a donation to sports clubs here is if it is €250 or more and spent on capital projects. No tax-defective prize for anyone who guesses who benefits most from this.

In the UK, relief is available on much smaller donations which can be spent on running costs, an invaluable aid to clubs in poorer areas. In the UK, all Community Amateur Sports Clubs get a rates reduction

of between 80 to 100 per cent, regardless of whether they have a drinks licence. Here there was no such scheme until 2015, but the only relief introduced was for buildings such as dressing rooms and equipment sheds. Clubhouses and community halls in which alcohol is sold are still liable for full rates. Some clubs' annual bills reach €30,000.

Unlike the pubs with whom they are said to be in competition, clubs are not-for-profit, with any surplus reinvested into the local community.

Finally, Carroll points to an underuse of existing facilities, especially those in schools.

Partnerships such as the one between Coláiste Eoin, Kilmacud Crokes and Mount Merrion FC are rare, despite SCEP's weighting in favour of shared facilities.

That suggests more needs to be done to encourage or, if needs be, coerce schools and clubs to team up.

Andrews (above) said: "Many schools in urban areas have fine facilities that lie empty most evenings and over the weekend."

"I would strongly welcome supports being put in place to help open up these facilities for use by local sports clubs."

Carroll also argues that better sporting

facilities should be incorporated into the building of any new school. At present, tarmac courts are a requirement but they are not suitable for use for much of the academic year.

Carroll points to Temple Carrig school in Greystones, built in 2014 with a full hockey pitch.

It, and its sports hall, are available for rent.

When put to the Department of TCAGSM, it said the question of facilities at schools was a matter for the Department of Education, questions around tax relief were more appropriate to the Revenue Commissioners while the SISC scheme was being administered by POBAL, on behalf of the Department of Transport.

All of which is perfectly valid but are they working together on an overarching strategy and if not, why not?

Andrews has called for a nationwide sporting facilities audit to target the areas where investment is most needed.

Carroll said there was one of sorts, having been invited to sit in on a meeting.

He recalled: "I asked what it was for and was told it would be for tourists."

**CARROLL SINGER . . .** ex-cricketer and hockey star Kenny



# CONFRONTING THE REAL ISSUES MORE DIFFICULT

**LAST WEEK, there was some confusion on the part of an American visitor staying with us.**

With a stronger command of Irish history than most foreigners, she was struggling to comprehend a timeline which could have seen Wolfe Tone pen a song about the IRA.

The article she had read about the Ireland women's football team being at the centre of a controversy made a bit more sense when it was explained that the song they had sung was instead written by a band called after him.

That was the easy bit. The rest is a bit more difficult. Theobald Wolfe Tone, it should be remembered, wished 'to unite Protestant, Catholic and Dissenter'.

Now, a song by a music group named after him is a recurring focal point for enduring divisions which find expression through football.

And authorities feel compelled to act when its lyrics are seen or heard, but to what end?

At present, Vera Pauw's players are under investigation by both Police Scotland and Uefa.

That relates to them, in the midst of their celebrations in their dressing room at Hampden Park after qualifying for the World Cup, singing 'Celtic Symphony'.

It includes the line, in reference to graffiti on a Glasgow wall, 'Ooh Aah, up the 'Ra'.

The song was also heard among Ireland fans at the same venue a couple of weeks previously for the men's fixture in the Nations League, won 2-1 by Scotland.

It is not hard to understand why, to some, it would be offensive.

And Pauw's response in particular was very well received when she declared: 'Your freedom ends when you step into the freedom of somebody else'.

But the song can be freely purchased and downloaded in Britain without any prospect of legal censure — and the furore has only increased its popularity, it rose to No 2 in the iTunes chart.

So the idea that police resources are being used to look into this fleeting rendition is scarcely believable, and yet a Police Scotland statement said: "We are aware of the video and enquiries into the incident are ongoing."

Uefa is against all political expression unless it is of their choosing.

And, so, in the past, national associations and clubs have been censured for Palestinian flags being displayed at games, whereas unfurling Ukrainian ones has been high on encouraged since the invasion by Russia earlier this year.

Its take on the Irish national question remains to be seen.

But there are those who appear to genuinely believe that throwing Ireland out of the World Cup would be a fitting response for this episode.

It's a reminder how all sense of perspective can be lost when football and political affiliations are involved.

And it's not just those on the terraces or their smartphones who are guilty of it either, as those responsible for the running of the game are more interested in cracking down hard on the symptoms of sectarianism rather than tackling the underlying causes.

On Thursday, Kyle Lafferty faces a Scottish Football Association disciplinary hearing where it is expected the Kilmarnock striker will receive a ten-match ban for using the term 'pack of Fenian b\*\*\*\*\*'.

He is accused of not acting in the best interests of football and breaching a rule which forbids the use of 'insulting language which includes reference to the likes of ethnic origin, race, nationality, religion or belief'.

The Association's rules state that the punishment for the latter is a mandatory minimum ten-match ban which can only be reduced "where exceptional circumstances are established".

Lafferty was captured on video using the phrase in a Belfast bar during a night out with his North-

# TONE DEAF

## All sense of perspective can be lost when football and political affiliations are involved



## Neil O'Riordan

OUR COLUMNISTS ARE THE TALK OF SPORT

ern Ireland international squad team-mates.

The ex-Rangers player reacted when, having been asked to pose for a picture, the man then shouted 'Up The Celts'.

It was certainly ill-advised and there are those who will argue that the manner of his instinctive response is an indication of his true colours. But Lafferty has already

been penalised by being axed from the international squad and fined by his club.

On top of all that, the Enniskillen native is in line to receive a suspension which would prevent him from playing for his club until the new year.

For someone who turned 35 last month, that's a significant part of what remains of his career. Some

will think he deserves it. Others might reflect that there is nothing that a disciplinary process loves more than making an example of someone.

There is a recent precedent involving not a player from Northern Ireland plying his trade in Scotland, but a Scot plying his trade in Northern Ireland.

John Herron parted company with

Larne in August ahead of him receiving a ten-match ban from the Irish FA after he was pictured wearing a top which had Tiofaidh Ar Lá written in the shape of a gun and appeared to say 'Sing Up The Ra, Ooh Ah Up The Ra'.

Afterwards, Herron — who signalled his intention to move to Australia to rebuild his career — said: "I went to a concert and I didn't think about my actions when I was there. I didn't think about what lyrics mean to people."

And it seems the most appropriate action taken in either of these cases was Killie's announcement that they had engaged Nil By Mouth.

The Ayrshire club said the anti-sectarian charity will work closely with Lafferty on a one-to-one basis, in addition to delivering training to their first-team squad and academy

squad members, to provide education which the charity believes is key to tackling sectarianism in society.

That measured response stood in contrast to the way in which Lafferty's international team-mate Conor McMenemy was dragged into the frenzy in the immediate aftermath, which resulted in him being excluded from Ian Bara-cough's squad as well.

McMenemy missed the game against Kosovo after attention was drawn to an almost decade-old video in which he sang a pro-IRA chant.

It was, it seemed, a victory for whataboutery until VAR chalked the goal off. When it was discovered that he had been disci-

plined at the time by his then-club, the Glentoran player was restored to the fold.

Bara-cough tried his best to convince people that the Irish FA had taken the right course of action by standing someone down until it could be established that he had already been censured for the offence. Alternatively, they could have just waited until the phone call had been made to check.

Just because an action is swift and decisive does not mean it's the correct one.

And it seems as though football authorities are far more keen to make an example of a player or players

guilty of a momentary lapse in judgment than address ongoing sectarianism they have to endure.

On Sunday, James McClean published a lengthy statement on Instagram on the abuse he has suffered for the past decade.

In response to his charge that it had done little to stop it, the Football Association referred to the ten-match ban handed down to Kirk Broadfoot in 2015 and action taken against Barnsley in 2020.

If they had been the only two isolated incidents to which McClean could point it would be fair enough, but that's not the case, with countless others occurring without any action being taken or, worse, the charge that he brings it on himself. He is entitled to look back at the rush to condemn and convict over the past week with more than a hint of despair.

**SING WHEN YOU'RE WINNING . . . but video of the history-making Ireland squad has sparked huge controversy**



**BAN LOOMS . . .**  
Kyle Lafferty used offensive phrase

The idea that police resources are being used to look into this fleeting rendition is scarcely believable



BROADFOOT . . . banned

## JAMES

From Back Page condemns any supporter found to be engaging in any form of discriminatory behaviour.

"Everyone attending, working or taking part in a football match at the Stadium of Light has the right to feel safe, valued and included and the club encourages all supporters to play their part."

McClean has repeatedly been targeted with anti-Irish Catholic abuse as a result of his decision not to wear a poppy on his shirt during his time in English football and he hit out in a post on his Instagram.

He said: "For my son who is 7 years old and watches every Wigan game, either being at stadium or on Latics TV, to be asking his mother, 'Why are they booing and singing that song at Daddy?' and to have to tip-toe around answering him is something which should not be happening."

"This post is not one of sympathy (trust me, it's not wanted) but one of anger. Every year we have an FA representative come into each club to discuss the same old cr\*\* they spew to us about discrimination, every single year I challenge them on the abuse every single year they do nothing."

In 2020, Barnsley were fined £20,000 and told to implement an action plan over discriminatory chants targeting McClean, while in 2015, Rotherham's Kirk Broadfoot was banned for ten games for abuse aimed at him.

## Pompey Dan over

Charlton.....3  
Portsmouth.....0

DANNY COWLEY gained a PE degree less than three miles from The Valley — but Eoghan O'Connell and Co left him feeling like the class dunce last night as Charlton climbed to tenth in League One.

Ryan Inniss and Corey Blackett-Taylor struck inside the opening 31 minutes and former Ireland Under-21 ace O'Connell later wrapped the win up following a straight red card for Marlon Pack.

Portsmouth boss Cowley has frustrated fans by sticking with the same defence — and it looked as if they had a point as they were exposed again. Inniss headed the Addicks ahead from a short corner and Blackett-Taylor then slotted home the second to ensure Charlton's unbeaten home run would stay intact.

After Pack saw red for a late lunge at Scott Fraser, the midfielder's free-kick was headed in by ex-Celtic defender O'Connell.



GONE . . . Herron left after T-shirt row

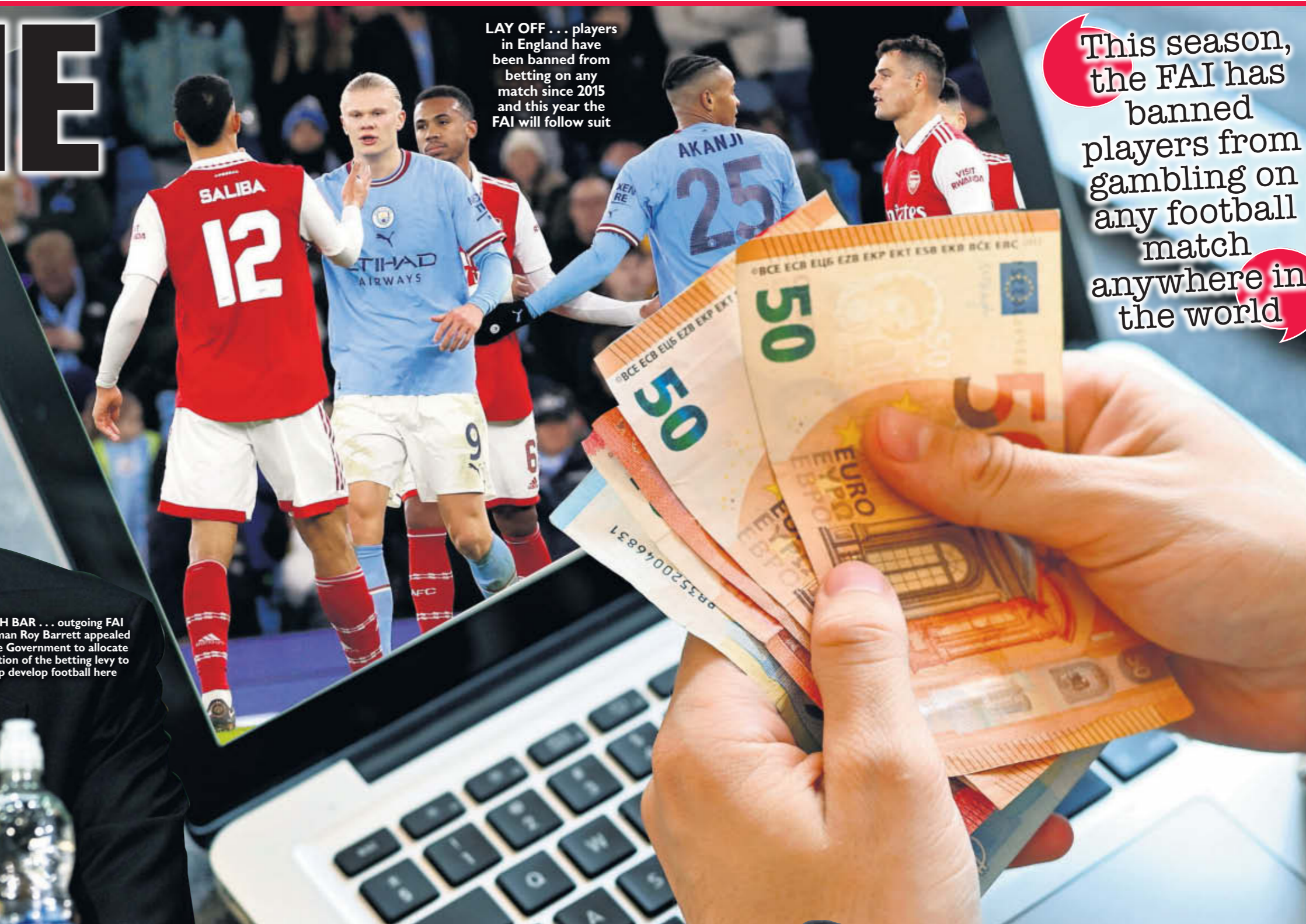
# SUNSPORT ALWAYS GIVES IT TO YOU STRAIGHT

# BETTOR, THE DEVIL YOU KNOW

## Strict rules on gambling welcomed by players



CASH BAR... outgoing FAI chairman Roy Barrett appealed to the Government to allocate a portion of the betting levy to help develop football here



LAY OFF... players in England have been banned from betting on any match since 2015 and this year the FAI will follow suit

This season, the FAI has banned players from gambling on any football match anywhere in the world

LAST Sunday, I ducked into a pub in Central London to watch Arsenal against Manchester United.

I got chatting with a Dutch guy who had been over for West Ham's game the previous day as some of their fans had a hooligan connection with his club FC Groningen's.

Trying to move the conversation along, I brought up how Groningen had been involved in an unusual match in Ireland when they had played Galway United in the community GAA ground in An Cheathrú Rua in the Uefa Cup back in 1986.

He was familiar with the Tribesmen, not because of that but, as he admitted: "I bet a lot."

That foreigners gamble on the League of Ireland is not news but the extent of it will come as a surprise to most.

A fortnight ago, the FAI invited club representatives to Abbotstown to underline just how high the gambling interest will be when the men's and women's leagues kick off in 2½ weeks' time.

For your average men's Premier Division match in 2022, turnover for gambling companies was €9.1million.

For First Division games, it was



## Neil O'Riordan

CHIEF SPORTS WRITER

€3.25m. FAI Cup matches bring in €3.85m.

For WNL matches last year, bets worth €363,062 were placed.

In the figures supplied to the FAI by Uefa, there was no breakdown of how much of that betting took place within Ireland and how much outside of the country.

But there were other sums given which provided some context.

In Ireland, €14m is bet daily while Asia accounts for 65 per cent of global betting.

This means that, presumably, overseas interest in our league is significantly higher than the odd Dutch guy.

Given the levels involved, it is no wonder the FAI is so keen to get a slice of the pie in the way that the horse and greyhound racing indus-

tries do through the betting levy. If those figures are totted up for league matches alone, across 180 games each in the men's Premier and First Divisions and 110 in the women's Premier Division it adds up to €2.26billion for a season.

If you estimated that a third of those bets were being placed in Ireland and a one per cent levy was imposed on those, you would be looking at an annual cash injection into the leagues of €7.5m.

That would be transformative and it is why outgoing FAI chairman Roy Barrett rose the issue in a Press conference following the announcement of his intention to resign.

But that is not why clubs were being presented with those figures by the FAI.

It is because when you have a

league in which the contractual financial rewards are comparatively low and the stakes are so high, it creates a potentially fertile ground for match-fixing.

In a league in which many players are still amateurs, it is easy to see how they could be viewed as a soft target who could be tempted into trying to make a quick buck.

And, while a player's conscience might preclude them from throwing a match, it is not difficult to envisage how somebody could be convinced to pass on injury news, concede a throw-in or free-kick at a particular time and be persuaded that no harm had been done.

But, of course, once that taboo has been broken, fixing the result of a game in which there is nothing obvious at stake does not

become such a big leap and on it goes.

The seminar was timely given that it was reported earlier this month that a file was sent to the Director of Public Prosecutions relating to alleged match manipulation within the league.

In 2019, the Anti-Corruption Unit in the Garda National Economic Crime Bureau (GNECB) launched an investigation into unusual betting patterns surrounding historical matches involving Limerick FC, which is no longer a League of Ireland club.

Over the past 3½ years, 15 people – in Dublin, Cork and Limerick – have been arrested but subsequently released without charge.

They included current and former players.

Proving such allegations is notoriously difficult.

In 2017, the FAI handed out 12-month suspensions to Athlone Town pair Igor Labuts and Dragos Sfrijan, relating to alleged match-fixing in their loss to local rivals Longford Town that year.

His appeals to an independent arbitrator were dismissed, in the case of Sfrijan because he did not attend the hearing.

But Labuts was successful with an appeal to the Court of Arbitration for Sport in 2020.

A third Athlone player, Jason Lyons, received a seven-match ban

for betting on matches in which he was involved in 2017 – an offence for which players have been sporadically punished down the years.

This season, the FAI has gone one step further.

The association has banned players from gambling on any football match anywhere in the world.

Those rules have been in place in England since 2015, covering players from the Premier League down to the eighth tier in the men's game, and the top two division of the women's game.

In 2017, right at the tail end of his playing career, Joey Barton received an 18-month ban, reduced to 13 on appeal, for falling foul of those rules.

And Brentford striker Ivan Toney missed out on a place in England World's Cup squad after he was charged with 232 offences in November.

Asking a third party to place a bet on their behalf is no less serious, as is the sharing of what might seem like innocuous team or transfer news.

England defender Kieran Trippier received a ten-week ban for telling his friends to "lump on" Atletico Madrid when he was on the move from Tottenham Hotspur.

In each case, under Article 26 of Fifa's code of ethics, a player found guilty of any of the above, could face a three-year ban and a

fine of nearly €100,000. For many in and around the game here, getting rid of grey areas is a relief.

PFA Ireland General Secretary Stephen McGuinness said: "That grabs players' attention when we mention those to them because the penny drops about how costly it could be."

It is why on his annual round of clubs in pre-season, the union chief has had match-fixing and gambling on top of his agenda for his talks with players.

McGuinness said: "If you're a footballer, you can't bet on football, it's as simple as that."

"I think some people are glad of the clarity."

Our vice-chairman Roberto Lopes was very strong on wanting it brought in because it means there are no grey areas now."

There has also been a new development to encourage whistle-blowing, with the world players'

SURE BET... both Ivan Toney (left) and Jason Lyons have been charged with gambling offences in recent times



union, Fifpro, rolling out a new app Red Button.

Former St Pat's, Dundalk and Shamrock Rovers defender McGuinness said: "We're giving every player in the league a scratchcard with a unique code and asking them to download the app."

"And they can use that to report anything suspicious they hear or see directly to Fifa, who will link in with Interpol and Uefa."

"Previously, the FAI had a phone line which players could ring up but I think this is a better system."

"The betting industry don't seem to be willing to educate players. The only time I've heard from them is when they wanted to sponsor our awards."

"So we're trying to do it as best we can."

"Because the FAI has shown they will go after people."

"I've sat in when Interpol were down with the Limerick players, so they need to be aware of the dangers."



HEALY... new signing

## Swede emotion

By OWEN COWZER

CORK CITY boss Colin Healy made his second Swedish signing of the close season by snapping up Kevin Custovic on loan.

The wing-back joins for the 2023 season from Danish top-flight outfit Vejle, having spent the past six months on loan with Swedish outfit Örebro.

Healy said: "We have been doing a lot of work to identify signings who will add to the group."

"He is a versatile player, he works hard and has a very good attitude. We are looking forward to seeing him in action."

Custovic, 22, is the second Swedish player to join Cork this month following the arrival of Albin Winbo from Varberg last week.

Healy has also added strikers Ethon Varian from Bohemians and Tunde Owolabi from St Pat's while Celtic youth goalkeeper Tobi Oluwayemi arrived on loan.

## Duffy set for Imps

By OWEN COWZER

LINCOLN CITY are set to sign UCD star Dylan Duffy for an undisclosed fee.

Duffy, 20, was one of the Students' star men last year as they retained their Premier Division status after his switch from Shamrock Rovers.

But SunSport understands that League One Imps have made a move for the winger and he will join Mark Kennedy's first-team squad.

Duffy, who played for Shamrock Rovers' second string in the 2020 First Division and made three appearances for the first team in 2021, was closely watched by Lincoln.

Sporting director Jez George regularly scouts the League of Ireland having signed ace Danny Mandroui last season and allowed Séan Roughtan and Sam Long join Drogheda on loan.

Duffy, who played for Shamrock Rovers' second string in the 2020 First Division and made three appearances for the first team in 2021, was closely watched by Lincoln.

## Millwall eye Kian

By NEIL O'RIORDAN

KIAN CORBALLY is in training with Millwall with a view to securing a move.

Corbally, 19, will spend a fortnight with the Lions after leaving St Pat's.

The midfielder has also attracted interest from League One and Two clubs in England, and Serie B.

Corbally made two appearances off the bench for St Pat's in 2021.

And he spent the second half of last season on loan at Longford Town, where he played 14 times under Gary Cronin.