

Maurice Brosnan

in Naples



This week in Naples was mayhem, magnificent mayhem



Napoli fans celebrate on the street as their team clinched their first Serie A title since 1990 thanks to a 1-1 draw at Udinese.

Picture: Gregorio Borgia/AP

THIS week in Naples was mayhem. Every week in Naples is mayhem. This was magnificent mayhem. The big house is on fire. Thirty-three years of longing went up in flames on Thursday night.

Napoli last lifted Serie A in 1990. Such hunger is a gateway to madness. At times like this, the city does not welcome you. It overwhelms you. Smothering and swarming. Clothes will reek of flare smoke for weeks and good luck getting your ears to stop ringing. From the moment the wheels touch the runway, every conversation, every sign on every street corner and laneway, every excitable sound orientates around one thing: A third Scudetto.

In the cobble streets and alleys of Quarter Spagnoli, endless bunting stretches across the sky. Over at Pallonetto by the seafront blue, lights illuminate historic citadels. In Fuorigrotta near the stadium, flags form a blue and white guard of honour. It is omnipresent and constant.

The fuse has been gathering momentum and was ready to detonate.

It could have been Sunday at the Stadio Diego Armando Maradona. They failed to beat Salernitana and the wait went on. The collective now utterly famished. And it showed.

On May 10, 1987, Italian anthropologist Amalia Signorelli went for a walk on a sunny day. Then a Maradona-inspired Napoli needed a draw against Fiorentina to win their first title. "The world has changed," she wrote, "the noisiest, most crowded, and most chaotic city in Europe was deserted."

It felt like that on Wednesday. The second opportunity to kickstart celebrations. If their closest rivals Lazio did not win, Napoli were champions. They crowded around outdoor televisions and assembled on corners. Hushed in their homes.

Smouldered as Sassuolo coughed up a sloppy goal early on and swore when Lazio doubled their lead in the final minutes. Toma Basic's first career goal sent natives streaming back into the street and Naples got going once again.

In his press conference this week, the man who masterminded this triumph made a passing observation. Manager Luciano Spalletti is from Certaldo, near Florence, in the north. Since Roma in 2001, no club south of the country's traditional football capitals, Milan and Turin, has won the league.

"The Neapolitans know well that Naples is beautiful, but just how beautiful it really is can be said better by those like me who are guests of it," said Spalletti.

"Those who have always had it in front of their eyes cannot be struck by what appears in front of them."

Far be it for me to disagree with the local hero, but it is hard to believe anyone could underestimate this place. It is

a continuously shifting and demanding and proudly alive. How do you comprehend a marvel? A moped nearly crashes with bus-like routine. Buses rush around as if they are mopeds. Sure, slowly a rhythm does emerge from the haze. Those relentless shrill beeps do have a purpose.

They are a warning to anyone or anything that is lurking around an adjacent corner. "We are coming," they squall. It is nowhere near sufficient. Every turn has the exuberant capability to surprise. Surely not even a lifetime is enough experience to take it for granted.

Neapolitans memorialise their particularity because for so long no one else did.

Even the dogs run too, the Neapolitans are coming. Sick with cholera. Victims of the earthquake. You never wash with soap. You are the shame of Italy. Neapolitan, work hard because for Maradona you'll have to sell your ass too!

The Juventus chant in the late 1980s, brilliantly evoked by the 2019 Diego Maradona personal archive documentary. The Argentinean came from Barcelona after back-to-back disappointing seasons. In disarming voiceovers, he retrospectively explained in that film that there were no other options. The unwanted city and an unwanted hero. A match.

"I felt as though I represented a part of Italy which counted for nothing," he explained as that Juventus chant blared, still scarcely able to disguise his disgust. Some scars never heal.

On Friday, Naples was not just celebrating their success. They toasted Juventus' failure. Seventeen points adrift

and mired in a financial scandal, mock coffins bore The Old Lady team photo on the lid. Inside was a picture of Massimiliano Allegri surrounded by black and white stuffed bags. Buckets on ropes drop from balconies to hoist up banners reinforcing the message: "Juventus Merda."

Thursday was a trip to Udinese. At the third time of asking, a single point would do. Napoli have always done good business with Udinese. Goalkeeper Alex Meret is one of several successful transfers.

Exciting Irish prospect Festy Ebosele comes on for the home side. He went from Bray Wanderers to the Derby academy to Italy. His father is a fabricator in Enniscorthy. When he joined the Bianconeri, Festy senior brought his son around the factory floor. Imagine his joy as his son lined out against the victors in waiting.

That's sport. The ever-ready flagpole upon which we long to hoist our colours and watch them soar high. Fans feed on it to sustain and embolden their pride and Naples is a particularly gluttonous example. "Anti-football football," is how Frankfurt coach Oliver Gasner described them

in the Champions League. He meant how they play, front foot and aggressive counter pressing yet still in an orchestrated manner. That is what and who they are.

This club has a soft spot for charismatic foreigners. Not just Maradona. From Attila Sallustro to Luis Vincio to Jose Altafini to today's version, Georgian sensation Khvicha Kvaratskhelia. Heroes for how they make them feel.

Pay tribute. Before kick-off, the Maradona mural is thronged. They sing, a hymn rather than a chant. It is almost peaceful. The calm before the... SANDI!

Goal, Sandi Luvric. Udinese 1, Napoli 0.

A sellout at Stadio Diego Armando Maradona slump back. Of course, it sold out. The minute they announced there would be a watch party in the ground with 11 screens and all proceeds going to charity everyone expected it to sell out. Seventy-thousand turned up for the Serie B relegation decider in 2004 and the same number were there a year later for the Serie C playoff.

Udinese's early goal sucks the oxygen from the rising stands. That wasn't in the

script. Every flare seems to quench. Moments later there are half-hearted cries for a penalty. A boy to our left turns to his father for reassurance. The gaze back issues a wounded plea; soon. Hopefully. How much longer can this go on? Napoli, please.

At half-time they regather. This side have gone through hell several times in their history and they keep going. Beep the horn, let them know we are coming. Revive the flares. Bring the noise and boom.

Nigerian talisman Victor Osimhen saw the ball ping-ponging around the box after a corner and had enough. Evenly, ever so evenly, he slotted in and Naples exploded. That was Osimhen's 26th goal of the season, by far the sweetest.

His face is the front page of *Tuttosport* in the morning. The caption is simple: "Hai vista, Maradona?" At the mural, his face is painted on a wall adorned with a superhero mask. Written underneath is "make love". The stadium ascends to euphoria.

The final whistle goes and now the son is comforting his overcome dad. Suddenly we are surrounded by phones, but this is different. Few are trying to record this moment. It is about sharing it. Faces fill the screens as they surrender to the urge to mark this moment with somebody somewhere.

Club president Aurelio De Laurentiis takes the mic and extends his arms to those above him. "Grazie. Grazie. Grazie. Grazie." Time now to give thanks and embrace. And to party.

Outside is bedlam. "Wash them, wash them. Wash them with fire. Oh Vesuvio," jeered rival fans in that documentary. A wish granted. The night sky turns red and no

tightly wrapped scarf or joisted up jumper is enough resistance to this level of smoke.

How does a city that already never sleeps rejoice? Take whatever it is that makes it special and double the dose. More. Always more. Dance for hours, days, weeks, months. Bikes boot around moronically, overcome with a completely understandable impulse to keep moving.

Walk along and make your way across Mappatella beach and towards the city centre. A scooter with enough people to field a five aside team flies past. A man climbs up on a chip van and watches on. He belongs on that chip van. Was that a boat doing laps of a roundabout? Fireworks rain up, down and sideways. Keep walking. Every scene is different. Every scene is the same.

In the morning we find a Fiat outside our accommodation. It is near totalled, missing a large portion of its bumper and driver door. A black bag is draped over the side with messy masking tape strung across the bonnet and windshield. Both airbags are ejected. The car is parked faultlessly, square to the footpath and inside all four white lines. Their chaos always has order.

The carousel keeps going all night long. Staying at a such an inexorable level that it becomes a simple challenge to articulate it. How can anyone?

Back in 1987 after they won their first crown, locals flocked to a Neapolitan cemetery. Today those with loved ones beyond the reach of Facetime will opt for the same visit. When they arrived then they were surprised to find graffiti daubed on the walls.

"You don't know what you're missing," it read. Perfect.

Victor Osimhen celebrates his equaliser against Udinese. Picture: Alessandro Sabattini/Getty



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The art of the...



DRAMATIC MOMENT: Runaway leader Goshen unseats Jamie Moore in the 2020 Triumph Hurdle.

Picture: Healy Racing



IN Patrick Mullins' mind, it resides as a series of snapshots. Out front. In the air. Hurling forward. Floored. So much time spent on dashing thoroughbreds is a blur moulded by split-second actions but in these moments the cloud clears to reveal one cruel certainty: it was a fall.

That is the real cert in this game. Night follows day. A jockey can expect to fall roughly once in every 15 rides in national hunt racing. Mullins suffered one routine dose aboard Douvan during the 2018 Queen Mother Champion Chase. A long-awaited showdown 12 months in the making between the French gelding and Altior prematurely ended at the fourth-last fence.

"I always find it amazing in a fall, you never remember it as video," Mullins recalls.

"It is flashes. The horse, the ground. Often you instinctively get your arm up. That is why we do so many collar bones. An outstretched arm means all the force goes through that. Look, better your collar bone than your head.

Maurice Brosnan on the only cert in horse racing



"There definitely is a way to fall. You often see younger riders or riders who aren't as fit and the way they hit the ground. You need to roll, move forward and take the sting out of it."

Coming down is inevitable. How far you descend is somewhat controllable. Horse-riding has always come with a safety risk. Even if most of it is blind luck, accounting for a

small margin that is not can prove critical. The bottom line is that at least trying to incorporate certain practises could be the difference between life and death.

The British Racing school use a mechanical fall simulator to teach apprentice jockeys how to fall. Riders are thrown off onto a landing crash mat. Peril is hardwired into the sport. Truth be told,

this does not alienate punters; it is part of the allure.

The same is true for the main characters. Talk to jockeys and they will rave about the sweet satisfaction that comes from successfully steering around a bad jumper. The thrill stems from the threat. A great highwire act.

In Ireland there is no such fall simulator or theoretical crash course, only the real one.

Ruby Walsh learned the hard way, the school of hard knocks and thundering drops. From ponies up, discovering what works and what hurts.

"I'd keep it simple. Keep moving, keep rolling," he says with typical candour. "Always look for your feet. If you are looking for your feet, you keep rolling. Every fall is different and at times it is hard to even get into position to find your feet.

"A lot of it is trusting your natural reaction. Even before that, you have a decision to make. The hundredths of a second from take-off side to landing side. You have to balance it up, at times a horse

doesn't take off and you are waiting for him to stand or fall.

"If you automatically get ready, what if the horse stays or only makes a mistake and you ready to fall? You have to judge it. Will he point the leg. Certain falls then you have no time to react. Just a bad go, the horse doesn't propel you off, so you land too close and it comes down on top of you."

There are different shades and degrees of danger. A fall in a hurdle race can be more serious than in a steeplechase. Smaller obstacles mean more speed. For a contender, speed is the enemy. In a fall, speed is the enemy.

"So many bad falls are off good jumpers," Walsh declares. "When a good jumper gets it wrong, they get it really wrong."

"A bad jumper knows how to make a mistake. They know how to survive. A good jumper is really slick and really accurate. If they get that wrong, the horse tends to get a really bad fall.

"A great jumper is a confident jumper. The more confi-

dent you get, the more you push the limits. A horse isn't any different. I found I had some terrible falls off great jumpers."

Let's return to Cheltenham 2018 for a moment. After all, Patrick Mullins was only on Douvan because Walsh came down on Al Boum Photo earlier that day.

His mount hit the second-last and plunged, rolling onto his lower body. It was the same leg Walsh broke at Punchestown the previous November. The toll was two fractures in the space of three months.

"I probably stayed on too long," he explains. "I thought he would stand up. I didn't go forward with him and stayed on too long. The speed had gone then and my bodyweight was back on him so I couldn't get forward to roll off. I was caught in the wrong place. That is how it goes."

There are two types of falls, stresses Maxine O'Sullivan. She is the daughter of Lombardstown trainer Eugene and a leading star on the point-to-point circuit who has



Above: Jockey Adam Wedge is caught in no-man's-land after parting company with Kings Odyssey in the Brown Advisory & Merriebelle Stable Handicap Chase in 2019.
Below: Campeador gives jockey Barry Geraghty a terrible fall in the 2016 Fred Winter Juvenile Handicap Hurdle.
Pictures: Healy Racing



Above: Wishfull Thinking and Richard Johnson falling at the last fence on the first circuit in 2012, injuring a photographer in the Champion Chase.

Left: Galopin Des Champs and Paul Townend fall at the last when clear in the Turners Novices' Chase last year.
Pictures: Healy Racing



also enjoyed her fair share of success on the racecourse.

At home they have all kinds of horses to be schooled, many of whom are young and bold. In those situations, she gets up already conscious of tumbling down. She can see that hit coming and that is tolerable. The alternative is torturous. Nothing is worse than the punch that leaps unexpectedly from the earth.

"My worst falls, one was my leg. It was actually a soft fall, but it was an impact break. Basically, my heel hit the ground first, so my lower leg smashed off my femur. The top of my tibia smashed. It is very common with builders who fall off ladders.

"The worst fall I had then was on the flat in a bumper in Killarney. That is the big difference. Jumping a fence, 80% of the time you know you will fall. It might be a second, on the last stride you know. They might survive, they might fall and you are prepared for that.

"That is different to the random one on the flat where you least expect it. They are the worst. A horse will clip its

heels and you are on the ground without realising what happened. That happened to me in Killarney. I was on the home bend, going well and the horse broke his leg.

"There were 10 horses be-

“The worst fall I had then was on the flat in a bumper... Jumping a fence, 80% of the time you know you will fall

hind me, it happened so quick. I was very lucky, really sore and concussed but so lucky.

"I thought he tripped or something because I was on the inner. I was really blaming myself, 'I was in a stupid position and it was my fault.' So first I was pissed off, still raging when I went to the doctors. Then I found out about the poor horse. Suddenly it was different and just sad."

It's not simply a case of how you hit the ground. Horses vary in terms of their surface preference while jockeys are all in agreement. The harder the going, the worse it feels.

"That is the reason they stopped all weather jumping," stresses Mullins.

"If you fall on sand, you stop dead. It is way more severe. If the ground is softer the impact is less. More jockeys and horses get injured in the summer. That is why watering is so important for jockeys and horses.

"Often trainers say there is too much watering, I find the better horses and better jockeys don't chance themselves on hard ground. Some

trainers think they win on harder ground but that is not a way forward for the sport."

An ounce of prevention is worth a pound of cure. Before every outing a jockey considers the card and maps out tactics. Part of that is looking out for dodgy jumpers with poor records. Even still, try as they may sometimes the field is a fickle mistress. Both O'Sullivan and Mullins laugh about it because if they didn't, they would pull their hair out. Pinballing around the pack during a race and sure enough, they end up behind the exact liability they were trying to avoid.

"Sod's law," says Barry Geraghty with a chuckle. A sure thing.

"At the same time, I remember going out before Tiger Roll's Grand National thinking, 'he is too small. He won't get around here'. He went and won it. Usually, you know the ones you don't want to be behind." So, a jockey clings on to a 500kg horse motoring along at speeds of up to 50kph and then comes down. The key is what comes after.

These animals can deliver 1,000 Newtons of force in a single kick. They wear steel or aluminium shoes. A glance is dangerous. As for a stamp, devastating.

Consider this: in the final five years of Barry Geraghty's career he missed a combined total of 18 months having broken both legs, both arms, his shoulder blade, eight ribs and punctured his lung.

"One of them, the arm, was impact. The rest were all kicks," he says. "That can be anything or everything. Sometimes you have some control. I remember falling at the last in Galway out front on the rail. I was able to look as I was passing the pillars in the rail, trying to pick my spot to get through.

"If I stayed on the course, I'd get the shit kicked out of me. Sometimes you can have some influence on where you are going and even if you don't, you'd be surprised at how well your instincts steer you in a split second."

"There is a massive difference between a kick and being stood on," adds Walsh. "And a

kick is still bad. Still if you are moving the force isn't as great. If you are static and stood on, it is a much greater impact. I'm not a physics genius but there is some dispersal of power if you are moving."

A BACK protector and helmet can only do so much. After one particularly heavy fall Walsh crumbled into a ball. As the field passed by a horse came down on his shoulder blade. The force was such that it drove his elbow down and crushed his humerus, breaking the bone in three places. Both Walsh and Geraghty worked with Santry physio Enda King to rehab after injuries and build a frame capable of withstanding the assured blows. A serious stint of core work helped them hold on longer; often returning from the point of no return. That strength also provided a spring and a bounce when they did drop.

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Danny Mullins had a lucky escape after getting his foot caught in his stirrup after Canardier fell at the last flight in the Coral Cup Handicap Hurdle in 2020. Picture: Healy Racing



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In 2019 Geraghty endured a brutal fall and a subsequent kick that left him with two fractures in his right leg. This was the tipping point in a run of dreadful injuries. For a decade, he was the ultimate cerebral figure on track well accustomed to pain and punishment. Psychologically though, the season-on-season agony started to grind. With the help of King, he practiced the process of falling. Learned to embrace it all over again.

"It was good for me mentally really. When you come back after a bad injury, the initial falls are the ones you have real apprehension about. It is good to get them under your belt. It is good to practise, but it is so hard to replicate the movement.

"We were doing a full roll. I'd meet the ground, touching off my elbows. No sooner had my elbow touched when I flick to my shoulder. Shoulder on the ground and start rolling. It is a combination of movements. A survival mechanism.

"You can't freeze in the moment, that has the potential to cause serious injury. You need to be fluid. If you resist and are tense, you will hit the ground much harder."

Next week all sorts will flock to west UK and live it up across four days of festive fun. Mid-March means the sport,

with all of the good, bad and ugly, takes centre stage. In a place beyond that intense glare, the exercise is the same. Horse racing is guaranteed headlines for one week every year. Horses and jockeys fall all year round.

When they do, the same small community is always there to pick them back up. The bind within the weights room may be special but it is not exclusive to those confines. For over 40 years, racing photographer Pat 'Cash' Healy has been capturing thrills and spills. Routinely his face is the first sight a fallen jockey sees when their vision returns.

"I know within five seconds if they will be ok or not," Healy says. "Number one is the physical reaction. Number two I always go over to them, Ruby or Racheal or whoever and I say, 'do you know who you are talking to? They hopefully say 'yes, Pat Cash.' "Do you know where you are? Lis-towel or Cheltenham or Navan. So then you know if the head is ok. Unfortunately, I've seen jockeys with bad injuries. I always remember Jonjo Bright at Tyrella Point to Point.

"He had a fall in front of me, and I knew just straight away, 'this is trouble.' His mouth... his lips were quivering. I've never seen it before. I just knew this was bad.

"I've seen jockeys get the same fall and for whatever reason the way they landed; they were ok. You know, this young fella is in trouble because of his body's reaction. At the end of the day, it is like a crash and the body has a way of letting you know it is serious. Jonjo ended up paralysed and in a wheelchair."

OF all the riders, Ruby Walsh was unique. Healy would walk over and await the usual diagnosis: 'Cash, I am after doing my vertebrae. I did my ribs. He could basically tell you; I did my T5 or T7.' A conversation with Healy quickly reveals one integral trait; he is in awe of the exceptionally brave men and women who saddle up every single week. Ask him about the art of falling and he immediately talks about the near misses, having captured countless recoveries and remarkable acts of horsemanship. Referencing a Kevin Brouder example from Naas in 2021, he recalls seeing the horse's mistake in the viewfinder and marvelling as the jockey was launched sky bound only to land square on the horse's back.

He has witnessed countless heart-stopping derailments. Mammal trainwrecks. And he watches earnestly as them pick themselves up and do it

all over. And again. And again. And again.

"I'd go to the jockey room after a fall. The pain these lads are in, you see soccer with the rolling and crying they do. I've seen jockeys with broken legs or arms, a broke vertebrae in their neck, you go in to check on them and they are laughing and joking, straight away working out how long will they be out and what will they miss. They never moan.

"I remember John Thomas (McNamara) at Askeaton, god bless him, but he had a fall in front of me and said straight away, 'fuck it. I put out my shoulder.' He was off to Limerick hospital. I said, 'right I'll bring your car and your clothes and meet you there.' "He said, 'you will not. I'll be back for the last race.' And he was. They are amazing athletes. There are no other sportsmen like them. They walk on thin ice. One time in Navan, Stormin' Norman had a fall in front of me. He was lying on the ground looking up at me and shouted up, 'What am I riding in the next?' I've no doubt if it was average he'd say, you know what I'll take the rest of the day here to heal.

"Anyway, it was a good ride, one of Edward O'Grady's, Nick Dundee or some other strong horse. I told him that and he sure didn't he jump up straight away, dust himself down and go back at it."



LONELY WALK: Ruby Walsh walks back to the weigh room after Annie Power's famous fall at the 2015 Festival. Picture Healy Racing

A butterfly flaps his wings, a million mad things, and then Limerick triumph

FANS flood the field and with a principal's powerful stride, John Kiely marches down the sideline and beckons them off. This game is a pressure cooker. This game couldn't be closer. This game isn't over.

The pitch invasion is delayed but it cannot be denied. They thought they heard the final whistle, they thought wrong. Do not gamble. The only certainty here is that the Munster hurling final will deliver. Eventually, a barn-stormer comes to a close.

In the meantime, there are significant disputes. Clare are aggrieved. After play resumes there are two contentious tackles that could have offered them a free to equalise.

Referee Liam Gordon is escorted off and down the tunnel. Nearby Limerick make space in their trophy cabinet. For 70 sweltering minutes, more inches separate them. They rested miles apart in different worlds.

Brian Lohan's outfit were fanatically determined and wrongly scorned a chance to force extra time. Before that they had enough chances to claim the Mick Mackey Cup outright. A total of 48 shots, 23 scores. Dunning.

"All the stats are the same. Puckouts, breaking balls, everything is kind of even except for shooting efficiency. Their shooting efficiency was way better than ours," he would say in summary post-match.

A butterfly flaps its wings and Graeme Mulcahy swipes his hairy. Eibhear Quilligan's puckout had just picked out John Conlon. The lion-hearted centre-back delicately finds Tony Kelly in the centre. The shot is on and it is on his left.

Mulcahy does the right thing. It ends all wrong. His trademark harrising force. Kelly to swivel and swing with his right. A margin off. A margin means a post. A post means a rebound. A rebound means a waiting Mark Rodgers. Rodgers means the decider to catch the bounce with his left, and immediately unleash with his right.

For the duration of this championship, there has been a strange sort of peril in fixtures involving Limerick.

The initial questions posed were were their right, and there was a spell in the final round when onlookers were left wondering if they were out.

Here was no different. Their faithful sense it most of all and seize any opportunity to offer a lift. Cian Nolan grapples with Aaron Gillane in front of the



NO WAY PAST: Clare's Mark Rodgers is tackled by Limerick's Tom Moerissey during the Munster SHC final. Picture: Eoin Noonan/Sportsfile

Mackey Stand and they snarl with indignation.

Gearóid Hogarty sizes up Conlon in the centre, drops a shoulder and strikes his opening point from play. They duly give thanks.

Kyle Hayes has the dose they need. Quilligan takes a second too long over a puck-out as Limerick stay statua-like in their positions and goes long. Hayes thunders like a Shanghai Maglev train for his first and the siren sounds: "Limerick, Limerick, Limerick."

Then the goals arrives. The cold hard truth is that Clare needed more. Diarmuid Ryan hits a wide, Ryan Taylor has another and Rodgers forces a smart save from Nickie Quaid.

It is more of the same after the turnaround. Kelly miscalculates a pass and snags a shot too far left. McCarthy misses one from play and one placed ball. He makes way for Shane Meehan, but not before the lead changes hands again.

Limerick have their chin and hammer it. David Reidy fires a ball into Gillane and Nolan loses his stick in desperate pursuit. One green flag sets off a thousand. Goal.

Now the corner-forward firmly has the upper hand just in the decisive match-up, as all the previous foresaw. Conor Clary's absence proves a killer.

What does Kiely's side do when they have a target? Hit it again. Hit it better. Gillane follows up with his ninth and Nolan's number is up. A full-length Quilligan save prevents a second goal.

Clare dig deep for a response and just as Rodgers is about to fire an effort skyward, Peter Casey executes a

perfectly-timed flick. It ends with Kelly standing over a free on the 21 near the sideline. He misses.

Their leader hobbles off. Declan Hanson is met with a wall of appreciation. Afterwards, he returns the favour and singles them out for praise: "We hope you never see fired of these days."

He is the last player on the pitch over an hour later. Still limping, now smiling.

Peter Duggan sets Taylor in on goal but Nash dives and denies. Kelly tries to settle for a point and the crowd as Hayes rises to block down. It is not so much a block as it is a rejection. Point-blank refusal to yield an inch. An inch is all it takes.

Three-point ballgame. Can Clare make it two? Quaid has the answer. Standard. He rises high to pluck the sliotar from the air moments before it crosses the black spot. Still the heave Banner roar. Fitzgerald finally makes his mark, Aron Shansagher comes off the bench to score, and Kelly cuts the margin to one.

A million mad things and then... A million more in the final seconds. Even if the quality is several notches below last year's thriller the fare is gripping all the same.

There will be plenty of talk about the controversial conclusion. But later in the tunnel, Lohan outlines how helpful that is to them when asked if his players were discussing the incident in the dressing room.

"Look, there's always talk. Yeah, there is always talk..."

For John Kiely it is 12 finals. 12 wins. This five in a row started in 2019 with a 12-point triumph over Tipperary. Since then, they have won by four, five, three and one. The chasing pack are getting closer. But for now, Limerick have the edge.



Maurice Brosnan

TUS Gaelic Grounds