

Sports Weekend

Saturday, March 25th, 2023 Editor Noel O'Reilly Phone 01-6758366 email sports@irishtimes.com



Ireland's Grand ambitions realised

Gerry Thornley: pages 6&7



Kilkenny epitomise old school values

Denis Walsh: page 8

The former Cheltenham Gold Cup-winning jockey Bryan Cooper announced his retirement from the saddle yesterday. Photograph: Bryan Keane/Inpho



In numbers Bryan Cooper factfile

Age: 30.
Career winners: 532
Cheltenham winners: 9
(2013 – Our Conor, Beneficient, Ted Veale; 2015 – Don Poli; 2016 – Empire of Dirt, Don Cossack; 2017 – Apple's Jade, Road To Respect; 2021 – Mrs Milner).
Grade One wins: 39.
Notable victories: Cheltenham Gold Cup, Triumph Hurdle, Savill's Chase (twice), Irish Arkle (twice), Drinmore Chase (twice), Betway Bowl, Fighting Fifth.

A fear of falling: 'Injuries have taken their toll... I can't go on doing it'

On the last day of his racing life, Bryan Cooper woke in a panic that cemented him to the spot.

It was Wednesday week ago in Cheltenham and he was down to ride three horses on that afternoon's card. There was one for Willie Mullins, one for Joseph O'Brien and one for his father, Tom. Problem was, he felt nothing but dread at the thought of those rides.

In that moment, Cooper's fear of falling had finally won a working majority over his love of riding. He knew this day had been coming, he just hadn't expected it to arrive at this exact place and time. Not at Cheltenham, not in the middle of March. Not with his dad saddling a first festival runner since 2012 and needing his boy to ride it for him. Of all the days for his mind to finally shout stop, he could really have done without it being this one.

But there was no way around it. He had to find an escape route. He texted one of the girls who looked after the horses for his boss, Noel Meade. He made up a half-passable excuse about having sore ribs and told her he wouldn't be able to ride out that morning. Then he turned his phone to Airplane Mode. If nobody could ring him, nobody could give out to him. Better still, nobody could ask him if he was okay.

He wasn't okay. He hadn't been okay for so long, he'd struggle to put a time-frame on it. Definitely a few months. Probably well over a year. If he was to really dig down into it, possibly even the guts of a decade.

However long it was, he couldn't go on doing this to himself. It didn't matter that he was still only 30 years old. He had to stop being a jockey.

"When I came out with it on Wednesday and said it to people that were there with me, they were like, 'How in the name of God were you doing it for so long, thinking about it that way?' And when I've been thinking about it over the last week as well, that's what's been in my mind. How did I manage to put myself through it? But that was the main thing that was worrying me. Getting broke up."

His sister Sarah was staying in the same house and since nobody could get in touch with him, her phone suddenly had steam coming out of it. She barrelled up to his room to ask what the hell he was playing

at, only to find a lost soul sitting on the bed.

"I'm done," he said. When she asked what he was on about, he started to cry and didn't stop for an hour. David Mullins was staying in the house as well and when he came into the room and suggested going back to sleep for an hour, Cooper said, "No, you don't realise. This is it. I'm finished."

Nobody was sure what to do next. Cooper's best friend and sounding board is the Wexford jockey Mikey Fogarty but he wasn't answering his phone. He rang his agent Ciaran O'Toole who immediately understood and told him to make two phone calls - one to Noel Meade and one to his father. He didn't owe anything to anybody else.

By now, Jennifer Pugh was on her way over to the house. Pugh is the Senior Medical Officer for the IHRB, basically the jockeys' doctor. She has seen them all in every state of disrepair imaginable, physical and mental. She arrived to find him sobbing.

"I was still very emotional at the time," Cooper says. "And she came in and I could see in her eyes that she was starting to get emotional too, listening to me. I told her straight out what was going on, that I can't do it anymore."

"She just sat me down and calmed me down a little bit. Then I started to relax a bit more and we figured out a few bits and pieces and I realised that I wasn't in trouble. And when I knew I didn't let down Noel, when he was able to understand and was 100 per cent okay with it, then I started to calm down."

"I'd say I cried for an hour. I was crying with emotion but there was a bit of happiness there in my head as well. Happy that I

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Malachy Clerkin

In the middle of Cheltenham last week, Bryan Cooper's mind shouted stop, and he finally acknowledged a truth he had been denying to himself – he had to stop being a jockey

didn't have to deal with this anymore and I didn't have to go racing anymore. It was a weight off my shoulders."

How did he get here? Every way you can think of. Quickly and blissfully at the start, slowly and painfully as the years ticked by. If you drew a graph of Bryan Cooper's career, it would look like one of those side-on views of a mountain stage in the Tour de France. The highs were the highest you could get. The lows came at him at top speed too.

He was 20 years old when he rode three winners at Cheltenham in 2013. For the last of them, Tony Martin's Ted Veale in the County Hurdle, he rode as if in a dream.

Martin warned him beforehand not to be in front before the last and he took it to extremes, sitting out the back throughout the first circuit before lapping the field on the way home.

"This gossun," smiled Martin afterwards, "will be there a long time when Ruby, Barry [Geraghty] and Carberry are gone and retired."

It wasn't a minority view. Within nine months, Cooper had taken over from Davy Russell as Gigginstown's retained rider. For a jockey at the time, there were three jobs that everyone wanted above all

others - number one for Willie Mullins (Ruby Walsh), number one for JP McManus (Tony McCoy), number one for Michael O'Leary (Cooper).

He was just 21, 13 years younger than Walsh and 18 younger than McCoy. Nobody needed to talk up the trajectory of his career. It was a given that he was the next superstar of the weighing room.

But no sport is less inclined to make allowances for celebrity. Cooper's first leg break came in May 2013. It kept him out for four months which, in the penal code of the jumps game, actually counts as a fairly light sentence. Surgery, physio, a bit of time with your feet up and you're back at it. Summer racing has never been his thing anyway. So, all in all, no biggie.

Cheltenham 2014 was a different, darker tale. Coming to the second last in the Fred Winter, he was leading on a Gigginstown horse called Clarcam. The fall was particularly grisly and resulted in him breaking both his tibia and fibula.

Adrian McGoldrick, the Senior Medical Officer who had been treating jockeys since the mid-1980s, called it "the worst fracture I have ever seen in a lower limb".

One minute Cooper was about to claim his fourth Cheltenham winner, the next he was in an ambulance, bound for surgery and seven months on the sidelines. If you want a launch date for the fear that has ended his career, the trauma of that

week is top of the list.

"I was in Bristol hospital and I had to go down for a second surgery. I remember the guy in the room beside me going down ahead of me. There were six of us in the room and this guy went down before me. And when he came back to the room, he had lost his leg."

"I was up soon after him and I was in bits. I remember signing this form and them telling me, 'You know, there is a chance that you might come back with no leg here'. This poor fella was in the bed beside me and he was going, 'You could be the same'. That hit me very hard at the time and it stayed with me. I suppose it has played a part in what's after happening too."

That was nine years ago, more or less to the day. He dealt with it the only way a jumps jockey knows – avoidance, suppression, self-deception. It stayed with him, yes. But only as a lodger, under strictest house rules. He did his level best never to allow it near the front room.

Frankly, he never felt he had a choice in the matter. Jockeys will fall, on average once in every 15 rides. Jockeys will get hurt. Over the years, Cooper has broken his leg, his arm, his pelvis, countless fingers, lacerated his kidney, punctured his lung.

He has watched all that and worse happen to those around him. He saw his housemate Robbie McNamara take a fall in 2015 that left him in a wheelchair for the rest of his life. He lived all this, day after day, year after year. And still did all he could to ignore the worries within him.

If that sounds self-defeating in the long run, you need to understand two truths. One, the life of a jumps jockey just doesn't

have a lot of room in it for this specific flavour of fear. Every race comes down to a series of small decisions about pace and positioning and timing and jumping. Fear makes you hesitant, it contaminates the very decision-making on which winning and losing is based.

Fear makes you want to stay out of trouble. So maybe you ride a little wider or sit a little further back in the pack. Or worse, you don't fully commit when your horse needs to put in a big leap. In any of these scenarios, the best thing that will happen is you get beaten. The worst is exactly the sort of fall you're trying to avoid. Fear has no friends in the weighing room. Cooper wasn't about to welcome it into his circle.

But even more relevant is the second truth. His approach worked. Once he locked his fear up in a safe at the back of his mind and just ploughed on, he entered the most successful spell of his career. He came back to Cheltenham in 2015 and won the RSA on Don Poli. He very nearly won the Gold Cup on Road To Riches. Cooper had stormed back from the worst thing that had ever happened to him and shown everyone he could deliver.

It got even better after the summer. In 2015/16, he rode 94 winners in Ireland. Since the turn of the century, only five jockeys have ridden more in a season – Walsh, Geraghty, Carberry, Russell and Paul Townend. The gods of the weighing room. And when he capped it all off with the 2016 Gold Cup on Don Cossack, he was exactly where he had always wanted to be.

There was always pressure, for sure. Gigginstown had armies of horses and they were never shy about running them against each other in the biggest races. Choosing which one to ride was a first-world problem but calling it that never made it any easier to solve. Getting it wrong was never a good look. Getting it right brought relief as much as anything.

"I loved it for a certain period of time. I was riding the best horses and I was delivering plenty of winners. I definitely left some behind me, every jockey does. But I knew I wasn't going to be riding until I was 40. It's not something you have to do forever. There's so many other things you can go and do."

➔ Malachy Clerkin's interview with Bryan Cooper is continued on page 12.

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Look Up

Malachy Clerkin



We don't expect much but a bit of hope never hurts

Here we go, then. France in the Aviva on Monday night. All extraneous noises fall away, all ifs and buts and maybes fizzle out to nothing. Three years to the week since Stephen Kenny became Ireland manager, we finally get to the start line for a normal, straight-up, bog-standard qualifying campaign. It's been a while coming.

This isn't the harum-scarum early days of Kenny's reign, with all the pandemic constraints and the false Covid positives and whatever else. It isn't the World Cup qualifiers played out in surreal silence when people still couldn't come to some of the games. It isn't the Nations League, it isn't another friendly. It's 10 matches in eight months and Ireland will or Ireland will not. No in-between.

Though the draw has been brutal it does at least have a clarifying simplicity to it. Very often with an Ireland soccer manager there's enough of a grey area for the soccer culture war armies to fight over. Whether or not an Ireland team have broken par can often be a matter of opinion. That's not really the case this time around.

Instead the next few months of Kenny's

reign have a fairly vulgar straightforwardness to them. The pass mark is very specific. Nobody expects Ireland to finish above either France or the Netherlands. Nobody will abide them finishing below Greece or Gibraltar. Anything better than third is a success. Anything worse is a failure. No gerrymandering, no juking the stats. Do it or don't.

When the imperative is that clear-cut it significantly reduces the space for the "yeah, but" method of supporting the Ireland boss. There have been occasions throughout Kenny's 31 games in charge that plenty of us reacted to bad nights by reaching for it. Yeah, but at least they're trying to play decent football. Yeah, but at least he's bringing through the next generation. Yeah, but look where they're all playing their club football.

None of that is going to wash over the coming months. Ireland do try to play a more modern sort of game than in times past, we can all see that. But they've won just nine of Kenny's 31 games. For comparison, Brian Kerr's teams won 17 of his first 31. True, those teams often had Roy and Robbie Keane, Damien Duff, Shay Given and John O'Shea in them but even

so. Three years into any Ireland manager's reign, only results butter parsnips.

And anyway, there's not as much "yeah, but" to fall back on these days. Kenny's achievements in building the foundations of the next Ireland team are clear and obvious. The side that faces France on Monday will be predominantly made up of players whose careers are on an upswing. They'll be mostly either Premier League players or ones who are likely to be headed for the top flight next season.

Evan Ferguson

They'll also be, a few notables aside, players who are in their early 20s. Or, in the case of Evan Ferguson, even younger. The average age of the team that took the pitch against Latvia on Wednesday was 23.5. That's a full five years younger than the average age of the teams who played in the qualifying campaign for the last World Cup.

All of this is good. All of it is the work of the first three years. But all of it amounts to a dutiful and diligent assembling of the means, not an attainment of the end. Any rational and fair analysis of Kenny's time in the gig has to give him credit for



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putting it all in place. But now that it's done his Ireland teams have to produce.

That obviously doesn't mean giving Kylian Mbappé et ses amis the runaround on Monday night. France have handed better teams than Ireland a thrashing here and then and they will do so again. It's hard to imagine Ireland will be shamed by the outcome however bad it is.

Nobody's idea of a fun side

But what it does mean is going to Greece in June and either winning or at the very least not losing. They are who we are. Nobody's idea of a fun side to play against, no world stars. Part of European football's social climbing class. The sort of country Ireland need to start beating regularly if there's going to be progress.

And that's all anyone is looking for. It's fascinating being around the Ireland rugby team these days and feeling the electricity of expectation around them. There's such a frisson of excitement in seeing an Irish team deal with the dawn reality that they are good enough to win a World Cup. It's a unique moment in our sporting history.

Nobody places that level of expectation

on the soccer team. Nobody sane anyway. That's why it's always so bewildering when a below-par Ireland display sounds the outrage air raid sirens. It always puts me in mind of Basil Fawlty asking Mrs Richards what she expected to see out of a Torquay hotel bedroom window. Sydney Opera House, perhaps? The Hanging Gardens of Babylon?

We are a country that has failed to address soccer in any meaningful, coherent way for generations. A country that has farmed out the development of its best young talent to England forever and is only now, thanks to Brexit, being forced to tackle the job properly ourselves. We have no right to expect anything mega or marvellous from the Ireland soccer team — and in the main we don't.

But we like to have a bit of hope. A growing sense that if the planets align and the balls go to feet and not every opposition shot from 30 yards goes whistling into the top corner, we might knock a bit of enjoyment out of the whole thing. Bloody the noses of one of the big guns every once in a while and we're happy enough. It's not a lot to ask. And so we go again.

Racing Bryan Cooper interview

‘I achieved everything I wanted to... this is for my own wellbeing’

Continued from page one

This is Bryan Cooper's second retirement, believe it or not. The first came in August 2019 - he just didn't say it out loud in public. He'd had a couple of bad years, in and out of the saddle. The O'Learys sacked him from the Gigginstown job in the summer of 2017, partly for his attitude, partly for his work ethic, mostly for the fact that he wasn't winning enough.

He spent the next two years presuming the phone was going to ring with trainers eager to use him now that he wasn't a retained rider. And getting more and more pissed off when it didn't.

It all came to a head one Saturday night in Dublin. He hated his job, and he had no plausible route to getting back up on good horses. All it took was the wrong feeling on the wrong night, and everything crashed.

"I had just been living in this bubble thinking everything's going to be okay," he says. "But what I was doing was brain-dead. I was just living each day thinking it was all going to change by itself. But it wasn't. I spent that night in tears. And I realised, right, I need to figure some of my shit out here."

"It was a rough time for me and my parents. That was when I decided to pack up and go to Australia and figure out what the f***k am I going to do with myself. In my head, I was finished riding. I had a statement done up and everything. I was gone and I wasn't coming back. I was at rock bottom, no trainer wanted to use me. They all thought, 'Oh, his bottle is gone, he's finished'. And my bottle wasn't great at the time."

So he went to Australia for a few weeks. He travelled around and got out of the racing bubble and hacked through the briars in his head. He sat in bars with people who had never heard of the Irish jockey Bryan Cooper, who wouldn't know a champion hurdler from a two-humped camel. It made him realise that the world keeps spinning regardless of what he does or doesn't do on a horse. He came home a different person. Calmer, nicer. Someone with perspective.

Begged

Salvation came from the most unlikely source. Lucky Phil was a mare in his dad's yard that had run 14 times without ever winning, eight of them with Cooper on board. He got back from Australia with no intention of riding anything for anyone. But he couldn't say no to his father.

"He begged me to ride her at Gowran one day. I just got something in my head, thinking, 'You can't just go out like this. You will regret it so much. Quit now and it's basically what everyone has been saying about you'. So I rode her and she won. It was my first ride in months. Everyone actually thought I was injured. She won and I thought, 'Grand, I'll tip away for another while.'"

Lucky Phil raced 29 times in her life — this was her only win. But it was enough to keep the flame lit in her jockey. And so it went. He teamed up with the Nolan brothers in Wexford for a couple of seasons and found his way back. In 2021, at the no-crowds Cheltenham, he finally picked up his ninth festival winner — Mrs Milner in the Pertemps. Over time, he started



Bryan Cooper falls from Coeur Sublime at the last in the Knight Frank Juvenile Hurdle at the Leopardstown Christmas Festival on St Stephen's Day 2018. Photograph: Ryan Byrne/Inpho

getting rides again for Willie Mullins, for Gordon Elliott, for Gigginstown. He became Noel Meade's retained rider.

"I was enjoying being in the weighing room. There was no pressure on me. But there was still always something in the back of my head. I knew I wasn't going to do it for another 10 years. I said I'd give it a go and see what happens and I got back to a level I'm proud of. But I was firmly content at Punchestown last year that I'd do one more and that would be it."

Calling time

His plan was to ride out this season, finish up at Punchestown, let a few days pass and then release a statement calling time. But over the past few months, all that stored-up trauma, all those tiny droplets of fear, everything built and built until the dam finally broke.

He mentioned his bottle earlier — jockeyspeak for the fearlessness that is the base requirement for doing the job. Losing your bottle has always been the great taboo of the weighing room. Cooper isn't the first jockey to retire because he can't face the thought of falling anymore but you'll spend a long time digging through the

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I always knew, since I realised I was going to stop this year, that I'd be blatantly honest about why I'm stopping. Because I'm young to retire, I know that. I was always going to tell the gospel truth of it.

archives before you find too many who've admitted to it.

Here's what it feels like. He spent Tuesday in Cheltenham knocking about with David Mullins and a few others. He has never liked going there on his days off but the lads were good company and he enjoyed it well enough. It was just that every time he looked at his watch or flicked on his phone, he found himself mentally

counting down the hours to the three rides he was going to have to suit up for the next day.

He went for dinner with his dad and a few others on Tuesday night and couldn't bring himself to tell them how he was feeling. Instead, he did what he had always done. Packed it all into his mental suitcase and sat on it to try and get the zipper closed. He went to bed and though he hardly slept, he still convinced himself it would be okay in the morning. But it wasn't.

Only regret

Now that it's done, he feels liberated. His only regret is letting his father down. Tom Cooper is a small trainer in Kerry who had flashes of success in the 2000s with horses like Total Enjoyment and Forpadydeplasterer. The last decade has been lean though and it was a big deal for him to bring a horse over for the Champion Bumper this year.

"I feel really bad the way I did it over there because he had a runner and it was his first runner there since 2012. It was so much pressure for him because he has a new owner in the yard. I let him down there. I did. And it does upset me. But I had to do it. We'll have a pint and I know deep down he

understands. He's my biggest supporter."

So what now? The first day of the rest of his life, is what. He'll stay in racing, obviously. The bloodstock side of the game fascinates him and someone with his experience and his honesty will be a serious addition to whichever racing media outlet comes looking.

Retiring now is the right thing for him. But more than that, telling people why is right for him too. Dreading the falls and worrying about getting hurt isn't unique to Bryan Cooper. Copping to it might be, though.

"It's a proudest thing. But I always knew, since I realised I was going to stop this year, that I'd be blatantly honest about why I'm stopping. Because I'm young to retire, I know that. I was always going to tell the gospel truth of it."

"The injuries have taken their toll, they've caught up with me and I can't go on doing it. But I don't want it to take away from the career I had. I achieved everything I wanted to, I had a career that 95 per cent of jockeys would have had as a childhood dream. This is for my own wellbeing. I have to do this."

Briefs

Racing

UIR offered €100,000 per fixture for their media rights

The five racecourses that comprise United Irish Racecourses have been offered €100,000 per fixture for their media rights.

The breakaway UIR group made up of Limerick, Thurles, Kilbeggan, Roscommon and Sligo, confirmed yesterday they have received an "unsolicited offer" from Arena Racing Company.

ARC, which owns 16 racetracks in Britain, and is a commercial partner with Sky Sports Racing, is currently in negotiations for the purchase of Dundalk racecourse.

Those negotiations are understood to have stalled recently as Ireland's 26

racecourses are at loggerheads over a proposed €47 million per annum offer from Satellite Information Services and Racecourse Media Group to continue their current media rights deal for a further five years.

In January UIR was formed due to unhappiness about how vital media rights income is distributed by the sport's ruling body, Horse Racing Ireland. It said trust in HRI, which operates four tracks here, had collapsed.

Last October HRI's media rights committee, which is legislatively charged with negotiating media rights for all 26 courses, gave preferred bidder status to SIS/RMG.

BRIAN O'CONNOR

Soccer

Bayern move quickly for Tuchel after Nagelsmann sacking

Former Chelsea boss Thomas Tuchel has been named new Bayern Munich head coach after the club axed Julian Nagelsmann.

Tuchel, 49, has agreed a contract until June 2025 and will take training for the first time on Monday.

CEO Oliver Kahn dispensed with Nagelsmann after the club slipped to second in the Bundesliga, behind Borussia Dortmund, following Sunday's defeat by Bayer Leverkusen.

Kahn told the club website: "When we signed Julian Nagelsmann for FC Bayern in the summer of 2021, we were convinced we would work with him on a long-term basis — and that



Thomas Tuchel will take training on Monday.

was the goal of all of us right up to the end.

"Julian shares our aspiration to play successful and attractive football. But now we have come to the conclusion that the quality in our squad — despite the Bundesliga title last year — has come to the fore less and less often."

Cycling

Healy up to sixth overall with one stage remaining in Italy

One day after his superb stage win in the Settimana Internazionale Coppi e Bartali, Ben Healy made further advances in the general classification of the Italian race yesterday.

The Irish time trial champion finished sixth on stage four to Fiorano Modenese, being part of a chase group which almost reeled in the long distance breakaway rider Alexis Guerin (Bingoal WB).

Healy's group comprised five riders and finished just three seconds behind Guerin.

Swiss rider Mauro Schmid (Soudal-QuickStep) continues to lead overall. Healy improved one place to sixth in the general classification, and also sits second in the points competition and fifth in the king of the mountains contest. His EF Education-EasyPost squad dominates the team rankings.

Healy is 44 seconds behind Schmid with one stage remaining, an 18.6 kilometre individual time trial in Carpi.

Meanwhile, Seth Dunwoody is due to line out in the prestigious Gent-Wevelgem/Grote Prijs A. Noyelle-leper race for junior riders tomorrow.

The 16-year-old has performed strongly thus far this season, netting 11th in 1.1-ranked Koorne-Brussel-Kuurne juniors on February 26th and then last weekend taking sixth on stage two and seventh overall in the 2.1-ranked Guido Reybrouck Classic.

At home, Cycling Ireland's National Road Series begins this weekend with the running of the Donal Crowley Memorial Race in Blarney tomorrow.

The men's race will be 140 kilometres while the women's 90 is kilometres.

SHANE STOKES

Interview

The life and death of Red Óg Murphy



Malachy Clerkin

Family of young Sligo footballer who died by suicide in April implores young people to talk about their problems

The goals are still up in the front garden. The years have left the net good and raggedy and the grass won't need a lawnmower this side of spring. The green and white flag of Curry GAA is listing in the November drizzle as Redmond Murphy comes out to offer his welcome. "That's where it all started," he smiles. "Look up at the roof there – the amount of slates they broke kicking balls over the bar."

The Murphy house is in Moylough in Sligo, a few hairy fields west of the Mayo border. They moved here in June 2005, Redmond, Geraldine and their three boys. Daithi was two months old at the time, Oisín 2½. Then there was Red Óg, the eldest. Four going on five, with the emphasis on the going.

"He never sat still," says Geraldine. "Such a hyperactive child," Redmond says. "Always on the move, no matter where we were. There was an old man I used have to get to give me a hand to keep an eye on him down the back of Mass. He was that mad for running around."

In the livingroom, Red Óg is still here. In photos, both up on the wall and on the table by the TV. In the miniature Eiffel Tower he brought Geraldine home from Paris in February. In the Sigerson Cup Team of the Year plaque sitting up on the mantelpiece – although, as his mother points out, if he was physically here, he'd have it stashed up in his wardrobe, away from public view. He never liked showing off his trophies.

But they keep it there because, really, how could they not? It was the last thing he won. Four nights before he was due to receive it at the awards ceremony in Limerick back in April, Red Óg died by suicide. He was 21 years old.

He left so much behind him. A family, a girlfriend, a devoted circle of friends.



Red Óg Murphy of DCU Dóchas Éireann in action against University of Limerick; the 21-year-old footballer had been weighing up offers from different clubs in the US for the summer. PHOTOGRAPH: LASZLO GECZO/INPHO

car park one time and he was still there on the phone to us half an hour later wondering what he should do. He had fixed it back up and wrote a note giving his details but he was worried that he'd be doing the wrong thing not waiting. And we were saying, 'Sure you could be there for hours – just leave it and come home.'

What was on his mind that Thursday night? They don't know. A few teachers have told them since that teaching practice can be very stressful in the moment but though he was finding it intense, it didn't feel like something he couldn't handle. Footballwise, he was weighing up offers from different clubs in the US for the summer and wasn't full sure whether to go at all. But even then, it was all upside. Whatever he decided was going to be good.

"I was talking to him after Redmond that evening," says Geraldine. "And we were texting then after 10 o'clock about the weekend and about Rachel coming down and them going shopping for style on Saturday for the awards."

"The last text was at 10:17. He said, 'Night Mam, I'll chat to you in the morning.'"

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Oisín was the first to get wind that something was amiss. Rachel made contact to say Red Óg wasn't at school. He's in college in UL so he rang Geraldine to ask had she heard from Red Óg. It was around midday at this stage.

"And I said, 'No, sure I wouldn't be hearing from him at this time of day, he's in school until three.' But Oisín said, 'No Mam, he's not at school.' And when I heard that, I knew there was something very badly wrong. That would not be Red Óg. If Red Óg hasn't turned up somewhere without a call, something has happened."

"I was on site in Blanchardstown," says Redmond. "So I made my way across to DCU and it was just as I got there that Oisín rang to say he's with the footballers. I said, 'Is he alive?' And Oisín just said, 'No, he's dead.'"

"I got to spend two hours with him in DCU which was really nice. The Gardaí let me in when I got to the room. The body was on the floor and I got to spend the time with him. I found that helped."

Lots of things helped. Community helped, the club helped. The local parish

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The one thing he didn't leave behind was an answer. Eight months on, nobody knows why he did it. He had no history of mental health issues

Team-mates and classmates. A teaching career that he looked born to excel at. A football career that could have been anything.

The one thing he didn't leave behind was an answer. Eight months on, nobody knows why he did it. He had no history of mental health issues. He gave no hint to anyone that he was struggling – his family are as in the dark as everybody else. But they don't obsess over it either. The way they look at it, they were blessed to have him for as long as they did.

"There's nothing sorrowful out of this," Redmond says. "We want to help people."

"The hope," says Geraldine, "would be that if somebody reads this, if they have mental health issues, that they wouldn't hide. That they'd talk up. Obviously there was something that Red Óg covered up. Or maybe there was an accumulation of stuff that week that got to him. We don't know. But we hope that they would talk. Because I don't think young ones do talk."

II

Red Óg. The name marked him out from the off, maybe confused people as much as anything. He was blond on top, never had ginger hair in his life. Soon enough though, it was him who made the name famous rather than the other way around.

Red Óg Murphy was a footballer. For Moylough NS and St. Patrick's Community School, for Curry, Sligo and DCU. He played soccer for Real Tubber FC and had a spell in Aussie Rules for North Melbourne. If you saw him, you saw boots – probably new, definitely stylish – and you saw a ball.

He won a county sevens title and the Cumann na mBunscoil with Moylough. At St. Patrick's, he played in 13 Connacht finals and won eight. They beat Jarlath's of Galway one time in a Junior A final where Red Óg scored 3-11 of their 3-15. Redmond Senior, a Galway man, got some kick out of that one.

So his name rang out. In any conversation about the sorrowful mysteries of Sligo football, there was at least word that they had one coming. In 2017, when Sligo reached the All-Ireland minor quarter-fi-

nal, Red Óg top scored in every game despite being a year younger than everyone around him. Derry beat them by a point in the end but he was man of the match, scoring 0-11 of Sligo's 0-15. He captained them the following year but it wasn't a great crop.

Soon after that, he was in Australia, tilting at the AFL on a rookie contract. Like plenty before and since, he loved the life but the sport itself was a foreign language he just couldn't get on his ear. He went in January but was home in September. Before going, he had promised Geraldine he'd do his Leaving Cert if it didn't work out so after he landed back on a Saturday he was sitting in school on the Tuesday.

In everything, he was a perfectionist. "Come up and I'll show you his room," says Geraldine. "You'll see it on his desk." Right enough, there in the corner, his homework desk is covered in equations and bits of poems and chemical compounds, all written out neatly and clearly to help him remember. It's more than the idle doodling of a bored student. Graffiti with a purpose.

"Red Óg would keep at something until he got it," says his father. "The year we won the intermediate championship, we were playing Molaise Gaels and he took a free near the end, last minute, a chance to equalise the game. He missed it. It was outside his range, it was a wet night, the ball was cold, it wasn't going to carry."

"We came back up here and he went straight to the pitch to try and score a free from that spot. He mightn't have come home at all only we went to get him. I went down – Geraldine or I often had to do it. He was there, in the pitch dark, with only the light of the car, trying to kick the free that he missed."

"We played them in the county final then. And he scored three unbelievable points from frees. Harder than he had in the first game. That was the result of what had been churning in his head that night."

III

Paddy Christie finds an empty classroom and pulls up a chair. We're in Kilcoskan National School in north county Dublin, one of the countless plates he has spinning just now. School principal, recently appointed Longford manager, father of two under-10s and, despite it all, still over the DCU Sigerson team. To the Murphys, he was more than that again. "He was Red Óg's life coach in Dublin," says Geraldine.

When Christie first came across Red Óg in September 2021, he was inclined to be wary. It was obvious the lad could play – but plenty of lads come into DCU who can play. Beyond that, he knew two things about his football career. He had gone to Australia but came home after a few months. He had played senior with Sligo but had recently stepped away from the



Geraldine and Redmond Murphy: "There's nothing sorrowful out of this," Redmond says. "We want to help people." PHOTOGRAPH: JAMES CONNOLLY

panel. Red flags? Orange, anyway.

"When somebody comes with a name and a profile," Christie says, "you often dig down a bit deeper and you find that the person either goes beyond that name or doesn't live up to it. The little bits and pieces that I had heard about him was that he was a fine footballer but that he could maybe be a bit difficult at times. Maybe a bit hard to manage. So there were these question marks."

It didn't take long for Christie to make his own judgment. He brought Red Óg for a scan on his ankle one time, just the pair of them in the car wrestling the Dublin traffic to the southside and back for a morning. By the time he dropped him off, Christie could see had very little to worry about.

He brought him out to Kilcoskan soon after to do some substitute teaching. School principals never have enough bodies but even so, Christie wouldn't always be rushing to get lads with names for being footballers in from the teacher training colleges to help out. He's seen plenty of them come and go down the years, strutting through the door as intercounty stars passing the time when what he needed were trainee teachers looking to learn.

"Within weeks, I was certain that this guy was going to be (a) a fantastic footballer but (b), more importantly, a good person. A good citizen, with a very decent side to him. That was even more to do with what the teachers here said about him. Some of them wouldn't have a notion about sport – they wouldn't have a clue even who I was! So they were only judging him on the person he was."

Leaving a year late because of the AFL thing, so he was 21 coming to us when usually they'd be 19 or 20. When he mentioned this, Red Óg said, 'Ah, I was abroad for a while.'

"I thought that showed a lot of class. No mention of the AFL. Just, 'I was abroad for a while.' That's who he was. Some people would only be dying to tell you that they were on the other side of the world playing professional sport. But there was no side of him that thought he was a superstar."

IV

By April of this year, Red Óg was carving out what was, by any measure, a grand life for himself. His girlfriend, Rachel, was a Dublin southsider who couldn't have had less interest in football. They had been together since the previous September and were both doing teaching practice out in Firhouse, quietly enjoying the fact that nobody there knew they were together.

His first season as a college player had gone well. Second years don't usually make the DCU Sigerson team – and if they do, they don't make it as a midfielder. But Red Óg stood out as they won the league, albeit they came up short to UL in the championship semi-final. He twice scored penalties to overturn late deficits and one outrageous sideline kept them alive against St Mary's in Belfast when they were four down in the closing stages. He was one of two DCU players to make the team of the year.

He wasn't playing with Sligo but even that was a positive, conscious choice. He had been there for two seasons, straight out of minor. The first one turned into the Covid year and ended with Sligo pulling out of the championship. The second was under new management and though he played every game, he didn't enjoy it.

"People make rumours and gossip about Sligo but it was all fairly simple really," says Geraldine. "You hear all these stories that he fell out with management but there's nothing in them. Red Óg wanted to take a year away to concentrate on playing for DCU and to put his time into his studies. That's all it was. He was going back to play for Sligo this year."

"He needed a break," says Redmond. "There was nothing wrong with Sligo – it just wasn't his game. It was all systems and he wasn't enjoying it. His confidence was shot. We would be the same with all three of the lads – if you're not enjoying something, take a break from it."

At DCU, Christie quizzed him on it a couple of times and came away with the same conclusion. He had a lot going on and he wasn't loving it so he stepped away. Still, Christie said, you're too good not to be playing at the highest level. Don't leave it too long. Make sure you go back.

"I will," said Red Óg. "But I'm still young."

V

On the last night of his life, Red Óg gave nobody a reason to worry. His father works in Dublin three days a week and stays in digs out in Ashbourne so they would often meet up. They spoke on the phone around teatime and Redmond wondered if he wanted to go for coffee but Red Óg said no, he was tired and he was just going to stay in.

It was a Thursday night. He had plans laid out for each of the next four days. He got on to one of the teachers in the school where he was doing teaching practice and said his printer was out of ink and asked could she print off something he needed for the next day's lesson. He had a physio appointment down home booked in for Saturday.

Rachel was coming down for the weekend and they were going clothes-shopping on Saturday after the physio appointment. The Sigerson awards were on Monday night and if Red Óg was going somewhere there'd be photographers. Red Óg would be getting new threads for it. On the way down to Limerick, they had arranged to call in to visit his granny, Redmond's mother, in Galway.

This is who he was. A grown-up version of the four-year-old Redmond had to wrangle down the back of Mass. Always going, always planning. He didn't do things on a whim. He didn't do things in secret. He talked to his parents every day.

"We had no reason to believe anything was wrong," Geraldine says. "The second fellow, Oisín, is as deep as the sea. He wouldn't talk at all the way Red Óg would. Red Óg would talk to us about anything. A small thing would be a big thing for him. "He broke somebody's wing mirror in a

66

This is who he was. A grown-up version of the four-year-old Redmond had to wrangle down the back of Mass. Always going, always planning

priest, Fr Leo Henry, went above and beyond. School, football, college – all his circles contracted to hug the Murphys close. Their house in Moylough was filled with young people for the week, grieving, sharing, laughing. Youth won't be denied, even at a time like that. Especially at a time like that.

Their faith helped too. It's still helping. Somebody asked Geraldine one of the days was she cross with God and she said she couldn't be because it was a miracle they had him at all. She had a miscarriage before Red Óg came along and he was a very difficult pregnancy that they weren't ever sure would be successful until he arrived. "We had him for 21 years," she says. "I'm not a holy Joe but I couldn't be cross with God after we got that."

"We firmly believe that Red Óg is in heaven, he's just gone ahead of us in the queue," says Redmond. "He's here with us. We're still a family of five. He's just in a different form. That gives us strength. It's a positive thing."

All in all, they're doing okay. Not brilliant. Not amazing. Not, on any level, unaffected. But okay. Today they're okay. "I think for us, it's about living one day at a time. It's having the memories and reflecting on what Red Óg gave us. Focusing on loss won't get us anywhere."

In a strange kind of way, not knowing what drove Red Óg that night is a comfort to them. The fact that it makes no sense is the only way they can make sense of it.

"My one consolation is that if he was in his right mind, he wouldn't have done it," says Geraldine. "He wouldn't have dreamed of hurting us that way. Me especially. I know that. Daithi's birthday was the following weekend. There was so much going on. His mind just went and he snapped. I firmly believe that."

Red Óg was a streak across the sky. They prefer to spend their time marveling at the light rather than trying to make sense of the dark.

If you are affected by any issue in this article, please contact Pieta House on 1800-247247 or the Samaritans by telephoning 116123 (free) or Text HELP to 51444

All-Ireland club JFC final Fossa (Kerry) v Stewartstown Harps (Tyrone), Croke Park, tomorrow, 1.30pm (live on TG4)

Clifford brings a bit of Beatlemania to Fossa's magical mystery tour



Malachy Clerkin

GAA's brightest superstar has been paddling in backwaters to the delight of whoever turns up. It's like Springsteen playing dance-halls, a tenner on the door

Aoife Dowd was back home in west Kerry in mid-August. That's what you do, right? Dowd has been living and working in Dublin since the mid-2000s – "I'm what you'd call an economic migrant," she laughs – but a lot of people from a lot of places spend plenty of money to be in Kerry in August. Only the wilful wouldn't go when they have it for free.

Her home place is Brandon, on the northern tip of the Dingle Peninsula. Her club is Castlegregory, out across the bay. That Saturday was warm and gorgeous and the caravan parks in Maharees were humming. Once word got around, a cast of hundreds decided there was no better way to cap a day than to head over and watch David Clifford do his thing. He'd be doing it for Fossa but no matter. You don't get to choose what stardust hits as it falls. "My father was saying to me, 'Will we go?'" Dowd remembers. "I said, 'Of course we'll go! Sure isn't everyone going?' We got there and you could see kids in jerseys from all over the country. Laois jerseys, Limerick jerseys, Dublin jerseys. They were all down on holidays and here they were, to see David Clifford.

"There was a massive crowd. I would say it was the biggest crowd that was ever in the place since the opening of the new field in 1997. The field before in Castlegregory used have a bit of a slope in it but they redid it altogether and they opened it with a match between Kerry and Mayo in '97. That was the biggest attendance we ever had, up until this game against Fossa."

Castlegregory hung in there for much of the way and one of Dowd's neighbours held the boy prince to just two points from play. Sadly for his team, Clifford added another 1-7 from placed balls and Fossa were comfortably clear by the end.

Glastonbury

At the final whistle, it was like the gates clanking open at Glastonbury. Streams of kids ran onto the pitch, all shotgunning towards the low goals where Clifford was shaking hands with his marker. They came at such a speed that when the first one reached him, he bumped the Footballer of the Year into taking a backward step. First time for everything.

Dowd caught it all on camera and thereby invented the most wholesome sub-genre of content in Irish sport. The venue has kept changing as Fossa's run to the All-Ireland has progressed – Tralee, Castlegregory, Fossa, Annascaul, Killarney, Castlemahon, Mallow, Portlaoise.

The weather has turned colder and wetter, the background murkier and darker. But the scene is the same now as it was then – the ref blows the long whistle, every child in the ground scuds towards the Fossa number 14. Bedlam.

"There's a bit of Beatlemania to it," says Eamonn Fitzmaurice, the former Kerry manager who is in Fossa's backroom team this year.

"He came back into the dressing room last week in Portlaoise and it was the first time that he was a bit worried for some of the younger kids, that they'd maybe fall or get hurt doing it. But otherwise, it doesn't faze him at all. He's very normal, very humble."

"The crowds coming out has added to the enjoyment of it all. There's been a different energy to the games. You would always have got a bit of a crowd to junior championship matches in Kerry – I remember that from my time playing with Finuge. But nothing like this.

"We played an All-Ireland junior final in Portlaoise in 2005 and there were four clubs there that day because it was a double-header with the intermediate final. But even then, there was nothing like the



David Clifford signs autographs for young fans after a match for East Kerry in October. Below: carrying his son Ogie after Fossa beat Kilmurphy in the Munster junior football championship final in Mallow in December. Photographs: Ben Brady and Ryan Byrne/Inpho

66

We got there and you could see kids in jerseys from all over the country. Laois jerseys, Limerick jerseys, Dublin jerseys. They were all down on holidays and here they were, to see David Clifford

crowd that came last Sunday. "People came from all over the midlands to see it. I talked to people from Cavan, there were people there from Wicklow, Westmeath. Plenty of Laois people just came along for the day as well."

Something has happened here. Something unique and pure and very probably unrepeatable. The game's best player has been turning out week after week as a junior footballer. Drawing unprecedented crowds to what are, after all, matches from the lowest rung on the football ladder.

First within Kerry, as the summer lazed and lolled. Later in Munster and beyond as the winter weather came sheeting down. They have come from all over to see him. Marc Ó Sé has been managing Listry for the past couple of seasons, Fossa's next-door neighbours and sworn rivals. He ran into Tomás Ó Flatharta a while back and raised an eyebrow when Ó Flatharta said he'd been down to one of their games in the championship. It took him a moment to realise that what his uncle Páidí's old compadre was really saying was that he'd been to see Fossa and the Clifford brothers play Ó Sé's side.

As it happened, Listry handed Fossa their one defeat of the whole championship, overcoming them by point in the final group game. Both sides were already through to the knockout stages by then but when clubs separated by two miles of road meet in championship, it's no dead rubber. David Clifford missed a free at the death to draw the game and the Listry crowd harroed long and loud.



And then every kid in the place sprinted out to him, missed free or no missed free. Fossa caught them in the long grass, eventually. Come November, Listry handed the Clifford brothers pretty well for most of the Kerry junior final, sticking their best man-marker on Paudie to cut off the supply to David and finding their way to the closing stages with a four-point lead. But a scrappy late goal sent it to extra-time and David went on the rampage, whipping over score after score and ending the day with a tally of 2-12.

"I had a word with our full-back before the game," Ó Sé says. "And I said, 'Look, all you can do is your best on him. The one thing I'll say is don't poke the bear. Go out and play him but don't get it into your head that you're going to put him off his game. It's a waste of energy.'

"And in fairness, he did what we told him. He just played him straight up, no mouthing, no pulling and dragging, just did his best on him and did okay. But he picked up a yellow card so at half-time we said we'll

make a switch here. We moved our full-back off him and put his brother in there.

"It was only when the game started up again that I realised I hadn't warned the brother about not poking the bear. And sure enough, I looked up and he was digging away at him and giving him plenty in his ear. Sure Clifford went to town on us then. I was going, 'Can someone please go in there and tell him to shut the f*ck up!'"

'Swarm of kids'

By the end, Fossa were 4-15 to 0-22 to the good and the Clifford caravan was picking up speed. As losing manager, Ó Sé knew he had the customary visit to the opposition dressing room to make.

"But then I looked out onto the pitch and the swarm of kids that surrounded him. He's so giving of his time. He'd just won a county title with his friends and he was there signing everything and standing for selfies till the cows came home. I knew there'd be no way

he'd be into the dressing room for another half an hour and I wasn't going to go in and give a speech without him there. So I went off and had my shower first."

Onwards. Kerry clubs have won 18 of the 21 Munster junior titles since the competition started in 2001. Putting it mildly, these are not fixtures that have tended to draw much of an audience. And certainly never a neutral one. Until now.

Feohanagh-Castlemahon are based in west Limerick, deep in hurling country. It's the club of Tommy Quaid and Joe Quaid and home to one of the modern-day Limerick superstars in Seamie Flanagan. They play in Coolyroe, smuggled away off a byroad a few miles south of Newcastlewest. The idea that they would ever sell out a football match would have been absurd at every point in the club's history, right up until it was confirmed that David Clifford was coming up the road.

Munster Council statement, November 26th, 2022 (for immediate release): Today's Munster club junior football championship semi-final clash between Fossa (Kerry) and Castlemahon (Limerick) at Coolyroe, Quaid Park, has sold out. The Limerick venue has reached its 1,500 capacity and supporters without a ticket, including U16s, are now being asked by the Munster Council not to travel as there won't be tickets available at the grounds.

Liam Aherne has been doing commentaries on matches in and around the midwest for years – you know his voice even if you don't know his face. In early November, he got a call from Raf Rocca, owner of Streamsport Ireland who cover games for the Munster Council, asking for a favour at short notice – any chance he'll do Castlemahon's game against Waterford champions Shamrocks for him?

Grand, no hassle. And then they won. And then the news came through that they'd be playing the Cliffords next. Aherne wasted no time calling in the favour and rang Rocca straight away. "Eh, you know they way I dug you out there – can I do the Fossa game the next day?" Shameless. And just right.

"Coolyroe never saw anything like it," Aherne says. "The stand was full an hour before the game. And everybody knew it was going to be a total mismatch so it wasn't as if they were coming to see a con-

test or anything. They were coming to see David Clifford."

Scenes and snapshots. The Munster club finals were fixed for Mallow just before Christmas. Junior and intermediate in a double-header on the Saturday, senior on the Sunday. Not only did the Saturday crowd dwarf the Sunday one, the junior final held the whip-hand over everything.

In the first half of Fossa v Kilmurphy, most of the crowd gathered at the end of the pitch Clifford was playing into. At half-time, whole swathes of them trooped down to the other end and pitched camp for the second half. Towards the end, the PA announcer pleaded with fans to stay off the pitch at the full-time whistle and allow the intermediate teams warm up. He was roundly and magnificently ignored.

'Clips'

All in all, it's been a magical mystery tour, the perfect confluence of events. The Footballer of the Year, the GAA's brightest superstar, paddling in backwaters to the delight of whoever turns up. Springsteen playing dancehalls, a tenner on the door.

As long as he stays injury-free, Fossa probably won't play junior again during his career. True, these kind of scenes will likely be repeated in late summer next year whenever Fossa or East Kerry are playing but they'll nearly be performative by then. It won't be like this.

"There's a social media element to it all," Fitzmaurice points out. "I think that magnifies it to some extent. Younger supporters are all into seeing clips and being part of it and it feeds itself after a while. In fairness to David, it could get claustrophobic if he was a different sort of person. But he handles it all so well."

Maybe that changes as time passes. Clifford is 24 in a fortnight and the first phase of his career is behind him. History tells us that the biggest stars in sport shrink into themselves that bit more with each passing year. They share less of themselves, they curdle ever so slightly, they suspect – often correctly – that everyone wants something from them. If none of that happens to David Clifford, he's even more exceptional than we think.

For now, this was a spontaneous thing, a rolling snowball of organic, innocent good. A splash of wonder in a world increasingly parched of it.

TV weekend

Guide to sport on television

Saturday (Jan 14th)

SOCCER 12.30pm	BT Sport 1 (Premier League)	Man Utd v Man City
SOCCER 12.30pm	Sky Sports Football	C. Rotherham v Blackburn
GOLF 1.30pm	Sky Sports Golf	3.30am-1pm Abu Dhabi GC Hero Cup
HOCKEY 7.30am	BT Sport 4 (Men's World Cup)	New Zealand v Chile
9.30am		Netherlands v Malaysia
11.30am		Belgium v Korea
TENNIS 9.30am	Eurosport 1	7.30am-9.30am Adelaide International Final
ATP 5.30pm		
RUGBY 12.15pm	TG4 (Women's Interpros)	Munster v Leinster
2.30pm	SNOOKER	BBC2, 4.30pm-5.30pm, 7-10 Ulster v Connacht

London

Eurosport 2	1.4.30.6.45-10.30	The Masters Semi-finals
HORSE RACING	ITV4, 11.00pm-4pm	Warwick & Kempton Park
NETBALL	BBC2	England v Jamaica
GOLF	Sky Sports Golf	3.45pm-1am Sony Open in Hawaii
HONOLULU		
GAA	TG4 (Club Hurling Finals)	J. Ballygiblin v Easkey

7pm

I: Monaleen v Tuairín	
SOCCER	BT Sport 1 from 6.15pm Serie A: Lecce v AC Milan Inter Milan v Verona
SOCCER	Sky Sports Premier League Brentford v Bournemouth
RUGBY	BT Sport 2 (Champions Cup) Bulls v Exeter Saracens v Lyon
SOCCER	BT Sport 4 Ligue 1: Marseille v Lorient
NBA	Sky Sports Arena Bucks @ Heat
SOCCER	LaLiga TV & Premier Sports 1

8pm

LL: R Sociedad v At Bilbao	
NFL	Sky Sports NFL (WC play-offs) Seahawks @ 49ers Chargers @ Jaguars
SOCCER	BT Sport 3 Serie A: Sassuolo v Lazio
SOCCER	Sky Sports Football WSL: Arsenal v Chelsea
RUGBY	BT Sport 1 (Champions Cup) London Irish v Stormers Racing 92 v Harlequins
SNOOKER	BBC2, 1pm-5.15pm, 7-10pm Eurosport 2, 12.45-4, 6.45-10 The Masters Final
GOLF	Sky Sports Golf
Abu Dhabi GC	Hero Cup
HOCKEY	BT Sport 2 (Men's World Cup)

11.30am

Spain v Wales	
England v India	
SOCCER	BT Sport 3 Serie A: Sassuolo v Lazio
SOCCER	Sky Sports Football WSL: Arsenal v Chelsea
RUGBY	BT Sport 1 (Champions Cup) London Irish v Stormers Racing 92 v Harlequins
SNOOKER	BBC2, 1pm-5.15pm, 7-10pm Eurosport 2, 12.45-4, 6.45-10 The Masters Final
GOLF	Sky Sports Golf
Abu Dhabi GC	Hero Cup
HOCKEY	BT Sport 2 (Men's World Cup)

3.30pm

I: Galbally v Rathmore	
SOCCER	Sky Sports Premier League Newcastle Utd v Fulham Tottenham v Arsenal
SOCCER	BBC1 (Women's SL) Manchester Utd v Liverpool
SOCCER	LaLiga TV LL: Almeria v At Madrid
GOLF	Sky Sports Golf
Waiata CC	Sony Open in Hawaii
SOCCER	BT Sport 2 L1: Monaco v Ajaccio
NFL	Sky Sports NFL (WC play-offs) Dolphins @ Bills

9.30pm

Giants v Vikings	
Ravens @ Bengals	
NBA	Sky Sports Arena Knicks @ Pistons Warriors @ Bulls
SOCCER	BT Sport 2 Spanish Super Cup Final Real Madrid v Barcelona
SOCCER	6.45pm WSL: West Ham v Man City
SOCCER	7.45pm BT Sport 3 L1: Rennes v PSG
TENNIS	Eurosport, midnight-1pm Day 1 Australian Open