

**READY FOR THE OFF:** Davy Russell and his dad Jerry in the stables at the family home in Youghal, County Cork  
PICTURES: Mick O'Neill



# One for the road...

**T**HIS is it. The last dance. Davy Russell's final Cheltenham Festival after 23 years. One last ride around the fairground and then no more. "It mightn't be," says Davy with a wink. He gets the response he's half expecting from his dad Jerry, who is sitting across the road with his arms folded. "Fucking sure it will be," says Jerry. "It will be the last one." Davy is grinning now. Jerry is shaking his head. It's Tuesday morning in Youghal, exactly one week out from the start of the 2023 Festival and father and son are sharing stories about Cheltenham and a whole lot more. Davy's brother-in-law Colman Walsh passes around cups of tea. Conversation flows from Tyrone beating Kerry to Veronica Guerin

## DAVID COUGHLAN spends a day with Davy Russell and his dad Jerry as the legendary jockey prepares for his final appearances at the Cheltenham Festival

and of course, the Festival. Like the time Davy won the Gold Cup on Lord Windermere, or the time Jerry rode a lawnmower to the racetrack, or the time Davy pitched off school to watch the Stayers' Hurdle, or the one time Jerry was really worried for Davy's health at Cheltenham. That last one was 10 years ago when the jockey suffered a punctured lung on the Thursday of the 2013 meeting. "There was a woman in the medical tent that day, she saved his life," says Jerry. "There was air trapped in his

lung, she stuck a needle into him and released the pressure. "That doctor was absolutely brilliant. I reckon she saved his life. He was very ill. "That was one of the only times I got worried about his health after a fall. I never said it to Phyllis, she would've freaked out." Thankfully the good times have far outweighed the bad and Davy goes into this week with 25 Festival winners to his name — more than any other jockey still riding. March has always been a special month in the Russell household. It was in March 1996 that Davy had

Tuesday in early March 2023, but the farmyard is bathed in sunshine. A 1979 Renault 12 is parked just outside the back door. Jerry bought it a while back to restore and maybe sell it on, but there was a bit of sentiment in the purchase as well. "1979, yeah that was the year World War III started. World War III started the day he was born," says Jerry, laughing. "Ah I'm only joking. If I had to honest, I'd say he was the favourite, he was spoiled. "He's the hero of the family, but he'd never be told that. He'd be kept level. "But they all look up to him, He's hard enough to deal with at times, but his heart is in the right place..." Jerry is the one grinning now. So how does that make Davy feel? "Mighty," he says, deadpan. **Continued on next page**

**From page 9**  
**D**avy is one of six siblings, along with brothers Diarmuid and Sean and sisters Finuala, Eimear and Aileen. His dad is Cork through and through, but Phyllis was from Meath and Sundays were often spent in Croke Park. Particularly when the Rebels met the Royals. "We used to go to mass above in Meath in the morning and the priest would see us at the back of the church and announce it over the microphone," says Davy. "We had some great days, driving all over the place, through every town you can think of." Back then Jerry ran a Renault dealership as well as a small farm. He had horses too, ponies and point-to-pointers and was chairman of Youghal town council. He was also involved in the local GAA club and coached athletics. And wherever Jerry went, the young Davy went too. "I was an extra limb on him," says Davy. "If he said he was going to the moon, I'd want to go." Weekends were often spent at point-to-point meetings and Jerry had one rule, according to Davy. "We'd arrive at the field and he'd say, 'Be here, in the car, as they cross the line for the last race, or I'll be gone,'" says Davy. "At the end of the day he'd be in the car, in the queue, leaving the field and we'd be going along checking all the cars because he might have a different car from the garage on a different Sunday. "He never left without us." Jerry's trips to Cheltenham also captured Davy's imagination — even if the toys brought home were more important than what happened at the track. Or even on the way to the track. "I remember one year going over and it was the height of the Troubles in the North," says Jerry. "And all the Irish were viewed like terrorists at the time. "The day before we left, I rang Tom Costello because his son was riding a horse called Over The Road. "We were half an hour talking about this foal and that foal and just as he was putting the phone down, he said, 'Over The Road will win'. "We drove over and we were pulled in at the customs and we got a fair grueling from this fella. 'Where are you going, with whom, with what?' "I said, 'We're going to Cheltenham. We go there every year. "He was a huge fella, a hardy boy. Ah look, I know he'd only a job to do. "Reminders of Davy's amazing career are dotted around the house. Riding silks, photos and a cabinet full of trophies. "I says, 'I do, but I won't tell you and you after grueling us'. "But he kept at me, so eventually I says, 'Okay I'll give you the horse... Over The Road'. "Tom Costello Jr was riding Over The Road in the four-miler on the Wednesday of the old three-day

**“PHYLLIS SAID I'D BE BETTER OFF COMING HOME TO CUT THE GRASS HERE INSTEAD OF AT CHELTENHAM!”**



**GRASS ACT:** Jerry Russell with a photograph of himself from the day he rode a lawnmower to the 1982 Cheltenham Festival and (below) Davy celebrates winning the Gold Cup in 2014

meeting in March 1988. It turned out to be the same day as the Milltown Cemetery attacked as tensions in the North reached boiling point. But the atmosphere was very different at the checkpoint on the way back. "So the horse won at 10-1," says Jerry. "We were delighted. "We get to the customs again and I see the hand go up. And he signals to roll down the window. Same fella. "And he says, 'Now, the next time you're passing, you'll have no problem, you'll be straight through!' He was a different man altogether. "All of them at the customs, they all backed him, every one of them!" Reminders of Davy's amazing career are dotted around the house. Riding silks, photos and a cabinet full of trophies. "I says, 'I do, but I won't tell you and you after grueling us'. "But he kept at me, so eventually I says, 'Okay I'll give you the horse... Over The Road'. "Tom Costello Jr was riding Over The Road in the four-miler on the Wednesday of the old three-day meeting in March 1988. It turned out to be the same day as the Milltown Cemetery attacked as tensions in the North reached boiling point. But the atmosphere was very different at the checkpoint on the way back. "So the horse won at 10-1," says Jerry. "We were delighted. "We get to the customs again and I see the hand go up. And he signals to roll down the window. Same fella. "And he says, 'Now, the next time you're passing, you'll have no problem, you'll be straight through!' He was a different man altogether. "All of them at the customs, they all backed him, every one of them!" Reminders of Davy's amazing career are dotted around the house. Riding silks, photos and a cabinet full of trophies. "I says, 'I do, but I won't tell you and you after grueling us'. "But he kept at me, so eventually I says, 'Okay I'll give you the horse... Over The Road'. "Tom Costello Jr was riding Over The Road in the four-miler on the Wednesday of the old three-day

**ON THE ROAD AGAIN:** Davy Russell and his dad Jerry standing with a Renault 12 in the yard of the family home in Youghal, County Cork  
PICTURES: Mick O'Neill



**“I WAS AN EXTRA LIMB ON HIM. IF HE SAID HE WAS GOING TO THE MOON, I'D WANT TO GO...”**

but Jesus it was freezing. The frost was hopping off the ground." He had a can of petrol tucked between his legs as he set off. After a few miles Maycock alerted the media and soon Jerry was being followed by reporters. About five miles from the racecourse he stopped the mower to phone Phyllis. "No sooner did she put the phone down and *The Cork Examiner* rang her," he says. "He had got word of it. Thank God I told her first! "I think she said something like, 'He'd be better to come home and cut the grass here than cut the grass in Cheltenham!'" He eventually reached the track and parked between a Bentley and a Rolls Royce and later that day the mayor of Cheltenham presented him with a cup for the most outrageous event of the year. Davy was reared on such songs and stories, but it was the horses that mattered most to him. When Paddy Kiely, from nearby Dungarvan, had a chance in the 1993 Stayers' Hurdle with Shuil Ar Aghaidh, he skipped off school to watch the race with his friend Seamus Budds. "We went down to Cashman's betting shop to watch it," he says. "I wasn't coming home here to watch it, because I'd be shot, because I'd skipped off school." Jerry rolls his eyes. "Oh yeah, he done plenty of that in his day," says Jerry. Charlie Swan was on board the 20-1 shot for Kiely and Davy can still recall the scene as Shuil Ar Aghaidh reeled in Pragada for the famous win. "I can remember the crowd at the betting shop and we trying to push in and we couldn't push in and we had to look in through the window," he says. "I just remember the noise when the horse won. The place went wild." It flicked a switch and later he would be at the centre of many wild days in the Cheltenham winners' enclosure himself after huge wins on horses like Weapon's Amnesty, Mall Dini, Balco Des Flos, First Lieutenant, Presenting Percy, Lord Windermere and Tiger Roll. But Jerry recalls one afternoon between the flags even more fondly

than those big occasions. "I remember he rode five winners at Bartley one day," says Jerry. "I stood in the one place. There was a little gateway going into the parade ring. I never moved out of it. I stood there all day and I never enjoyed anything as much in my life." Davy's first Cheltenham ride came on Toni's Tip for Ferdy Murphy in the 2000 Kim Muir. His first Festival winner came on Native Jack in the 2006 Cross Country Chase and the following year he became number one for Michael O'Leary's Gigginstown operation. "There were many ups and downs with Gigginstown, notably when Davy lost his job as retained rider on New Year's Eve in 2013, but Jerry and Phyllis were always behind him. "The time he lost his job with Gigginstown and he phoned me," says Jerry. "I just said, 'You're still a good jockey, you will come back'. And the same season he won the Gold Cup. That was brilliant. "Myself and Phyllis were in Tenerife that year. She was back at the apartment. She couldn't watch when your man was running. She'd



**CHANCE:** Davy Russell on board Gold Cup hope conflated

be afraid he'd get a fall. She'd never admit that and she was always supportive to him, but she'd be worried about him. "I was watching it in a pub and the place was hopping and I rang her up and told her he'd won. It was just brilliant." Davy etched his name in racing history with back-to-back Aintree Grand National wins on Tiger Roll, but three years ago his career looked over with a horrific neck injury following a fall in the Munster National. He spent months in a neck brace and was off the track for nearly a year, but last season he was back on the track and back riding Grade One winners again. "I knew he'd fucking come back," says Jerry. "He's stubborn, he'd be like me with that. I'd be stubborn and determined. He's wicked determined." The determination comes from Phyllis too. "She was a determined woman," says Jerry. "She was sick for 16 years and her quality of life, especially in the last four or five years, was very poor. "But she did not want to die. She loved life."

Of all the great Cheltenham memories, and there are too many to list, Jerry's most cherished is the year he went to the Festival with Phyllis in a Renault. As it happens, it was a Renault 12. "I remember we stayed in Abergavenny. It was the best trip I ever had," he says. "I always try and poke out one good bet, one good winner for the week. And that year I got one. "Phyllis, she always wanted a sewing machine. And I bought her a Toyota sewing machine out of the winnings. It was the best thing." Jerry has his flights for the coming week, booked by his daughter-in-law Edelle, and he's looking forward to watching Davy at the famous venue again. "For the man himself, it's an unexpected pleasure to be riding there again. He retired just before Christmas and only returned to help out trainer Gordon Elliott when Jack Kennedy broke his leg. It's bonus territory, but he won't be spending any extra time smelling the coffee and soaking up the atmosphere. "I'll soak it in afterwards. When it's all done," says Davy. "Cheltenham is not a place for soaking it in. There's no mercy over there." His final ride could come in the Gold Cup on Conflated and Jerry believes the horse has a big chance. Whatever happens, he will be there to support and advise and help in any way he can. "As you get older, your body isn't able to take the tormentation that you get in that game," says Jerry. "But I never told him what to do in his career, we supported him absolutely." Jerry holds his hand at his knees. "Since he was that height, he was supported," says Jerry. "He has uncles and aunts and cousins all over the country and he's the hero to them all. He's a hero, north, south, east and west." And as for Davy's hero? "Himself over there," he says, gesturing at his dad. "Always was." The room falls silent. The wisecracking and storytelling have stopped. For a moment the two are lost in thought. Maybe lost in a hundred thousand memories of car trips and childhood and family and the Festival. The arrival of Tess (3) and Liam (4) breaks the quiet. Tess wants some Nutella and crackers. Liam wants to play cowboys with Grandad and Jack the dog. Back to reality, back to the present day. And soon Davy will be back down to business. Back at Cheltenham for one final encore. For one more time. One for the road? Davy and Jerry are both teetotalers, so the parting glass is always going to be tea. So this is it. Take your places, the last dance is about to begin.

## DAVY'S CHELTENHAM FESTIVAL WINNERS

- 2006 - Native Jack (Cross Country Chase)
- 2007 - Joes Edge (Festival Trophy Handicap Chase)
- 2008 - Nalad du Misselot (Coral Cup)
- 2008 - Tiger Cry (Grand Annual Chase)
- 2009 - Weapons Amnesty (Albert Bartlett Nov Hdle)
- 2010 - Weapons Amnesty (RSA Novices' Chase)
- 2011 - First Lieutenant (Neptune Novices' Hurdle)
- 2011 - Carlito Brigante (Coral Cup)
- 2012 - Sir des Champs (JLT Novices' Chase)
- 2013 - Lord Windermere (RSA Novices' Chase)
- 2014 - Tiger Roll (Triumph Hurdle)
- 2014 - Lord Windermere (Cheltenham Gold Cup)
- 2014 - Savello (Grand Annual Chase)
- 2015 - Windsor Park (Neptune Novices' Hurdle)
- 2015 - Rivage D'Or (Cross Country Chase)
- 2016 - Diamond King (Coral Cup)
- 2016 - Mall Dini (Pertemps Final)
- 2017 - Presenting Percy (Pertemps Final)
- 2018 - Presenting Percy (RSA Novices' Chase)
- 2018 - Delta Work (Pertemps Final)
- 2018 - Balco des Flos (Ryanair Chase)
- 2018 - The Storyteller (Brown Plate)
- 2020 - Envoi Allen (Ballymore Novices' Hurdle)
- 2020 - Samcro (Marsh Novices' Chase)
- 2020 - Chosen Mate (Grand Annual Chase)



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DUAL JEWEL: McCarthy

KERRY'S PARIS A CAPITAL TALENT

Daragh SMALL

ONE year into her senior intercounty career Paris McCarthy has already experienced the glory of a Lidl National League title and a TG4 All-Ireland senior final appearance.

It was an immense season for Kerry and, in the early weeks of 2023, it's what keeps the fire lit in the Dome at East Tennessee State University.

The 19-year-old, capped at underage level for Ireland, is busy with her basketball scholarship, hoping one day to make it in the WNBA. Equally talented as a footballer, when she returns to the Kingdom fold, McCarthy will be one of a number of Castleisland Desmonds' stars looking to drive Kerry on to the next level.

Inspired

Daragh Long and Declan Quill inspired them team to a perfect run in Division 2 of the League before they secured a 1-12 to 0-12 victory over Armagh in the final at Croke Park.

The momentum continued into the summer months, as they finished top of the pile in Group 3 of the TG4 All-Ireland group series.

A brilliant 4-10 to 0-13 win against Mayo in final four secured a final date against champions Meath.

The Royallettes were just a bridge too far in the final at Croke Park but they learned plenty and will return this year with an even bigger point to prove.

"There is an indoor football field for American Football, I bring my Gaelic football with me and my boots.

"I practise kicking and skill-work, just so I'm not losing my touch," says McCarthy.

It's been a crazy year, but look

where I am now



ON HER BIKE: Imogen Cotter in action and (left) getting ready for the new season

'Bruce and Faith have become my Girona parents. I'm lucky to have them'

'I was just crying every day. I was struggling to process it all...'

IMOGEN Cotter is a long way from Idaho, but the US state has become a big part of her life.

That's through the retired couple Bruce Wicherski and Faith Miller.

"They've become my Girona parents," says the Irish cyclist. "They're brilliant and they've become good friends with my parents Fintan and Grania too."

"They've even been to stay with them in Ireland. I feel really lucky to have them in my life."

Cotter moved to Spain just over a year ago to start a career as a professional in the peloton and the Idaho couple of have been a huge support to her.

But the moment the friendship began could hardly have been more traumatic.

Last January Cotter was on a training ride when she was hit by a van overtaking a cyclist on the opposite side of the road.

Her bike was broken into five pieces and she was thrown into the air, landing on the van's windscreen, before hitting the ground.

She woke up to find Bruce by her side.

"Faith was a nurse. When I was hit, Bruce rang Faith. He didn't know if I had internal bleeding or not. He thought I was dying," she says.

Minutes

"It took 40 minutes for an ambulance to arrive. Faith just said: 'Hold her hand.' That's something I remember so clearly."

"Every time I opened my eyes, he was there, which was such a relief. I think Bruce was my guardian angel that day."

She was taken to Girona's Trueta Hospital where her long road to recovery began.

"I think when you look it up on Google it says I broke some bones, which makes it sound so trivial," she says.

"It was actually a lot of damage."

She shattered her kneecap, severely ruptured tendons in her knee and fractured the radius and ulna bones in her arm.

Given the damage to the van and her bike, she was lucky to be alive. The mental scars were just as deep.

"The more detail you remember, the worse it is," she says.

"The first month afterwards I was waking up every night just remembering the smack of hitting off the windscreen of the



David COUGHLAN EXCLUSIVE

INSPIRATIONAL IMOGEN ON HER LONG ROAD BACK FROM HORROR CRASH

den at elite level — but she was a runner first, competing on the track and in cross-country races.

After university she moved to London and spent time working in shops and bars, wondering what to do next.

Contract

In 2017 she joined Cycling Ireland's talent transfer team and made the switch to road racing with a bike.

She never looked back. Four years later she was national champion and signing a professional contract with the

Belgian Plantur-Pura team — now Alpecin-Fenix.

Unfortunately she didn't get to wear the Irish national champion's jersey in a competitive race last year.

Physical

The end of the physical recovery was just the beginning of another cycle of healing.

"I guess all of the surgery, that side of things had died down. I didn't have to think about when my next surgery was," she says.

Her recovery was lengthy and painful. Two knee surgeries, three surgeries on her arm and months of rehab.

Amazingly she returned to the peloton in late August.

"I've actually started going to therapy, starting to deal with it all, which has really helped."

The support of her team has been crucial and she will be riding in their second tier line-up this season with ambitions to make the step up to WorldTour level sooner rather than later.

Getting through the one-year anniversary of the accident on January 26 is the first step.

"One year. It's simultaneously

gone incredibly fast and incredibly slow," she says.

"I'll be relieved when the one year is out of the way. The build-up to it...I've been thinking, 'This time last year what was I doing?'"

"I think I'll be happy when I'm on the other side of it and can just focus on racing again. It's been crazy year."

Campaign

Cotter is back in Girona, back training and getting ready for the new campaign.

She'll be in the small town of Benicassim as part of a pre-season camp when the anniversary comes and goes and she wants to turn the occasion into a positive.

"I had a call with my coach the other day and I said to him

I wanted to flag it because I'm really nervous about that date," she says.

"He said, 'If you want to get on the bike there that day or if you don't or if you need to talk to someone, we're going to be there for you.'"

"That's really how they've been throughout the whole thing. It's been really amazing."

"If the team had decided to walk away, I would've had to understand that. Cycling isn't a charity, it's a business."

"But they were there every step of the way."

"My coach said that maybe on that day I can take a moment and pat myself on my shoulder and say 'I made it through that year'. Maybe I don't have to do it in a sad way. I can look it at and say, 'It's a year, but look where I



TEAM COTTER: (L-R): Fintan MacCoitir, Imogen Cotter, her sister Phoebe Cotter Salisbury, Faith Miller, Bruce Wicherski and Imogen's mum, Grania Cotter



LONG ROAD BACK: Imogen Cotter recovering last year and (right) pictures from her Instagram account of her knee from February 2022 to January 2023



KILLESTER A TOUGH ONE FOR MAREE

Declan KING

THE big game this weekend in the InsureMyVan men's league is the clash of high-flying cup finalists University of Galway Maree and Killester.

"We have never beaten Killester and unless we are fully ready both physically and mentally for the challenge we'll be in for a long night," says Galway coach Charlie Crowley.

Elsewhere, the other finalists, DBS Eanna, go to Garvey's Tralee.

"We still have a number of injuries that need care over the next few weeks so I'll be waiting on physio reports," says Eanna's coach Darren McGovern.

Emporium Cork Basketball will be trying to get back on track against Griffith College Templeogue.

Bright St Vincent's, still without Stefan Zecevic, are at home to Energise Ireland Neptune, while Belfast Star play Moycullen and EJ Sligo All Stars are at home to Flexachem Killorglin.

Travel

In the Women's MissQuote Superleague, cup finalists Killester travel to Leitrim Americans.

Liffey Celtics this evening, with home coach Karl Kilbride coming up against his former club.

"We know our performance will have to be much improved from recent games if we are to get a win," he says.

Killester's opponents in the cup final next weekend, Trinity Meteors, are in action again today against their semi-final opposition DCU Mercy.

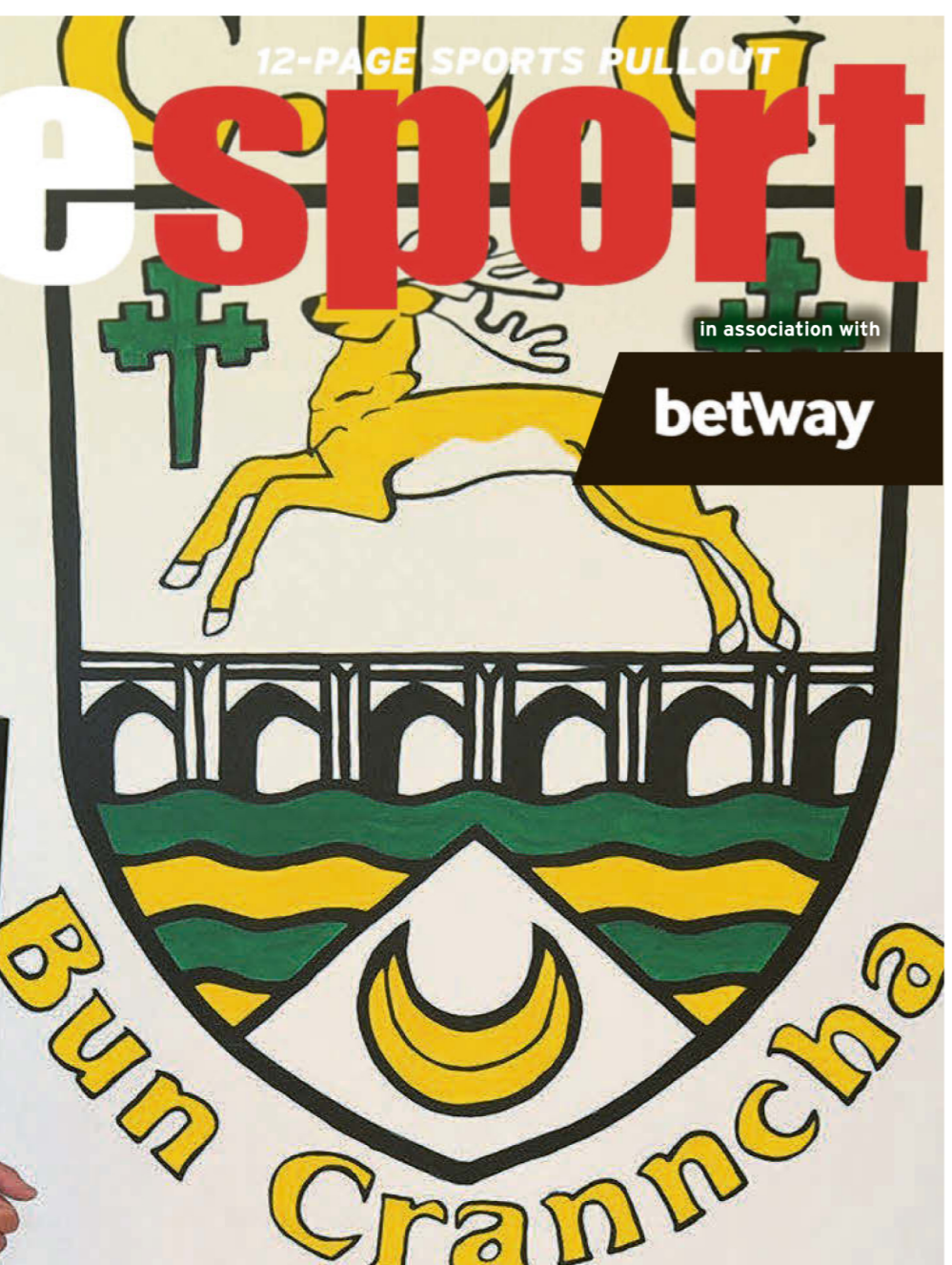
There are two games in Cork tomorrow afternoon, with The Address UCC Glanmire playing University of Galway Mystics and Singleton's Supervalu Brunell are at home to Ulster University.

Glanmire's Mark Scannell is delighted to be back in action after missing the cup last week.

"It was a tough weekend not being involved in the cup but we are ready to get back to league action with a league assignment against a very dangerous Galway team. "But we'll be ready for them."

# inside sport

12-PAGE SPORTS PULLOUT



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# FROM DESPAIR TO HERE

### THE STORY OF HOW A FOOTBALL TOURNAMENT IS STILL HELPING BUNCRANA DEAL WITH GRIEF, 25 YEARS ON FROM OMAGH BOMB

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**David COUGHLAN** EXCLUSIVE

**MICHAEL** McMenamin was listening to a match on the radio when he heard the news.

A car bomb in Omagh had ripped the town apart, killing many instantly and injuring hundreds more.

Twenty-nine people would eventually die from the blast in the single-worst atrocity of the Troubles.

"Every time you'd go through Omagh, you'd think about that day," says McMenamin.

"It was August 15, 1998, a good fine summer's day.

"I remember I was working here at the house and listening to Highland Radio commentary on some match.

"Tom Comack interrupted the match to say there'd been a bomb in Omagh.

"As the details came through it got worse and worse and worse."

It was just four months since the signing of the Good Friday Agreement and the market town had been busy with shoppers.

Among them were a group of young children from Bun crana in Co Donegal with some Spanish friends, who had taken a trip to visit the nearby American Folk Park.

**News**

Seán Clerkin was a Garda in Bun crana and working in the station on that day 25 years ago when word filtered through.

"I remember where I was clearly when I heard the news. It was around four o'clock," says Clerkin.

"I was in the station and I remember a detective shouting over to me: 'There's been a bad bomb in Omagh'.

"Then he started explaining about the busload from Bun crana that had gone down. It was terrible.

Members of the dissident republican group the Real IRA had packed a red Vauxhall Cavalier full of explosives. The car was parked on Market Street in Omagh.

Vague warnings sent to UTV about the bomb's location then led to police inadvertently moving shoppers down Market Street, the very location of the device.

At 3.10pm, the 500lb bomb detonated in a deadly fireball.

Oran Doherty (8), Seán McLaughlin (11) and James Barker (13) from Bun crana were among the victims, along with young student Fernando Blasco Baselga (12) and group leader Rocio Abad Ramos (23), both from Spain.

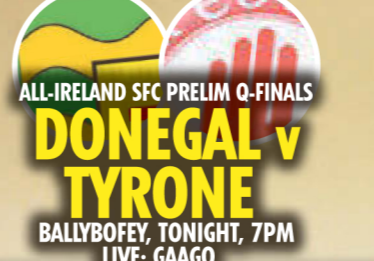
Doherty and McLaughlin lived just four doors down from each other in Knockala Drive in the small town on the Inishowen peninsula.

McMenamin was the Donegal GAA Officer at the time and knew of the two families.

For Clerkin, the tragedy was even closer as the Barker family were his neighbours.

He remembers the devastation in Bun crana's tight-knit community.

# When a young person dies it impacts everyone



**HISTORY IN THEIR HANDS:** Seán Clerkin (left) pictured with Malachy McCann, Bun crana club chairman, holding photos of previous winners of the Bun crana Cup and (right, from top): the aftermath of the Omagh bomb; Michael McMenamin hands the trophy to Derry's Barry McGoldrick in 2011; Donegal's U16 team celebrate winning the 2018 edition of the event

## 25 YEARS ON, FOOTBALL STILL HELPING BUNCRANA REMEMBER VICTIMS OF OMAGH BOMB

"It drew a very large crowd in the first years with people from all over Donegal descending on Bun crana.

"And a lot of good young players from across Ulster would've played in it."

**Future Donegal stars Karl Lacey, Michael Doherty, Ronan Mac Niallais and Eamon McGee all played on the winning team in the competition's first year.**

As the tournament grew it became an important fixture in the calendar for the best players at Under-16 in Ulster.

Tyrone's Peter Harte played in the 2006 final, while Ireland and Everton star Seamus Coleman was on Donegal's 2004 winning side.

McMenamin was delighted with the reaction to the competition, but a family tragedy of his own meant he had to step away from involvement.

"I stayed involved for the first couple of years, but we'd a son died in 2001," he says, quietly.

"Maurice was his name, Maurice McMenamin, 20 years of age, he died from meningitis, suddenly. It was a tough experience.

**Losing**

"You hear of anybody losing a young person now and ... you know how they feel.

"And you know what they're going through and the difficulties they're having."

He remained involved in his local club and its reputation was such that when Jim McGuinness was Donegal manager he brought the Muff man on board to look after logistics.

It meant he even got his hands on Sam Maguire in Croke Park in 2012, something he never thought possible.

"Brilliant experience," says McMenamin.

"He ran a tight ship, but very easy to work with. Provided you did what you had to do, he didn't bother you and didn't interfere."

"Exceptional man, a great motivator.

"It was incredible to get an All-Ireland and lift the Sam Maguire in the Hogan Stand. I never thought I would do it, at my age!"

Clerkin guided Donegal's minors to the Ulster title in 2006

"I think the first year it was played was 2000," says McMenamin.

"The first year there were six counties, then all nine Ulster counties."

"In more recent years it's been broadened out to include other teams like Dublin."

**Start**

From the start, the competition was well received.

"The families always attend the finals," says McMenamin.

"It would've been emotional for the families and the people of Bun crana in the first years.

that memory will always be there.

"The heartbreak of the parents, the brothers and sisters and uncles and aunts. It was just terrible."

**Hits**

"When there's a death, especially a young person, it hits everyone hard.

"It impacted us all."

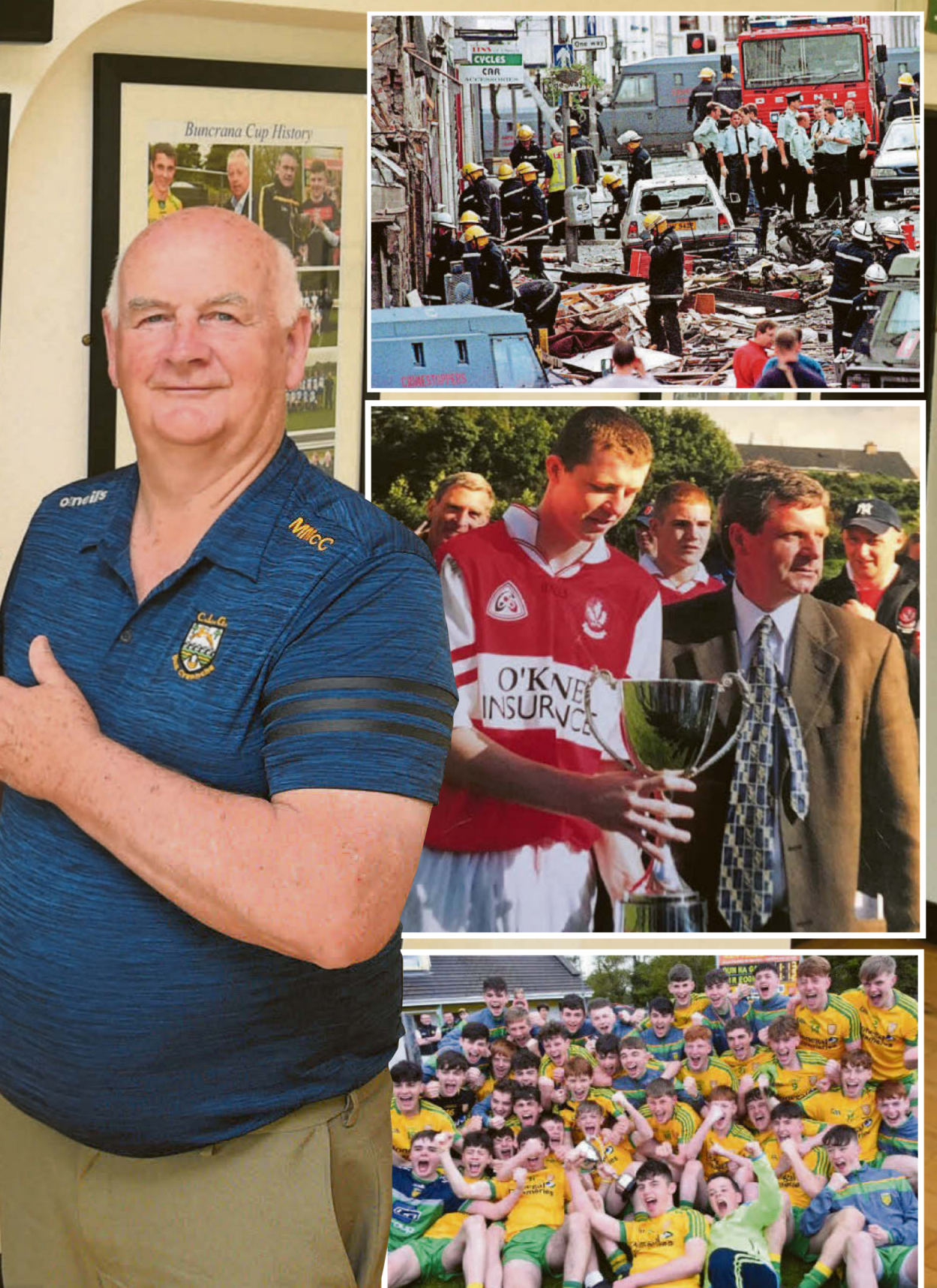
McMenamin was heavily involved in the county Under-16 development team at the time

with Donegal legend Martin McHugh.

**Together with John McConnell, he and McHugh began the process of organising a football competition to be played in honour of those who lost their lives in Omagh.**

It was to be an Ulster-wide tournament for Under-16 county teams, with the condition that the final would always be played in Bun crana.

And so the Bun crana Cup was born.



Same as every other year.

"To look forward 25 years seems an eternity, but when you look back 25 years it seems to have gone very fast," says McMenamin.

He stops for a moment.

"Maybe not for those directly involved," he says with a sharp intake of breath.

"I'm sure they've gone through an awful lot since then. Losing sons, daughters, mothers, fathers.

"I'm sure it's been a long tough time on them.

"I suppose it keeps their names alive.

"You'd hope every year, the Bun crana Cup, people will remember how it came about and what was the purpose of it.

"And hopefully it lives on."

They then crashed out tamerly to Down in the Ulster Championship and a recent independent report criticised aspects of how Donegal GAA was being run.

But in recent weeks, players like Conor O'Donnell, who played in the 2016 Bun crana Cup final, have been reviving the county's fortunes on the field.

"Donegal have a good record against Tyrone in Ballybofey," says Clerkin.

"Donegal has had its own problems, but there's some good young players coming through. This is game will put a bit of confidence into them.

"The team that played against Monaghan, probably only six of them played in the Ulster final last year.

"For all the negativity going through Donegal, it's good to see them doing well."



REVIVAL: O'Donnell

## 'HOME COMFORT COULD BE KEY'

David COUGHLAN

SEAN Clerkin is hopeful Donegal's young team can continue their good recent form against fierce rivals Tyrone this evening.

It's been a difficult season on and off the field for the county and victory against Monaghan last weekend was a welcome boost for their supporters.

This evening Donegal face a Tyrone side who have struggled themselves since winning the All-Ireland two years ago, but one with more experience in their ranks.

Donegal are vastly changed from the side that were beaten in last year's Ulster final and finished bottom in Division One of the League this season.

## Crashed

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