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**Diaspora and Rootedness, Amateurism and Professionalism in
Media Discourses of Irish Soccer and Rugby in the 1990s and
2000s**

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Diaspora and Rootedness,
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Professionalism in Media
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THIS ARTICLE EXPLORES the tensions between conceptualizations of the nation in terms of diaspora and rootedness, and between amateurism and professionalism, in Irish media discourses of Irish soccer and rugby in the 1990s and 2000s. Given the article's broad scope and limited space, detailed theoretical elaboration and extensive examination of discursive data will not be possible.¹ Rather, the article offers a tentative overview of how these tensions have been manifested in Irish print and broadcast media, and of how they have evinced fantasies and anxieties about sporting achievement as indicative of collective national achievement.

The popularized notion of diaspora in Irish society in the 1990s facilitated the transformation of Ireland's history of emigration into a narrative of emigrant success in the global economy. Emigrant profes-

1. The conceptual and analytical frame informing the article draws on various perspectives on the discursive construction of national and gender identity. See, for example, Eileen Kennedy, "Watching the Game: Theorising Masculinities in the Context of Mediated Tennis," in *Sport and Gender Identities: Masculinities, Femininities, and Sexualities*, ed. Cara Aitchison (London: Routledge, 2006): 22–33; Hywel Bishop and Adam Jaworski, "'We Beat 'Em': Nationalism and the Hegemony of Homogeneity in the British Press Reportage of Germany Versus England during Euro 2000," *Discourse & Society* 14, no. 3 (2003): 243–71; Joseph Maguire and Emma Poulton, "European Identity Politics in Euro '96: Invented Traditions and National Habitus Codes," *International Review for the Sociology of Sport* 34, no. 1 (1999): 17–29; and Pablo Alabarces, Alan Tomlinson, and Christopher Young, "Argentina Versus England at the France '98 World Cup: Narratives of Nation and the Mythologizing of the Popular," *Media Culture Society* 23 (2001): 547–66.

sional footballers were seen as exemplars, their success indicative of “native” qualities rooted in national community. A peculiarity of Irish sport is the overwhelming popularity of the amateur Gaelic Athletic Association (GAA), whose games are not played internationally.² Although soccer and rugby lag behind GAA games in levels of domestic participation and spectatorship, their international contests attract considerable media and popular attention in Ireland.³ The Republic of Ireland soccer team’s participation in the 1988 European championships and the 1990, 1994, and 2002 World Cup tournaments with teams composed exclusively of emigrant or emigrant-descended players coincided with the popularization (and was cited as exemplary) of the concept of diaspora at this time and with a reimagining of Irish emigrant history as a narrative of success rather than economic and cultural failure.⁴

However, paid sportsmen make unstable heroic objects of investment. Extensively publicized refusals of national selection by high-profile players have highlighted the fragility of projections of national heroism and shown how the economic power and cultural significance of clubs as employers conflict with those of international competition. By contrast, Irish success in international club-rugby in the 2000s has generated sporting heroes whose success is traced to amateur commitment to place and community despite rugby’s professionalization in 1995. This attribution offered a vision of a nationally sustainable professional game where player professionalism was driven by local rootedness, despite the provinces’ regional rather than traditional club status. Journalists and other commentators in the Irish media depicted rugby’s crossing of amateur/professional, middle/working-class, urban/rural, and North/South divides as the successful national integration of multiple masculinities, a narrative that contrasts with predominantly working-class emigration to British professional football. Hence there arose an ideologically loaded

2. The exception is the “International Rules” series, commenced in 1984, between Irish and Australian teams drawn from Gaelic football and Australian-rules football.

3. Mike Cronin, *Sport and Nationalism in Ireland: Gaelic Games, Soccer, and Irish Identity since 1884* (Dublin: Four Courts, 1999), 117.

4. See Catherine Nash, *Of Irish Descent: Origin Stories, Genealogy, and the Politics of Belonging* (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 2008), 26.

parable of “native” masculine achievement despite the catastrophic decline of Ireland’s economy beginning in late 2007.

“CHERISHING THE DIASPORA”?

Greeting the Irish soccer team on their “homecoming” from the USA ’94 World Cup, President Mary Robinson showed them the candle in a window of Áras an Uachtaráin, placed there on her inauguration in 1990 to represent the Irish diaspora. In acknowledging their emigrant and emigrant-descended status,⁵ she compounded her inaugural speech’s recognition of the self-identified 70 million people worldwide claiming Irish descent, and prefigured her 1995 “Cherishing the Diaspora” speech to the Oireachtas.⁶ In Raidió Teilifís Éireann (RTÉ) television news bulletins (7 July 1994), as the players shuffled uneasily behind Robinson, reporter Charlie Bird enthused that “never have a nation’s scattered children and grandchildren provoked so much pride at home.” Fintan O’Toole similarly claimed that the team’s composition symbolized a nation “capable of turning its most painful wound, emigration, into an asset.”⁷ However, as the paradox of the team’s “homecoming” as a staged event en route to their actual homes in Britain suggests, though ostensibly accepting of “hybridized, deterritorialized identities,”⁸ the concept of diaspora as employed in Ireland coexisted with an enduring definition of the nation-state as a geographically bounded entity. Embedded within this apparent progressivism there was in evidence a degree of anxiety concerning the boundedness of national identity and ambivalence toward professional soccer players

5. Irish law extends citizenship to those with one or more Irish-born grandparents. From the 1960s an increasing number of British-born soccer players represented the Republic of Ireland; a team with a majority of Irish-born players competed on just six occasions during Jack Charlton’s managerial reign (1986–95). See Michael Holmes and David Storey, “Transferring National Allegiance: Cultural Affinity or Flag of Convenience?,” *Sport in Society* 14 (2011): 260.

6. Deaglán de Bréadún, “President Reminds TDs and Senators of the World Outside Their Window,” *Irish Times*, 3 Feb. 1995, 8.

7. Fintan O’Toole, “Our World Cup Fixation Masks a Deep Malaise,” *ibid.*, 29 June 1994, 10.

8. Marc Scully, “‘Plastic and Proud’? Discourses of Authenticity among the Second-Generation Irish in England,” *Psychology & Society* 2, no. 2 (2009): 124.

as emblematic of Irish identity. After all, these players were plying their trade in Britain and some had very tenuous Irish connections.

Over the years this anxiety and ambivalence have been variously expressed in Irish-media representations of international soccer. Tom Humphries's borderline parodic celebration of Preston-born Kevin Kilbane's Irish credentials (both his parents were Irish-born) is illustrative: "If he gathers every note of traditionalism his parents struck, he'd have an Irish symphony. Mass. Potatoes. Dev. The Pope. Morals. Music. Relatives. A granny from Cork. Full house."⁹

Direct-migrant players have also been contained within a narrative of sustained cultural purity and umbilical connectedness despite dislocation. At the televised 2002 World Cup Phoenix Park "homecoming" (RTÉ 2, 18 June), Damien Duff was humiliatingly asked about the Padre Pio medal that his mother had given him. A radio documentary about Waterford-born Wolverhampton/Ireland player Stephen Hunt highlighted his representation of soccer's broadening appeal outside Dublin since the Jack Charlton years, referring to Hunt, Kevin Doyle, and Shane Long, all from non-Dublin "background[s] in [Gaelic] football or hurling," as "the boys from the county Reading" (the club for which all had played).¹⁰ The theme of the local boy's transplanting literally "from the foothills of the Comeragh Mountains" to the metaphorically "dizzying heights of the [English] Premiership" was combined with references to his "abstemious lifestyle" and "amateur ethos" despite professional status in order to complete a narrative of sustained virtue. His dislocation thus implied only temporary migration rather than permanent emigration. As Garry Whannel maintains, the moralizing of much sports-star media representation is a means of disciplining masculine identity—here eliciting the player's own active complicity as a projected paragon of migrant masculinity for a domestic Irish audience.¹¹

Representations of emigrant-descended players like Kilbane are often framed by explicit or tacit concern with their utility value to "us" (i.e., the "authentic" inhabitants of the bounded nation-state).

9. Tom Humphries, "A Willing Servant, Waiting in the Wings," *Irish Times*, 6 Sept. 2003, 42.

10. "Never Say Die—The Stephen Hunt Story," *RTÉ Radio 1*, 2 Jan. 2012.

11. Garry Whannel, *Media Sport Stars: Masculinities and Moralities* (London: Routledge, 2002), 145–58.

Humphries later abandoned his romantic construction of the time-warped diaspora, disparagingly referring to second-generation “Oirish recruits” and arguing that the “granny rule” was a “munificent little loophole . . . through which we . . . convinced ourselves we were taking back a little of what we had lost in the diaspora.” In “post-Tiger” Ireland, he argued, “we should start imposing limits on ourselves now in terms of where we trawl and how deeply we fish.”¹² Read in this context, the earlier Kilbane profile seems intentionally parodic, approximating the dismissal of the laughable “plastic paddy” trying too hard to be Irish.¹³ The rhetorical “we” belongs to the Irish-born and resident, with additions by invitation only. Humphries’s sentiments, recently echoed in the Irish media, conflict somewhat with Mary Robinson’s romantic vision.¹⁴

The antinomic tension between the discourse of diaspora and the conservative discourse of rootedness through bloodline and attachment to place was expressed differently by “celebrity” economist David McWilliams’s apparent embrace of the “Jack Charlton theory of economics”; Charlton’s “post-nationalist, national soccer team”¹⁵ epitomized a nation capitalizing on “our most unique resource,” the diaspora, whose value McWilliams compares to oil.¹⁶ But despite his seeming progressivism, there is an even more troubling hierarchy of authenticity in his vision, from the native, to the migrant Irish or Irish-descended, to the nondiasporic immigrant resident. McWilliams sees the diaspora as a genetically essential extension of the nation and advocates an explicitly “Zionist” proposal to encourage diasporic immigration through preferential treatment for immi-

12. Tom Humphries, “Granny Rule Is Mother of Dependency,” *Irish Times*, 23 Jan. 2006, 10.

13. This term was reputedly coined by “young elite workers who migrated from Ireland in the 1980s and 1990s” as an “active disidentification with the second generation.” See Máirtín Mac an Ghaill and Chris Haywood, “Young (Male) Irelanders: Postcolonial Ethnicities—Expanding the Nation and Irishness,” *European Journal of Cultural Studies* 6 (2003): 391.

14. John O’Brien, “Losing Our Independence,” *Sunday Independent*, 28 Nov. 2010, <http://www.independent.ie/sport/rugby/losing-our-independence-2439375.html>. See also, for example, “Granny Rule Still Kicking Up a Green Storm,” *Irish Times*, 26 Mar. 2011, 3.

15. David McWilliams, *The Generation Game: Boom, Bust, and Ireland’s Economic Miracle* (London: Macmillan, 2008), 232–33, 237, 254, 257.

16. *Ibid.*, 254.

grants of Irish descent.¹⁷ This is a cultural and genetic essentialism that chimes perfectly with the 27th Amendment to the Constitution (2004), denying automatic citizenship to those born on the island of Ireland (a provision in effect since the 1998 constitutional referendum) without at least one parent being entitled to Irish citizenship.

The anxiety and ambivalence underpinning these players' representation as resources that "we" can selectively exploit interconnects with a contradictory interplay between conceptualizations of amateurism and professionalism. Whether taken seriously or not, Kilbane's expressed motivation appears to fall between the "amateur" pursuit of what McIntyre called the "internal goods"¹⁸ of practices like sport, or the "autotelic" pleasures of such a practice as "an event or activity valued for itself," and professional sport as an "instrumental activity" valued "for some further payoff that the event or activity is expected to provide."¹⁹ The socio-affective rewards of filial identification with Kilbane's Irish-migrant parents are hard to locate in an either/or, amateur/professional classification. Confounding the distinction is central to the romantic narrative of Kilbane's articulation of national allegiance as a *felt* Irishness.

However, the emigrant descendant with no hitherto expressed Irish identity may potentially highlight how professionalism has "corrupted" the amateur ethos of sport that international competition might otherwise exemplify. National soccer associations are secondary employers, and although players are financially recompensed, national-team commitment theoretically evinces a devotion to "the national cause" rooted in amateur "love of the game" and of nation alike. Professionals playing for potential career enhancement, particularly when ignored by their country of birth (and perhaps of primary allegiance) may well highlight "external goods" as motivation equal or superior to the motivational value of "internal goods." Holmes and Storey detail many cases of "functional or 'careerist'" motivation among emigrant-descended players.²⁰

17. Ibid., 257–58.

18. Alastair McIntyre, *After Virtue*, 3rd ed. (London: Duckworth, 1981).

19. Bernard Suits, "Tricky Triad: Games, Play, and Sport," in *Philosophy of Sport: Critical Readings, Crucial Issues*, ed. M. Andrew Holowchak (Upper Saddle River, NJ: Prentice Hall, 2002), 36.

20. Holmes and Storey, "Transferring National Allegiance," 261–62.

Stephen Hunt may reassure “us” of young emigrants’ “old-fashioned” national commitment, but the player whose commitment was most widely questioned, causing a “civil war” among supporters, was Cork-born emigrant and former Manchester United captain Roy Keane.²¹ Keane withdrew from Ireland’s Saipan training base prior to the 2002 World Cup, complaining of inadequate and poorly managed training facilities. He subsequently changed his mind but was expelled by manager Mick McCarthy following a row in front of the squad when McCarthy questioned his commitment. Keane was widely represented in Irish media as exemplary of the supposed professionalism of “Celtic Tiger” Ireland, but both the Celtic Tiger and the idea that a teenage working-class emigrant whose sporting professionalism developed in England was a “native” achievement were somewhat fictional.²²

More recently, Cork-born Stephen Ireland’s refusal to return to national “duty” following his controversial withdrawal in September 2007 (falsely claiming that his grandmother had died, he actually returned home to Manchester because his partner had a miscarriage), further highlights the self- rather than nation-serving motives and relocated lives of many emigrant players.²³ Indeed, the term “granny rule” has since been employed as a pun on its original usage as a dismissive label for the (ab)use of Ireland’s liberal citizenship laws to signify Ireland’s refusal of national-team selection.²⁴ The semantic shift highlights professional athletes’ precariousness as national heroes, including—perhaps especially—Irish-born emigrants. Voluntary opting-in to enhance a career at least entails positive choice, whereas refusal of “given” identity highlights national identity’s unnatural, culturally acquired status. Hence the futility of notoriously

21. Conor O’Callaghan, *Red Mist: Roy Keane and the Football Civil War* (London: Bloomsbury, 2004).

22. Marcus Free, “Antihero as National Icon? The Contrariness of Roy Keane as Fantasy Embodiment of the ‘New Ireland,’” in *Sport, Representation, and Evolving Identities in Europe*, ed. Philip Dine and Seán Crosson (Bern: Peter Lang, 2010), 189–213.

23. The incident became known as “Granny Gate.” See <http://www.rte.ie/tv/scannal/grannygate.html>.

24. See, for example, “Stephen Ireland ‘Granny Rule’ Inspires Farfan Stunt,” *Irish Independent*, 7 Feb. 2009, <http://www.independent.ie/sport/soccer/ireland-granny-rule-inspires-farfan-stunt-1631754.html>.

harsh television soccer pundit Eamon Dunphy's "open letter" plea for Stephen Ireland's return.²⁵

Then there are "native" emigrants of unquestionable commitment, but who are embarrassingly "unprofessional." Former captain Steve Staunton was appointed manager in January 2006 with management experience amounting to "putting out the training cones" as Walsall assistant manager.²⁶ Staunton endured numerous Irish-media lampoons focused on his nickname Stan (he supposedly resembled Stan Laurel), strong Dundalk accent, tendency to repeat phrases ("I'm the gaffer," etc.), and poor managerial judgment.²⁷ Following his departure the *Irish Times* published a series of Staunton quotes followed by ironic rejoinders: "I thought their keeper van der Sar was like a 13th man."—"After losing 4–0 to the Dutch. Some suggested the visitors' missing 12th man [soccer teams have 11 players] was the Irish defence."²⁸ Staunton's poor results aside, his implied stupidity suggests classism and schadenfreude in his media representation: the uneducated working-class emigrant with an "educated" left foot but little else.

By implication soccer players are not "professionals" in the middle-class sense of standardized expertise acquired and validated through education. Amateur love of game and country alike may have inspired Staunton's appointment. However, contra Fintan O'Toole's Charlton-era claims about working-class players being in the "cultural driving seat," Staunton's embarrassment ill-suited the growing fantasies of "Celtic Tiger" economic and cultural regeneration, an anachronism in an era of increasingly professionalized coaching.²⁹

Such cases illustrate the fragility of mapping amateur ideals onto emigrant working-class professionals, or professional ideals onto working-class amateur managers as national heroes. They highlight

25. "If You Don't Come Back, You Could Regret It for a Long Time," *Irish Daily Star*, 4 Oct. 2008, 76–77.

26. John Meagher, "This Game Is Over," *Irish Independent*, 22 Dec. 2007, <http://www.independent.ie/sport/soccer/this-game-is-over-1252791.html>.

27. Daniel McDonnell called Staunton's subsequently disastrous appointment at Darlington "Another Fine Mess." See *Irish Independent*, 23 Mar. 2010, <http://www.independent.ie/sport/soccer/another-fine-mess-2107559.html>.

28. Mary Hannigan, "StanSpeak: Steve Staunton's Reign in Quotes," *Irish Times*, 24 Oct. 2007, 23.

29. O'Toole, "Our World Cup Fixation," 10.

both the structural weakness of domestic Irish soccer's disproportionate reliance on the "cash cow" of international competition and the dangers of reliance on sport as material example, indicator, and metaphor of collective native achievement.

THE RISE OF IRISH RUGBY IN THE PROFESSIONAL ERA

In the 2000s Irish national and provincial rugby success became a new focus of national media celebration as a symbol of economic and cultural regeneration. However, when the game turned professional in 1995, Irish rugby was initially ill equipped;³⁰ the lucrative contract-driven player exodus was such that when Englishman Brian Ashton was appointed national coach in 1997, he ignored All-Ireland League matches to attend games solely in England.³¹ Combined with the Irish Rugby Football Union's (IRFU) pursuit of foreign-born players technically qualified for Ireland through parentage, grandparentage, or residency, this pattern started to mirror Charlton's soccer reign (though courting foreign-born players had precedents, most notably Brian Smith, recruited in 1989 after having played for Australia in the 1987 World Cup).³² When Ireland exited the 1999 World Cup, Edmund van Esbeck linked professionalism's advent with an inferiority complex driving the snubbing of domestically based players and the reselection of foreign-born and -based players who "failed to produce."³³

Although the provinces had competed in the European Heineken Cup since its initiation in 1995, they became competitive only through the appointment of provincial directors and IRFU central contracting of full-time professionals in 1997. Occasional matches against touring international sides excepted, provincial contests had histori-

30. Liam O'Callaghan and Mike Cronin, "Without Its Clubs, Rugby Union Is Nothing": Resisting and Embracing Professional Rugby in Ireland," in *The Changing Face of Rugby: The Union Game and Professionalism since 1995*, ed. Greg Ryan (Newcastle: Cambridge Scholars, 2008), 130–46.

31. Brendan Fanning, *From There to Here—Irish Rugby in the Professional Era* (Dublin: Gill and Macmillan, 2007), 92.

32. Edmund Van Esbeck, *Irish Rugby, 1874–1999: A History* (Dublin: Gill and Macmillan, 1999), 174 and 190.

33. Edmund Van Esbeck, "Ireland Has Failed on All Counts," *Irish Times*, 22 Oct. 1999, 16.

cally attracted low attendances while the All-Ireland (club) League (AIL—established in 1990) was very popular.³⁴ Provincial Heineken Cup success (Ulster won in 1999, Munster was a finalist in 2000 and 2002) combined with the provinces' entering the Celtic League in 2001 to facilitate the national team's regeneration while precipitating AIL decline. Ireland won the Six Nations' "Triple Crown" in 2004, 2006, and 2007, and the championship itself in 2009, completing their first "Grand Slam" since 1948.

Contrasting with their soccer counterparts, most international rugby players for Ireland were now "home grown" and provincially based. By 2003 the hyperbole and vulgarity exhibited below typified how international rugby success was construed as a distinctly "native" exemplar of the "Celtic Tiger" economy: "We want to win things. So familiar is that refrain from the players, it conjures images of [Ireland coach] Eddie O'Sullivan giving his charges a thousand lines before bed every night. 'I am here to win. Being a Paddy no longer means being the loveable loser.'" Or to quote RTÉ television rugby presenter Tom McGurk: "This is a fully professional team. You could call it a Celtic Tiger rugby team."³⁵

Key to this hyperbole were the combined discourses of "hard" masculinity, cerebral coaching, and professionalism that interconnected with fantasies of national-as-masculine economic achievement and the abundance of managerialist discourse in the hegemonic narrative of the "Celtic Tiger." This combination contrasted with the "rugby habitus" of "hustling and harrying" forward-dominated play formerly typifying Irish rugby.³⁶ The journalist Tommy Conlon thus described the approach of Ireland rugby coach Eddie Sullivan:

[In 2004] the team and management traveled to Twickenham with a portfolio of tactics that hadn't been drawn up on the back of a fag box forty-eight hours before kickoff. The criteria laid down by O'Sullivan for a winning performance included no more than forty "system errors" . . . and a "tackle efficiency rate" of more than 90 per-

34. Liam O'Callaghan, *Rugby in Munster: A Social and Cultural History* (Cork: Cork University Press, 2011), 235.

35. Justine McCarthy, "Giants," *Irish Independent*, 8 Nov. 2003, <http://www.independent.ie/opinion/analysis/giants-195380.html>.

36. Jason Tuck, "Rugby Union and National Identity Politics," in *Sport and the Irish: Histories, Identities, Issues*, ed. Alan Bairner (Dublin: UCD Press, 2005), 110.

cent (he got 94 percent). Which explains why rugby personnel sound more like management consultants these days.³⁷

The rapidly growing discourse of quasiscientific and managerially planned movement of bodies in space in Irish rugby as a positively Taylorist fantasy of organizational efficiency illustrates the now routine paralleling and mutual referencing of management and coaching discourses in professional sport,³⁸ with sports teams often described as “machine-like” in sports-management texts.³⁹ Ireland management and coaching staff have increasingly engaged in such jargon-laden discourse, with manager Paul McNaughton (formerly a banker), for example, describing a pre-Six Nations squad gathering as “like a corporation on an off-site looking for some answers.”⁴⁰ Similarly, video analyst Mervyn Murphy describes opposition line-out analysis as a form of quasiwartime intelligence code-cracking (so evoking another well-worn sporting analogy); he draws attention to the search for “things like the hooker who might have a certain way of throwing the ball, a certain twitch just before his delivery, [or] how a jumper gives notice that he’s ready, a clap of the hands, a front movement, a back movement.”⁴¹

The scientific-management and coaching discourse is linked with celebration of the IRFU’s centralized planning that underpins coaching and support structures. Unlike international rivals, Irish players are systematically “rested” to optimize recovery and career extension. In 2003 television rugby pundit George Hook compared “the support structures . . . with the high-powered technology of American football. [Coach Eddie] O’Sullivan now runs an organization that boasts a support team of twenty staff for roughly fifty players. The 40 percent ratio of management to workers is rare in the industrial

37. Tommy Conlon, “Professionals Harboured in a Semi-State Cocoon,” *Sunday Independent*, Jan. 30, 2005, <http://www.independent.ie/sport/rugby/professionals-harboured-in-a-semistate-cocoon-463745.html>.

38. Annelies Knoppers and Anton Anthonissen, “Male Athletic and Managerial Masculinities: Congruencies in Discursive Practices?” *Journal of Gender Studies* 14, no. 2 (2005): 123–35.

39. Trevor Slack and Milena M. Parent, *Understanding Sport Organizations: The Application of Organization Theory* (Champaign, IL: Human Kinetics, 2005), 9.

40. Alan English, *Grand Slam: How Ireland Achieved Rugby Greatness* (Dublin: Penguin Ireland, 2009), 72.

41. *Ibid.*, 63.

world.”⁴² Tommy Conlon likened rugby’s centralized organization to a “semi-state [i.e., state-sponsored] cocoon” where “Irish players are sheltered.”⁴³

This interplay between economic and sporting discourse was implicitly oriented toward Ireland’s professional-managerial class, with the populist style typifying the uncritical celebration of the economic boom (particularly common in the *Irish Independent* and *Sunday Independent* newspapers), the regular reduction of the state in Irish business and media discourse to the national economy, and its reduction in turn to a “plc.”⁴⁴ Variants on the phrase “wearing the green jersey” were increasingly used in the 2000s to signify the patriotic commitment of Irish businesspeople.⁴⁵ Even when the “Celtic Tiger” proved to be a fiction fueled by a politically unchecked property boom and unregulated bank lending (with bankers and developers in well-worn green jerseys⁴⁶), Ireland’s Grand Slam was presented as a compensatory native achievement. The naming of fourteen players for the 2009 British and Irish Lions tour inspired the following rash of metaphor and managerialist discourse: “As the nation mourns the passing of one great feline [the “Celtic Tiger”], it is somewhat fitting that another clutch of cats have given the country something to latch on to. . . . Irish rugby’s achievements have been built on sound structures, good macro management, fierce commitment at every level, and properly aligned and focused funding.”⁴⁷

As native professionals adhering to a code of professionalism in-

42. George Hook, “Funding of Support Structure Feeds Team That Eddie Built,” *Sunday Independent*, 30 Jan. 2005, www.independent.ie/sport/rugby/funding-of-support-structure-feeds-team-that-eddie-built-463746.html.

43. Conlon, “Professionals Harboured.”

44. The 1987 Irish Management Institute conference was entitled “Ireland PLC Countdown 2000” (Padraig O’Morain, “Ireland’s Moment at Hand—Quinn,” *Irish Times*, 24 Apr. 1987, 14).

45. See, for example, Barry McCall, “Building on Our Global Reach,” *ibid.*, 2 July 2010, B12.

46. Fintan O’Toole traces the “green jersey cliché” to Progressive Democrat party leader Mary Harney’s “indignant rebuff” to the European Commission’s call for tighter economic regulation: “I hope everyone wears the green jersey on this” (“Flash the Red Card to ‘Green Jersey’ Politics,” *ibid.*, 24 Jan. 2012, 16).

47. Declan O’Brien, “Ireland’s Pride Shows What Nation Can Achieve,” *Irish Independent*, 22 Apr. 2009, <http://www.independent.ie/opinion/analysis/irelands-pride-shows-what-nation-can-achieve-1715199.html>.

cluding shared abilities, values, work ethic, and commitment to the national cause (versus professionalism as the mercenary pursuit of money), Irish rugby management, coaches, and players were more readily construed as emblematic of economic renaissance than their soccer counterparts.

Such hyperbole soared when Ireland defeated England in the GAA's Croke Park in 2007, the stadium being made available for international rugby and soccer while Lansdowne Road stadium was redeveloped. The GAA's special provision was widely depicted as a generous gesture of solidarity. This game's particular historic significance, especially the playing of "God Save the Queen," featured extensively in Irish media. The movement from actual warfare to sport's symbolic conflict was repeatedly highlighted as symptomatic of national maturity, the demonstration of "a generous sense of Irishness, a belief in our sovereignty as an independent state, a pride in our achievements in the Celtic Tiger years and, above all, a national affirmation that we are in command of our destiny."⁴⁸

Metaphors proliferated as journalists competed for the most gushing encapsulation. Johnny Watterson's piece was perhaps most telling in describing Croke Park as a physical embodiment of Celtic Tiger "new money," while naturalizing the hegemony of post-independence cultural nationalism through the image of the rugby-pitch markings dwarfed by the remaining (metaphorical) "acres of green" of the larger GAA pitch.⁴⁹ Professional rugby's "foreign sport" was by implication accommodated by a national organization for amateur games run professionally, representing "new money" but still adhering to its amateur ethos despite competition from other sports.

Despite the managerialism and scientific-coaching discourse noted above, the themes of professionalism interlocking with amateurism in the present and of "foreign" sport in "our" sporting "cathedral" resonated with an existing thematic discourse about rugby's rootedness in diverse but interlocking communities, and about the endurance, for players, of an amateur ethos.⁵⁰ From this content emerged a newspaper profile of obsessively professional Eddie O'Sullivan, appointed national coach following New Zealander Warren Gatland's dismissal

48. "More Than a Match," *Irish Times*, 26 Feb. 2007, 15.

49. "Sons of Ulster Go First into the Breach," *ibid.*, 10 Feb. 2007, A2.

50. Watterson, "Sons of Ulster."

in 2001, a key moment in the rhetorical shift in discourses of Irish rugby from the inevitability of soccer's dependency model toward the assertion of national self-reliance.⁵¹ Although reiterating his Americanized coaching terminology and describing a visit to watch emigrant players in England, the article emphasizes O'Sullivan's Irish, rural, Catholic family life: Christmas is "still a traditional and family-orientated week, [but] since he became Irish manager, he demanded of himself that he keep on going. Mass and dinner with the family, of course, but [then] he headed off across the twinkling midlands on a night when the roads belonged just to him."⁵²

PROVINCE-AS-CLUB: THE "MUNSTER FACTOR"

The context of this discursive intertwining was Munster's Heineken Cup record (victories in 2006 and 2008), which facilitated a romantic Irish media narrative of collective endeavor driven by a "classless"⁵³ spectrum of supporters from "dockers to doctors"⁵⁴ that additionally bridged the divide between Limerick and Cork as the province's principal rugby centers. Despite the size of the province, notions of playing for "the parish" and "the jersey," representing family and community, were frequently invoked.⁵⁵ The autobiographies of Moss Keane (who played in Munster's 1978 victory over New Zealand) and Mick Galwey (captain in the 2000 and 2002 Heineken Cup finals), both former Gaelic football players from north Kerry, strengthened Munster's image of inclusivity.⁵⁶ Galwey's career additionally bridged rugby's amateur and professional eras, and along with younger representatives of Munster's transformation into province-as-club (Ronan O'Gara, Peter Stringer, etc.), his 2000 recall to the national team was a key factor in Ireland's international success in the 2000s.

51. Fanning, *From There to Here*, 164–65.

52. Keith Duggan, "Stay Cool, Calm and Collect It," *Irish Times*, 22 Jan. 2005, A5.

53. Keith Duggan, "The Tiny Steps That Have Led," *ibid.*, 2 May 2009, A4.

54. Kathy Sheridan, "Passion Play," *ibid.*, 25 May 2002, 50.

55. See, for example, the various interviews in the DVD commemorating Munster's 2006 Heineken Cup victory (*Munster: The Brave and the Faithful* [Irish Productions, 2006]).

56. Moss Keane and Billy Keane, *Rucks, Mauls, and Gaelic Football* (Dublin: Merlin, 2005); Mick Galwey and Charlie Mulqueen, *Galwey: The Autobiography* (Dublin: Irish Rugby Review, 2002).

O'Callaghan demonstrates that the 1978 victory notwithstanding, interprovincial matches historically were poorly attended, and Munster's record was relatively weak. Clubs were the focus for supporters; the contrast between Limerick's "cross-class . . . game of the inner city" and Cork's middle-class "suburban bias" and fee-paying-schools tradition renders "assertions of widespread classlessness in Munster . . . highly illusory."⁵⁷ Yet Munster's romantic narrative has endured and is closely connected with that of national-team involvement as a hybrid of professional dedication and amateur rootedness in community.

Munster's rootedness was stressed through the repeated theme of the players' bond with supporters, which was credited with transposing Limerick's Thomond Park atmosphere to "away" games and anchoring temporary migration in an acute sense of "home"—"Thomond Park on tour."⁵⁸ Indeed, when Munster was struggling in the 2006 Heineken Cup final in Cardiff, the television transmission, carried on giant stadium screens, cut to a shot of thousands watching the game in Limerick's O'Connell Street, intensifying the sense of a circuit of mutual reinforcement. Hooker Jerry Flannery described "suddenly [feeling] energized all over again. This win isn't so much about 15 players, it's about who we are, where we live, the people we know."⁵⁹

The connection between Munster's rise and the theme of rugby finding a "home" in Croke Park was made explicit in RTÉ's television documentary "The Fields of Atherry,"⁶⁰ which traces the popularity of this modern folk song about forced emigration (through deportation for theft of grain during the Great Famine) among various sets of Irish sports supporters, from soccer fans who reputedly first adopted the song at the *Italia '90* World Cup, to Munster and then Irish rugby fans in the 2000s. Despite the song's emigrant theme, its title simultaneously invokes a sense of identity rooted in place. And although Atherry is actually in Connacht, Tom McGurk here

57. O'Callaghan, *Rugby in Munster*, 229, 235.

58. "Ghosts of Finals Past Exorcised in Sacred Crusade for Glory," *Sunday Independent*, 21 May 2006, <http://www.independent.ie/sport/rugby/ghosts-of-finals-past-exorcised-in-sacred-crusade-for-glory-130307.html>.

59. Quoted in Eoin Murphy, *Munster Rugby: The Phenomenon* (Dunshaughlin, Co. Meath: Maverick House, 2006), 188.

60. RTÉ 1, 28 Dec. 2010.

emphasizes the song's motivational powering of Munster's emotional circuit: "Unless your body is full of adrenalin, you can't take [professional rugby's physical] hits, and the most effective form of getting adrenalin is emotion, and the most effective form of creating emotion is music, is song. So literally 'The Fields of Athenry' are pumping that team full of adrenalin."⁶¹

In McGurk's account of the 2007 Croke Park Ireland-England match, the circuit continues to pass through the Irish team and its supporters as actual warfare ("Croke Park was a battlefield, blood had been spilt on that pitch, therefore it was sanctified") is replaced by symbolic warfare: "After we got through the national anthems, after the English looked like we had them well beaten, a little triumphant note of 'Fields of Athenry' came out, and it was very, very high."⁶²

As previously noted, Munster's supposedly cross-class supporter and player base was central to this narrative. Fanning's account of Munster's reinvention as a club through its initial managerial appointments typifies the narrative of codified class harmonization. He identifies a dynamic interplay between the middle-class pedagogy of "order and planning and control" of first provincial rugby director (and current Ireland coach) Declan Kidney, who came from Cork's school system, and assistant Niall O'Donovan (from Limerick's Shannon club), who had "the goods on what it took to win dog fights, to deal with these mongrel men" (i.e., working-class Limerick-club players, the "mongrel" designation being used here in a celebratory rather than pejorative way).⁶³

There were also numerous stories of Munster players' fueling performances with personal or familial memories of unjust defeat or marginalization—the "ability to maximize perceived slights as a source of motivation, no matter how faint or unintentional."⁶⁴ As O'Callaghan highlights, this is a rhetorical variation on an older localism mapped onto the province.⁶⁵ Players and local journalists repeatedly saw Limerick clubs as relatively disadvantaged by provincial- and national-

61. Ibid.

62. Ibid.

63. Fanning, *From There to Here*, 125.

64. Gerry Thornley, "Theirs Is an Odyssey Like No Other," *Irish Times*, 13 May 2006, A3.

65. O'Callaghan, *Rugby in Munster*, 235.

team selectors. Anthony Foley, for example, stressed resentment of allegedly more favored rivals as endemic to Limerick mindsets, even when playing other Limerick clubs, recalling his father's club Shannon's prematch "psych-ups . . . fuelled by memories of their struggle for acceptance . . . [by older clubs or] bitterness that so few of our players had been capped."⁶⁶

Interviews and autobiographies contributed extensively to the impression of Munster's anchorage in the cultural specificities of particular places. Mick Galwey's autobiographical expression of bitterness regarding Brian Ashton's treatment of "home-based players as second-class citizens"⁶⁷ followed his national reselection in 2000 and the declining reliance on emigrant players. His background emblemized Munster's cross-class, urban/rural inclusivity. Representing rugby's urban rootedness and localization as Limerick club Shannon's captain, Galwey's north Kerry background was a peculiarly Irish mix: his father was a blacksmith and small farmer, and Galwey had worked as an apprentice baker. A Kerry County Gaelic footballer, he played rugby ironically through the influence of his uncle, who had been banned by the GAA for involvement in "foreign games."⁶⁸ And despite rugby's urban concentration, his north Kerry club, Currow, produced two fellow former international and Lions players, Mick Doyle and Moss Keane. In a 2000 Radio Kerry tribute legendary Kerry sports journalist Con Houlihan referred to the part of the Lansdowne Road pitch where all three had scored international tries as "Kerryman's Corner."⁶⁹

More recently, players like Donncha O'Callaghan have extended the popularization of the new identity of province-as-club, embodying the bridging of amateur and professional eras and motivations by stressing, in various media interviews, its roots in locality and the provincial jersey as symbolically representing "friends and family . . . , probably something I was born into."⁷⁰ O'Callaghan joined Mun-

66. Anthony Foley, *Axel: A Memoir* (Dublin: Hachette, 2008), 14.

67. Galwey and Mulqueen, *Galwey*, 98–99.

68. *Ibid.*, 13.

69. Radio Kerry, "Terrace Talk," 2000 (n.d.), <http://terracetalk.com/interviews/GAA/21/Mick-Galwey>.

70. Quoted in Gerry Thornley, "Sense of Family Is Key to This Lock," *Irish Times*, 10 Apr. 2004, 41. Note the pun on his playing position, lock forward.

ster in the 1990s on an IRFU Academy contract, having graduated from a fee-paying school but coming from an atypically working-class background via a scholarship.⁷¹ His autobiography interweaves and illustrates tensions between elements of amateurism, professionalism, and class in Munster's now corporate image of hard, uncompromising masculinity where induction combines demanding bodily discipline associated with the professional era and a traditional industrial apprenticeship involving practical jokes, mutual resentment, competition, and low-level bullying, rationalized through the "Munster jersey [as] a precious thing."⁷² Extending the themes of class and rootedness in Foley's and Galwey's autobiographies, O'Callaghan promoted the more abstract notion of Munster as place and masculine culture, embedding a professional attitude in "amateur" love of the game and quasifamilial community alike.

CONCLUSIONS

Such frequently rehearsed player biographies and celebrations in Irish media of Munster's (and more recently Leinster's 2009, 2011, and 2012) Heineken Cup success⁷³ reflect the perpetual tensions in Irish sport between professionalism, the potential for player emigration to wealthier leagues, and the expectation that players demonstrate an amateur sense of the "internal goods" of the game, though informed by willing service to "community." Yet there is a sense of "collective" ownership of these players and province-clubs in their discursive representation that was absent from the more elusive soccer "diaspora" discourse of the 1990s and early 2000s. What Roy Keane was harshly criticized for—ruthless professionalism—is now applauded in Irish rugby because it is more easily anchored in an ideal of communal service, rootedness, amateur ethos, and professional training as education and "home grown" development through the provincial "academies." It is also connected with a further thematic and discursive strand beyond the immediate scope of this article: the

71. Donncha O'Callaghan, *Joking Apart: My Autobiography* (London: Transworld, 2011), 24.

72. O'Callaghan, *Joking Apart*, 60.

73. Space restrictions prevent consideration of significant differences between representations of Leinster, Munster, and Ulster players and teams in Irish media.

targeted in-migration and integration of foreign players and coaches, symbolically reversing a more troubling history of uncontrollable emigration and potentially “mercenary” emigrants—a reversal that figuratively reassures “us” of the integrity of the nation.⁷⁴

And yet here too a further potential source of anxiety has recently emerged—the prospect of “foreigners” taking provincial playing positions from “our” players, strengthening Irish province-clubs but potentially at the expense of the national team, a problem highlighted by the IRFU’s 2011 decision to limit provincial recruitment and retention of in-migrant players. Given that some are already local heroes who “want to buy into the jersey,”⁷⁵ the relationships between local, provincial, and national identities in Irish rugby are becoming more vexed.⁷⁶ Thus even this “native” sporting success story is likely to continue to highlight the inevitable instability and contingency of sport as symbolic representative of nationhood—and of the very notion of national cultural integrity and continuity.

74. Indeed, capacity to cope with local masculine culture was often stressed as a selection criterion: “The Munster lads . . . didn’t suffer fools gladly and everyone had to be able to take the slagging.” See Niall O’Donovan, quoted in Barry Coughlan, *Rags to Riches: The Story of Munster Rugby* (Cork: Collins Press, 2009), 156.

75. An anonymous Irish player quoted by Gerry Thornley, “Are the IRFU Right to Impose Restrictions on Foreign Players?,” *Irish Times*, 28 Jan. 2012, 5.

76. Thornley’s article “Fighting for the Blues Not Foreign to Nacewa” (*Irish Times*, 19 May 2012, 7) reflects these tensions in his account of Isa Nacewa, the “Leinster Blues” New Zealand-born player, describing him as a culturally settled Leinster “fan for life now” despite his ineligibility for Irish national selection.