

Sports Wednesday

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Derbies set Connacht on the road to Europe

Alan Quinlan: page 3



Ocean Race: Heading into waters unknown

Justin Slattery: page 4

Rugby News

Sexton likely to return in time for France game

Outhalf working on his fitness as he rests after sustaining four concussions in a year
Ian Madigan, Paddy Jackson and Ian Keatley in the frame to start against Italy



Gerry Thornley
Rugby correspondent

Jonathan Sexton remains on course to be available for Ireland's second game of the Six Nations at home to France on February 14th.

Sources in Racing Metro confirm the Irish outhalf is making good progress after being advised to rest from playing for 12 weeks after sustaining four concussions in the last year. He should receive the all-clear for a return to full contact work from a Parisian neurologist, Dr Jean-François Cherman, the week before the French game.

Sexton is now more than half-way through his 12-week recovery timeframe, dating back to Ireland's win over Australia

tralian game, on foot of which he underwent tests with Cherman, who advised him not to play for 12 weeks. One of the flip sides of his enforced absence from matches was that it afforded Sexton the opportunity to go home for Christmas with his wife, Laura, and boy, Luca.

Subsequent tests have shown a marked improvement, and all going well Dr Cherman is expected to ratify Sexton's return to play when assessing him in the first week of the Six Nations. Ireland will have to begin the defence of their title against Italy in Rome without him.

Torn quadriceps

Ironically, Sexton was unavailable for Joe Schmidt's first five games as Leinster coach back at the start of the 2010-11 season, when the player's delayed return and extended pre-season as part of the Irish Player Welfare Programme was then compounded by injury when he sustained a torn quadriceps.

He played his first game for Leinster under Schmidt in the Heineken Cup which, in a further irony, was a 38-22 win at home to Racing Metro.

Similarly, Sexton made his seasonal reappearance in a test match at the start of the 2011-12 campaign away to Scotland in an August World Cup warm-up match, as did all others that season, and as will be the case next August in the build-up to the 2015 World Cup.

Schmidt will have to choose between Ian Madigan, Paddy Jackson and Ian Keatley to face Italy. But it would be surprising if Sexton wasn't involved a week later against the French presuming he is given the all-clear to return.

Projected comeback

In what capacity remains to be seen, as the games could well come thick and fast for Sexton at that juncture given Racing host Clermont Auvergne in the week after the French game and then, a week after Ireland host England in round three of the Six Nations, the Parisian club are at home to Grenoble.

However his projected comeback is managed, if as is now anticipated, Sexton is given the all-clear to return in the second week of the Six Nations, he will be straining at the leash after 12 weeks on the sidelines.

Soccer English FA Cup



Lukaku earns reprieve for Everton

Respite for under-fire Martinez after injury-time equaliser denies West Ham

Third round

Everton
Lukaku 90+1

West Ham Utd
Collins 56

ANDY HUNTER
at Goodison Park

Roberto Martinez gambled the house, or Everton's transfer kitty at least, on Romelu Lukaku in the summer and the €35 million striker repaid his under-pressure manager with a precious 90th-minute equaliser to deny West Ham United victory at Goodison Park. Everton were on the brink of an eighth defeat in 10 matches when their record signing struck to give Martinez much-needed relief.

His Everton side had fought

and created, and gave lie to the suspicion they are no longer playing for their manager. But defeat beckoned after James Collins scored with a second-half header for Sam Allardyce's team, one that would have intensified the scrutiny on Martinez after an alarming run of form. Lukaku's eighth goal of the season earned a chance at redemption.

Usual jitters

The visitors, with Stewart Downing dictating proceedings from central midfield, controlled possession, spread the usual jitters throughout the Everton defence, and stretched the home side frequently down the left, where Bryan Oviedo deputised for the injured Leighton Baines. Joel Robles tipped over a rising drive from Downing and saved from Matt Jarvis's flick at the

near post. Without the injured Andy Carroll or Diafra Sakho in attack West Ham were unable to make their control count against a nervous Everton back-line.

It was the home side that carved open the clearer chances and had, in Lukaku, a powerful striker able to unsettle defenders and create space for others to exploit. Everton's record signing has a decent return of seven goals this season but his influence on games has been limited in comparison to last season's loan spell. This, however, was a reminder of the Belgian international's impor-

stance to how Martinez wants his team to play.

Lukaku created Everton's first opening out of nothing, turning on a Steven Naismith throw-in and testing Adrian with a bouncing shot from 18 yards that the West Ham goalkeeper gathered at the second attempt with Kevin Mirallas poised to pounce.

Traded shots

Considering the pressure on their manager and a run of six defeats in seven matches, Everton's first-half display was encouraging for Martinez. The teams traded shots at the start of the second half, Mirallas lobbing over and Carl Jenkinson forcing Robles to save at his near post. Downing went close with a right-footed drive that deflected off for a corner off the head of Sylvain Distin. It was returned with devastating effect for West Ham.

Morgan Amalfitano crossed to the near post and Collins, having lost Distin at the start of his run from the penalty spot, arrived in between Naismith and Muhamed Besic to steer a

Romelu Lukaku scores Everton's late equaliser against West Ham United during the third round tie at Goodison Park. PHOTOGRAPH: MICHAEL REGAN/GETTY IMAGES

bullet header beyond Robles. The Everton response was led inevitably by Lukaku but, with quality in short supply around him, his tireless efforts appeared to be in vain until the 90th minute. Substitute Aiden McGeady released Oviedo down the left and the Costa Rican's cross fell at his feet at the far post. Lukaku made no mistake, earning Everton and their manager a massive reprieve.

Guardian Service

EVERTON: Robles, Coleman, Jagielka, Distin (Stones 71), Oviedo, Besic (McGeady 65), Barry, Mirallas (Eto'o 65), Naismith, Barkley, Lukaku. **Subs not used:** Kone, Browning, Garbutt, Griffiths. **Booked:** Eto'o, Lukaku. **WEST HAM UTD:** Adrian, Jenkinson, Collins, Reid, Cresswell, Noble, Downing, Amalfitano (O'Brien 78), Nolan, Jarvis (Poyet 68), Valencia (Cole 60). **Subs not used:** Tomkins, Vaz Te, Demel, Jussakainen. **Booked:** Cole. **Attendance:** 22,236. **Referee:** Anthony Taylor (Cheshire).

Inside: page 5

"If a contract had been put in front of me in pre-season I would have signed it. I'd just retired from England to concentrate all my efforts on Liverpool. I didn't want my club games to be tailored."



2015 Schools Fitness Challenge

Moyna sounds alarm on the unfit state of 'Third World' Ireland's youth

Sports scientist slams educational inertia: 'We are not moving with the times at all'

GAVIN CUMMISKEY

Ireland is a Third World sporting nation. That's the considered view of Professor Niall Moyna from Dublin City University's centre for preventive medicine.

"The Sports Council have made great strides in the last 20 years, but we are still a Third World sporting nation - there is no doubt about that," said Moyna, who played a fundamental role in Dublin clinching the

2011 All-Ireland title as both conditioning coach and sports scientist.

"We talk the talk, but we are couch potato sports people."

As proof, Moyna, speaking at the launch of the 2015 schools fitness challenge, offered up a three-year study of 13,067 students spread across all 26 counties. It uncovered a high number of 15- to 16-year-old boys showing "early onset of heart disease".

The stagnant nature of the

Department of Education, Moyna noted, has continually crippled Ireland's chances of becoming an elite sporting nation while also contributing to an increased rate of type 2 diabetes among adolescents.

Different world

"I think the inertia in the Department of Education is mind-boggling," Moyna said. "We live in a different world than we did even 10 years ago, but we are not moving with the times at all. If we are really, really serious, we have to educate kids. And asking a child to switch on when they get to secondary school is too late. "I don't like the word 'PE' teacher. It's got the connota-

tions of elite sport and that's only about 10 percent [of students]. The other 90 percent, we have to find a way of getting them regularly active.

"I would like to see dedicated teachers in primary school because if we can't get kids to adapt their behaviour, it is very hard to change it. Then, when we get them to secondary school, we can educate them."

Making physical education a subject with CAO points is essential to Moyna's vision of transforming Ireland into a modern, First World sporting nation.

"I'd like to scrap the biology curriculum and scrap the PE curriculum," he said, "then take the life sciences out of biol-

ogy, the human element, and put it into the new environmental science course, combining PE and biology.

"Contextualise biology, learn about it from the effects of alcohol, stress, tobacco, diet and inactivity so they understand what happens when they do these things. Learn how they all effect our organ systems, because when you leave secondary school you leave with your body. You forget 95 percent of the rest of it.

"Young people think 'I'm young so I'm healthy', but we are showing they actually have clinical manifestations of heart disease at 15 because they are inactive and overweight."

Schools can register for the



“Young people think ‘I’m young so I’m healthy’, but they actually have clinical manifestations of heart disease at 15 because they are inactive and overweight”

fitness challenge at avivahealth.ie/fitnesschallenge before January 17th. The programme has been extended to transition year in 2015. Nine of the fittest schools will receive €500 equipment vouchers from Elvrys Sports.

High fit vs low fit

Compared with "moderate and high fit kids", Moyna said, the study found that "low fit kids had higher body fat - 23 percent versus 10 percent - significantly higher blood pressure and bad cholesterol circulating in their bloodstream.

"They also had larger amounts of plaque in their carotid artery, which supplies the brain, and the arteries in their

body that supply the heart didn't function as well as the moderate and high fit kids.

"You say to parents, 'Johnny is overweight or they are unfit', and it doesn't resonate. You say 'Johnny has a wee plaque in the artery that leads to the brain and that increases the risk of a stroke', and they listen then.

"Hopefully this is a wake-up call, not just for our parents but our education and health systems.

"We shouldn't be surprised," Moyna said. "Twenty years ago type 2 diabetes was called 'adult onset diabetes' because it didn't happen in children. In Ireland we now see it in prepubescent kids."

Gaelic Games

Galway manager queries red card change

EAMON DONOGHUE

The GAA's 2020 Hurling review committee's proposal to allow a player who would traditionally be sent off for receiving a second yellow card be substituted because "we don't have cynical fouling in hurling" has raised many eyebrows - including those of Anthony Cunningham.

Former Tipperary manager Liam Sheedy headed the 11-person committee that revealed their 15 proposals to help improve the game yesterday. But Galway manager Cunningham said that particular rule change may just "invite more fouling".

"We're delighted that we don't have cynical fouling in hurling; our game is very clean but we think it's best served 15 on 15 and we think it's definitely worth looking at," said Sheedy during the committee's presentation.

But Cunningham said: "It's not that easy. That might just invite more fouling, it mightn't work out because definitely if you have a defender on a yellow card



Liam Sheedy: "We think it's definitely worth looking at."

and now if they know they can be substituted and there's ten minutes left, of course they're going to take one for the team won't they?"

"If there's a few minutes left and Richie Power is running through then you're going to take him out."

"In the league semi-final this year we had a man going through and he would have scored a goal, there's no doubt, but he was just taken down on the 21.

"If you have a smart defender it's going to introduce cynicism in the last ten or 15 minutes of matches."

However Sheedy said: "If there is cynicism creeping into the game, it would be on the edge of the square - and we feel the best way to address that is the one-on-one penalty."

This is a notion supported by Limerick's All Star defender Séamus Hickey. He feels the proposal is "a positive thing because in 2013 and 2014 a lot of these decisions about certain sendings off had a big effect on games.

"It's no harm trialling it and I don't think it will result in heavy cynicism. Most cynical fouls this year were a result of the penalty rule."

➔ Gaelic Games
Hurling committee proposals: page 4