

Comment

Ian O'Riordan



My Boy Charlie: are boom times feeding cocaine use in sport?

It's 10 years since Kieren Fallon rode Myboycharlie to win the Group One Prix Morny at Deauville in France, after which he returned a positive test for cocaine. Pure cocaine, apparently, which was unusual, but at least it was the good stuff.

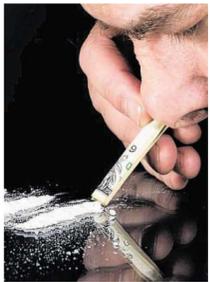
He was handed an 18-month ban, only Fallon didn't appeal. He'd already tested positive for cocaine the year before, at Chantilly, and just been cleared of race-fixing allegations. He says in his recent autobiography, *Form*, "he didn't really have the strength for another legal battle".

Actually he saw the lighter side of it. "Myboycharlie - you couldn't make that up, could you?"

Not unless it was Christmas and snowing as well, no.

Besides, alcohol was his vice, not cocaine. What was a line of Charlie when after every race meeting he'd a bottle of vodka, a carton of orange juice, and a bucket of ice waiting for him in the car?

Fallon doesn't detail how or why he was using cocaine in *Form*; it is known to be popular in the jockey trade as an appetite suppressant, but it's as if he's trying not to break some sort of omertà. Plus this was 2007, boom times. Cocaine was everywhere.



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When the economy collapsed in 2009 we reverted to traditional drugs, alcohol and cannabis, which was grown locally. No one had money any more for cocaine

"I actually think you could do a measure of cocaine popularity as an index for the national economy," John Power, senior scientist at the State's laboratory at Garda Headquarters, told this newspaper back in July.

"When the economy collapsed in 2009 we reverted to traditional drugs, alcohol and cannabis, which was grown locally. No one had money any more for cocaine.

"Now Ireland has one of the highest rates of cocaine use among young people in Europe. We're on the up. The boom is back."

And cocaine it seems is everywhere - partly because An Post don't realise they're now its biggest distributors. Actually horse racing may be a good index of its popularity, or if not then maybe greyhound racing. And even if it's mostly recreational use rather than performance-enhancing this might be a warning to the wider sporting world.

Confirmation last week that three Irish jockeys had tested positive for cocaine at the October Bank Holiday meeting in Galway was certainly seen as a warning sign for the Turf Club.

Ger Fox, who rode Rogue Angel to win 2016 Irish Grand National, along with amateurs Danny Benson and Roger Quinlan, were among eight jockeys to undergo a routine pre-race test in Galway, and all three samples revealed

traces of Benzoyllecgonine, the main metabolite of cocaine.

They were each given a two-year ban, most of which has been suspended provided they submit to various conditions, including a programme of education. Those three positives, out of the eight riders randomly tested, represented 10 per cent of the number of jockeys who rode in Galway that day.

"There's a problem there, and it needs to be addressed," said Denis Egan, Turf Club chief executive, who are now considering increasing to four years the standard ban for a positive test.

Dogs tested positive

The Irish Greyhound Bound have a problem too. Two more owners were fined this week after their dogs tested positive for cocaine, and the case of champion greyhound Clonbrien Hero, who in September was reported to have tested positive for cocaine three times this summer, still hasn't gone to a hearing. Trainer Graham Holland secured a temporary injection preventing it on the grounds he hasn't been told what exactly the case against him is.

Clonbrien Hero, meanwhile, continues to race, completing a classic hat-trick last month with victory in the Irish St Leger at Limerick.

And Holland remains adamant his dog is innocent, blaming the likely contamination of legal tender with traces of cocaine, which could have been passed on to the dog, or else on the hands on people patting his dog on the head after winning races. Unless of course the dog himself managed to roll up a €20 note.

You definitely couldn't make that up, and those light-hearted excuses mightn't sit so well in non-cannine cases. Like all banned substances, the principle of strict liability is applied, the athlete being responsible for a positive test no matter how the cocaine actually gets into their system.

It doesn't matter either that some people question why cocaine is on the banned list in the first place, given it may well be performance-inhibiting, or else only give the 'perception' of being faster, higher, stronger.

Athome

According to the World Anti-Doping Agency (Wada), a substance is banned if it fulfils two of three counts; it's performance-enhancing, dangerous to the athlete's health, or against the spirit of fair play.

Depending on who you believe (Tyson Fury, Diego Maradona, etc) cocaine qualifies on none or all those counts, but it remains on the Wada list, along with four other recreational drugs (amphetamine, cannabis, ecstasy and heroin).

With a difference, however: they're only banned in-competition, Wada claiming they're not in the business of policing Class A drugs at home or on the streets.

No wonder the three most searched items on the Wada list are 1) anabolic steroids, then 2) marijuana, and 3) cocaine - as if most athletes can hardly believe it's still okay to take cocaine as long as it's out-of-competition.

This also sends out a worrying if not slightly conflicting message: of the four positive cases found in the 1,003 anti-doping tests carried out by Sport Ireland last year, one was for cocaine (amateur motocross rider Ross Fanning); boxer Michael O'Reilly and Kerry footballer Brendan O'Sullivan both blamed their positive out-of-competition tests on a contaminated supplement, while Paralympic cyclist James Brown was banned for refusing a test.

Cocaine, in other words, was the only direct hit. For in-competition testing only that probably counts as boom times.

Gaelic Games PwC All Star Tour 2017



Tipperary's 'Bonner' Maher eager to get back to action



Eamon Donoghue
in Singapore

Premier star admits Army duty overseas last season left him playing catch-up

Tipperary's Patrick 'Bonner' Maher learnt a lot in 2017, but those lessons came at the expense of his own hurling season.

Serving in his first overseas tour of duty with the Irish Army, Maher only returned to the intercounty fold in May and feels he was playing catch-up for the rest of the summer. On the flip side however, his experiences in Syria and Israel gave him a unique insight into the on-going conflict there, and a greater appreciation of the life he has in Ireland.

On reflection of the pros and cons he has opted to take a career

break this year, and return to university, in a move the two-time All Star hopes will allow for a return to his best form on the pitch.

"Yeah it's a fairly intense place to step into, going away from everything at home and all your comforts there and being thrown into a place that's in dire conflict," Maher explained, talking during the PwC All Stars Tour in Singapore.

Explosives

"The first few weeks there you're very on edge because you're hearing explosives and you're hearing gunshots going off. Yeah it's that intense, I know the first week we were there a yoke pulled up fairly close to us and started firing back into Israel. There were rockets and everything going off and you're just lying there in your bed.

"You're in kind of prefab buildings and you're just sitting there like - the whole place is shaking - and you're just sitting there saying 'what am I doing here'."

"It's in the Golan Heights region. So it's a zone of separation between Israel and Syria it's along the fence there. It's interesting, like I said the first few weeks when you're out there

it's very intense but then it nearly becomes a norm after about a month. You hear an explosion and you're just used to it. When you'd be on the Syrian side you'd see a lot more stuff going on. It's a norm for them to be carrying around weapons.

"You'd be seeing lads going around on mopeds with AK-47s hanging out the back. It's bananas. But it's something I always wanted to do, to serve overseas for my country, and it's just interesting like that you come back with a different concept of what's going on out there and you kind of - you're on the ground so you get to see an awful lot of what's actually going on out there."

Fairly disappointed

Maher though believes that his eye-opening experiences had a direct impact on his performances on the pitch, as Tipp lost their crown in an All-Ireland semi-final defeat to eventual champions Galway.

"It's hard to come back from [being overseas], I didn't come back full-time until May and while your fitness would be up to a certain level, your hurling, it obviously takes you a while to get back into it. And that would always be one thing that stands to me is the fitness, but the hurl-

ing is probably something I lacked this year.

"From my own point of view, I was fairly disappointed with how the year went for me personally. You put an awful lot of demand on yourself to try and get up to that level but it's hard when boys have five months on you from a hurling perspective. You're kind of catching up for the year.

Syria and Israel

"We were interchanging through two different camps, so it was two weeks out in Syria and two in Israel, and we had a ball with there and a few lads to pick about with... but match fitness is completely different. You can be the fittest man in the world coming back but it doesn't make a bit of difference until you get your eye in.

"So I'm actually after taking a career break for this year, so I'm up in DIT doing a [Business management] course and I'm hurling in the Fitzgibbon and I'm hurling at the minute, playing a couple of practice matches and I think that's going to stand to me more in 2018. And I think I'll be that bit more sharper because of it."

Despite his own personal disappointments, the 28-year-old does not believe this year was a

Patrick 'Bonner' Maher: "You can be the fittest man in the world coming back but it doesn't make a bit of difference until you get your eye in." PHOTOGRAPH: INPHO

wholly negative one for Tipperary. He does admit though that the legacy of his talented generation will be decided in the next few years.

"It wasn't that bad of a year. The league final was heavy enough, the Cork defeat or whatever. We picked ourselves up and came back at Galway in the All-Ireland semi-final. It was two heavyweights going blow for blow. The last year three years, there has only been a point in between us in All-Ireland semi-finals.

"We've been in some titanic battles up along and we probably feel that we should have more than we have. An awful lot of great teams came through and have nothing to show for it as well like. Over the next two years it'll define us as a team. We're just looking forward to that challenge, we're looking forward to next year. We've had a group meeting and everyone is looking forward to it, looking forward to the year ahead."

Gaelic Games

Moore's missing players tilt the balance to Loman's

Leinster Club SFC final
Moorefield (Kildare) v St Loman's (Westmeath)
O'Moore Park, tomorrow, 2pm
Live on TG4

SEÁN MORAN
GAA Correspondent

For the first time in eight years the Leinster final takes place with no Dublin team involved.

Although it was Rathnew who took champions St Vincent's scalp, Moorefield were impressively focused when going to Aughrim and eliminating the Wicklow champions despite being down to 14 men. Their defence was very capable in grim conditions and confined the opposition for two scores in the whole of the second half.

Their best player was Éanna O'Connor, who posed constant problems while his marksmanship from placed balls was impeccable. His brother Cian will miss the match because of a rashly-earned red card and manager Ross Glavin acknowledged that discipline has been a bit of an issue this season.

Overseas duty

On top of that they will be missing county players Adam Tyrrell and Ryan Houlihan, both of whom are on overseas duty with the Army.



Éanna O'Connor: Posed constant problems for Rathnew

St Loman's come into this with the advantage of manager Luke Dempsey's experience both as a Kildare man but more specifically, having had a recent stint in charge of Moorefield.

The Westmeath champions have varied it so far. A great start put them in the driving seat against a useful Tyrrellspass side but in Leinster they have dived with death in their matches, showing great resilience to recover a six-point deficit against a Mullinalaghta side who had beaten them a year previously and then falling seven behind, admittedly early on, against Simons town in the semi-final.

Accomplished

Their attack is accomplished with John Heslin the prime mover and in good form but he has good support from Shane Dempsey and Ken Casey and another county stalwart Paul Sharry has also been to the fore of the club's progress.

Defence is held together by the veteran Paddy Dowdall who is another having a fine campaign.

They also have strength in depth and Dempsey has been adept at launching the bench.

Moorefield have an experienced core of Daryl Flynn, David Whyte and Ronan Sweeney and the menace of O'Connor and Niall Hurley Lynch up front but the players missing weakens them. There may be a slight question over whether Loman's have an out-and-out man marker to deal with O'Connor but as a unit they have the edge.

Corofin should have too much for Fulham

All-Ireland Club SFC quarter-final
Fulham Irish (Britain) v Corofin (Galway)
Ruislip, tomorrow
Throw-in: 1pm

Corofin demonstrated plenty of iron in the soul when seeing off Castlebar in the Connaught final and although they will be missing Ciarán McGrath who has a knee injury and Daithí Burke, in Singapore with the hurling All Stars, they should have enough to cope with the London champions, managed by Down All-Ireland winner Greg McCartan.

Sports briefs...

Winter Olympics

Vonn to 'represent the US, not Trump'

American skier Lindsey Vonn has become the latest athlete to speak out against Donald Trump.

The most decorated female skier of all time said that she wants to "represent the people of the United States, not the president" and would turn down the invitation to the White House traditionally put forth to the entire US Olympic team.

"I take the Olympics very seriously and what they mean and what they represent, what walking under our flag means in the opening ceremony," Vonn said.

"I want to represent our country well. I don't think that there are a lot of people currently in our government that do that."

When asked if she would accept an invitation to the White House, Vonn was to the point: "Absolutely not. Nope. I have to win to be invited so - no, actually I think every US team member is invited. So, no, I won't go." Vonn, who had knee surgery, is preparing for her first Winter Olympics since 2010.

Rugby



Knee injury rules Warburton out of Six Nations 2018

Wales star Sam Warburton will miss the entire 2018 Six Nations Championship and is unlikely to play again this season after undergoing knee surgery.

Warburton, who has been recovering from a neck operation he had earlier this term, is expected to be sidelined for four to six months, the Welsh Rugby Union said. He has not played since captaining the British and Irish Lions in the third Test against New Zealand at Auckland's Eden Park five months ago.

In a statement, the WRU said: "Sam Warburton has undergone surgery to

resolve a knee injury.

"With Warburton currently sidelined with a neck injury, the proactive approach was taken with a view of ensuring he returns to action fully fit. The recovery is anticipated between four-six months."

And Warburton added: "In close consultation with the WRU and Cardiff Blues, we decided it would be proactive to have surgery now on a knee injury, and I am looking forward to returning to action fully fit."

Flanker Warburton, 29, has played 74 times for Wales.

Snooker UK Championship

Maguire braced for O'Sullivan and his band of supporters in York

Stephen Maguire vowed he would have no fear of Ronnie O'Sullivan's boisterous band of supporters after setting up a semi-final against the five-time winner.

The 42-year-old O'Sullivan first won this event in 1993, aged 17, and he remains the man to beat. A 6-3 victory over Martin Gould including breaks of 107, 106 and 94 saw him safely through to the last four in York.

Maguire, who overcame Joe Perry 6-3 on the adjacent table, has met O'Sullivan in two previous UK Champion-

ship finals and a thriller could be in store when they go head to head again this afternoon.

As ever, O'Sullivan will be backed by a partisan crowd, but Maguire has no problem with being the underdog. "I think it's harder for him," Maguire said. "They all shout for him and I wouldn't like to be in his position where you get 'Come on Ronnie' every single time he's at the table. It's not for me but he seems to handle it well.

"I hope it's a great match but I'm here to win and if I lose I'll be devastated."

Tennis

Nadal and Muguruza honoured

Spaniards Rafael Nadal and Garbine Muguruza were named as the International Tennis Federation (ITF) world champions yesterday - the first time in 19 years the awards have gone to players from the same country.

Nadal, who claimed the honour for the third time, made a sensational comeback from an injury-plagued 2016, winning a 10th French Open title and the US Open to take

his grand slam haul to 16, three behind Roger Federer who also won two of the year's majors after returning from injury. The 31-year-old Mallorcan ended the year as world number one.

Muguruza won the ITF award for the first time after capturing the Wimbledon title and ascending to the world number one ranking for the first time although she ended the year ranked number two.