

Gaelic games All-Ireland SFC final



'When we cross the white line we'll kill you, no two ways about it'



Ian O'Riordan

Flying defender says the bond between the collective has become even stronger this year

Jack McCaffrey takes a seat under a large glass window in the lobby of the Gibson Hotel and lets it all sink in, sip after delicious sip. Every player who wins an All-Ireland talks about needing this moment, and for McCaffrey it's only beginning the morning after the day before.

Only where to actually begin? Being taken off in his first All-Ireland win over Mayo in 2013? Losing to Donegal a year later? Being sick as a dog before the 2015 final and still ending up footballer of the year? Watching Dublin's 2016 win from the stand after his selfless year of medical studies in Africa? Or Sunday's triumph over Tyrone, one year after a cruciate ligament tear ended his 2017 final with four minutes?

"I know," he says with that cartoon assassin's smile, "the first time I've been on the pitch when the final whistle blew in an All-Ireland. Incredible, so satisfying, such a relief, and I'd have to say that's one of the best performances that I've ever put in."

"Going out on Sunday, I just wanted to work as hard as I possibly could. The lads got me out of jail last year, pulled me over the line when I couldn't go out and do it myself."

"We spoke as a group before the game and I was going to work so hard, do everything I could, because this time last year I felt I was on the cusp of a really good perfor-

mance, on the money, and it was taken away from me. It was a real source of inspiration for me. Who am I to not make a 20-metre run? This time last year I wasn't able to.

"So from my point of view, personally, it's incredibly satisfying to transition from watching in the stands throughout the league and early parts of the championship to being down on the field.

"And I think everybody really stepped up and maybe did what they had to do.

Like Paul Mannion, who would love to be kicking 2-3, turning over Tyrone players in our full back line, on two occasions. I think the collective bond and the collective work ethic we've had has really come to the fore this year and, if anything, we've become even tighter."

No team or player gets very far without that bond and work ethic, and McCaffrey is the embodiment of it - this being the year of his fourth All-Ireland, while toiling his way back from injury, also qualifying in medicine, and all before turning 25 next month. To attribute all that to population or resources - or something as indecent as financial doping - is to ignore the gift of it all.

"One of our absolutely key strengths is that we don't get ahead of ourselves," he says, suddenly with meaning. "There are so many arguments out there about Dublin football, the stuff we've done, but I would challenge anyone to take a look at our group and have a cut off us. When we cross the white line we'll kill you, no two ways about it. We'll do whatever it takes to win."

Charity

"But outside a football context, it's something I take great pride in. I know someone who came up to me and said 'I met Philly McMahon at a charity thing', and Philly would never say it at training, and the same can be said from number one through the 30. It's something we really try not to lose sight of, something really special for us, and something we've stayed in touch with."

This is not McCaffrey pretending every county is as well armed as Dublin; it's just

mildly offensive when some people attribute all their success to money.

"Sometimes it's just lads trying to get a bit of a rise. I think when everyone sits down and has a think about it, there are not many lads who look at us playing football and say 'jeez, the Dubs they've got so much money, it's not fair'."

"Things may have been a bit disproportionate in the past but on the flip side of things, with my father coaching the 1993 lads, he wasn't bringing home a pay cheque.

"I think that this group of players that we have at the moment, I don't think we've got anything that anyone else doesn't get. I do think the GAA has a myriad of issues they can deal with, off-season stuff, and being fair to everyone is first and foremost on our list."

Incredibly lucky

"I think people at this point are just starting to enjoy what we do, and appreciate that. I'm incredibly lucky to put on a Dublin jersey alongside some of the best Dublin footballers of all time, some of the best footballers ever to play for Dublin. If I had come along and they hadn't, I'd be soldiering away, struggling. Nobody is labouring under the illusion that this is something to continue indefinitely."

If his father, 1988 All Star defender Noel McCaffrey, helps keep him grounded ("if anyone wasn't underestimating Tyrone it was the McCaffrey household") then so too does McCaffrey's entrance into medicine. He spent the summer working with the paediatric unit in Our Lady of Lourdes Hospital in Drogheda, and will soon rotate onto the cardiology team, and he's clearly found his vocation.

"I absolutely love it. A huge percentage of the team are foreign nationals, who have no concept of Gaelic football but have kind of come to realise there is something going on that they should maybe be a bit excited about."

"At the moment I'm working half-eight to five, relatively set hours. It will definitely be a bit more up in the air. But there's a very similar culture to what you find in a dressing room, in my experience, every-

Dublin's Jack McCaffrey in full flow during his impressive performance in Sunday's All-Ireland final at Croke Park.

PHOTOGRAPH: TOMMY DICKSON/INPHO

Going out on Sunday, I just wanted to work as hard as I possibly could. The lads got me out of jail last year, pulled me over the line when I couldn't go out and do it myself

one covers each other. So I think as long as I want to play football it will be catered for and people will have your back which is something I really appreciate.

Humbling space

"And it's a really humbling space to be in, you do get to experience some families that are in incredibly tough times. We went to visit a young man on Monday, who is passing away, an 18-year-old fella. And to know he was going to be sitting there with a Dublin jersey on, cheering you on, rather than diminishing what football is, because of how trivial it is, it just makes you appreciate it so much, the release it gives people, the joy that people get from watching us play football. It's kind of mind-blowing when you sit down and think about it."

The Jack McCaffrey of 2018 has changed in other ways too - definitely a defender first: "Yeah, I was a horrific tackler, relying on my pace to kind of recover when I lost men or whatever. And you can hear lads talking about it on the pitch. Like, they get the ball, they say 'go on, got at him, go at him'."

"It's great to turn a perceived weakness into a strength, and I've seen it in games over the last number of years that teams will get the ball and can see that I'm eyeing them up and, 'oh it's McCaffrey, I'll just go at him, he can't tackle' and to be able to invite that on, and then turn them over, is great."

None of these victories would be as sweet without the lingering taste of defeat, starting with the 2011 All-Ireland minor final, to Tipperary, alongside the likes of Paul Mannion, John Small and Ciarán Kilkenny.

"It's funny, we're sitting here after winning an All-Ireland, and when you look back on your achievements to date, it's kind of the losses that stick out a little bit. That loss to Tipperary in 2011. Losing to Longford in the U-21s in 2013. Losing to Donegal in 2014, then a Freshers All-Ireland final we lost to DCU with UCD. Maybe it's something about the nature of athletes, always something you have in the back of your mind."

Now let that thought sink in.

Tyrone reaction

'I feel hurt but it's not like the real hurt of loss'

Harte believes daughter's death in 2011 helps to put defeat into perspective

EAMON DONOGHUE

Mickey Harte knows the pain of his team's defeat in Sunday's All-Ireland final is "not like the hurt of real loss".

The three-time All-Ireland winning Tyrone manager had to endure the death of his daughter Michaela McAra, tragically murdered while on her honeymoon in Mauritius in January of 2011.

"Obviously the different perspective is that football can become a life and death issue for people who have never experienced life and death issues," the Tyrone manager explained, talking the morning after his team's six-point defeat to Dublin.

"I understand that and they're passionate about the sport and they're heartbroken about this here and so I would never take away from their sort of sense of hurt or loss."

"I would perfectly understand it, but I would like them to think outside the box as well and see there's many worse things that you can wake up to on a Monday morning."

"Just think about that, that people have to think and wake up to those things, things that are more permanent. I'll think about their hurt and loss as football people and fanatics and I appreciate that and I empathise with it. But I'd ask them to think about how people wake up to something that can never be the same again, and there's never another chance to get back to where you'd have liked to be."

Balance

"And then they'll begin to understand that while it may be life and death in words, in real terms it's not. There are things that are more important than that. So I have to think carefully about the balance of that and not be taking away from a people's normal day to day sense of loss in terms of sport."

"But that's maybe what makes this more possible for me today, I would have probably been more heartbroken about this if life had been different in our case. But the fact I know something that's much much worse than this and never could be compared to this, then I feel hurt about this but it's not like the real hurt of loss."

The 66-year-old believes his

young team fell short on the day in terms of experience.

Dublin manager Jim Gavin commended the Ulster county, who to a man, remained on the pitch while his team lifted Sam Maguire.

"I think it's good manners to just stay out there on the pitch and let the winners have their day," Harte said. "Maybe it was those young men savouring those moments. Maybe there's something in them saying 'I've watched this from the floor here, I'd like to watch it from the stands.'"

"For every sort of bad day there's always a good day and maybe that's the way of life. Enjoy the times that are good and then manage the things



Football can become a life and death issue for people who have never experienced life and death issues

that are not."

As for the flow of the match, Harte reflects on the impact made by Dublin's key men.

"They have a pattern of play and there's a few key players a lot of that play goes through. So knowing it is one thing and being able to negate it is another thing. But of course you would have to be conscious of the amount of ball Ciarán Kilkenny handles and how instrumental that he is in how things operate for Dublin as a team."

"And Brian Fenton I suppose is that elusive midfielder who in the modern era of a sweeper - it depends where your sweeper comes from - our sweeper comes from the middle of the field. Therefore we're going to be light in the middle of the field a lot of the time therefore there's going to be more freedom for him. So we have to get somebody else to pick up the slack so to speak. Obviously the most major factor in why we didn't win the game is the quality of Dublin, and perhaps the inefficiency of our finishing."

Harte rejects marquee forward issue

Mickey Harte has hit back at "tired sound bite" journalists following his team's defeat on Sunday. After his team kicked 16 wides - in comparison to Dublin's tally of six - some have referenced a lack of a marquee forward as reason for Tyrone's shortcomings.

"I just think it's a tired sound bite, it really is," explained the 66-year-old Tyrone manager, speaking yesterday morning. "The game has moved on, and people are living in the distant past. It's just a lack of independent analysis and thinking and it's actually boring. Give us something better than that you know? That's what being an analyst should be about. It should be insightful and trying to come up with new ways of describing things rather than leading on some old clichéd throwaway. This thing called marquee forwards; it's something of the past."

The criticism Harte has faced over the years hasn't been exclusive to the media. He revealed last week he was diagnosed with bladder cancer in early 2015 and received ongoing treatment up until last December, when he finally got the all-clear. "I know there were moves afoot to try to get me to go or to get the need for change... But no, I think it was important to have the football to take your mind to other things and to have something to drive for."

Briefs

Racing

Schmidt lands first success as owner at Roscommon

Ireland rugby coach Joe Schmidt had a first success as a racehorse owner when his runner Cosmic Horizon won at Roscommon yesterday.

Cosmic Horizon landed the Irish Stallion Farms Auction Race for two-year olds under the season's leading jockey Donnacha O'Brien. The 7-4 favourite is trained by O'Brien's brother Joseph and was winning on the third attempt. He had previously finished runner up at the Galway festival.

Schmidt wasn't at Roscommon to greet his winner but after Cosmic Horizon's two-and-a-quarter length defeat of Dark Conqueror his jockey said: "It was a good performance and it wasn't a



Ireland coach Joe Schmidt wins with Cosmic Horizon.

bad race. He was unlucky at the Galway and it's nice to get a win into him."

It was a productive evening for Joseph O'Brien who completed a near 500-1 hat-trick on the card. His brother rode Best No Argue to a 6-1 win while the 25-1 outsider Flicker Flame also scored. **BRIAN O'CONNOR**

Rowing

Puspure and Donovans are top hopes for World Championships

The Ireland team for the World Championships flies out to Bulgaria today. The team of 18 athletes in eight crews is one of the biggest the country has chosen. They returned from training camps in Italy and Spain and had a quick turnaround before departing.

Single sculler Sanita Puspure and the lightweight double of Paul and Gary O'Donovan are the top hopes in Plovdiv. The O'Donovans start their programme on Sunday. The championships has an entry of 900 athletes from 62 countries.

One of Ireland's top club coaches, David Mannion, has left NUIG and will start a job as a lead coach with Tideway



Ireland's Sanita Puspure will be a contender in Bulgaria.

Scullers in London on September 8th. The NUIG coach from 2012 to '18 and a multiple championship winner with the college has moved quickly. Mannion told *The Irish Times* the change was a chance for him to concentrate on long term development. **LIAM GORMAN**

Cricket

England great Cook to retire from international cricket

Alastair Cook has called time on his record-breaking England career and will bow out at the end of the fifth Test with India after admitting "there is nothing left in the tank".

The 33-year-old will make his 161st and final Test appearance at the Oval from Friday - a match that sees Joe Root's side having taken the series through an unassailable 3-1 lead - but will continue playing for Essex.

It will mark the end of a hugely significant 12-year chapter in English cricket, with Cook having risen from a century on debut in Nagpur in 2006 to become the country's record run-scorer in Test cricket; his tally sits at



Alastair Cook: will play his 161st Test at the Oval.

12,254 and includes 32 centuries.

The left-hander, who stepped down from a four-year spell as the Test captain in February last year, after leading the side 59 times, has endured a challenging summer in which he has averaged only 22 - Guardian service

Results round-up

Boxing

WORLD UNIVERSITY CHAMPIONSHIPS (Elista, Russia) - **Quarter-finals: 60kg** - Terry McEntee (Old School/DCU) lost to Min Uulu Sitbek (Kyrgyzstan) 0-4

Cycling

TOUR OF BRITAIN - Leading Positions after Stage 2: 1 Cameron Meyer (Aus) Mitchellton-Scott at 4hrs 14mins 46secs. 2 Alessandro Tonelli (Ita) Bardiani CSF at 1sec. 3 Patrick Bevin (NZ) BMC Racing Team at 2secs. 4 Julian Alaphilippe (Fra) Quick-Step Floors. 5 Joshua Sutterlin (Ger) Movistar Team. 6 Primoz Roglic (Slo) LottoNL-Jumbo. 7 Wout Poels (Ned) Team Sky. 8 Christopher Hamilton (Aus) Team Sunweb. 9 Bob Jungels (Lux) Quick-Step Floors at same time. 10 Hugh Carthy (Gbr) EF Education First-Dracup at 19secs. **Irish riders:** 82 Mark Downey (Irl) Team Wiggins at 11mins 22secs. 83 Matthew Teggart (Irl) Team Wiggins at 11mins 55secs.

Soccer

REPUBLIC OF IRELAND U21 SQUAD v Kosovo & Germany. **Goalkeepers:** Kieran O'Hara (Manchester United, Ioan Macclesfield Town), Liam Bossin (Nottingham Forest). **Defenders:** Darrin Kane (Cork City FC), Ioan AFC Fyde, Ryan Sweeney (Stoke City), Ioan Mansfield United, Liam Kinsella (Walsall), Connor Shaughnessy (Leeds United), Ryan Delaney (Rochdale), Corey Whelan (Liverpool), Ioan Crewe Alexandra). **Midfielders:** Jake Mulraney (Hearts), Jamie McGrath (Dundalk), Ryan Manning (QPR), Ioan Rotherham United), Harry Charisley (Everton), Josh Cullen (West Ham United, Ioan Charlton Athletic), Rory Hale (Derry City). **Forwards:** Ronan Curtis (Portsmouth), Joe Quigley (Maidstone), Reece Grego-Cox (Crawley Town), Ronan Hale (Birmingham City), Ioan Derry City). **Fixtures: UEFA Under-21 European Championships Qualifying** - September 7th: Kosovo v Republic of Ireland, 6pm (7pm local time). Stadium: Adam Jashari, Mitrovica. September 11th: Republic of Ireland v Germany, 6pm, Tallaght Stadium, Dublin