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Minnie, Katie and Eleanora Murphy at Estancia San Martin,
Salto, Buenos Aires province, ca. 1890
(*Anastasia Joyce Collection, Universidad de San Andrés*)

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Sporting Traditions in Ireland and Latin America

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Sporting Traditions in Ireland and Latin America: An Introduction

By John Kennedy
Guest Editor



The Fahy Boys hurling team, ca. 1940
(Hurling Club collection)

Like many other aspects of Western culture, sport can be traced back to ancient Greece, where it played an important role in society, particularly for religious and aesthetic purposes. It was in ancient Greece that the concept of sport as a competitive activity developed, the most well-known manifestation being the Olympic Games which were held from 776 BC to 394 AD. Modern organised sport began to emerge in late eighteenth-century Britain and reached its zenith during the mid-Victorian period (1850-1873) with the codification of various types of 'traditional' football.

Latin America was one of the first regions to benefit from the diffusion of these modern sporting innovations. In continental Latin America, in contrast to the Caribbean region, the diffusion process took place through the

bonds of informal empire associated with trading and capital investment, rather than through formal colonial mechanisms. Argentina, as the country whose economy was most heavily influenced by the British, was also one of the earliest countries to embrace modern British sports. By the early twentieth century, these modern British sports had become an integral part of Argentine culture. They have picked up the ball of British sport and run with it with more vigour than any other non-English speaking nation (Carlin, 2007). As Argentina was also the recipient of the largest number of Irish immigrants in the region, the Irish, as part of the wider English-speaking community generically termed *ingleses*, were to play a significant role in the diffusion and development of these new sporting innovations.

As the articles in this journal demonstrate, the contribution of the Irish and subsequently Irish-Argentines to the sporting landscape was varied and wide-ranging. Many Irish people who worked for British-owned railways or businesses were either co-founders or members of the first sports institutions, initially cricket clubs and later football and rugby clubs. Some also contributed to the Argentine national team in the early days of football. Some Irish immigrants who had settled in the countryside and progressed from labourers to landowners became connected with the development of equestrian pursuits such as horseracing and polo, which is covered in the essays by Murray and MacLoughlin. Beyond the boundaries of the community of *ingleses*, Irish immigrants and their families also made a contribution, particularly in the field of education; the most notable example being Dr. Santiago Fitzsimons, a pioneer of physical education in the Argentine school system, which is detailed in 'The Sporting Dimension to the Relationship Between Ireland and Latin America' essay by Kennedy. Irish and Irish-Argentines were not only influential in the development of British sports, but also those of North-American provenance such as basketball, as examined by Kennedy. Furthermore, the impact of the Irish in sports was not just confined to Argentina, but also extended to Spain, as explored in the article by Burns, which documents the story of Patrick O'Connell, the Dublin-born player who went on to manage five Spanish clubs, most notably FC Barcelona.

The Irish Diaspora were not removed from the profound cultural and political developments that were occurring in late nineteenth-century Ireland, such as the trends towards Home Rule and cultural nationalism. Such developments were to have an impact on the Diaspora in Argentina, where some of the community carved out a more distinct ethnic and social identity from the wider community of *ingleses*. These changing relationships are examined in this edition. Among the earliest expressions of these developments was the founding of distinct Irish association football clubs in the 1890s, such as Lobos Athletic Club and Porteño Athletic Club, as examined in Raffo's essay. An obvious progression of this growing consciousness of Irish identity was the

importation of the sporting elements of cultural nationalism as exemplified by the setting up of Buenos Aires Hurling club in 1900, analysed here by Quinn.

Participation in sport was also shaped by social class, rather than just ethnicity. Murray examines how many Irish were attracted to Argentina by the possibility of becoming landlords, a progression in Ireland that would not have been attainable. Many of these became involved in equine sports, in particular horseracing, which was associated from its early years with nobility, landownership and masculine behaviours. As Murray illustrates, a disproportionate number of Irish or Irish-Argentines were founders of the exclusive Jockey Club of Buenos Aires, indicating the social and economic advancement of the former tenant farmers. The article on polo by MacLoughlin also illustrates this social and economic advancement. In contrast, as Quinn demonstrates, Hurling Club never attracted this traditional rural population of wealthier Irish immigrants to their fold; the club was almost exclusively made up of Irish or Irish-Argentines with more urban working and middle-class backgrounds.

The internationalisation of sporting culture from the mid-twentieth century onwards involved reciprocal interactions, with Latin Americans becoming innovators in various sporting disciplines, in particular football, polo and to a lesser extent rugby, and introducing these innovations to Europe and further afield. This interaction is eloquently illustrated in the biographical profile of the footballer Alfredo di Stéfano. Other aspects of reciprocity include the small but high-profile presence of Latin American players in Irish provincial rugby teams, including Felipe Contepomi, who is interviewed in this edition.

John Kennedy

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The Sporting Dimension to the Relationship between Ireland and Latin America

By John Kennedy



Mercedes Football Club. From left to right, standing: Rufino Bello, Tuco Rodríguez, David Lennard, Hugh Gahan, Severo Ruiz, A. N. Other, J. J. McLoughlin (secretary), Charles L. Lowther (treasurer). Second row: James J. McLoughlin (president), Tommy Price, N. Alori, Eugene Gahan (captain), Juan Arturo Gahan. Third row: Johnny Rossiter, Leo Gahan
(*Hiberno-Argentine Review*, N° 149, Buenos Aires, 5 March 1909)

The prominence given to the successes of Argentina in a wide variety of sports in recent times, in particular those of British origin, has created a greater awareness of the important contribution 'ingleses' have made to the diffusion of the sport in Latin America and Iberia through the bonds of informal empire. Central to this is the influence Irish immigrants and Argentines of Irish origin have had on the dissemination and development of these sports. In addition to this, a specific contribution was made with the introduction of hurling to Argentina. Irish-Argentines have had a significant influence in football, rugby, field hockey, basketball, polo and other sports. Relations between Ireland and the region were enhanced through frequent sporting contacts. As Ireland has now become a net recipient of migrants and home to communities from Latin America and Iberia, it is likely that in the future they will in turn make their mark in those sports which the Irish played a part in diffusing and developing in their countries of origin.

Introduction

As 2007 drew to a close, there was a growing recognition of the dominance of Latin America in world sport, largely through the wide-ranging success of Argentina across a number of sporting disciplines. Ángel Cabrera won the US Open golf tournament at Oakmount; David Nalbandian won the Madrid and Paris tennis Masters; Manu Ginóbli continued to stir the world of basketball, and of course there was the spectacular success of the 'Pumas', reaching third place in the Rugby World Cup in France. Not only that, but the country also maintained

its position at the top of the Fédération Internationale de Football Association (FIFA) rankings. These achievements have prompted greater examination of the roots of this success.

The genesis of this sporting success lies in late eighteenth-century England and the development of modern organised sport, which reached an apex in the latter half of the nineteenth century. The Latin American and Caribbean regions were among the first beneficiaries of these sporting innovations. In Latin America the diffusion of British sports took place through the informal bonds of empire through trading and capital investment,

whereas in the Caribbean it was through more formal colonial mechanisms. As one of the earliest Latin American countries to practice modern sports and the only country with significant Irish immigration, 'which has been estimated to be 45-50,000' (Murray 2004: 28), the focus of this survey article will be mainly on Argentina. However the experience is paralleled to a certain extent in other Latin American countries, as well as in Iberia. As constituent members of the community of *ingleses*, Irish immigrants played a key role in the nurturing of these new sports and their diffusion. Their descendents made their own contribution to helping to make Argentina the dominant power in world sport that it is today. As Carlin (2007) notes, all Argentines, irrespective of origin, display the 'desperate need to carve out an identity separate from the rich cultural one inherited from their transoceanic forebears.'

The Emergence of Modern Organised Sport

Before the advent of modern sports a variety of what can be termed traditional sports were practiced in Britain and Ireland. These included various types of football including a type played in Cornwall called Cornish hurling [1] and *Caid*, a precursor to Gaelic football, played in Ireland. This array also included animal-based sports such as bear-baiting, bull-running and cock-fighting, which were common throughout Europe. These were later banned, largely due to the efforts of the Methodist movement, under the British Cruelty to Animals Act in 1835.

It is a common misconception that organised sport in England emerged during the Victorian era (1837-1901), and that there was a gap between the decline of ancient forms and the development of new games (Holt 1989). 'The interplay of change and continuity, persistence in some things and innovation in others, is too complex to be slotted neatly into a simple modernisation model' (Holt 1989: 12). The first sports to take on an organised form were horseracing and cricket, albeit in a more rural context - proof that organic change in sport was taking place long before the mid-Victorian period.

Horseracing could be considered to be the first organised sport. The publication of a racing

calendar in 1727, the formation of the Jockey Club in 1752 and the establishment of classic races such as the St Ledger in 1776 and the Derby in 1780, set the foundations for modern racing. Cricket was the first team sport to emerge on an organised basis and also provided a mechanism that enabled social interaction between the aristocracy and commoners; a rarity at the time. One of the first clubs to be established was the Hambledon Cricket Club which was founded around 1750. Later in the eighteenth century the game gained its own governing body, the Marylebone Cricket Club (MCC).

Despite these organic developments, it was the elite public school [2] system that left the most enduring legacies, through the codification of various types of 'traditional' football. Although various types of ball games had long been part of the boys' curriculum, most headmasters saw little benefit in these pursuits and actively discouraged them. Thomas Arnold, headmaster at Rugby school from 1828 to 1842, was a pioneer in this area and was one of the first to see the potential of organised sport as a source of discipline and morality. Gradually other schools began the process of organising and introducing discipline into these sports. Another impact the public school system had on sport was the emphasis on amateurism, and the spirit of 'fair play'.

At first the universities were instrumental in establishing common rules, as most public schools had their own variants; however they were later supplanted by professional associations. The Football Association (FA) was first established in London among the old boys clubs, who drew up common rules to agree on the basis upon which they could play against each other. Initially the FA rules allowed holding the ball and hacking (kicking the opponents in the shins). However, clubs from Sheffield argued that these practices should be forbidden. With the creation of the International Football Association Board in 1886, the views of the Sheffield clubs were accepted and reflected in the new agreed code. Although a set of common rules was agreed for rugby in 1845, it was not until 1871 that the

Rugby Football Union (RFU) was formed to govern the sport.

Whilst the impetus for the codification of these traditional sports may have emanated from the public school system, there were a number of contemporaneous social and economic factors which led to the diffusion and success of organised sports, including the concept of muscular Christianity, [3] industrialisation and the associated urbanisation, the ban on the more popular blood sports, the development of the railway system, and increased wealth. The spread of empire is also considered to be an important factor in the promotion of sport, 'though public school sport was in the first instance not specifically intended to train the lieutenants of the Empire, it came rapidly to be seen in this light' (Holt 1989: 204).

As well as codification of traditional sports, there was some influence from the colonies in terms of reverse cultural transmission, as demonstrated by the adoption of polo by the British elite in colonial India. The first game was played in Hounslow Heath in West London in 1870 between two mounted military regiments; the Tenth Hussars and the Ninth Lancers.

The introduction of organised sport to Latin America: Argentina – a case study

As was the case in other Spanish colonies, among the earliest spectator amusements in the River Plate [4] region was bullfighting. Games such as the Basque ball sport, *jai alai*, were also introduced. In time the region developed its own distinctive *criollo* [5] sports, the most prominent being *pato* (duck). The chronicles of Félix de Azara mentioned a 'run' held in Buenos Aires in 1610 on the feast of the beatification of St. Ignatius Loyola (Lupo 2004: 57). In various writings of the eighteenth century there were several references to these 'runs', which were characterised for their dangerousness, often leading to tragic outcomes. The ecclesiastical authorities were the first to attempt to prohibit the game, by threatening to excommunicate any parishioners involved in the sport. A further attempt was made, this time by the civilian authorities in 1822, when the Governor of Buenos Aires, General Martín Rodríguez, issued a decree prohibiting the playing of the game, but

it failed in its objective. Arbena & LaFrance (2002: xii) have argued that 'this was part of an effort to impose capitalist control over the Pampa and its labour force'. It was not until the 1930s that a set of rules based on polo were developed for the game, through the efforts of Alberto del Castillo. It was designated the national sport of Argentina in 1953.



The children of William Murphy at the tennis court.
Estancia San Martín, Salto, Buenos Aires province,
ca. 1890

(Anastasia Joyce Collection)

Though British immigrants began arriving in Argentina as early as 1806, their numbers were small, and they were generally involved in mercantile interests. Following the fall of the Rosas regime in 1852, [6] Argentina embarked on a path of economic development, central to which was British capital. The most significant manifestation of this investment was the railways. As the railways grew, many of their employees were specifically recruited from all over Britain and Ireland for their specialist skills. By 1890 there were, according to Rock (1987: 132), over 9,344 kilometres of railway, most of it privately owned by British companies. The growth of the railways also attracted trading concerns, insurance brokerages, banking and financial enterprises, which brought many more *ingleses* to the region. The British later became involved in public utilities such as gas, tramways and water supply. Even though 'the British share of immigrants was never to surpass four percent of the annual total' (Jakubs 2000: 136), the impact they had in terms of the sporting environment was wholly disproportionate to their size.

The first organised sport played in Argentina was cricket. It is claimed that the first games were played in the Retiro district of the city of Buenos Aires during the English invasions in 1806 and 1807. It may also have been played in the rural district of San Antonio de Areco in Buenos Aires Province (Graham-Yooll 1999:176), where many of the prisoners from the invasions were incarcerated by the Viceroyalty of the River Plate. The first recorded game was at the country house of James Brittain in 1817 in the city district of Barracas (Raffo 2004:33). After many attempts, the first club, the Buenos Aires Cricket Club (BACC) was formed in 1831. However, it appears that references to the club disappeared in the late 1830s, though they reappeared during the Mitre era (1862-8). [7] In 1864 the BACC was re-formed officially and a pitch was inaugurated at Palermo Park in the city of Buenos Aires, which became the chief focus for cricket in Argentina.

The sporting trends that were emerging in Britain during the mid-Victorian period soon made their presence felt in Argentina with the first recorded football match played on 20 June 1867 by a group of British players in the grounds of BACC in Palermo. Many teams were formed during the following years, but few records remain. The most significant development was the formation of a team at the Buenos Aires English High School in 1891 by its Scottish headmaster Watson Hutton, later to become Alumni. The club was the most successful in the amateur era and took part in the inaugural Association Football League (AAFL) [8] competition in 1893. Other clubs were formed during that period, which still exist today, including Banfield AC, Rosario Central and Quilmes Athletic. It is no accident that many of the early clubs grew up around the railway stations.

Rugby Union made its first appearance in 1873 when the first game was played at Palermo. Though there are some claims that the first game on the continent was played across the river Plate in Montevideo in 1865 (Richards 2007:54). It was soon adopted as the code to be played at the Buenos Ayres Football Club. In 1874, BACC also adopted the code after a Mr Coghlan, president of the club, highlighted the

confusing regulations that applied to football, so it was decided to apply the rules of Rugby Union as the preferred code. Generally it was cricket clubs that were the earliest 'incubators' of the sport (Richards 2007: 54). It would appear that the game became so popular that it threatened the survival of football. Due to the number of casualties, the sport was banned for a period, but made its reappearance again in 1886. The game spread to other cities with the founding of clubs in Rosario in 1886 and Córdoba in 1898. It was not until 1899 that a governing body, the River Plate Rugby Union (later to become the Unión Argentina de Rugby), was formed.

Horseracing 'English style' on a round course was introduced in 1826, when the Buenos Ayres Race Club was founded by *ingleses*. The Foreign Amateurs Race Sporting Society was founded in 1849 and was active between 1849 and 1855, when it closed down due to disagreements among its members. By that time, it had been superseded by a number of smaller clubs. The equine sport most synonymous with Argentina, polo, made its first recorded appearance in 1875 at the 'Negrete' ranch of James Anderson Shennan (Graham-Yooll 1999:179). Following from that, the game became very popular among the English-speaking landed elite.

Other British sports arrived in Argentina, such as rowing, which was introduced on the river Luján in Tigre in 1871, lawn tennis in 1881 and hockey in 1905. 'British sports became an important part of national life and the only aspect of the British community that put Britons in close social and cultural contact with Argentines' (Graham-Yooll 1999: 175).

Although the focus has been on Argentina, the transference model above is equally relevant to other Latin American countries, as well as Iberia. A good example of this is that Spain's first club Huelva was founded in 1875 by British managers and workers at the Río Tinto mine (Burns 1998: 71).

As well as being instrumental in nurturing and diffusing the new British sports, the Irish community were to make a unique contribution to sport in Argentina through the introduction of hurling, a sport which itself was influenced

by the trends emanating from Victorian England. Although there are references to the game in the late 1880s in Mercedes in Buenos Aires province, it was not organised until 1900 through the efforts of William Bulfin, who was the editor of *The Southern Cross* newspaper of the Irish Catholic community. However, unlike some of the other sports introduced from Britain and Ireland during that period, it would remain a preserve of the Irish community.

Sport in Ireland during the Victorian period

Hurling is the sport most associated with Ireland, or more correctly the southern variant of the game called *iomán*, [9] where the ball can be handled or carried on the hurley (wooden stick). However, by the time the most significant immigration to Argentina had begun, the game had virtually died out. The 1740s and 1760s could be considered the apex of the sport and thereafter it declined due to a combination of factors, including the withdrawal of gentry patronage in an age of political turbulence, modernisation and the dislocating impact of the Irish potato famine (1845-9). By the middle of the nineteenth century, hurling only remained in a few pockets, which included Cork city, South East Galway and north of Wexford town (Whelan 1993: 27-31). So it is likely that only a few of the Irish immigrants to Argentina had any familiarity with or expertise in the game.

Coinciding with the demise of hurling, cricket began to be promoted from the mid 1850s onwards and began to spread rapidly. 'By 1872 cricket had a presence in every county in Ireland' (Garnham 2003:29). A small number of local studies have been conducted in recent years, examining the spread and uptake of the game, the most relevant being Hunt (2007), as it concentrates on County Westmeath, where over 42.9% of Irish emigrants to Argentina originated (Murray 2004: 29). From the 1860s, the game saw significant growth in Westmeath, and was the game 'that enjoyed the most continuity of play, and by the end of the century was the participant sport with the greatest popular appeal' (Hunt 2007: 113). Although the game has often been portrayed as being confined to the higher social groupings, evidence from Westmeath indicates that it was particularly

popular with the farming and labouring classes, the social class which was the most representative of emigrants to Argentina. The extent to which these immigrants participated in cricket in their adopted country is an area that merits further study.

Initially the GAA made a limited impact in County Westmeath and the popularity of cricket remained largely unchallenged, though this failure has been attributed to internal management failures (Hunt 2007). It was to be the early years of the twentieth century before the GAA was properly established in the county.

In addition to cricket, some of the newer codified games, such as association football and rugby, became popular, but these were mostly confined to urban areas or private schools and had less popular appeal.

The contribution of Irish and Irish-Argentines to Sports in Argentina

In urban areas, Irish immigrants, particularly those who worked for the railway and in British-owned trading and commercial concerns, joined the new British-founded sporting institutions which began to emerge from the 1860s onwards. Among these was James Wensley Bond of County Armagh. Bond played in the first organised football game on Argentine soil on 29 June 1867 in Palermo. He was to become a committee member in the newly-formed Buenos Aires Football club. Another Irish player in the same historic match was Richard Henry Murray of Dublin, auditor of the Buenos Ayres British Clerks' Provident Association (Raffo 2004: 69).

By the 1890s the practice of football took on a more identifiable Irish character, with the establishment of Lobos Athletic Club in the south of Buenos Aires on 3 July 1892, by a group of Irish-Argentines. This is considered to be the first Irish sports club in the country and signified that Irish-born and Irish-Argentines were seeking to assert their identity within the English-speaking community. This reflected some of the wider developments in the community, including the establishment of *The Southern Cross* newspaper in 1875, which sought

to uphold a more nationalist and distinctively Catholic creed. Another football club 'Capital Athletic Club' was founded mostly by Irish-Argentines in 1895. The club's original name was changed to Porteño Athletic Club soon after its foundation. Besides football the members also played cricket and other sports. Over time, the club lost its distinct Irish character and football was supplanted by rugby.

Besides Lobos and Porteño Athletic Club, many Irish-Argentines continued to be involved in British-founded clubs, such as Belgrano Athletic Club and Alumni. They also played for some of the newer *criollo* clubs, one of the most prominent players being Guillermo Ryan, who was a regular team member in the early years of Boca Juniors (*El Xentenario* 2004: 16-26). As the sport changed from being primarily rooted in the British community to being a sport of the masses, predictably both the influence and participation of the British and Irish community in the sport diminished. 'In the beginning, football was practiced as a relaxing activity, but after these "romantic" years came the professional era, beginning in 1931, in which it became a game, and a business' (Noguera 1986: 147). Argentina followed a similar path to Britain. Once the sport was professionalised, this led to a decline in middle-class players, and it came to be seen as primarily for the working classes. Professionalism probably signalled the death-knell of any significant involvement of *ingleses*, including Irish-Argentines, in the sport at the highest level, as such developments contravened the deep-seated philosophy of 'the gentleman amateur'. The decline is also perhaps an indicator of social advancement and the greater availability of opportunities for Irish-Argentines. Since the end of amateurism, very few Irish-Argentines have appeared in the annals of the sport at the highest level. One of the more notable players of Irish ancestry in recent years was Carlos McAllister, who played for Boca Juniors. Such is the absence of Irish-Argentine involvement that an examination of the of the Argentine premiership team lists for the 2007 season in the sports magazine *El Gráfico* (December 2007) did not indicate one player of discernable Irish ancestry.

Irish-Argentines also contributed to the national team in the early days of football in Argentina, a time when the team was almost exclusively of British origin. In the second international match played between Argentina and Uruguay in 1902, Eduardo Duggan of Belgrano Athletic Club was one of the team members, as was Juan Moore. Other famous players with Irish surnames who played for the national team in that era were Martín José Murphy (1890-1966), who was a member of the 1908 team and later an *estanciero* in Venado Tuerto (Coghlan 1987: 708), and Harry and Ernesto Hayes of the 1910 team.

Undoubtedly, Irish members of cricket clubs, from which rugby union emerged, were active in the game from the beginning. As the game transformed from an exclusively British sport to 'rugby criollo', through the medium of universities, schools and new clubs, Irish-Argentines made their mark. Ernesto 'Che' Guevara was an inside centre and played for three clubs: Atalaya Polo Club, Yporá and San Isidro Club (Lapaque 2007). If not one of the most accomplished players, he was certainly the most famous. An Irish-Argentine, Mario Dolan, a contemporary of Guevara, was one of the founder members of San Isidro Club (SIC) which split from Club Atlético San Isidro (CASI) in 1936 and today is one of the most successful clubs in the country. Following the demise of hurling, Hurling Club took up the sport in the 1940s and finally got promoted to the first division in 1997. Some Irish-Argentines also achieved caps for the Pumas: Jaime O'Farrel was captain in 1956, and the most prominent Irish-Argentine in recent times was Santiago Phelan. Recently Agustín Creevy played for the Under-21 team. On the management side there have been two Puma coaches of Irish origin, Adolfo 'Michingo' O'Reilly during the 1980s and Dermot Cavanagh during the 1960s. The Irish Christian Brothers also made a contribution to rugby in the wider River Plate region, particularly through the Stella Maris School in Montevideo and the Cardenal Newman School in Buenos Aires.

Since the introduction of polo to Argentina, Irish-Argentines have played a prominent role in the game. The Argentine polo team that won

the gold medal in the 1924 Summer Olympics included Arturo Kenny and in the 1936 summer Olympics Roberto Cavanagh and Luis Duggan were gold medallists. Juan A.E. Traill was the first to achieve the top handicap of ten in 1913. Indeed two of the most prominent teams in the 1940s, Venado Tuerto and El Trébol, were mainly composed of Irish-Argentines. The dominance of Irish-Argentines in the sport continues to the present day with Gonzalo (Jr) and Facundo Pieres, and Pablo MacDonough, all possessing the maximum ten handicap.

From the introduction of hockey to Hurling Club in 1930, the club became a major force in the men's and women's game. The men's team dominated Argentine hockey for a seven-year period, winning the first division championship in 1949, 1950, 1951, 1953, 1954, 1955 and 1956. The Argentine hockey team that competed in the 1948 Summer Olympics included four members of Hurling Club. The women's hockey team won their first division championship in 1958. In more recent times Irish-Argentines continue to be prominent in the sport. Alejandro Doherty represented Argentina in the 1988 Olympics and Tomás MacCormik competed in the 2000 Summer Olympic Games and the 2004 Summer Olympic games. Others of note include Ian Scally from Buenos Aires who is a member of the USA team, and whose father Gabriel played for Argentina at the 1968 and 1972 Summer Olympic Games.

Given the strong links that Irish-Argentines have developed with equestrian sports, it is unsurprising that they also left their mark in the national game of pato in the modern era. One of the most successful teams in the recent history of the game was San Patricio, which was originally founded in the early 1960s by the Reilly brothers from Marcos Paz in the province of Buenos Aires. From the late 1980s to early 1990s, the team, which included Luis Von Neufforgue y Reilly, dominated the game, winning the Argentine Pato Open in 1989, 1991, 1992, 1994 and 1995. Other notable players in recent times include Diego Kelly, Nucho Kelly, Juan Ganly, Guillermo Kennedy, and Gustavo Fitzsimons. The Rossiter brothers Carlos, Normando and Patricio from Estancia Santa Susana in Campana, were also involved in pato

from 1980 to 1998, winning many national tournaments.

In the area of the management and promotion of sports, a number of Irish-born Argentines have made a distinguished contribution to the evolution of sport in Argentina, perhaps none more so than Dr. Santiago Fitzsimons, who is considered a pioneer in the field of physical education and had the foresight to see the benefit of physical exercise as part of a holistic educational experience. In 1888, as director of the National College of Corrientes, he received permission from the Federal Minister for Public Instruction Filemón Posse, to employ Thomas Reeve, a Cambridge graduate, as a physical education teacher (Lupo 2004: 77). This was a first for Argentina. Two years later, Fitzsimons was appointed National Inspector General of Public Instruction. One of his key initiatives was to introduce physical education as part of the curriculum in all National Colleges and normal schools in the country, thereby bequeathing a lasting legacy to generations of Argentine schoolchildren.

Fitzsimons was to have another major impact on Argentine sport, albeit in a more indirect manner. In 1891 he was appointed director of the National School of Commerce, located in Bartolomé Mitre Street in the centre of Buenos Aires. One of the people Fitzsimons hired was Paddy McCarthy from County Tipperary, a physical education teacher, and a former boxer and footballer, who himself had a major impact on sport in Argentina (Murray 2005). In fact he participated in the first professional boxing match in Argentina in 1903 against the Italian Abelardo Robassio. As part of the physical education curriculum McCarthy introduced football and boxing. Among his students were three teenagers of Genovese origin from the port district of La Boca: Esteban Baglietto, Santiago Sana and Alfredo Scarpatti (Resurgimiento Boquense). McCarthy's football lessons had a major influence on them, so much so that the three along with the Farenga brothers went on to found Boca Juniors football club in Plaza Solís in La Boca in 1905. Indeed McCarthy became one of the first coaches at the club.

In the sphere of sport and politics, Irish-Argentines have also been prominent. Rodolfo 'Michingo' O'Reilly, a former rugby player with Club Atlético San Isidro (C.A.S.I) was appointed the Secretary of Sport under the Alfonsín government following the restoration of democracy in 1983. In addition to his governmental duties, he also exercised the role of manager of the Pumas. Another Irish-Argentine Dr Santiago Leyden was appointed Secretary of Sport for the City of Buenos Aires in 1996 during the governorship of Fernando de la Rúa.

The role of the Irish-owned press in the development of sport in the River Plate

The media have played a key role in the diffusion of organised sport, and nowhere more so than in Argentina. One of the key organs of this phenomenon was *The Standard*, Argentina's first English language newspaper, founded in 1861 by two Dublin brothers Edward and Michael Mulhall. It would be for almost a century the most influential newspaper in the English-speaking community. The newspaper played a central role in reporting administrative developments in sports clubs, such as reporting on Annual General Meetings, as well as coverage of the games themselves. *The Standard* was regularly used as a means of recruiting new members, a good example being an announcement by Buenos Aires Cricket club on 5 May 1864 seeking new members and supporters for the first proposed cricket international against Uruguay in Montevideo. It also announced exhibition boxing matches such as one between Johnny McKay and William Valley on 4 March 1864. The paper advertised the meeting to form the first football club in South America 'in a pension in Calle Temple, today Viamonte, where many young British resided' and the paper also reported on the first football game. As well as team sports, *The Standard* was a fervent promoter of athletics (Raffo 2004).

The Standard's editorial generally represented a distinctly British viewpoint. Another separate English-language newspaper, *The Southern Cross*, was founded in 1875 by Rev. Patrick Joseph Dillon for the Irish Catholic community, and

presented a Catholic and Irish nationalist viewpoint. *The Southern Cross* was also an important organ in the diffusion of sport in the Irish community. William Bulfin, the editor of the paper in the early 1900s, is credited with the formal introduction of hurling to Argentina, though it had been played earlier in the country in an unorganised fashion. In August 1900 a lengthy article on the rules of hurling were published in the paper. *The Southern Cross* also played an important role in women's hockey, when it published an article in June 1930 seeking players for the Argentine Federation of Hurling. Since then, Hurling Club has gone on to become one of the more successful teams in the country in both women's and men's hockey.

Sporting Contacts between Ireland and Latin America

Rugby

The most enduring and frequent sporting contact between Ireland and a Latin American country is that with Argentina in the sphere of rugby. The earliest international contacts with Argentina were through the British Isles team (colloquially known as the British Lions and, from 2001, the British and Irish Lions), who toured the country in 1927 and again in 1936, and included Irish players. However, it was not until 1952 that the first Irish team visited Argentina, making history in the process by becoming the first Home [10] rugby union to do so. 'The tour was nearly aborted due to the death of Eva Perón' (Cronin 2007: 48). The two international games against Argentina in Buenos Aires were non-cap internationals. Whilst Argentina lost the first test by six points they drew 3-3 in the second test in Buenos Aires, which was almost considered a victory for Argentina, as they had avoided defeat against a major rugby nation.

The Irish visited Argentina again in 1970 and lost the two tests, signalling the emergence of the Pumas as a rugby power. The Pumas reciprocated Ireland's gesture of being the first Home Nation to visit Argentina by making their first appearance in Europe in 1973 at Thomond Park in Limerick against Munster. *The Irish Times*

commented: 'that Ireland should be the first hosts is extremely fitting, for we are pioneers among the Home Countries to tour South America, when we sent a party out in 1952' (MacWeeney 1973: 3). The Pumas returned again in 1978, but only played one game against Leinster. Ireland planned a tour in 1985, but it was cancelled in the aftermath of the Falklands / Malvinas war.



Brazil fans from São Paulo and living in Naas, Co Kildare, near Croke Park before the Ireland-Brazil football match on 6 February 2008. Brazil won 1-0
(Dara Mac Dónaill, *The Irish Times*, 2008)

It was to be 1990 before sporting links were re-established. In a report in the *The Irish Times* the restoration of playing links with Argentina was warmly welcomed (Van Esbeck 1990:30). In that particular encounter the Pumas won 28-24. Perhaps the most infamous night in the history of Irish rugby was when the Pumas deprived Ireland of a place in a home 1999 World Cup quarter-final in Dublin. The Argentine team upset their Irish counterparts with a score of 28-24 in the final pool game in Lens, France. Since then, encounters between the Pumas and Ireland have metamorphosed into one of the most bitter rivalries in the sport, though this has been confined to invectives among the team and coaching staff as opposed to the fans. Ireland was drawn in the same pool against the Pumas again in the 2003 World Cup in Australia and in France 2007. At club level there has also been a lot of contact between the two countries. Club Atlético de San Isidro (C.A.S.I.) was one of the first clubs to tour Ireland in 1973.

Sporting contact has not always generated a forging of cultural understanding. One of the most bizarre incidents in sporting contact between Ireland and Latin America occurred in

August 1978 in Buenos Aires. Irish rugby international Willie Anderson was on tour with the Penguins rugby club (an international touring club based in the UK), when he was arrested for stealing the Argentine flag from a government building (Cronin 2007: 58) and demeaning a patriotic symbol. An editorial in *The Buenos Aires Herald* labelled the act 'brainless buffoonery'. Two companions, fellow Irish internationals David Irwin and Frank Wilson, were also arrested, prompting calls for intervention from the British and Irish governments. The matter was even raised by an Argentine journalist with an irascible General Galtieri, who was then army commander-in-chief and senior member of the military *junta*. His response was 'do not bait me. No one here is going to touch any flag and he who does will pay the consequences' (*The Irish Times*, 16 August 1980). Although Wilson and Irwin were released after three weeks, Anderson was to spend over three months in prison before being cleared of any charges.

Football

In the area of football the contacts between Latin America and Ireland have generally pertained to *friendlies*. The first Latin American country to play Ireland was Argentina, who came to Dalymount Park in Dublin in 1951 and defeated the Republic of Ireland team by 0-1. The next encounter with a Latin American country was perhaps the most divisive in the history of the Football Association of Ireland (FAI). In 1974 the FAI planned a foreign tour of Chile, Brazil and Uruguay. The proposed tour included a match against the Chilean national team in the National Stadium in Santiago de Chile. In doing so the Republic of Ireland team would become the first foreign side to play in Chile since General Augusto Pinochet's military *coup* against the government of Salvador Allende in September 1973. Playing in the National Stadium would be particularly symbolic, as it was used as a detention centre following the *coup* for 'at least 7,000' political prisoners (Collier & Sater 2004: 360) and became the main centre for interrogation.

According to reports in *The Irish Times*, foreign minister Dr Garret Fitzgerald came in for

particular criticism from the Irish Committee for Chile for not publicly denouncing the proposed tour, as he had done with Irish Rugby Football Union's Lions Tour of South Africa. Despite the protests the tour did go ahead, also including Brazil and Uruguay, with the Republic of Ireland team defeating Chile 2-1. In an interview, Eamonn Dunphy, a member of the Irish team, was to later recall: 'When we went out to inspect the pitch, armed guards ordered us back to the dressing rooms. It was a sobering experience. I think most of the lads in the team realised we were being used then. The stadium was freshly painted for our visit so all traces of blood and torture were destroyed' (Sheehan 2005).

Field Hockey

In the area of women's sport, the most frequent contact has been through field hockey. Many teams from Argentina have visited Ireland and Irish teams have also toured Argentina. In 1959, the Argentine team visited Cork and Waterford and were given a civic reception by the Mayor of Waterford. A commentary in *The Irish Times* said 'it is a pity these touring sides could not have travelled more extensively throughout the country because their visits have stimulated interest in women's hockey'.

Latin American Involvement in Contemporary Sport in Ireland

The potential for any significant migration of sportsmen or women from Latin America to Ireland in recent years has been limited. The dominance of Gaelic games, which assert a distinct Irish identity and are amateur and non-international in character; the small population coupled with a low population density; and the limited attendant advertising, are all factors

which have limited the growth of fully professional sport in Ireland. The only team sport that is fully professional is rugby, which has four provincial teams. As the only fully professional sport, rugby does have a small, yet high-profile presence of Latin American players: Felipe Contepomi, star of the Pumas, is the fly-half for the Leinster team; Juan Francisco Gómez, originally from Morón in Greater Buenos Aires, also plays for Leinster; and Federico Pucciariello from Rosario in Argentina, who was capped for Italy, plays for Munster and was part of the team that won the European Heineken cup in 2005/06.

The extent of the Latin American community's involvement in sport in Ireland, both at a competitive and non-competitive level, is difficult to gauge. At a community level, there have been efforts to set up sports clubs for the significant Brazilian community - a manifestation of this been the establishment of 'Gort for Brazil FC', in Gort, County Galway. Shaughnessy (2007) has shown that there is evidence that there has been some cultural transference as some Brazilian children have taken up hurling.

On a coaching level, the presence of Latin Americans is almost non-existent, though one of the more innovative programmes in youth football in Ireland in recent years has been the emergence of the 'Samba Soccer' summer camp which brings Brazilian coaches to Ireland in the summer months, fostering stronger sporting links between Ireland and Latin America.

John Kennedy

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Notes

[1] Cornish hurling is an outdoor team sport of Celtic origin, played with a small silver ball. It is similar to handball.

[2] In England the term 'public school' refers to fee-charging independent secondary schools.

- [3] The concept first appeared in Emile by the philosopher Jean-Jacques Rousseau, which described physical education as important for the formation of moral character.
- [4] Argentina and Uruguay.
- [5] In this instance the term means 'local' or 'home-grown'.
- [6] Juan Manuel de Rosas (1793-1877) was a conservative politician who ruled Argentina from 1829 to 1852. Rosas was one of the first famous caudillos in Latin America.
- [7] Bartolomé Mitre (1821-1906) was President of Argentina from 1862 to 1868.
- [8] The AAFL was precursor to the Asociación del Fútbol Argentino (AFA)
- [9] It is generally accepted that there are historically two variants of the game: iomán which was played in the southern part of Ireland where the ball could be handled or carried on the hurley, and camán, which was akin to modern field hockey in that it did not allow handling of the ball and was played in the northern part of Ireland.
- [10] Home Nation refers to rugby teams from England, Ireland, Scotland or Wales.

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Irish Association Football in Argentina

By Víctor Raffo

Translated by Ciara McGuire

Little has been documented about the descendants of Irish migrants and their connection with the introduction of football to Argentina, a country that is passionate about this sport to such an extent that it is now a powerful global competitor. During the last decade of the nineteenth century, Hiberno-Argentines founded clubs such as Lobos and Porteño, which competed in the League of Buenos Aires, the first of its kind in South America. Both clubs have lasted until the present-day, but they do not identify themselves with the Irish community of Argentina. This shift is due to changes in Argentine sport which resulted in Hiberno-Argentines moving away from football into different spheres.

Argentina is recognised world-wide as a force to be reckoned with in football. One of the factors that might explain this supremacy is the early development of this sport in the River Plate when compared with the development of sport in other parts of the world. Football was regulated officially in England in 1863, and scarcely four years later it was already being practiced in Buenos Aires, where a small group of British residents, including some Irish people, founded the Buenos Aires Football Club (BAFC), a pioneer in South America.

But to what can we attribute this speedy development? The British colony in Argentina was small and isolated in the main, in the context of a country in which another language was spoken. The community strongly felt the urge to recreate 'ethnic associations' which could typify the culture of their country of origin and might serve them in a more long-term way during their residence in foreign lands. It is common to hear that football was introduced to Argentina by 'the English', but in fact the Irish and the Scottish played a significant part also. Even amongst the founders of the BAFC in 1867 there was one Dubliner, and another who hailed originally from County Armagh. Among the clubs that competed in the first years of the

Association Argentina Football League (AAFL, the first in South America), founded in 1893, were two clubs founded by Hiberno-Argentines: Lobos Athletic Club and Porteño Athletic Club.

Although this is not the place to elaborate greatly upon the characteristics of Irish immigration to Argentina, it is helpful to highlight some pertinent points. The total number of Irish migrants to Argentina in the nineteenth century is thought to be 40-45,000 (Murray 2004: 28). Almost all of these people moved to the province of Buenos Aires. [1] Compared with the numbers of migrants who went to North America, Australia or New Zealand, the number of Irish migrants who arrived in the River Plate region seems insignificant. Here however, they arrived at a destination in which an unfamiliar language was spoken, and though the Catholic faith was practiced they were immersed in a land where unfamiliar customs were practiced by entirely different peoples. This presented challenges to the possibility of swift integration.

Prior to the 1840s, the few Irish in Argentina were clustered mainly in the city of Buenos Aires. From that time, corresponding to a time of economic crisis in Ireland, an organised and continuous flow of immigrants began to increase. In 1844, Father Anthony Fahy arrived, and for the next three decades he played a fundamental role in the consolidation and the development of the Irish Catholic community in Argentina.

From 1870 onwards, the number of migrants diminished significantly, almost to the point of disappearing. This relates to the changes which the socio-economic structure of Argentina underwent at the time. This complicated Irish migrants' chances of becoming part of the community. Nevertheless, because of its own organic growth, the community of Hiberno-Argentines had doubled in number. In the 1890s, an internal migration began from communities in the countryside towards the city

of Buenos Aires and the other towns in the province. It was customary at this time for farmers and landowners to 'have a house in the city' and this coincided with the organisation of the clubs which we will now analyse.

Football in the Countryside: Lobos

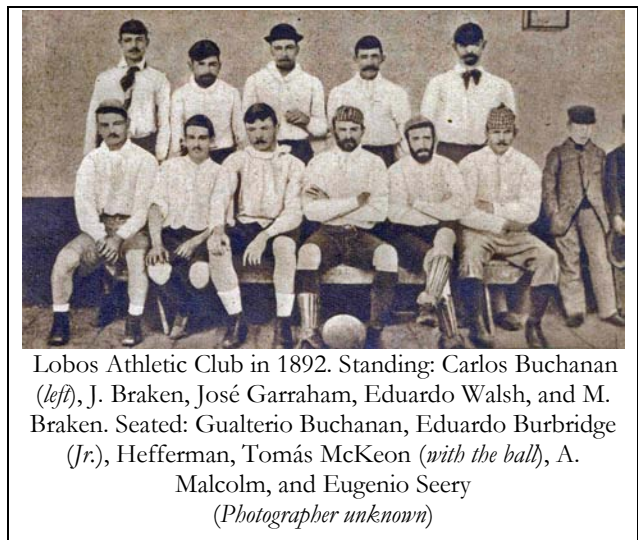
Work was tough and distractions few in the immense expanses of the Pampas. Marriages and wakes were the only forms of entertainment and social activity for those Irish migrants who spent most of their days taking care of ewes. As their income increased, they began to transform their way of life, sending their children to schools in the city, or to Britain and Ireland, as well as creating institutions which improved communication between members of the community. At the same time, many left rural life and became part of other sectors of the economy, such as the railroads. Within this context, the Hiberno-Argentines began to set up clubs in the region northwest of the province of Buenos Aires, like the Lobos Athletic Club, founded in the district of Lobos on 3 July 1892, 102 kilometres from Buenos Aires. In its foundation charter, the club set out its aims:

Life seems very dull and monotonous in this town of Lobos and to make it a little more lively and agreeable a few of the youth of this place decided upon having some amusement in their leisure hours on Sunday. This amusement was decided upon and unanimously namely Association Football. To this effect a meeting was called and it was arranged to form a Club which was to be called "Lobos Athletic Club".

The first board of Directors consisted of Edmundo T. Kirk (President), Carlos Page (Vice-President), Tomás McKeon (Treasurer), Eugene Seery (Secretary) and Tomás Moore (Team Captain). Other co-founders were Patricio Kirk, Tomás Garrahan, Santiago McKeon, Eduardo Burbridge, Juan Geoghegan, Lorenzo Owens, Felix Dolan, Hugo Lawlor, William Weir, José Joyce, Eusebio Eguino, Eduardo Slamon and Eduardo Burbridge (Jr.). Among them were several former students of Buenos Aires English High School. This school had been founded by the Scottish Professor Alexander Watson Hutton in 1884, who is recognised as 'The Father of Argentine

Football', as he introduced to Argentina the rules of association football, which prohibited handling, as distinct from the rules of Rugby Union, which did not. Watson Hutton taught football to his students, among whom were Tomás Moore and his cousins Tomás and Santiago McKeon, who were in charge of teaching the game to the other founders of the club. The Secretary's report tells of the beginnings of the club in the year of 1892-1893 as follows:

As our members were few it was difficult to form two teams of eleven for our practice match, which was not to be wondered at, as with the exception of four or five none of us had ever played football before



Lobos Athletic Club in 1892. Standing: Carlos Buchanan (left), J. Braken, José Garrahan, Eduardo Walsh, and M. Braken. Seated: Gualterio Buchanan, Eduardo Burbridge (Jr.), Hefferman, Tomás McKeon (with the ball), A. Malcolm, and Eugenio Seery
(Photographer unknown)

Little by little however, new players were joining and before long they were able to form a good team which challenged clubs and schools in the city of Buenos Aires, achieving some astounding results. 'Before the gaze of our fiancées and families we felt invincible,' affirmed Tomás Moore. The first playing-field was located in the hinterland of the railroad, next to the station. At the outset they adopted the colours blue and white, but as many clubs had this strip in 1893, they changed the team colours to dark red and black. Years later Tomás McKeon remembered these first encounters on the field:

The spectators were made up mainly of horsemen within our group, who in the classical position of fellow countrymen, edged to the front and were placed in rows at one side of the field. They were generally labourers of the same rank as the players

who took part in the match, and who came to see 'the children's' performance (Lucero 1962: 3).

By 1894 the Lobos Athletic Club had one of the best teams in the country and was registered for the championships of the Football Association League of Argentina, which despite its name was really the League of Buenos Aires. Before the threat of armed conflict between Argentina and Chile arose, the football activity of the club became paralysed in 1896-1897. The climax came on 11 September 1898, when the club lost in the final to the Lomas Athletic Club.

The following year the Lobos Athletic Club became the first Argentine club to tour internationally. On 30-31 July 1899, they faced the Albión and Peñarol clubs in Montevideo, Uruguay, and defeated them 2-1, and 2-0 respectively. At the end of the second match a political revolution exploded in the Uruguayan capital and the team had to take refuge in a warship of the Royal Navy, which brought them back to Argentina.

However, during the 1899 season, other clubs petitioned the board of the League because they felt that the 102-kilometre trip to the grounds of the Lobos caused too many problems for them. As a result, in 1900 the AAFL (the Football Association League of Argentina) decreed that in order to participate in their championships, all teams must have a playing-field within fifty kilometres of Buenos Aires. As a result of not being able to compete, the Lobos team dissolved. Those members who had been students of the English High School reunited with former classmates and played in other clubs, a combination which resulted in the formation of the first great champion teams of Argentine football: Alumni. [2]

Between 1900 and 1911 Alumni were champions for nine seasons, [3] and eight of the former Lobos players had joined their ranks: Carlos and Walter Buchanan, Armando Coste, Guillermo and Heriberto Jordan, Juan McKechnie and Juan and Eugenio Moore. It is also worth emphasising that when the Argentine national team of the country's memorable early football history was put together, it contained the figures of Carlos and Walter Buchanan and Juan Moore, the latter being appointed Team

Captain. He played in Montevideo in 1902 when Argentina defeated Uruguay by 6-0.

Shortly after the foundation of the Lobos Athletic club in 1892, its members tried to establish similar clubs in neighbouring districts, but all these initiatives either failed outright, or were short-lived. Around 1897 in Salto, Salto Athletic Club was founded and their team was formed by the personnel of the ranches of 'Santa Rosa' and 'Las Rosas', mainly by the families of Duggan and Healy respectively. [4] At the same time, the Irish Argentine Football Club was founded in Rojas, with a powerful team who crossed the region, laying waste to all of its adversaries (Rodrigo 2001). And in Navarro, Lorenzo Gahan as President and his brother Federico as Team Captain headed a rather precarious Navarro Athletic Club.

Football in the City: Porteño

On 28 July 1895 at the 'Confitería Las Familias' in the city of Buenos Aires, a group of students, all of Irish descent, organised a club which they named 'Club Atlético Capital' with the intention of playing football. According to a legend surrounding the club's inception, the students did not have enough money even to buy balls. This limitation motivated them to meet at a racecourse on 6 October of the same year in order to bet what little money they had on a horse by the name of 'Porteño'. The noble creature achieved a great triumph even though he was not one of the favourites, and the students returned from the races with enough capital not only to purchase balls, but also a kit for the team, boots and even bandages and some medicine. That same day they decided to change the name of their club to 'Club Atlético Porteño'. Another version of the story affirms that this club was founded specifically to oppose the clubs of other schools and English companies in Buenos Aires.

What is known for certain is that the first officials of this new institution were Tomás Gahan (President), Juan P. Feliberg (Secretary) José Ignacio O'Farrell (Assistant Secretary), Gerardo R. Kenny (Treasurer), Tomás Cavanagh (Vice-Treasurer), and Francisco Geoghegan (Team Captain). Shortly afterwards honorary presidents Santiago O'Farrell,

Guillermo Bulfin (editor of *The Southern Cross*), and Guillermo F. Frecker (a director of the British School) were appointed. Several of the organisers of the club were young students. The core group of founders was Alfredo Gahan, José Gahan, Miguel A. Kenny, Miguel Tyrrel, Miguel Dogerthy, José Cavanagh, Eugenio Kenny, Juan Aneil, Patricio Rath, Francisco Bowes, Héctor Mac Lean, Patricio Dillon, Santiago B. Kenny, Alberto Kenny and Eduardo O'Farrell. Navy-blue (almost black) with vertical white stripes were chosen as team colours.



Alumni, Argentina's First Division Champion in 1900, including six players from Lobos Athletic Club. (Standing): McEwen (referee), Carlos Carr Brown, Alejandro Watson Hutton (director of the English High School), Armando Coste, Diego Brown, and Walter Buchanan. Seated: Guillermo Jordan, Tomás Brown, Andres Mack, Ernesto Brown and Eugenio Moore. (On the ground): Juan José Moore, Spencer Leonard and Heriberto Jordan (Photographer unknown)

Their first match was on Sunday 4 August 1895, on some uncultivated land in the district of Chacarita, which was the scene of an amusing incident. The police detained the president of the club and various players on the grounds of 'immorality', due to their dressing in a manner which showed their uncovered legs. Victims of their own passion for sport, those detained were released within a few days after much negotiation (Palacio Zino 1920: 10). [5]

In 1899 the AAFL decided to create the Second Division. At that time the club had 42 members and registered its team in this new category. 'There is said to be splendid material for a good team of footballers, and no time will be lost in getting practice started', *The Standard* newspaper reported, on the topic of the Irish club ('Sport: Porteño A. C.',

The Standard, 20 April 1899, p. 5). During its first official season Porteño finished sixth out of nine participants and consisted of the following players: H. Chopitea, G. Hearney, T. Geoghegan, Torney, Laviaguierre y Rugeroni, Kenny, McDonald, F. Geoghegan (Captain), Tyrell and E. Hearne. The team was based in the district of Caballito. *The Standard* reported in the same year:

*The Porteño Athletic Club is now preparing a grand entertainment to take place in the Catholic Club of this city next July. The saloon, through the influence of the Porteño's Hon. President Doctor O'Farrell, has been generously granted by the Committee of the Catholic Club. It will be a grand affair. (...) The object of the concert is to get up funds to build a pavilion on the ground occupied by the Club in Caballito and belonging to the Irish Orphanage ('Editor's Table', *The Standard*, 28 July 1899, p. 6).*

Porteño remained in the Second Division until the 1907 season when it was promoted to the First Division. A major achievement was garnered in 1911 when they ended the season on top, defeating the powerful Alumni club by 2-1. The following year a split occurred in the organisation of Argentine football and two federations emerged as a consequence. Porteño affiliated themselves to the *Federación Argentina de Football* and were crowned champions, however there were no longer any Irish surnames on the Porteño team.

Common Characteristics of both Clubs

Throughout their history, both clubs shared common ground in some aspects. Both the Lobos and Porteño clubs were initiated to give priority to football, a sport which was practiced in all English-speaking circles, both ignoring cricket. In 1895, *The Standard* newspaper tried without success to form a Hiberno-Argentine team of cricket players to be called the 'United Irish Team' (UIT). It was referred to ironically as 'the Marylebone Cricket Club of the Plate.' It should be remembered that the editors and publishers of the newspaper, the Irish Mulhall brothers, showed great loyalty to the British Crown. *The Standard's* pages never contained news of notices or statistics of the UIT, inviting the assumption that the entire initiative failed, or

that it was merely a farcical enterprise. [6] In addition, in the summer of 1897-1898 the first cricket championship was played in Buenos Aires, but neither the Lobos nor Porteño were present. [7] In the particular case of Lobos, the club's minutes of 1894 recount:

Our cricket season began in October when the weather got too warm to continue playing football. This game, due to the lack of excitement it affords to beginners, and the excessive heat, did not take well, and after three or four frail attempts, it was ultimately given up completely, and to this day it has remained a dead letter.

Another particularity which distinguishes both clubs is that each continues to exist up to the present day, yet neither one can count among its members any Hiberno-Argentines. The Lobos club celebrated 110 years of existence in 2002. Its centennial trajectory did not however mirror its auspicious beginnings. It never returned to the First Division of Argentine Football League, but it continues to participate in regional leagues. Porteño, for its part, alternated between good and bad seasons. The club continued to play in the official Football League until 1929, when the concealed professionalism of most of its rivals was impossible to continue to deny. Ever faithful to the spirit of amateur sport, the team made the decision to dissolve its ties with the official leagues and to disband the team altogether.

Notes

[1] The original urban area began to extend towards the countryside. It first expanded towards the south (Cañuelas, San Vicente, Chascomús, Ranchos) and from the 1860s towards the west (Mercedes, Suipacha, Carmen de Areco, Exaltación de la Cruz, Luján, San Andrés de Giles), eventually advancing beyond the frontier with the indigenous population (Rojas, Chacabuco, 25 de Mayo, Bragado, Saladillo).

[2] The original name of the team was the 'English High School', but two years afterwards, the AAFL prevented them from continuing to use that name and they became known as 'Alumni'.

[3] They were champions of the Argentina Football Association (in reality this was the league only for Buenos Aires) in the years 1900, 1901, 1902, 1903, 1905, 1906, 1907, 1909, 1910 and 1911. Alumni were disbanded at the beginning of 1912.

[4] The Football league of Salto, Bodas de Oro (Golden Jubilee), 1978. The first president of the league was Juan J. Moore.

[5] There was no mention of this game in *The Standard*, which in its edition of 5 August 1895 devoted a great amount of space to a game of rugby between a combined 'England and Ireland' team versus a combined 'Scotland and Wales' team, played in the district of Lomas de Zamora, Buenos Aires. The 'English/ Irish' team was formed by Treacy, E. Robson, F. Jacobs, H. Anderson, F. Chantrill, C.

The main sport of the club was in fact rugby and this continues today; in 1932 it competed in the championships of the Union of Rugby of Buenos Aires (URBA). It is a fact worthy of note that in 1938 Porteño merged with *Sportive Française*, a conjunction which resulted in the incorporation of many families of French origin into its ranks. Since its beginnings as a rugby team, the club colours have been blue with sky-blue horizontal bands. It was first based in Palermo, but the club's history is characterised by constant movement of locale. Its location has changed nine times in total. From 1971 it has had its grounds in the district of San Vicente, to the south of the city of Buenos Aires.

Around 1910, the concealed professionalism or 'shamateurism' of Buenos Aires football began to rear its head. At this point Anglo-Argentines 'took refuge' in the leagues that were specifically for the schools or companies of the British community, such as the railway leagues. With the passing of the decades, English-speaking sportsmen turned their attention to rugby or cricket, but by this time Ireland had already become politically divided. Now the club of choice for the Irish community in Buenos Aires is the Hurling Club, founded on 22 August 1922.

Víctor Raffo
TEA y DeporTEA, Buenos Aires

Holway, G. C. Kennard, A. Jones, L. Jacobs, D. Hannay, C. Smiles, W. Smiles, Smiles, Liversidge and R. Brooking. It should be borne in mind that the English language press in Buenos Aires was reluctant to publish policing matters involving the English-speaking community.

[6] See for example, "Sport", *The Standard*, 29 February 1895, p. 7.

[7] Participating clubs were Hurlingham, Belgrano, Buenos Aires, Flores, Lanús, Lomas and Palermo. The first cricket championships were held under the auspices of the Buenos Aires Cricket Club, in its role as custodian of the sport. La Asociación del Cricket Argentino (Argentine Cricket Association) was founded in 1912.

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Catholic, Male and Working-class: The Evolution of the Hurling Club into a Wide-Ranging Irish-Argentine Institution (1920-1980)

By Ronnie Quinn



Game of hurling in Mercedes, 1917
(Hurling Club collection)

The Hurling Club of Buenos Aires presents an eloquent case study for the researcher of Diasporic Irish identities. Established by an initial group of enthusiastic young men - most of them with Roman Catholic and urban middle-class backgrounds - the Club never attracted the traditional rural population of wealthier Irish immigrants or their families. With the support of Roman Catholic missionaries to the Irish in Argentina, hurling was introduced in this country by the writer William Bulfin and other nationalists shortly after the foundation of the Gaelic Athletic Association in Ireland. This article is an account of the different events that led to the foundation of the Club, and its further development from the restricted Irish Catholic social circle of employees of the British companies in Buenos Aires to its current status as an inclusive and prominent supporter of rugby, field hockey and other sports.

Introduction

From the mid-1850s, there was a rapid spread in Ireland of organised sports of English origin, in particular cricket. This coincided with major land-reform and an agitation towards self-government in the form of the Home Rule movement. Allied to this was the increase in literacy and transportation links, which made it easier to distribute British goods. A logical reaction to these events was a growing feeling that a distinctive sense of Irish culture was being

slowly eroded. Archbishop Croke of Cashel, a leading member of the Irish Roman Catholic hierarchy, voiced his indignation 'by the ugly and irritating fact that we are importing from England not only her manufactured goods, but her fashions, her accents, her vicious literature, her music, her dances and her manifold mannerisms, her games and her pastimes, to the utter discredit of our own grand national sports, to the sore humiliation, as I believe, of every genuine son and daughter of the old land' (Mandel 1979: 100-101). In November 1884 the

Gaelic Athletic Association (GAA) was founded in Thurles in County Tipperary to revive and nurture traditional Irish pastimes such as hurling [1] and a local variant of football.

As Whelan (1993) postulates, there were historically two variants of the game of hurling: *iomán* [2] a summer game which was played in the southern part of Ireland where the ball could be handled or carried on the hurley and *camán*, which was akin to modern field hockey in that it did not allow handling of the ball. As in England with other traditional sports, *iomán* was patronised by the gentry as a spectator and gambling sport, associated with fairs and other public gatherings. They picked the teams, arranged the hurling greens and supervised the matches, which were frequently organised as gambling events. 'Landlord patronage was essential to the well-being of the southern game; once it was removed, the structures it supported crumbled and the game collapsed into shapeless anarchy' (Whelan 1993: 29). Other factors also played a part in its demise, including political turbulence, modernisation and the dislocating impact of the potato famine. By the mid-nineteenth century the game had virtually disappeared, only remaining in a few pockets, including Cork city, South East Galway and north of Wexford town. It was to be the southern version *iomán* which would form the template for the organised game of hurling.

Such was the rapid spread of the organisation that three to four years after the GAA's foundation, hurling made its first appearance in Argentina. Generally it has been viewed that political nationalism was the primary reason for the rapid spread of the organisation. Whilst it is impossible to ignore the important contribution that it made to the dissemination of the sport, recent work by historians such as Cronin (1998) has argued that other factors led to the growth of the GAA including 'codification, fair play, muscular Christianity' (Cronin 1998: 89), which are similar reasons given for the spread of British sports. But there may be broader social and cultural reasons for this as well, especially in the Diaspora. We examine below how hurling initially helped a section of the Irish-Argentine community form a distinct identity differentiating them from others in the English-

speaking community, as well as from the wider community.

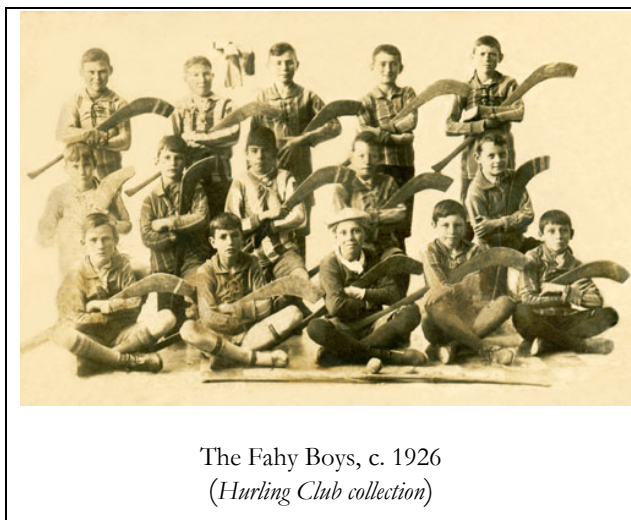


Jim Hoare (*left*), F. Gaynor and J. Gaynor, of the Federation of Hurling, 1927
(*Hurling Club collection*)

Introducing Hurling in Argentina

The first record of hurling in Argentina is from 1887 and 1888, three to four years after the founding of the GAA, when Irish immigrants and those of Irish descent began playing the game in Mercedes [3] and near the Passionist monastery of Saint Paul in Capitán Sarmiento. [4] It is likely that the games being played were largely un-codified and not competitive in nature (King & Darby 2007: 430). No information exists as to the motivation of the first players of hurling or their country of origin. It was not until May 1900 that the first attempts were made at organising and promoting the game when an exhibition game was played in the lands of the Irish Catholic Association in the district of Caballito, which is now a public square known as Plaza Irlanda. It would appear that the key instigator was William Bulfin (1864-1910) of Birr, County Offaly, who was editor of the weekly newspaper for the Irish community, *The Southern Cross*, which became an important organ for promoting the game. Indeed over the course of the early 1900s there were many

articles explaining the rules and nuances of hurling.



The Fahy Boys, c. 1926
(Hurling Club collection)

The first 'official' match took place in July of the same year, between teams from two districts of the city of Buenos Aires, Palermo and Almagro, though the game had to be limited to nine players per team, rather than the usual seventeen, due to the shortage of hurleys. The following month the Buenos Aires Hurling Club was established with James Patrick Harte (d. 1932) of County Cork elected as its first president. For all intents and purposes it was to 'be institutionally and officially a branch of the GAA' (King & Darby 2007: 431). Games were played most weekends and received good coverage in the local press including the Argentine daily, *La Nación*.

Generally those that played hurling in the early days were urban middle-class workers who had settled in the western districts of the city of Buenos Aires, principally Villa Devoto, Belgrano, Flores and Caballito, and worked for such firms as Swift, [5] Agar Cross, [6] Duperial, [7] and the railroads, or were clerks for the insurance companies and banks. In the rural areas it tended to be more popular among labourers rather than landed Irish-Argentines. Not only was the game likely to appeal to these social groups, but it was also heavily promoted by the Roman Catholic Church as a way of nurturing identity and ensuring the preservation of religious adherence in a social and commercial environment dominated by Protestantism.

Following the end of World War One, the importation of hurleys resumed and there was a revival of the sport. In August 1920, Miguel Ballesty (1876-1950) of Salto, son of County Westmeath immigrants, convened a meeting with delegates from four of the most prominent hurling clubs in the country: Buenos Aires Hurling Club, Mercedes, Bearna Baoghail [8] and Wanderers. At the first meeting it was decided to create a commission, which subsequently became the Argentine Federation of Hurling, to examine the feasibility of renting, on a long-term basis, a dedicated space where the game could be played. Hitherto, hurling clubs had rented football fields and other sports fields on an ad-hoc basis. The first committee was formed by Miguel Ballesty (president); S. Farrell (secretary); Jack Dowling (treasurer); J. Clinton, P. Murtagh, P.J. O'Reilly, E. Ennis and M. Kennedy (committee members) .

Initially the committee rented the grounds of Club Singer, located at Alberdi 400 in the district of Boedo, which was accessible by the new metro. On 21 October 1921 a special game was played in Mercedes in honor of Laurence Ginnell, diplomatic envoy of the Irish Republic who was visiting the country. Another game that would go down in the folklore of the club took place on 8 October 1922 between Irish-born players and another composed of Irish-Argentines in which the Irish-Argentines convincingly defeated their opponents (The Southern Cross 1975:58). The game itself was a re-run of another game that was played in 1914 just before the outbreak of World War One.

A short time afterwards the committee moved to the sports grounds of Banco Nación in the neighbourhood of Floresta, acquiring a longer lease. The site was redeveloped and two hurling pitches and tennis courts were built, as well as a wooden clubhouse, painted in the colours of the Irish flag: green, white and orange. Other sports played there included *pelota a paleta* and *bochas* (a type of boules). It was inaugurated on 15 August 1922 and a week later on 22 August 1922, the Argentine Federation of Hurling, the forerunner of the modern Hurling club, was founded.

After only twenty months at the Banco Nación site, the Argentine Federation of Hurling was to

move again when in April 1924, they had to vacate the site due to a road building scheme. A new ground was located in the western district of Villa Devoto, located near the intersection of Santo Tomé and Sanabria streets. Although the original intention was to buy the site, Miguel Ballesty could not convince the other committee members to agree. Some felt the ground was too remote from a transportation perspective and the area was underdeveloped, whilst others felt that it was more prudent to continue renting. Finally, it was decided to rent part of the land. In front of a large audience in Villa Devoto on 13 July 1924 the grounds were opened and blessed by Monsignor Santiago Ussher. [9] The inaugural match was between Capilla Boys and Saint Patrick's Alumni.

Some of the clubs that played hurling during the early days of the new Argentine Federation of Hurling were: Buenos Aires Hurling Club, Mercedes, Wanderers, Bearna Baoghail, La Plata Gaels, Almirante Brown Capilla Boys, Saint Patrick's Alumni, Saint Patrick's Mercedes, Fahy Boys, St. Pauls, Irish Argentines, Juniors, New Lads, Santos Lugares, [10] Club Nacional and Belgrano. There was to be a strong influence from the Catholic Church and many teams had in their ranks priests or students of the Pallotine or Passionist religious orders, who had either come from Ireland or were of Irish-Argentine descent.

The Decline of Hurling

It is generally accepted that the advent of World War Two led to the demise of hurling as it once again became impossible to import hurleys. Although the potential of sourcing wood from the Delta region north of Buenos Aires was investigated, no suitable substitute could be found to replace the strength and resilience of ash. [11] Arguably, and notwithstanding the impact of the war, the importation of hurleys would have become problematic anyway, as Argentina's economic policy moved towards import substitution industrialization, or ISI, from the 1940s onwards.

However, there were more important social factors leading to the disappearance of the game. The small numbers playing hurling and the small number of clubs led to an unacceptable level of

violence, causing much discord in the community. It was felt by the community leaders and the clergy that the only way to deal with the issue was to put an end to the playing of hurling. From that point on, hurling would only be played as an exhibition game once a year on 25 May, known locally as Revolution of May Day and a public holiday.

A Permanent Abode

In May 1941, a number of clubs that were members of the Argentine Hurling Federation came together to form the Hurling Club. It was a major challenge to integrate what had until then been a number of disparate clubs with bitter rivalries. As hurling had been abandoned, many of the ex-hurlers began to take up field hockey.

The newly formed Hurling Club was soon on the move for a second time, as a consequence of the city government's street building programme. Exasperated by the repeated need to relocate its grounds, the committee decided in late 1942 to find a site for purchase. An ambitious fundraising initiative was commenced, which included a small bond issue. By the end of 1945 the club had raised sufficient funds to enable the purchase of seven and a half hectares of what had been agricultural grazing land in the district of Hurlingham, in Greater Buenos Aires. The club was finally inaugurated on 25 May 1948 and for the first time in its history it had a permanent premises. The first official game to be played at the new grounds was a men's hockey match against the Chilean-German team, Club Deportivo Manquehue from Santiago in Chile. There was also a rugby game against the Pacific Railway & Athletic Club de Saénz Peña, now Club Atlético Ferrocarril General San Martín, which Hurling won by 8-6. The club went from strength to strength in the early 1950s.

The date of 14 February 1955 was to be an inauspicious one in the club's history, when an electrical short circuit caused a fire that burnt the wooden clubhouse to the ground. Only part of the locker room was to escape the flames. As a measure of the standing the club had achieved among the English-speaking community and indeed the wider community, there were many

acts of solidarity which helped the club get back on its feet again. Hurlingham Club [12] provided a marquee to serve as a hall and a bar and the *Círculo de Villa Devoto* sports and social club opened its doors to members of the Hurling Club so that they could use its facilities. The Pacific Railway Club organised several fundraising events to enable the re-building of the clubhouse. A group of club members who had knowledge of the construction sector, known as *Los Horneros*, [13] led the rebuilding work in what was a significant voluntary effort.

The Introduction of Rugby

In early 1941 a group of junior members of the club led by Jimmy Ussher showed an interest in forming a rugby team in the Hurling Club. They invited José Daniel Moché to a meeting to explore the feasibility of taking up rugby. Moché himself was a former player with the first division at Olivos Rugby Club, and had a connection to Hurling through his wife's family. A nucleus of a team began to practice the game from mid-1941 onwards under the management of Moché. To meet the requirements for affiliation to the Rugby Union of the River Plate, the predecessor of the current Union of Argentine Rugby (UAR), they needed to play a number of friendly games against affiliated clubs before they could formally seek union membership.

Their first competitive match was held on 17 May 1942 in Villa Devoto, against Lomas Athletic Club. Hurling's first try in competitive rugby was scored by Guillermo 'Mozo' MacAllister with Sean Sill making the first conversion. The visiting team, steeped in a long tradition of rugby, won 19-5. A second friendly took place two weeks later on 31 May 1942 against St. Andrew's College in Llavallol, Lomas de Zamora. As a novice rugby club, Hurling received much help and assistance from other clubs such as Porteño Athletic Club (a club which itself was founded mainly by Irish-Argentines), who allowed them to use their pitch in Palermo, as the Hurlingham site was still under development. They later also used the grounds of the Buenos Aires Cricket and Rugby Club. It would be 1948 before Hurling acquired

its own grounds, as mentioned above. Media support was also forthcoming, in particular from Hugo Mackern, a freelance journalist who worked for one of the leading English-language newspapers *The Buenos Aires Herald* and the sports magazine *El Gráfico*.



Rugby Blue vs. White - Father Fahy Centenary Celebration, 13 September 1943. (*Top row, left to right*): D. Thompson, D. Jack, F. Morrow, D. Kelly, J. Carmody, D. Fitzpatrick, S. Sills, J. Kelly, F. Colson, T. McCormack, A. Suarez, S. Shamoun, D. Farrell, J. Ferro, T. Fitzsimon, J. Laffan, T. Elliot. (*Bottom row*): Cromayne, B. Fox, G. MacLoughlin, D. MacLoughlin, E. Shanly, E. Aguirre, L. Shanly, F. Farrell, A. Geraghty, D. Lewis, R. Harten, L. McCormack
(*Hurling Club collection*)

Hurling became an official member of the River Plate Rugby Union in 1943 and began to compete in the tournament of the Third Division in the same year. It played its first official match on the grounds of Porteño Athletic Club on 9 May 1943 against Kangurú Rugby Club, losing by 17-3. In their first year they came fifth, just behind Obras Sanitarias. The team included South African Rybeck Elliott, who had first come to Argentina as part of the Junior Springboks in 1932.

At that time in the history of rugby union no substitution of players was allowed. Not being able to alternate meant that it would be difficult to develop the talents of the younger generation of players. Hurling overcame the problem by joining the Catholic Rugby League (LCR) in 1943, an organisation which ran in parallel to the River Plate Union. In 1945 Hurling came second in the tournament organised by the LCR.

The early 1950s was a time of great progress for the club in rugby, despite the setback of the clubhouse fire. The first junior team was created in 1953 and later that decade Hurling made its first tour at the invitation of the Tucumán institution, Lince Rugby Club, to open their new playing pitch. It also played another game with a fledgling team from the city of Concepción, Concepción Rugby Club, now Huirapuca Rugby Club. By the early 1960s the Club had started to reap rewards. In 1963 the junior team were runners-up in the UAR Reserve Division Championship. This formed the nucleus of the team that would go on to win the Third Classification in 1966 against Banco Nación, gaining promotion to the third division of the Ascenso championship. The specialist rugby magazine *Tercer Tiempo* devoted significant coverage of the ascent of Hurling in the world of rugby.

In 1980 the club embarked upon its first major tour abroad, playing five matches in Ireland and one in England. They won two matches against Galwegians Rugby Club in Galway and Malone Rugby Club Belfast, tied a game against Lansdowne Rugby Club in Dublin and lost three games against University College Cork, Limerick and Bohemians Rugby Club in Staines, London.

Excelling in Field Hockey

In June 1930 a notice was published in *The Southern Cross*, seeking players interested in playing field hockey for the Argentine Federation of Hurling, in a move orchestrated by Mary P. Richards and Tabby Gramática Brown. There was an enthusiastic response to the call and with the collaboration of Patrick (Paddy) Gramática Brown - one of the most famous referees at that time in the sport - a team christened the Golden Wings began training with a view to competing in the Women's Hockey League. The club joined the Argentine Association of Amateur Field Hockey (AAAH) and the following May made its debut in associations league against Saint Andrew's Past Pupils. The team was quick to make an impact in the sport and some time later the sports magazine *El Gráfico* published a photo of six sisters from the Fox family who played for the

Golden Wings. The ladies team won their First Division championship in 1958.

Whilst the motivation of the male club members in adopting hockey is unclear, one can identify some of the influences involved. In particular, members were already familiar with the game through the women's division 'Golden Wings'. There was also likely to have been a feeling among members that they could excel at the game given their expertise with a hurley. They began to practice and play friendlies in the latter part of 1941, and in 1942 they joined the AAAH and began to compete in its main tournament. Another group took up rugby.



Hockey seven-a-side, second division 1948. (Top row, left to right): D. Fox, I. Lang, O. Patridge, L. Mackinson. (Bottom row): T. Fleming, L. McCormick, R. Mackinson
(Hurling Club collection)

The first official male field hockey game played by Hurling Club was in May 1943 against Quilmes Athletic Club 'B' team. They won the first match by 2-0 and the first goal in competitive hockey was scored by Cecilio McCormack, who some years later would become president of the AAAH. *The Standard* newspaper reported that Hurling had committed a number of unusual offences during the match, including kicking the ball with their feet. By the end of the first season the men's hockey team were crowned champions of the second division. In their first year in the premier division, they were unlucky in losing the top spot to Quilmes by a single goal. Following that, however, Hurling came to dominate Argentine hockey for the next seven years, winning the first division championship in 1949, 1950, 1951, 1953, 1954, 1955 and 1956.

Such was the club's rise to prominence in the sport that three forwards and two midfielders were chosen to be part of the hockey team that competed in the 1948 Summer Olympics in London. These were Tomás Quinn, Luis Scally, Tomás Scally, Tomás Wade and Guillermo Dolan. The goalkeeper Mario Vieytes from the Club was pre-selected, but was not included in the final list. The team travelled to London by ship, together with distinguished sportsmen such as the basketball player Oscar Furlong, and Delfor Cabrera, winner of the marathon. Their training and practice sessions were held on the ship's deck. In their first group game they lost to India 1-9 (eventual gold medal winners), won 3-2 against Spain and drew 1-1 with Austria. Overall they came second in the group, but this was insufficient to allow them to progress to the semi-finals.

The Hurling Club and Identity

The early group of predominantly male, Catholic and urban middle-class employees who started the Hurling Club in the 1920s resisted the Anglophile attitudes typical of many contemporary Irish and Argentine landed families. Though hurling originally represented a factor of differentiation from these other groups, it also led to insularity. The adoption of the more widely played sports of rugby and hockey enabled club members to assert their identity in the wider community. Whilst hurling was first viewed as masculine entertainment, perceptions began to change from the 1930s onwards, when women were not only accepted as companions of the male members, but as full

members themselves. The success of female hockey is a manifestation of this successful integration of women in the Club.

The Club still continues to successfully maintain an Irish identity, though this is being challenged through a decline in participation from members of the Irish-Argentine community and a concomitant rise in members from the wider community. The then Irish Foreign Minister Dick Spring paid an official visit to the Hurling Club in 1996 and recalled that 'it was a memorable experience to see the green jersey, complete with shamrock, worn with distinction by the players of the Hurling Club with such names as Scully (*sic*), [14] Rush and McAllister - in a match against the Rugby Club of Buenos Aires (*sic*)' (Spring, 1996). To some extent the impact on the unique identity of the club through the diminution in participation from the Irish-Argentines has been offset by the large number of touring Irish rugby clubs, other sporting clubs and official delegations from Ireland that visit the club on a regular basis. In recognition of its strong Irish-Argentine ethos and its capacity to continue the Irish-Argentine sense of identity and links with Ireland, in 2007 the Club was given a grant by the Irish Department of Foreign Affairs as part of their annual grants programme to Irish community organisations in the Southern Hemisphere.

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Member of the Hurling Club, Buenos Aires

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Athletics meeting at Santo Tomé, 1926
(*Hurling Club collection*)

Notes

- [1] Hurling is a game similar to hockey, played with a small ball and a curved wooden stick called a hurley. You may strike the ball on the ground, and, unlike hockey, in the air. You can also put the ball on your hurley and carry it.
- [2] The modern Irish language word for hurling is iománaíocht and a hurley stick is camán.
- [3] Mercedes is a town in the province of Buenos Aires. It is located 100 km west from the city of Buenos Aires and 30 km south west of Luján.
- [4] Capitán Sarmiento is a town located around 160 km north of the City of Buenos Aires.
- [5] Swift was a company set up in 1907 to export meat products to Europe.
- [6] Agar Cross began importing and selling machinery and farm equipment in 1875, later branching into windmill sales and the agrochemical sector.
- [7] Duperial is an Argentine chemical company.
- [8] Bearna Baoghail ('gap of danger'), refers to the moment in a siege when the fortification has been breached and the area is extremely dangerous for defenders. These words were included by Peadar Kearney in his Soldiers Song (1907), which in the Irish language is the national anthem of Ireland: 'Tonight we'll man the Bearna Baoghail, / In Erins cause come woe or weal, / 'Mid cannons roar and rifle's peal, / We'll chant a soldier's song.'
- [9] Santiago Martín Ussher (1867-1960), Roman Catholic priest, was born in San Andrés de Giles. He received the orders on 22 December 1894. Ussher was parish priest of Baradero and a member of the ecclesiastical courts of the Buenos Aires archdiocese. He published *Los Capellanes Irlandeses en la Colectividad Hiberno Argentina* (Buenos Aires, 1954).
- [10] Translated as 'Holy Places'.
- [11] However, *Fraxinus* sp., including American and European ash, is the genus most frequently cultivated in the streets and parks of Buenos Aires.
- [12] Hurlingham Club was founded in 1888 by influential figures in the British Community led by John Ravenscroft, as a sporting and social club.
- [13] In English 'ovenbirds'.
- [14] The surname referred to should have been Scally rather than Scully.

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The Development of Rugby in the River Plate Region: Irish Influences

By Hugh FitzGerald Ryan



A very pleased Old Christians team, including Roberto Canessa (*left*) and Gustavo Zerbino (*right*), both Andes survivors. Gustavo is the current president of the Uruguay Rugby Union (URU)
(*Photographer unknown*)

Origins of the game

Two years before the irascible Duke of Wellington [1] scored his final victory over Napoleon at the Battle of Waterloo in Belgium, young Matthew Bloxam entered Rugby School. It is a cliché that Waterloo was in fact won on the playing fields of Eton, England, attesting to the vigorous and barely contained mayhem practised at the time on the sports fields of the English public schools. Sixty-four years later Bloxam wrote his recollections of the game of football as played at Rugby in his times. These games consisted of selected teams of twenty or so, to which others might attach themselves as they saw fit, not dissimilar to a form of football known as *caid* quite common in Ireland at that time. He remembered William Webb Ellis, a boy ‘with no lack of assurance,’ whose time at Rugby overlapped with his. It was this boy who allegedly broke the rule on handling the ball. According to Bloxham, on one occasion in 1823, on catching the ball, Ellis did not retire to

take his kick, but rather, ‘with a fine disregard for the rules of football,’ ran forward with the ball in his hands, towards the opposite goal. If a junior boy had done this, wrote Bloxam, ‘he would probably have received more kicks than commendations’. This in time was to become the apocryphal account of the origin of the game. ‘It is an attractively subversive story, impossible to prove beyond doubt’ (Richards 2007: 24).

The game was adopted by other public schools as ‘Rugby football with some exceptions’ and inevitably, as the British Empire spread to many parts of the world, its administrators and army officers brought the game with them. In 1871 the English Rugby Football Union was formed, and the laws were codified as they were to apply wherever the game was played. Scotland, Ireland and Wales followed suit in 1873, 1874 [2] and 1880 respectively. For almost a century the game was strictly an amateur game.

The schism which led to the creation of the Northern Rugby Football Union (NRFU) in Yorkshire, England (later to become rugby league) in 1895 was deep and bitter. The kernel of the dispute was that some believed that working men should be compensated for the loss of a day's or a half-day's pay, while others regarded rugby as exclusively a game for 'gentlemen', presumably with private means. It took ninety-nine years and 364 days for the International Rugby Board to concede the principal of payment for playing, due in a large degree to the vast amounts of money flowing into the game from advertising and television, as well as a drain of players to rugby league.

Introduction to the River Plate

British games arrived to the River Plate with British citizens who were involved in trade, rather than with imperial administration and conquest. Sports clubs served a valuable social function for immigrants who had little affinity with bull-fighting or other sports of Spanish origin.

Rodeo, the pre-eminent sport of the *gauchos*, is still popular and attracts thousands to the spectacle of the *domador* (the horse breaker / tamer) in the Prado Park in Montevideo during Holy Week. A visitor from Ireland would have been struck by the similarities to the Royal Dublin Society's Horse Show, [3] even in the design of the exhibition buildings. However, the differences were more striking. This is a week of wild horses, broken bones and *gauchos* in flamboyant costume, with *facóns* (long knives) tucked into their belts.

As in Ireland and Britain during the early nineteenth century, cock-fighting was prevalent at the time, as a focus for gambling. Legend has it that many a man gambled his wife's honour at these events, certainly not the action of a gentleman!

Despite its ancient origin, - it was played at Troy by Achilles and Patroclus - the *gaucho* gambling game *taba* was frowned upon by the civil authorities and eventually outlawed. Not dissimilar in concept to 'Pitch and Toss', [4] it is played with the knuckle bone of a cow and

attracted extravagant bets on how the bones might fall. It remains illegal in Uruguay, except on election-day. The newly arrived *inglés*, despite the emphasis on the Classics in his or her public school education, would most probably have regarded it as they would have regarded Pitch and Toss home, a pursuit for corner boys and wastrels.

The largest bull-ring in South America was completed at Colonia del Sacramento in southern Uruguay in 1912, the same year that bull-fighting was made illegal in the country, attesting to the decline of the old amusements in favour of the imported European games and to some spectacularly bad timing on the part of the promoters.

The Montevideo Cricket Club (MVCC) illustrates the situation of the new immigrants well and may serve as a paradigm for developments in Argentina also. Founded by an *inglés* involved in the meat trade as the Victoria Cricket Club in 1842, it withered almost immediately due to the siege of Montevideo, which began the following year and lasted until 1851. General Rivera and the Colorado party declared themselves to be the defenders of liberty and with the help of Britain and France, fortified the city against General Manuel Oribe, the Blanco party and their ally, the dictator Juan Manuel Rosas of Argentina. Giuseppe Garibaldi, the Italian national hero, was among the foreign volunteers who came to defend this 'New Troy'. Most of the inhabitants of Montevideo were European at that time, though there was a substantial community of Afro-Uruguayans. It is doubtful if there was any space for field games within the walls during those years. Presumably the traditional games went on as before. The government was obliged to impose severe duties on imports, which may explain why the Cricket Club was unable to import bats, balls and stumps until 1862.

Paradoxically during two decades of war and political upheaval, British influence and commercial activity increased in Uruguay. The production of wool expanded rapidly, in inverse proportion to the decline of cotton production during the American Civil War.

British investors such as the Drabble Brothers and MacIntyre developed new production techniques, notably the enclosure of pastures with barbed wire and the introduction of British breeds of sheep and cattle. In 1862 the firm founded by German chemist Justus von Liebig in London, The Liebig Extract of Meat Company (Lemco) began to produce their famous meat extract at Fray Bentos.

The government of Bernardo Berro, from 1860 to 1864, introduced many liberal reforms, set up a new and strong currency using the gold standard, and separated the Catholic Church from state institutions, especially education.

The MVCC reappeared under its present name at a meeting in 1861 of the original founders, at the fashionable *Confitería Oriental* in Montevideo. Its objective was to foster all sports, including rugby, athletics, rowing and football. Tennis and the use of the velocipede were also later introduced.

The Bank of London opened a branch in Montevideo in 1863, and in 1865 Montevideo Waterworks was set up by a British company to provide a source of clean drinking water, encouraging more British settlement and investment. Thousands of comparatively affluent Brazilian troops passing through Montevideo during the Paraguayan war [5] brought about a large injection of cash into the economy. The first railways were also built at this time. In 1876, during a period of political stability and prosperity, Uruguay purchased English railway equipment and a further influx of British immigrants took place. The employees of these enterprises all gravitated towards the sports clubs already in existence or founded their own along similar lines. Names of football clubs such as the Carmelo Wanderers are evidence of the direct influence of the *ingleses* in their foundation. President Pedro Varela in 1875, noted for his progressive and egalitarian education policies, remarked that he felt like the manager of a great *estancia*, the owner of which lived in London. Indeed the impact of the British community would in less than two decades manifest itself in the highest echelons of political power, when in

1894 a Scottish-Argentine, Duncan Stewart was appointed interim President.

A cricket match against Buenos Aires Cricket Club, scheduled for 1864, was postponed until 1868. The first international competition of its kind in South America was delayed various significant events: the *Cruzada Libertadora* of Venancio Flores; the overthrow of the Blanco government; the massacres at Paysandú; the war against Paraguay; the assassination of Flores; the subsequent assassination of Berro; and a massive outbreak of cholera on both sides of the River Plate.

From 1863 to 1865, Flores, with troops from Brazil and Argentina, raised a revolt against Berro and the Blancos and ravaged the country north of the Río Negro. He was responsible for the massacre of the citizens of Paysandú and the destruction of their town. He wrested power from the Blancos and began to roll back the reforms instigated by Berro. In this he was supported by the Catholic Church and conservative elements in society and in the military. He involved Uruguay with Brazil and Argentina in a war against Paraguay that resulted in the devastation of that country.

On 19 February 1965, during a heatwave and with an outbreak of cholera in the city, Berro, regarded as a man of peace and reconciliation, staged a coup, beginning with the assassination of Flores and seizure of the government buildings. The young son of Flores came to do reverence to the decapitated body of his father. Tearfully he embraced his former mentor and friend, Bernardo Berro, drew a pistol from his coat and shot him dead. There followed a reign of terror, partly precipitated by an English telegraph operator in the new Proudfoot Telegraph Company, who confused 'vénganse' (come!) with 'vénguense' (take revenge!), in a message to military commanders. The episode exhibited to perfection all the elements of Shakespearian tragedy, especially the dramatic unities of time and place. The heatwave abated. The executions petered out and play was resumed. In calmer times both clubs played the first international rugby match in the region in 1874.

The first football match in Uruguay was played between a team from MVCC and a team from a visiting British ship in 1878. The story of the expansion of Association Football in South America is well known. The game of rugby was eclipsed by the increasing passion for *fútbol*.

English cricket clubs were the incubators of rugby's development in the River Plate region (Richards 2007:54). Rugby later gained a firm foothold in the clubs established by the English schools during the 1870s and 1880s. Significantly, these schools also enrolled Uruguayans and Argentineans, integrating the colleges and their sports into the mainstream of Uruguayan and Argentinean life and leading to the formation of clubs throughout both countries. The game advanced rapidly in Argentina and in 1899 the River Plate Rugby Football Union was formed, later to be Unión Argentina de Rugby (UAR). However, the club had to wait until 1987 to be affiliated to the international board (IRB), when they were invited to compete in the inaugural World Cup. 'Rugby criollo' was introduced in 1949 at the Carrasco Polo Club (Richards 2007: 164). Uruguay did not form its own union until 1951. Appropriately the first president of the union was Carlos E. Cat, a leading figure in Montevideo Cricket Club, who had played rugby for San Isidro Club in Argentina. There would also appear to be an Irish link with the foundation of the Uruguay Rugby Union, as its first honorary secretary was a Mr D McCormack. The game is constituted on an amateur basis in both countries.

Irish Involvement

Two events of significance occurred in Montevideo in May 1955. Firstly, the last tram of the crumbling British transport system rattled along the route from central Montevideo to Punta Carretas, a suburb on the coast. Britain had amassed large debts to Uruguay for the supply of foodstuffs during the Second World War and arguably, a debt of honour for its assistance in the destruction of the German warship *Admiral Graf Spee* at the outbreak of hostilities. Drained by the cost of the war, Britain, in the grip of rationing, harsh

winters, poor harvests and facing the imminent loss of its Empire, could not or would not pay the debt. Instead, British interests were persuaded to sign over ownership of the rattle-trap, ill-maintained transport infrastructure to the Uruguayan state. Most of the system was decommissioned forthwith. This was perhaps a shrewd deal for Britain, but definitely not for cricket! [6] Secondly, a small group of Irish Christian Brothers opened a school at Carrasco, a leafy suburb on the outskirts of the city. This school, Stella Maris, was to attract worldwide attention in 1972, following the crash of Flight F-227 of the Uruguayan Air Force, high in the Andes.

The Irish Christian Brothers, colloquially known as 'the Brothers', were founded in County Waterford, Ireland, by Edmund Ignatius Rice, a devout Roman Catholic and philanthropic businessman in that city. He opened his first school for the education of poor boys in a stable in Waterford in 1802 with the support of the local Roman Catholic bishop Thomas Hussey. Using his own money to provide food, clothing and books for the students and the teachers who came to join him in his work, and having overcome many difficulties, the order of the Irish Christian Brothers was finally sanctioned by Rome in 1821. It was designated as a religious congregation of men, as opposed to ordained clergy. By this time they had founded schools in many parts of the country, under the patronage of local bishops (Cullen & O' Toole 1979).

The Catholic Emancipation Act of 1829 posed an unexpected threat to the existence of the Order. The bill proposed to continue the law of 1791, forbidding religious orders from recruiting new members, under threat of transportation to the penal colonies. [7] A delegation to London bearing a petition signed by thousands of prominent people of different Christian denominations secured an interview with the Prime Minister, the Duke of Wellington, the famously reluctant Irishman. [8] Edmund Rice's brother, Fr. John Rice was a member of the delegation. He explained clearly the work done by the Brothers in the fields of

education and charity. The Duke replied in a characteristic fashion:

'You exist contrary to the law. You may perceive that the people of this country are hostile to you.' The law remained, but Daniel O'Connell, [9] a Catholic lawyer known as The Liberator in Ireland, advised Edmund Rice to disregard it. It was O'Connell who famously remarked that he could drive 'a coach and four' [10] through any act of parliament. Nevertheless, its presence created financial difficulties for the Brothers. They found that they could not affiliate to the new state-funded multi-denominational National Schools system that was set up in 1831 as these schools were strictly secular, (as were the public schools set up in Uruguay in the 1870s.) In order to survive, the Brothers introduced a system of fee-paying schools, whereby the better off subsidised the education of the poor.



To some degree this question arose wherever the Brothers opened schools, as they were to do in many parts of the world. Stella Maris in Carrasco and Cardenal Newman College in Buenos Aires are regarded as schools for the more affluent middle class. Nevertheless the schools have been consistently involved in social and charitable work in their communities, following the teaching of their founder. Cardenal Newman, founded in 1948, was their first school in South America, followed by schools in Uruguay, Peru and Paraguay. The influence of the Brothers has waned in modern times and their numbers have diminished.

'The Spirit of the Scrum'

Stella Maris was to a certain extent an offshoot of the Brothers' Cardenal Newman School. It had taken quite a few years for the Brothers in Dublin to accede to repeated requests from Catholic parents and clergy in Buenos Aires. The Order was more inclined to concentrate on the English-speaking countries of the Empire.

Nevertheless, Cardenal Newman School opened in 1948. Some of the Brothers from the earliest times are still attached to the college and, in some cases, still active in social work with elderly and underprivileged fellow parishioners.

A group of Catholic parents based in Uruguay came to Buenos Aires and petitioned the Brothers to found a similar school in Montevideo. They had originally approached a congregation of Canadian Jesuits, but liked what they saw in Buenos Aires. From the outset, the Brothers insisted that the college would be English-speaking and that the education provided would be Catholic. Moreover, physical education and sport would play a major role in the life of the college. Given the perceived aversion of the Brothers to 'foreign games' (any sport of British origin) in Ireland, it is interesting that they chose rugby as the dominant game at Cardenal Newman and at Stella Maris. Moreover, Uruguay was still basking in the glory of two wins in the football World Cup competition: the inaugural World Cup in 1930, which was held at the Estadio Centenario in Montevideo, and the 1950 World Cup in Brazil. When they had first arrived 'rugby was hardly played at all there' (Reid 1974:21).

The reasoning behind the choice of rugby was that it encouraged teamwork rather than the cultivation of individual stars. At all times boys were taught to play fair but hard, and to support one another, all striving together towards a common goal. This spirit of cooperation permeated all aspects of the life of the school and still does. This attitude contributed to what has been called 'the mystery of Christians'. The Brothers, some of them new to South America and speaking little or no Spanish, learned from the boys and *vice versa*.

As the first generation of graduates left the school, many imbued with a passion for rugby, they decided to continue practising the game and in 1965 established 'Old Christians' Rugby Club. Reflecting the Irish link, they adopted the shamrock as the club's crest. Within a short period of time they became a dominant force in

Uruguayan rugby. In 1968 they won their first Uruguayan National championship, and their second in 1970. They made their international tour to Argentina in 1970 and the following year went to Chile, chartering a plane from the Uruguayan air force.

Such was the success of the 1971 tour to Chile that it was decided to do another tour the following year, again chartering a plane from the air force, recruiting friends and relatives to help fill the plane. On 13 October 1972 the flight (F-227), which flew via Mendoza in Argentina, crashed in the snow-covered peaks of the Andes on its way to Santiago de Chile. The survivors initially survived with scarce food reserves salvaged from the plane, but once these supplies ran out, they were forced to feed themselves on the bodies of their dead companions (Reid 1974) and (Parrado 2006).

Initially the young men turned to their team captain for leadership. They attributed their survival to a great extent to the attitudes and discipline inculcated in them by the Brothers, and to their involvement in rugby. They invoked the 'Spirit of the Scrum'. They prayed together as they had at school and sang their school chants and songs.

Nando Parrado and Roberto Canessa undertook a ten-day expedition of incredible risk and hardship over the Andes, securing the rescue of their fourteen surviving companions, [11] after seventy-two days in the mountains. On returning to Montevideo, the survivors consulted Brother John McGuinness, the director of the college, as to how they should deal with the frenzy of media attention. His simple answer was 'Tell them the truth'.

This most extraordinary of 'rugby stories' focused world attention on Uruguay and on Stella Maris and defines to this day the spirit of the school. Fittingly, thirty years later, a selection including a dozen of the survivors played the match originally intended for 1972, which they won by twenty-eight points to eleven. Roberto Canessa, one of the try scorers, remarked: 'We were really up for the game. We were focused, just like thirty years ago.' Most of the survivors are still closely involved with the

school and with the Old Christians club. Many of them are distinguished members of the professions and commercial life in Uruguay. Nando Parrado is prominent in the media and in business. Roberto Canessa is Uruguay's leading paediatric cardiologist and in 1978 he was picked to play on the South American rugby XV, named the Jaguars.

Although the Brothers had an influential role in Uruguayan rugby, establishing the foundations for one of the country's most successful clubs and the diffusion of the sport in the country, their contribution to Argentinean rugby was on a smaller scale, as the game was well established by the time Cardenal Newman College was founded. Nevertheless they still made a significant contribution to Argentinean rugby. Club Newman was founded in Benavides, Buenos Aires in 1975, by graduates of the school, and the Club competes in the first division of the Rugby Union of Buenos Aires (URBA) championship. 'Pumas' (Argentinean national rugby team) players who got their start in Club Newman include the Contepomi brothers, Felipe and Manuel, and Marcos Ayerza.

The Modern Game

Argentina played its first full international game against a touring British Isles team in 1910. Distance, two World Wars and lack of funding limited international involvement until the later decades of the century. The game spread within Argentina itself. There are eighty clubs in the greater Buenos Aires area and about four hundred throughout the country. In the Northwest, the game comes close to surpassing football in popularity. More than seventy private schools, mostly bilingual as a result of British and Irish influence, and twenty universities, predominantly in the Buenos Aires area, have their own rugby teams. Women's rugby has begun to develop in a handful of clubs. The season runs from March to November. This has enticed European teams to tour there for an easy run up to the Six Nations, only to be severely mauled by the Pumas. There have also been Irish links with the Pumas: two coaches were of Irish origin, Adolfo 'Michingo' O'Reilly during the 1980s

and Dermot Cavanagh during the 1960s. There have also been players of Irish origin, including Santiago Phelan, who played in the late 1990s and retired in 2003.

In their first World Cup, the Pumas scored a win over Italy but finished bottom of their pool on points difference. In subsequent World Cup tournaments and Test Series they scored notable wins over all the Six Nations teams and gave the All Blacks a severe fright, allaying any notion that they are a second-tier force in the rugby world. In the 2007 World Cup they devastated Ireland and went on to destroy the reigning champions, France, twice, coming third overall in the tournament. Many Argentinean players play professional rugby in Europe including Agustín Pichot, Felipe Contepomi and Juan Martín Hernández. Contepomi, a graduate of Cardinal Newman College, playing for Leinster, was named as the sports writers' player of the year in Ireland in 2007. He made his international debut against Uruguay in 1995 and established himself as a formidable force with Bristol in England and later with Leinster, enabling him to complete his medical studies in Ireland.

Although the UAR considered a change to its statutes which would allow professionalism in Argentina's domestic leagues, this was unanimously rejected in an extraordinary meeting in January 2008. Whilst some were pushing for inclusion in the Six Nations competition, it seems more likely that Argentina's future lies with the Tri-Nations competition in the Southern hemisphere.

On the opposite bank of the Plate, the game similarly remains steadfastly amateur. After the formation of the Uruguay Rugby Union (URU) in 1951, four teams took part in the first club tournament: Carrasco Polo, Colonia Rugby

(now defunct), Old Boys and Montevideo Cricket. Since then Old Christians, Los Cuervos, Champagnat and El Trébol (Paysandú) have joined the competition. Carrasco Polo has been the dominant champion for most of this time, winning twenty-one championships, followed by Old Christians with sixteen. Old Christians won the Championship in 2007. Brother McGuinness, speaking from retirement in County Kilkenny, expressed regret that the game was changing from an open, running game to one of 'big hits' and increased physical contact. He kept a close eye on the rugby scene in Uruguay. He maintained that Carrasco Polo retained its dominance by recruiting the biggest players available.

The Punta del Este Sevens attract the best players in South America and formerly some of the most outstanding players in the world, such as Jonah Lomu. The tournament is a major tourist attraction in Punta del Este and one of the highlights of the rugby year in the region. The URU puts a great deal of effort into organising youth rugby in the country by encouraging clubs and schools. In this way they have enlarged the pool of up-and-coming players, to the benefit of the clubs and ultimately, it is hoped, the national team, Los Teros. [12] On the international level Los Teros have won twenty, drawn one and lost thirty-eight. Notable wins were against Georgia in the World Cup in Australia; 18-12 against Portugal in 2007, following a previous defeat; 43-15 against Chile in 2006 and a spectacular recovery against Chile in 2007, coming from 27-0 at half-time to win by 35-34. Unfortunately they failed to qualify for the World Cup in France in 2007.

Hugh FitzGerald Ryan

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Notes

- [1] Field Marshal Arthur Wellesley, 1st Duke of Wellington (1769 -1852), was a British Army soldier and statesman, and is considered one of the leading military and political figures of the first half of the nineteenth century.
- [2] The Irish Football Union (IFU) was formed in Dublin in 1874 and in 1875 the Northern Football Union (NFU) was founded in Belfast. The two bodies agreed to merge in 1879 to form the Irish Rugby Football Union (IRFU).
- [3] The Royal Dublin Society (RDS) was founded in 1731 to promote and develop agriculture, arts, science and industry. The society's main premises and main arena in Ballsbridge, a suburb of Dublin, hosts an annual international showjumping week entitled 'Dublin Horse Show, culminating in the Aga Khan Showjumping final.
- [4] Pitch and Toss is a simple coin game, known by this name in Britain since at least the eighteenth century.
- [5] The War of the Triple Alliance, also known as the Paraguayan War, was fought from 1864 to 1870; it was fought between Paraguay and the allied countries of Argentina, Brazil and Uruguay.
- [6] An idiom which is used especially in England and Wales meaning something is unfair.
- [7] Initially the British used North America as a penal colony, the most famous being the Province of Georgia. Convicts were transported by private sector merchants and auctioned off to plantation owners upon arrival in the colonies. After the American independence in 1779 this avenue was closed off. Australia was to later take its place with penal colonies such as Norfolk Island, Van Diemen's Land and New South Wales.
- [8] When someone commended him as a famous Irishman, he replied 'Being born in a stable does not make one a horse.'
- [9] Daniel O'Connell (1775 -1847) was Ireland's predominant political leader in the first half of the nineteenth century. He campaigned for Catholic Emancipation - the right for Catholics to sit in the British parliament in Westminster, which was achieved in 1829 through the Roman Catholic Relief Act. In the 1830s Daniel O'Connell became a major figure in the House of Commons and was active in the campaigns for prison and law reform, free trade, the abolition of slavery and Jewish emancipation.
- [10] An idiom which means that lawyer can always find for their clients some loophole in the law.
- [11] José Pedro Algorta, Alfredo 'Pancho' Delgado, Daniel Fernández, Roberto 'Bobby' François, Roy Harley, José Luis 'Coche' Inciarte, Álvaro Mangino, Javier Methol, Carlos 'Carlitos' Páez, Ramon 'Moncho' Sabella, Adolfo 'Fito' Strauch, Eduardo Strauch, Antonio 'Tintin' Vizintín and Gustavo Zerbino
- [12] 'Tero' is the Spanish for Southern Lapwing (*Vanellus chilensis*). It is the national bird of Uruguay.

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Don Patricio O'Connell: An Irishman and the Politics of Spanish Football

By Jimmy Burns [1]



Patrick O'Connell (centre, with hat),
Barça manager, 1935-1937
(Jimmy Burns, *'Barça, A People's Passion'*.
London: Bloomsbury, 1999)

Football in the Spanish-speaking world owes a great deal to foreigners, not least those of an Anglo-Saxon or Gaelic background. The game in South America and in Spain, like the railways and the mines, followed the flag of British colonialism with traders and colonisers of English, Scottish, Welsh, and Irish origin helping to form the first football clubs as part of their social engagement with the 'natives'. While Latin American countries south of the Río Grande, led by Brazil and Argentina, would see a new home-grown style of football emerging from local talent, the involvement in Spanish football of *ingleses*, as the northern foreigners came to be generically referred to, proved more enduring. Of those overseeing the development of clubs, nowadays associated with Spain's *Primera Liga*, few characters have earned as much belated recognition as Patrick O'Connell, the Dublin-born international and Manchester United player who went on to manage five Spanish clubs, most notably FC Barcelona, when Catalans were torn apart by the Civil War.

Until a few years ago, the figure of O'Connell was largely unknown to millions of football fans around the world, and had been overlooked by historians of Spanish history.

After living in Spain, O'Connell fell on hard times. Withdrawn from the game and unable to find any alternative employment, he died destitute in London in 1959, aged 72. His fascinating story would have undoubtedly stayed for ever lost amidst the abandoned plots of some north London cemetery had it not be for my fortuitous encounter in the mid-1990s while researching the political and social history of FC Barcelona. While watching a match at the club's massive stadium the *Camp Nou*, a young Irish student and passionate football fan engaged me in conversation.

It was during the early stage of my research, and I was slightly daunted by the prospect of writing about FC Barcelona - or *Barça* as it is popularly known - within the wider context of Spanish history, while doing justice to the wealth of talent that had either played at or managed the club during the years since its foundation in 1899. When the student asked whether I was going to devote some pages to O'Connell's time at *Barça*, I had to confess that I had so far only stumbled upon his name by chance in a short history of managers I had unearthed in the club's archives. Thanks to the student, I learnt that O'Connell had some relatives living in Manchester and that, in addition, there were survivors of his time in Spain who might have a story to tell. My subsequent investigation into O'Connell's life helped me to build up a profile of the man and the times he lived in while in Spain.

There is a sense in which O'Connell's life on the sharp political edge of Iberian football is a chronicle of a story foretold. It is difficult to separate his arrival in Barcelona in the 1930s from his birth into the Ireland of the 1880s. O'Connell was born into a working class family whose nationalist politics and emigration were influenced by the Irish potato famine of 1845-

9. To this day little is known about O'Connell's background. It is safe to assume however that the fate of his relations on both sides of the Atlantic was sealed by the deeply disturbing events of those years. For the young Patrick, from the outset football provided both an escape and a sense of identity. He played as a junior for the Dublin team Stranville Rovers before joining Belfast Celtic during a period when the politics of sectarianism and religious bigotry were beginning to cast a long shadow across the island of Ireland.

It was at Belfast Celtic during the early years of the twentieth century that O'Connell began to make his mark as a tough and talented defender. The club was by then the leading light in Irish soccer, as popular if not more so than some of the more traditional Gaelic football teams. Founded in the traditionally Catholic Falls Road of Belfast in 1891, it was named after Glasgow Celtic which it wished to emulate in the style of its play and the passionate loyalty of its supporters. Football, or soccer, as they liked to call it, allowed working-class Irish nationalists to reach out across the Irish Channel, and find common cause with those of similar ancestral roots on the British mainland.

O'Connell had spells as a player at Sheffield Wednesday and Hull City, before moving to Manchester United in 1914. Originally founded in 1878 as Newton Heath, the club changed its name to Manchester United Football Club, but only after serious consideration had been given to the alternative name of Manchester Celtic. The Irish contribution to Manchester United's greatness has been noted by football historians. But O'Connell's place in the club's history is somewhat dwarfed by that of other Irishmen who have distinguished themselves as major stars. It is not O'Connell, but names like McGrath, Whiteside, Stapleton, Best and Keane that have come to form intrinsic elements of the Red Legend.

Despite famously captaining Ireland with a broken arm and being part of the team that won the 1914 Home Championship with ten men, O'Connell's stint at Manchester United during the 1914/15 season coincided with a slump in the club's fortunes after an earlier successful period under its first real team

manager Ernest Magnall. O'Connell scored two goals in thirty-five league appearances during a season that saw the club narrowly escape relegation by one point before it was submerged in a match-fixing scandal with which he was associated.

It was on the eve of a match between Manchester United and Liverpool that O'Connell met up with a group of players from both sides in a pub and agreed to lay an 8-1 bet that United would win by 2-0. This was indeed the scoreline when it fell to O'Connell to take a penalty. He took the penalty and the ball went very wide. The day was Good Friday and no doubt a sense of guilt and subsequent contrition took hold of the still relatively young O'Connell. Years later his picaresque inventiveness reaped a rich reward at FC Barcelona. Yet on the eve of the so-called Great War, it brought him shame at Manchester United, even though he escaped criminal charges.

Like millions of his generation, O'Connell subsequently had his controversial stay at the club brought to an abrupt end by the First World War, with all competitive football in the United Kingdom suspended from 1915 through to 1919. It was a conflict that cost the life of the Manchester United star Alec 'Sandy' Turnbull, among countless other amateur and professional football players. O'Connell managed to save himself from the worst horrors of the trenches, and played on throughout the rest of the war and its immediate aftermath in lesser known amateur clubs on both sides of the Scottish border, including two seasons as a 'collier' with the non-League Ashington AFC. This was one of the oldest clubs in Northumberland, where the legendary Charlton brothers, Jack and Bobby, would later begin their footballing careers as ball boys.

For O'Connell the time spent at Arlington also proved to be a launch pad, but of a very different kind. Far from helping him consolidate his life as a player in Britain, it sent his career in a completely new direction, to Spain, not as a player but as a manager, leaving his numerous family behind in Ireland and England. Like so much of O'Connell's life, the precise reasons behind this dramatic turn of

events remain shrouded in some mystery, but there seems little doubt that a gambling instinct lay behind them.

Compared with much of northern Europe, Spain - both on account of its history and geology - was still a strange, idiosyncratic land, officially part of the continent, yet separated from France by the Pyrenees in the north and sharing centuries of common cultural traits with North Africa in the south. The exceptional advantages enjoyed by Spain as a neutral producer of war materials and other essential goods had vanished with the peace. A succession of internal political crises made Spain the scene of one of the more savage social conflicts of post-war Europe, with violent revolutionaries suppressed by a military dictator in 1923, marking a break in Spanish constitutional history, and parliamentary monarchy based on universal suffrage was banished until 1977.

O'Connell was leaving behind a country that was emerging from a war he himself had played little part in, but which had left his fellow countrymen struggling with another acute phase in their troubled history. For the Irish problem had emerged from the First World War as the gravest challenge to British statesmanship, with the IRA launching a violent campaign against the British 'invaders' and London responding with the 'Black and Tans', followed by the 'Auxis' of the Auxiliary Division.

O'Connell left for Spain in 1922, the year in which the Treaty between Great Britain and Ireland unravelled into a brutal civil war between the Irish Free State and a considerable section of the IRA, setting Irishmen against Irishmen. There must have been a strong part of him that made him feel that just as he might not have much to gain from heading towards Spain he probably did not have much to lose either.

Moreover, whatever the uncertainty of Spanish politics, Spanish football appeared to be going from strength to strength, with the sport now as popular a cultural pastime among large swathes of the population as bullfighting.

Twenty-six years had elapsed since the foundation by the *ingleses* in 1878 of Spain's first football club, Recreativo de Huelva, on the southwest coast of Spain, near the Río Tinto copper mines. By the turn of the century, the *ingleses* were helping to create other historic football institutions - Athletic Bilbao, FC Barcelona and Madrid FC (later Real Madrid).

Spanish football's staggered journey of expansion from the arid south to the north of Spain and to Madrid, and its gradual translation into a mass sport, reflected the shapelessness of Spanish society, and in part its differentiation from the rest of Europe for much of the nineteenth and part of the twentieth centuries.

The Spain of small towns with their local *fiestas* linked to religious icons and localised economic activity endured alongside the Spain of the cities and bullfighting, the national *fiesta* with its roots in the Iberia of Roman times. Bullfighting had become a business enterprise in the nineteenth century, with the railways being exploited for the regular transport of both fighting bulls and spectators. In spite of the attempts of Spanish reformers to introduce football, its spread to the lower classes was much slower than in the United Kingdom.

That the first games of football in Madrid were played in a field near the old bullring, with participants using a room in a local bullfighting *taverna* as one of their meeting places, was perhaps not entirely coincidental. Spanish Football, far from seeking to take the place of bullfighting, came to coexist with it quite easily as a cultural and social phenomenon, generating similar passion and language, with the great players joining the great matadors in the pantheon of popular mythology.

O'Connell began his new life in Spain during the 1920s, a period that saw the results of a significant demographic shift in the country that had begun during the First World War. With South America cut off during the war as a destination for Spanish emigrants escaping from rural poverty, there was a major population movement within Spain from the countryside to the big towns. The influx of low-income families into the bigger towns

around Spain brought with it a whole new sector of the population that turned to football as a form of entertainment and social integration.

Among the northern Spanish ports along the Cantabrian coast, Santander alone aspired to rival the Basque Bilbao and the Galician Vigo, with its navy, fishing vessels, and maritime trade with Northern Europe and the Americas. Together with its spectacular surrounding mountain scenery and beaches, it boasted a certain enduring air of nobility. In the early twentieth century the city became the favourite summer resort of King Alfonso XIII and his British Queen Consort Ena.

As in Huelva and Bilbao, the first games of football in Santander involved locals playing against visiting British and Irish seamen, with the town adopting a distinctly un-Spanish sounding name *Racing de Santander* at the foundation, with the King's blessing, of its first official football club in 1913.

Ten years later, the club had developed a reputation as one of the best teams north of Madrid with a liking for attacking football. This demanded speed on and off the ball from its young players. Several of them 'graduated' to the bigger clubs like Real Madrid. The strategy and tactics use by the players improved still further with the arrival of Fred Pentland, a charismatic former English football player who had played for Blackburn Rovers, Queens Park Rangers and Middlesbrough, as well as England. After retiring as a player, Pentland had gone to Berlin in 1914 to take charge of the German Olympic football team. Within months, the First World War broke out, and he was interned in a civilian detention camp. Famously, Pentland helped to organise hundreds of prisoners -some of them professional players - into teams to play an informal league championship. After the war he coached the French national team at the Olympic Games before travelling to Spain.

O'Connell seems to have been sufficiently inspired by Pentland's example of survival in the midst of adversity to want to follow in his footsteps. An opportunity came when the

Englishman, nicknamed *El Bombín* because of the bowler hat he wore, was poached by the longer-established rival Athletic Bilbao in 1922, leaving the managership of *Racing* vacant. O'Connell impressed the club's owners by building on Pentland's methods, encouraging the native skills of dribbling with the ball, while training his defenders in the long up-field passing and crosses that he had learnt as a young player in Ireland and Britain. He also placed great emphasis on fitness, discipline and team work. This represented a cultural shift for many Spaniards, on and off the pitch.

The seven years O'Connell spent at *Racing* were formative years for the club. O'Connell's own experience as a defender proved hugely valuable when during the 1926-27 season a new off-side rule was introduced. He trained his defenders in moving forward so as to isolate the other side's attacking forward and leave him offside when gathering the ball from a pass. His main achievement however was in establishing *Racing's* rightful claim to be treated as an important football club by its loftier rivals. Thanks to O'Connell, *Racing* was able to successfully challenge an attempt by a small group of clubs led by FC Barcelona, Real Madrid and Athletic Bilbao to restrict the access of smaller clubs to the new Spanish League. The so-called 'minimalists' wanted the *Primera Liga* to be composed only of them and three other clubs, Real Sociedad, Arenas and Real Unión de Irún. The 'maximalist lists' made up of all the other smaller Spanish clubs organised a parallel championship which *Racing* won. A subsequent compromise agreement led to the creation of an expanded *Primera Liga* in which *Racing* was among those allowed to play.

Having secured *Racing's* place in top Spanish football, O'Connell spent two seasons as manager of Real Oviedo in Asturias, once again succeeding Pentland and helping to mould the newly created club into a competitive sporting institution. O'Connell then spent a further three seasons at Real Betis in the Andalusian capital of Seville.

The years 1929-1935 were marked by growing political and social tension in Spain. O'Connell, or *Don Patricio* as he was now popularly referred

to, had become accustomed to his expatriate status, and was seemingly content to maintain a distant if dutiful relationship with the family he had left in England, sending them regular bank transfers drawn from the income he earned as manager. He spent these turbulent years in regions of Spain with a strong tradition of industrial and rural militancy that surfaced in the run-up to the Spanish Civil War.

O'Connell had already moved south when the Asturian miners and other workers staged an attempt at a proletarian revolution, which was brutally repressed by army units led by an ambitious young Spanish officer called Francisco Franco. News of the repression of his former fans in Oviedo would have had for O'Connell echoes of Irish history. This would also have been the case with the stark social divisions he encountered in Andalusia, a region of Spain sharply divided between hugely rich and often absentee landowners and poverty-stricken rural workers. It was in Andalusia, however, that O'Connell had his first direct experience of the thin line that separated Spanish football from Spanish politics.

Betis was one of two clubs in the city of Seville. The other, named after the city, was considered an eternal rival for reasons deeply rooted in the class divisions that plagued the capital. In 1909, Betis was formed by a break-away faction of members of Sevilla FC who were angered by the social exclusiveness of the club's management. The split occurred after a majority on Sevilla's governing board had refused to approve the signing of a young worker as a player on the grounds that he did not have the social standing that was expected for entry into the team. From then on, Sevilla's reputation as 'el club de los señoritos' (the toffs' club) became engrained in local popular mythology, with Betis taking pride in being the club that genuinely represented 'el pueblo' (the people), while at the same time enjoying royal patronage.

Under O'Connell, Betis achieved considerable success on the field. After becoming the first Andalusian club to qualify for the *Primera Liga*, Betis went on to win the championship on the 28 April 1935 with a crushing 5-0 victory over

Racing. The night before the game, which was played in Santander, O'Connell visited the *Racing* squad at a hotel where they were staying. *Racing* was down in the league table and had no chance of winning the championship, regardless of the outcome of the game. By contrast, Betis was at the top of the table but had to win if it was not to be overtaken and lose the championship to its main rival that season, Real Madrid.

O'Connell shared a drink or two with his former club colleagues and then suggested that they might do him a favour he would be foolish to refuse: 'You've got nothing to play for tomorrow. You won't kill yourselves to beat us will you?' he asked. The answer from one of the leading players was unequivocal: 'I'm sorry, *mister*, but Madrid wants us to win. Our president, José María Cossio, is a Madrid fan himself and is offering us 1,000 *pesetas* per (*Racing*) player if we win.'

It was perhaps just as well that O'Connell left the matter to rest there, for to have pursued the conversation with an offer of a counter bonus (or bribe) may have led to another abrupt closure on his career, and a critical chapter in the history of Spanish football would have subsequently turned out very differently.

For we now enter what undoubtedly represents the most extraordinary period in O'Connell's life, when, after a short holiday in his native Ireland, he returned to Spain, this time as manager of one of the world's great sporting institutions, FC Barcelona. The timing of his arrival in the Catalan capital and his adherence to one of its totemic nationalist organisations suggests that behind O'Connell's ambition to manage one of Europe's leading teams lay the politics of a man prepared not to remain indifferent to the Spanish Civil War.

For O'Connell took up the management of FC Barcelona after Catalonia had emerged as one of the regions in Spain where there was a significant proportion of the population determined to defend the Spanish Republic from the right-wing plotters and their friends in the military. He had arrived in Barcelona in the summer of 1935, days after the football club

had elected as its president Josep Sunyol, a parliamentary deputy for the left-wing Catalan nationalist party, *Esquerra Republicana de Catalunya*. In February 1936 a Popular Front electoral coalition between Communists and Socialists was swept to power, bringing Spain a step closer to the brink of war, with sectors of the military pushing ahead with plans for a *coup*. The uprising took place on 18 July 1936.



The new football season was not due to start until early September, but FC Barcelona's management board met in emergency session to discuss the club's future in the midst of growing revolutionary fervour in the streets of the city, with armed militias menacingly asserting their control.

The main concern of the directors of *Barça* was that a rapidly deteriorating political and economic climate would soon make it impossible to keep the club running as a financially viable sporting entity. While the club's administrative offices were near the city centre, its prime asset, the stadium on the outskirts, was at the time in a less densely populated neighbourhood and vulnerable to occupation by one of other of the warring factions.

The board voted to advise one of their star players, the Uruguayan international Fernández, not to return from holiday in Latin America until further notice, and cancelled pending negotiations with one of his fellow countrymen.

Barça's other foreign player, the Hungarian Berkessy, was also taken off the books as a cost-saving exercise. O'Connell was asked to stay and agreed.

The board and the manager decided that the club would in the short-term at least continue to play football in areas as yet not caught up in full-scale fighting, pending developments in the Spanish Civil War. This meant that the club missed involvement in the suspended *Primera Liga* and restricted itself to some less important competitions at regional level. The decision to adopt a 'business as usual' position was a gesture of faith in *Barça* as an enduring political and cultural entity. However, the fate of the club was complicated by the fact that over the years it had developed a reputation as a symbol of Catalan pride and identity, opposed to the centralising tendencies of Madrid. Prior to the outbreak of the Spanish Civil War, the political tension had translated into rivalry on the pitch between FC Barcelona and Real Madrid. This rivalry became far more acute during the post-war years of the Franco regime.

The extent to which football was being subsumed into the politics of Spain was clear from early on in the Spanish Civil War when FC Barcelona's president Sunyol was captured by pro-Franco forces north of Madrid and shot. The precise circumstances of Sunyol's death remained a mystery throughout the Franco years. It was only in 1996, on the sixtieth anniversary of his disappearance, that the results of the first detailed investigation into the death were published jointly by the Catalan journalist Carles Llorens and two academics, José María Solé and Antoni Strubell. Though Sunyol's body has never been found, the site of his summary execution was located in a winding mountain road outside the town of Guadarrama, which the politician had mistakenly believed was safely in the hands of Republican forces. In fact the town had been taken by the military insurgents. It seems he was shot simply because his political beliefs were opposed to Franco's, although the symbolism of his presidency of FC Barcelona would have been an additional incentive to have him shot.

By October 1937, Franco's Spain had official control over some of the country's best known football clubs. They included Betis, Racing and Real Oviedo, the three clubs that O'Connell had managed when Spain was a Republic. In Madrid and in Barcelona, the two major cities which remained resistant to the military uprising, football struggled against the rising tide of left-wing political militancy. Real Madrid's right-wing president was forced into exile and the club's stadium in Chamartín was periodically requisitioned for Soviet-style sports demonstrations.

Worried lest they might meet with the same fate at the hands of unruly anarchist militias, the surviving directors of FC Barcelona set up a consultative workers' committee aimed at pre-empting any attempt at having its assets seized. These were turbulent times and *Barça* struggled as best it could to keep afloat as a functioning entity, organising games and keeping young players as occupied as possible so that they would not be drafted to the front.

Yet during O'Connell's first and only full season as manager, the club faced the looming prospect of a financial crisis, with gate receipts falling off and an increasing number of club members not paying their dues. While many *Barça* supporters remained loyal to the club, they were too caught up in the war politically, and had to prioritise their spending on essential goods. There were other Catalans who were politically sympathetic to the Franco cause, and were averse to participating in an organisation ruled by a workers' committee, however much its founders found it a convenient smoke screen to hide their independence.

What is beyond doubt is that FC Barcelona's survival as an organisation became increasingly at risk because of political developments beyond the stadium. By the middle of 1937, in scenes later vividly depicted by George Orwell in his *Homage to Catalonia*, the city of Barcelona was submerged in an ideological struggle between anarchists and Trotskyites on the one side and Stalinist communists on the other. In such circumstances, officials and players at FC Barcelona began to look towards the future

with a deepening sense of vertigo, caught up in a political spiral that was out of their control.

Then, suddenly, there came an unexpected lifeline, in the form of an invitation from Manuel Mas Soriano, a Mexican basketball-player-turned-entrepreneur. Soriano wanted FC Barcelona to assemble its best team and send it to Mexico on a tour of the country and of the USA. The deal was that the club would be paid US\$15,000, a considerable sum by contemporary values, with flights and all other expenses covered separately.

To the club's committee, the players and O'Connell, the deal seemed heaven-sent, the kind of lucky throw of the dice that the Irishman had never lost his faith in from his early days as a gambler. It not only offered a temporary solution to the club's cash-flow problems, but also allowed its personnel to escape from a political situation that could no longer guarantee their safety. That the late Ángel Mur, the grounds man, managed to be included in the trip was thanks to a mixture of good luck and Irish humour, as he recalled in an interview with me many years later.

Mur told me how he had been on the pitch doing some gardening duties when O'Connell approached him. At first Mur thought the Irishman had come to berate him about the poor state of the turf. To his surprise, O'Connell told him he wanted him on the Mexico/USA tour as the club's masseur had recently left. The fact that Mur knew nothing about medicine or therapy of any kind appeared not to matter too much. O'Connell assured him that he would teach him the basics. Mur subsequently claimed that he learnt the rest from a couple of books on anatomy on the human body that he picked up from a local library.

In Mexico, *Barça* was given a warm official reception by the authorities and the local press and entertained by the Spanish exile community. No one in the club seemed in any great hurry to return to Barcelona, so that a tour that in normal circumstances would have taken two weeks went on for two months. *Barça* played six matches, of which they won

four. The local newspaper *El Universal* commented that there were two reasons why *Barça* was so popular. The first was that it played well. The second was that the players behaved like true gentlemen. This was a thinly-veiled tribute to their manager who had, against the odds, helped to turn the tour into both a propaganda *coup* and a financial *tour-de-force*.



Carlos Gardel, tango singer and
Barça fan
(José María Silva, 1933,
Archivo General de la Nación)

After Mexico, *Barça* moved on to New York where they played four matches in September 1937. One was against the local Latin community team known as *Hispano*; two were against a ragtag selection of Italians, Irishmen and other European immigrants; and the fourth was against a team put together by the local Jewish community. More money was paid out. However, *Barça* had by now run out of places to escape to. At a closed meeting in their New York hotel, the club secretary Calvet offered players and staff a stark choice: they could choose to go back to Barcelona and risk whatever the end of the Spanish Civil War would bring or they could remain away from the Spanish turmoil, effectively as exiles but no longer as functioning members of the club.

Of sixteen players, four chose to follow Calvet, Mur, the team doctor Amoros and O'Connell back home. Of the twelve who chose not to, a majority returned to Mexico, and three opted

for exile in France. Meanwhile, Calvet took the intelligent decision not to take the money paid in cash for the tour back with him to Barcelona, where it would have run the risk of falling into the hands of revolutionaries or fascists. Instead he had it transferred to an account in Paris, to be held as security against the club's future needs.

Six months later, just before midnight, Franco's air force bombed a building near the centre of Barcelona used by *Barça* officials and staff, including O'Connell, as a social club. Because of the lateness of the hour, the building was empty of people except for the porter who miraculously survived with only minor cuts. Many documents also escaped destruction. Some of the trophies that the club had won over the years were crushed or melted in the heat, but others still stood. If there was any symbolism to be drawn from the incident, it was that it foretold a future where FC Barcelona would continue to draw strength from adversity.

On 8 January 1939 a *Barça* reserve team played the last football game inside territory held by Republican Spain against a minor team called Martinec, and won 3-1. Nine days later, a railway worker called Soler Godayol and a farm labourer, Suarc Albesa, signed up for membership of the club. Many more members would sign in the years following 26 January 1939, when Franco's army entered the city of Barcelona.

O'Connell had left Barcelona on his return from Mexico. He then returned to Spain during the Second World War and spent two further periods managing Spanish clubs during the 1940s, first with Sevilla, then back at Racing. He successfully suppressed, at least in public, whatever earlier political leanings he may have had, and focused on helping to turn football into a massively popular sport just as Franco wished, with a few more victories on the pitch.

But he never recovered the excitement or passion he experienced in Catalonia, and his later years were spent in relative obscurity, living far from the public eye in run-down lodgings near St. Pancras station, in north London.

Jimmy Burns

Notes

[1] Jimmy Burns is a journalist with the *Financial Times* and author of several books including *Barça: A People's Passion* (Bloomsbury); *When Beckham went to Spain: Power, stardom, and Real Madrid* (Penguin), and *The Hand of God: A Biography of Diego Maradona* (Bloomsbury). Jimmy Burns (www.jimmy-burns.com).

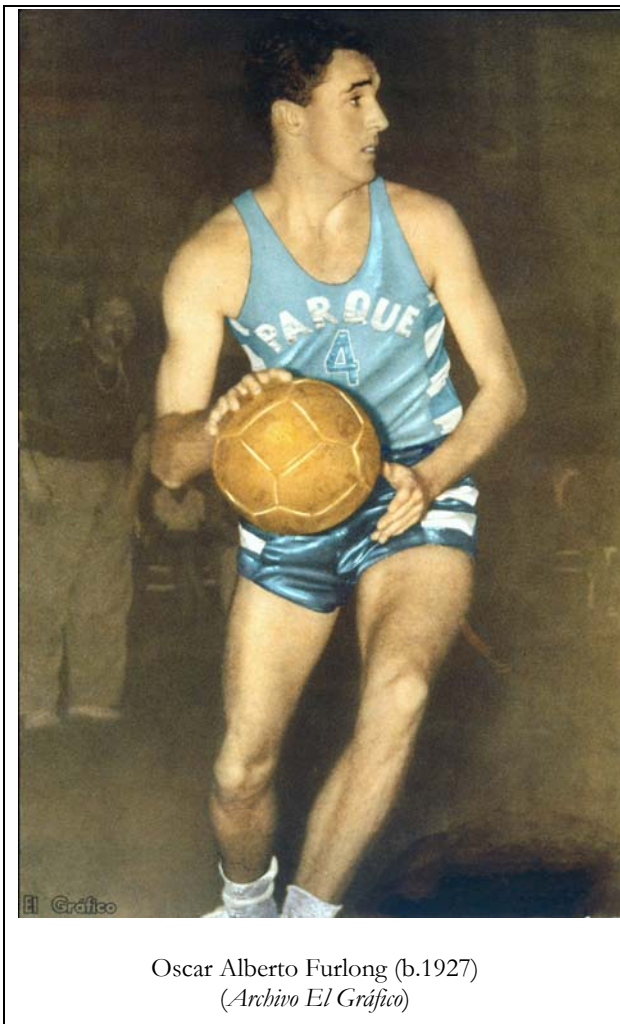
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‘El Primer Crack’ of Argentine Basketball: Oscar Furlong

By John Kennedy

Since the turn of the millennium Argentine basketball has gained international prominence largely through the exploits of the San Antonio Spurs player Manu Ginóbili from Bahía Blanca, the only basketball player ever to win a Euroleague title, a National Basketball Association (NBA) championship and an Olympic gold medal. Nevertheless, other players such as Rubén Wolowyski of the Boston Celtics have also contributed to the ascendancy of Argentine basketball in recent years. Over fifty years earlier another Argentine gained similar legendary status in the sport: Oscar Alberto Furlong, ‘*El Primer Crack*’. [1]



The sports periodical *El Gráfico* in its fortieth anniversary edition published in 1959 said of Furlong: ‘Here is the man who is the symbol of Argentine basketball. It could have been many other players, but if you ask anyone the name of an Argentine basketball player, the response surely will be Furlong and not only in our country, but abroad as well. Argentine basketball is Furlong and Furlong is the most skilled exponent and best in the class of this golden age’ (O.R.O., 2007: 99). Ricardo González, captain of the 1950 World Championship team, said of Furlong: ‘He was the Maradona of the age, the best [...], he understood the game like nobody else’ (CABB).

Oscar Alberto Furlong was born on 22 October in 1927 in Buenos Aires to Carlos Martín Furlong and Elena Chretienneau (Coughlan, 1987: 365-366). In 1887 Carlos’ father Pedro, who was descended from immigrants from County Wexford, established his own logistics company in the Port of Buenos Aires to transfer cargo between the port and its hinterland (Furlong Transportes). These were boom years for Argentine trade, with shipping using Argentine ports climbing from 2.1 million tons in 1880 to 7.7 million tons in 1889 (Rock, 1987: 153). The company established close trading links with the British-run railways and Express Furlong soon became one of the largest transportation companies in the country. As with other family members, Carlos was involved in running the business. When the railways were nationalised by Juan Domingo Perón [2] in 1948, ancillary companies linked to the railway were expropriated by the Government, and Express Furlong was among them. The directors and senior management of the company were subsequently prohibited from taking up positions in the transport sector for a period of ten years.

Furlong grew up in the middle-to-upper class neighbourhood of Villa del Parque in the Northwest of the City of Buenos Aires. The neighbourhood itself emerged due to an initiative during the presidency of Julio Argentino Roca [3] in 1901 to improve the teaching of agronomy, which had until then only been taught in the Faculty of Agronomy and Veterinary Science in the University of La Plata. In 1903 a field station was established along with a model farm. Over time Villa Devoto, an adjacent neighbourhood, began to expand toward the park. This part of the neighbourhood became known as Villa del Parque because of its proximity to the agronomy faculty. A railway station on the Pacific line was officially opened in August 1907 and on 8 November 1908 the neighbourhood was officially incorporated as a separate district of the city of Buenos Aires (Villa del Parque).

The first sports clubs in Argentina were established by the British, were closely associated with the railways and British commercial concerns, and generally catered for *ingleses*. Almost in parallel, new clubs emerged, founded by *criollos* and the general immigrant population. One of the first was Club Gimnasia y Esgrima (Gymnastics and Fencing Club), which was founded at a meeting in a café on Florida street in the centre of Buenos Aires in 1880 by Don León Marchand. The intention was to create a club exclusively for the practice of gymnastics and fencing (Piccirilli *et al* 1954: 436). Both sports reflected more continental origins - modern gymnastics evolved in Germany in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries and fencing developed from Italian, Hungarian and French influences. Fencing was actively promoted in late nineteenth-century Argentina by French and Italian teachers (Piccirilli *et al*, 1954: 505). In time other similar clubs were founded, and they evolved, with broader sports offerings. This reflected the impact of the diffusion of organised team sports of British and North American origin, while clubs also served as a social centre for the community.

One such club was the Club Gimnasia y Esgrima Villa Devoto, founded in 1912. As the neighbourhood of Villa del Parque grew and matured, the residents decided that it was time to establish a sports and social club of their own, which would act as a focal point for the community. The Club Gimnasia y Esgrima de Villa del Parque (GEVP) was formally founded by a group of residents in the waiting room of Villa Parque Pacific rail station in June 1922. Among the founding committee were Carlos and Luis Furlong, Oscar Furlong's father and uncle respectively. Carlos was later to become president of the club. In July 1922, the club acquired the stables of a Mr Caputo and erected a hut of timber with a zinc roof, serving as its first clubhouse (GEV Parque). From its humble beginnings, it grew into one of the most renowned sports clubs in the capital and dominated Argentine basketball for much of 1940s and 1950s.

The sport of basketball was developed in 1891 by a Canadian physical education teacher James Naismith, at the Young Men's Christian Association (YMCA) International Training School in Springfield, Massachusetts, USA. Naismith had himself been an accomplished gymnast, lacrosse player and American football player in his youth. The impetus came from Dr Luther H. Gulick, an instructor at the college and a major promoter of muscular Christianity, who viewed the gymnasium as an intrinsic part in the salvation of man (Putney, 2001: 71). Naismith was tasked with devising a game that would fit with the association's new ideals of 'teamwork, ease of access and applicability to all ages' (Putney, 2001: 71). On a practical level it was not to take up much space, not to be too physically dangerous and to be played indoors.

The first rules for basketball were published in 1892 and did not include some of the most common features of today's game including the dribble. The sport spread rapidly throughout the United States and Canada, mainly through the work of YMCA missionaries. It later became a demonstration sport at the 1904 Games in St. Louis, USA. Finally it became an official Olympic sport at the 1936 Berlin Olympics. It was introduced to Argentina by

PP Philips, who worked at the Department of Physical Education at the YMCA in Buenos Aires and quickly gained in popularity (Lupo, 2004: 253).

GEVP was from its earliest days an exponent of basketball and affiliated to the now defunct Federación Argentina de Básquetbol (FAB) in 1926. In a major expansion of the facilities at the club in 1937, a dedicated basketball court was built. Soon after, the club achieved an ascendancy in the sport that lasted for many years.

Following in the footsteps of his parents Carlos and Elena, Furlong at first devoted his energies to tennis. Due to the popularity of tennis at GEVP the courts could only be booked for a non-continuous half-hour at a time. At that time, the club had a celebrated basketball team, which included Jorge Canavesi, who would later become a pivotal and indeed pioneering figure in Argentine basketball. Furlong then turned his hand to basketball too and started playing in the youth divisions, although he did not abandon tennis entirely. Following his half-hour practice in the tennis court, Furlong spent the second half-hour training in the basketball court, and then continued the rotation by returning to the tennis court. An innate capacity for playful mischievousness led his team-mates to christen him 'Pillín', [4] a moniker he became universally known by.

In 1944 at the age of seventeen, he became a member of the GEVP senior squad and the following year they became champions of the premier division. They came to dominate Argentine basketball over the following decade in a large measure due to Furlong's brilliance, winning six Buenos Aires championships in total: 1945, 1946, 1947, 1948, 1951 and 1954. [5]

The 1948 Olympics were held in London against a backdrop of a city still recovering from the ravages of war. Argentina was one of fifty-nine countries to participate and only one of twenty-three nations to send a basketball team. Furlong was named as one of the fourteen members of the basketball team. Due to post-war austerity, there was to be no special

treatment for the Olympic athletes and they too would be subject to the same food rationing conditions as the local populace. For the purposes of the games the competitors were classed as heavy industrial workers and their rations allocated accordingly. As with other nations the Argentine delegation brought significant quantities of food with them. Also among the Argentine delegation were members of the Irish-Argentine institution Hurling Club, who were participating in the field hockey competition.

Only a short-time before, Mr Hawkes, president of the Argentine Confederation of Basketball (CAAB), had appointed Jorge Canavesi, former GEVP player and physical education teacher, as team coach. Whilst Canavesi did not prove particularly successful in the short-run, in the long-run this turned out to have been an inspired choice.

The Argentine basketball team was pitched against the USA and Czechoslovakia, among others in Pool C. The basketball team came only fifteenth out of twenty-three nations in an Olympics that was defined for Argentina by Delfo Cabrera [6] winning the marathon. Yet they did show some of their emerging talent in their pool game against the USA, losing by a respectable 57-59. However, during that game one Argentine player did stand out from the crowd and made a lasting impression on the coaches and scouts present. That was Furlong, who scored eighteen points in the game. In an interview, Jorge Canavesi recalled that Omar Browning, the American coach had said that 'apart from ourselves, Furlong of Argentina is one of the best players in the world' (Guterman & Gutiérrez, 2006a). He also made a big impression on Adolph Rupp, the legendary coach from the University of Kentucky.

The telegrams started flooding in with offers from the US-American National Basketball Association (NBA) and Furlong could have been the first player Argentine to play in that league. The Minneapolis Lakers (now the Los Angeles Lakers), even sent a contract ready for his signature. The Baltimore Bullets were also on his trail. However, Furlong had decided not to go to the USA and nothing would persuade

him otherwise. In an interview with the Argentine daily *La Nación*, he gave the following rationale for rejecting the offers he had received from the NBA: 'It was another age, where amateurism was important. I had it in my head to go and play at university, not as a professional. I had an offer from Racing of Paris, to study in the Sorbonne. I left it a while as I could not decide' (*La Nación*, 2000). Given what was to transpire a few years later, his steadfast commitment to the values of amateurism was one of the many great ironies associated with his career.

Noting the large number of countries that had decided to participate in the basketball competition in the 1948 Olympics, William Jones, Secretary General of Fédération Internationale de Basketball (FIBA) decided to push for the a World Championship competition at a congress held in the margins of the Olympics itself. A motion was carried at the congress to organise a world championship every four years in between the Olympic tournaments. The inaugural championship, to take place in 1950, was awarded to Argentina. There were a number of factors at play in awarding Argentina the inaugural championships: firstly, given that Europe was shattered by the war, there was no country that had the desire to hold it. Secondly, Argentina had a positive international image and had been a founding member of FIBA in 1932 (CABB). Finally, Perón, who had been a keen basketball player in his youth (Lupo 1999: 104), pledged his support. The venue for the event was the iconic indoor arena, Luna Park, at the corner of Corrientes Avenue and Leandro N. Alem Avenue in the centre of Buenos Aires; a venue inextricably linked with the modern history of Argentina.

As far as CABB and the coach Jorge Canavesi were concerned, nothing was to be left to chance; the team of twelve players [7] would undergo a long period of preparation to avoid the pitfalls of the 1948 Olympics, where they suffered a severe disadvantage in terms of team height. Canavesi engaged in intense preparation, studying the latest sports techniques emanating from Europe and the

USA and having them translated into Spanish. The team trained in the River Plate football club complex in Nuñez. For three months there was a gruelling schedule of six hours of training per day, including a run everyday from Nuñez down along Libertador Avenue to the Hipódromo in Palermo. Canavesi believed that the key was being faster and more athletic than the other teams, as they could not compete in terms of height. By contemporary standards, the training regime was very advanced and included four physiotherapists and an orthopaedist.

In their opening game the Argentine team won 56-40 against silver Olympic medal-holders France, which was a very promising start and pointed to even greater things to come. Furlong scored twelve of those points, Pichón fourteen points and the captain González thirteen points. Although the game against fellow South American rivals Brazil was more difficult, Argentina also won 40-35.

The defining game of the Championship took place on 3 November as Argentina faced the USA for the gold medal spot. The Luna Park arena was packed to capacity, with over 20,000 spectators crammed into the venue. *La Nación* reported that 'already from early on, large numbers of fans were in the vicinity, some to take a good vantage point and others with a faint hope of finding tickets which had been sold-out' (Trenado, 2000). Basketball fever had struck Buenos Aires. Both Argentina and the USA had unblemished records, both having won all five previous games. The USA were represented by the AAU Denver Chevrolets. The USA team had the distinct advantage of having the tallest contingent in the tournament with no less than nine players over 183cm.

At the end of the first half Argentina was winning by 34-24. Although the USA managed to close the gap to 40-37 in the second half, Argentina came back to dominate, earning a 64-50 victory. The hero of the night was Furlong, who scored twenty points and was the Most Valuable Player (MVP) and Top Scorer of the inaugural 1950 World Championship. Furlong later recalled, 'we were a very compact team and had much force. We played well with the

ball; we had a good defence and a good counterattack. We attacked in blocks - we had seen this done by the All Stars from California, a North American university that came to Argentina and who played very well in that period. We copied them' (*La Nación*, 2000). The key advantage that the Argentines had was speed, as they lacked the height of the Americans - the hard physical training they had undertaken under Canavesi had paid off.



Programme of the First World Cup, 1950, including the Coat of Arms of the Justicialist Party
(Pedro Ferrandiz Foundation)

As soon as the game finished, the spectators invaded the pitch to congratulate the players. A torchlight procession accompanied the bus containing the winners as it made its way along Corrientes Avenue towards the legendary El Tropezón restaurant in Callao Avenue, where the team and management celebrated their achievement (López Vázquez 2002). The night is commonly referred to in Argentine sporting parlance as 'la noche de las antorchas'. [8]

'Authorities promote sports as a means to improve the physical and mental health of the society at large. Leaders also back sports, as a means of enhancing a country's image and helping legitimise an incumbent regime'

(Arbena & LaFrance, 2002: xii). Getúlio Dornelles Vargas (1882 -1954,) who served as president of Brazil during the 1930s, was the first Latin American leader to give politicians a formal role in sports promotion. Perón expanded the boundaries further by funding travel and training for athletes, giving grants to football clubs and organising sports (Arbena & LaFrance, 2002: xii).

No doubt cognisant of the political benefit of associating himself with sporting success, after the victory at Luna Park, Perón called the team to congratulate them. According to Ricardo González, team captain, Perón said: 'I am not worried about what political ideals you have. What you have done for Argentina is better than the work of a hundred ambassadors' (Guterman & Gutiérrez, 2006b). Perón's intentions may have been entirely noble, as he had been an enthusiastic sportsman in his youth and even played basketball (Lupo 203: 190). Whilst other sporting stars of the age, such as Delfo Cabrera and Juan Manuel Fangio [9] had dedicated their wins to him, the World Champions distanced themselves from politics. The captain, González, simply thanked the general public for their support (Guterman & Gutiérrez 2006b).

Despite the basketball team's desire not to entwine their sporting success with politics, Perón gave them a reward in the form of a permit for each of them to import a car up to a certain weight. As Ricardo González said in an interview, 'most chose a Ford Mercury, as it complied with the requirements' (Guterman & Gutiérrez 2006b).

Following World War Two, a new model of economic growth began to be promoted in Argentina. Import substitution industrialisation, or ISI, along with exchange rate controls, were adopted into the economic policy framework. In an effort to limit the country's dependence on the international markets, government-induced economic measures such as the nationalisation of domestic industry were aimed at encouraging a more internal, self-sustaining development. As a result strict controls were placed on the importation of many consumer products including cars, so a permit was a

prized reward. Rather than keeping the cars, some of the team members sold them on to third parties, making a modest profit in the process. They knew little at this time of the repercussions this would have on their careers a few years down the line.

In 1951 the now defunct Helms Foundation of Los Angeles awarded Furlong the prize of best South American athlete. The same year Furlong was a member of the team that won a silver medal in the 1951 Pan-American Games in Buenos Aires. The following year Furlong and the other members of the team came fourth in the 1952 Olympics in Helsinki, narrowly losing out on a bronze medal to Uruguay. Furlong played all eight games in that Olympics. At the World University Games of 1953 in Dortmund, Germany, Furlong was part of the Argentine team that won the Gold Medal.

Although Furlong rejected the possibility of playing in the NBA after the 1948 Olympics, he did eventually have a playing career in the USA, though it was strictly amateur. In 1953 he won a scholarship (covering the fees) to go and study at the Southern Methodist University in Dallas (SMU). He studied for a Bachelor's Degree in Business Administration and from 1953 to 1956 played on the University's team, which was in the premier division of the National Collegiate Athletic Association (NCAA). As well as being an outstanding player, Furlong was also a pioneer in the Argentine game - he introduced the jump-shot [10] to Argentina after learning it during his three seasons with SMU. Though it is the most common shot today, it was a new innovation in the 1950s.

In September 1955 Perón was deposed in a military coup known as the *Revolución Libertadora*, and General Lonardi [11] assumed the presidency. Lonardi adopted a conciliatory policy towards Peronism, saying that there would 'neither be victors nor vanquished' (Romero, 2002: 131). This policy earned him the opposition of hard-liners, and in November of the same year, disillusioned and fatally ill, Lonardi was replaced by the hard-line General Aramburu. [12] With his vice-president, Admiral Isaac Rojas, he ruled by decree and

began a process of de-peronisation, vigorously purging Peronists from business, government and military posts. Even mention of Perón's name was forbidden (Rock, 1987: p335). As part of this process, Admiral Isaac Rojas appointed General Fernando Huergo to the presidency of the Argentine Olympic Committee (COI) and the Argentine Confederation of Sport (CAD-COA).

A commission was created to investigate irregularities in the field of sport, 'The Commission of Investigation in to Irregularities in Sports N° 49' (Lupo 2003: 341). Amador Barros Hurtado, President of the CABB, testified that all the world champions should be considered professional as they had breached the 'Amateurism Code' of the COI which prohibited sports-men and -women from receiving gifts. On 8 January 1957, all the World Champions were banned for life from participation in basketball. This has been described as 'sporting genocide' by the historian Víctor Lupo (Lupo, 2003: 339). Although none of the team members gave any support to Perón, merely having attained the World Championship during his period in power was enough to warrant sanctions from the new regime.

Furlong played his last game on 6 January 1957, when Villa del Parque won 71-52 to Welcome of Montevideo, scoring twenty of the points. The suspension of the golden generation of players at the height of their careers had major ramifications for Argentine basketball. It would be the 1990s before the country would again become a force internationally. One other consequence of this was that it also led to the demise of Buenos Aires as the epicentre of basketball in Argentina.

For Furlong the suspension brought down the curtain on a celebrated career, littered with many ironies, and still in his prime at age of twenty-nine, depriving Argentine basketball of one its greatest talents. In summary, his accomplishments included fifty appearances for the Argentine team, one World Championship, two Olympic Games, two Silver medals in the Pan American Games (Buenos Aires 1951 and Mexico City 1955), the Gold medal in the

World University Games of 1953 in Dortmund and six times Champion of Buenos Aires.

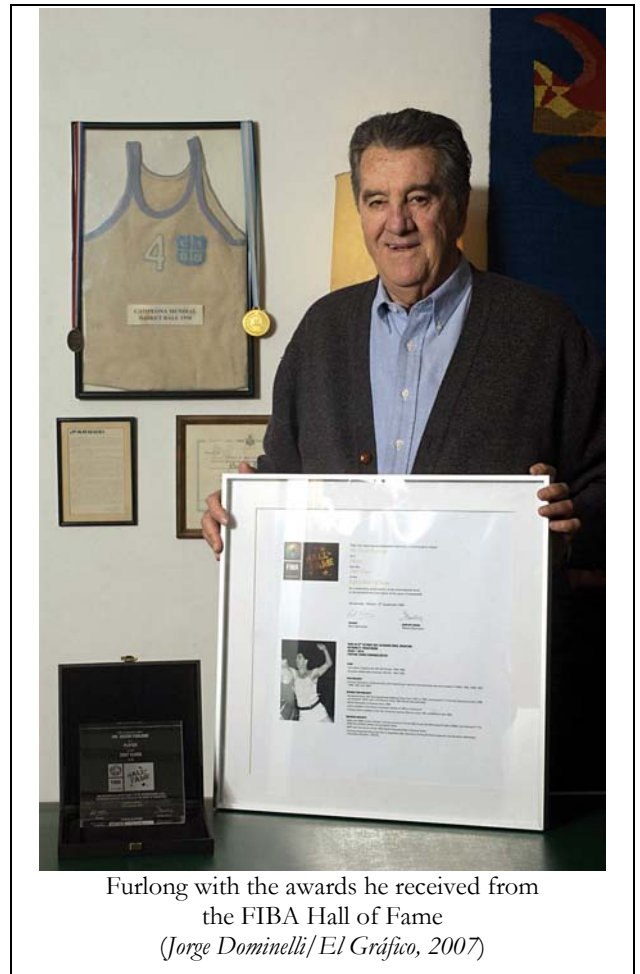
Not only is Furlong considered one of the greatest basketball players of all time, but he also excelled in tennis both as a doubles player and manager. Following his suspension from playing basketball, he concentrated on tennis and attained seventh in the national rankings. In 1966 he was invited to join the committee of the Asociación Argentina de Tenis (AAT), becoming vice-president. In the same year he was appointed coach of the Argentine Davis Cup team, a post he held until 1977. His greatest achievement was bringing the team to semi-finals of the Davis Cup in his final year as coach. Players under his tutelage included the legendary Guillermo Villas, the first South American male player to win a grand slam event, who first competed in 1970, and José-Luis Clerc in 1976.

Despite devoting considerable time to sport, he also built up a very successful business concern following his forced retirement from the game. In 1958, the ten-year moratorium on the Furlong family going into business in the transportation sector ended. Oscar, together with his brothers Eduardo and Carlos, founded Transportes Furlong, in Santa Isabel, Cordoba, concentrating on hauling cars from the new Kaiser Car factory. Transportes Furlong grew to become the one of the largest carriers in Argentina.

It was some years before Furlong's immense contribution to basketball was finally recognised, beginning in 1980 when he received one of most prestigious honours in Argentina, the Konex Platinum prize [13] for his contribution to Argentine sport. Other honours followed - he received the Delfo Cabrera prize from the Argentine Senate in 2005 and in the same year was declared a 'distinguished person' by the legislature of the autonomous city of Buenos Aires, along with the other world champions from 1950.

Acknowledgements

I am extremely grateful to Pillín, the subject of the article, to Eduardo Furlong for adding to my research, and to May Furlong, Willy Fox and Ronnie Quinn for their help.



Furlong with the awards he received from the FIBA Hall of Fame
(Jorge Dominelli/*El Gráfico*, 2007)

On 1 March 2007, FIBA officially inaugurated its Hall of Fame in Alcobendas, Madrid, Spain and announced its first inductees, who were chosen on the basis of an outstanding contribution to the sport at the international level and an outstanding contribution to the development and status of the sport. Among the first inductees was Oscar Furlong. As a measure of his contribution and standing in the sport, not only did it include such stars such as Bill Russell, the renowned former Boston Celtics player and a contemporary of Furlong in the NCAA, but also, posthumously James Naismith, the founder of the game.

John Kennedy

Notes

- [1] Crack is a word in the Rioplatense dialect defined as a person who distinguishes him/herself in an extraordinary manner in an activity: Jose Gobello, *Nuevo Diccionario Lunfardo* (Buenos Aires: Corregidor, 2003). The footballer Diego Maradona and the rugby player Juan Martín Hernández have been accorded this name in the Argentine press.
- [2] Juan Domingo Perón (1895 -1974), Argentine general and politician and three times President of Argentina.
- [3] Julio Argentino Roca Paz (1843 -1914), President of Argentina from 12 October 1880 to 12 October 1886 and again from 12 October 1898 to 12 October 1904.
- [4] Defined in the Oxford Spanish Dictionary as crafty devil or rascal.
- [5] The Argentine national championship was only created in 1984.
- [6] Delfo Cabrera (1919 -1981), Argentine athlete and winner of the marathon at the 1948 London Olympics. He was a close friend of General Perón and an active member of Justicialist Party.
- [7] Oscar Furlong, Raúl Pérez Varela, Ricardo González, Juan Carlos Uder, Rubén Menini, Omar Monza, Pedro Bustos, Alberto López, Roberto Viau, Leopoldo Contarbio, Hugo del Vecchio and Vito Liva.
- [8] The night of the torches.
- [9] Juan Manuel Fangio (1911-1995), was a race-car driver from Argentina, who dominated the first decade of Formula One racing in the 1950s.
- [10] Jump Shot: A shot performed while jumping in the air in which the ball is released at the highest point off the ground. It is often used when shooting over a defender trying to block the ball.
- [11] Eduardo A. Lonardi Doucet (1896-1956), de facto president of Argentina from September 23 to November 13 1955.
- [12] Pedro Eugenio Aramburu Cilveti (1903-1970), de facto president of Argentina from November 1955 to 1 May 1958.
- [13] The Konex Awards were established by the Konex Foundation in Buenos Aires in 1980 and are awarded on a yearly basis to distinguished personalities in Argentina in every national field.

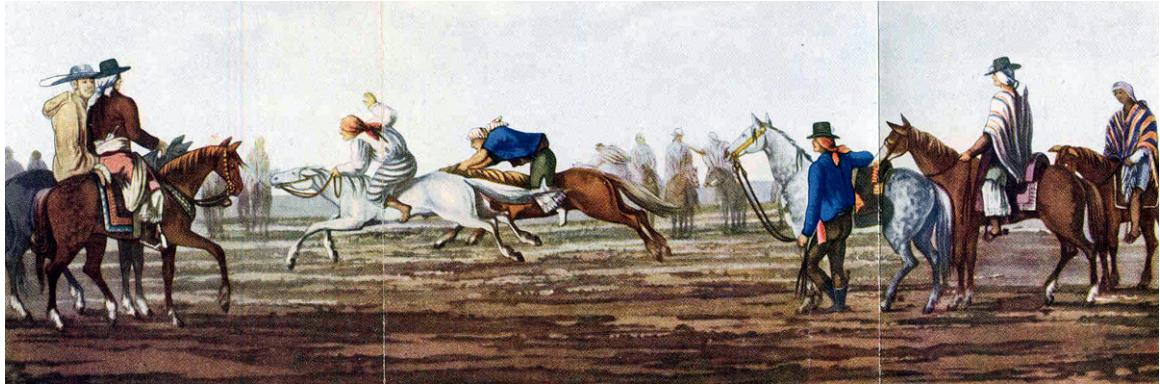
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Horses and Horseracing An Irish passion in Nineteenth-Century Río de la Plata

By Edmundo Murray



A horse race
(Emeric Essex Vidal, 1820)

*Basta de carreras, se acabó la timba,
un final reñido yo no vuelvo a ver,
pero si algún pingo llega a ser fija el domingo,
yo me juego entero, qué le voy a hacer. [1]*

‘Por una cabeza’, tango (Carlos Gardel and Alfredo Le Pera, 1935)

‘For the sportsman in the true sense, who cares for horses, dogs and living things, who joys in the open air and wide plains, it [Argentina] is the best life in the world’

(John Macnie, 1925)

Up to the 1980s, historians repeatedly remarked that the major attractions for the Irish to emigrate to Latin America were the Roman Catholic religion and freedom from English rule. However, the land-hungry Irish who emigrated to Mexican Texas in the 1820s were fascinated less by religion or political liberties than by the huge pasture plains and the availability of relatively inexpensive land in the Refugio and San Patricio colonies (Davis 2002: 8). In South America, most of the officers and soldiers who embarked in Cork and Dublin to join the independence armies in Venezuela, Colombia, Ecuador and other South American countries were enticed by the influence of Romanticism in early nineteenth-century Britain, the affirmation of masculinities and the cult of the adventurer (Brown 2006: 26). Furthermore, their fellow countrymen who chose Argentina as their destination were attracted by the possibility of becoming landlords and the freedom to practise their adventure-seeking lives. Significant among the characteristics of those lives was the tradition of horseracing, associated from early times with nobility, landownership and masculine behaviours. This article describes some of the horseracing activities in Argentina before and after the arrival of the Irish and British immigrants.

Work and Play on Horseback

‘Cattle and horses have feelings like ourselves; but the horse is by far the cleverest. [...] When a horse sees, himself, the necessity of using his intelligence, he is surprising’ (Bulfin 1997: 73). When William Bulfin published his *Tales of the Pampas* in 1900, he could not resist appealing to the one subject that was so close to the

hearts of both Argentines and Irish: horses. The Irish shepherds and the gauchos - the cowboys of the Pampas - were united in their worshiping of horses, although their manners and reasons differed. [2]

For the gaucho, the horse was the most common feature of their daily life. Work, travel and entertainment could not be conceived of

without horses and, at least in a rural habitat, everyone become a skilled rider from an early age. Up to the second half of the nineteenth century, thousands of wild horses populated the Pampas, and most were free to be seized without any other effort than driving and taming them. In contrast, most of the Irish farmers thought of horses as a valuable tool for draught work in farms or for transportation. In contemporary Ireland, riding a good horse was generally perceived to be a privilege of the landed classes and only a small number of tenant farmers and labourers were trained in the skills of horsemanship.

During the times of the Spanish conquest in the sixteenth century, Andalusian horses were successfully introduced in the South American plains. Many were abandoned and the species freely developed in an ideal context with regard to food, health, climate and topography. Centuries later, what is known in Argentina and Uruguay as the criollo breed [3] represents the descendants of the original horses brought to the Americas by the Spanish and Portuguese conquistadors, with the gradual addition of British, French and other European breeds.

The indigenous people of the Argentine Pampas became skilled riders and improvised breeders. The horse was their means of transport, a crucial resource for war and hunting, and their companion during the long journeys through the lonely plains. The gauchos, associated with the mixed ethnicities of Europeans and Amerindians and their descendants, adopted the horse as their most important friend. Later in the nineteenth century, European immigrants would perceive in their own relation with horses a symbol of their integration into the local culture.

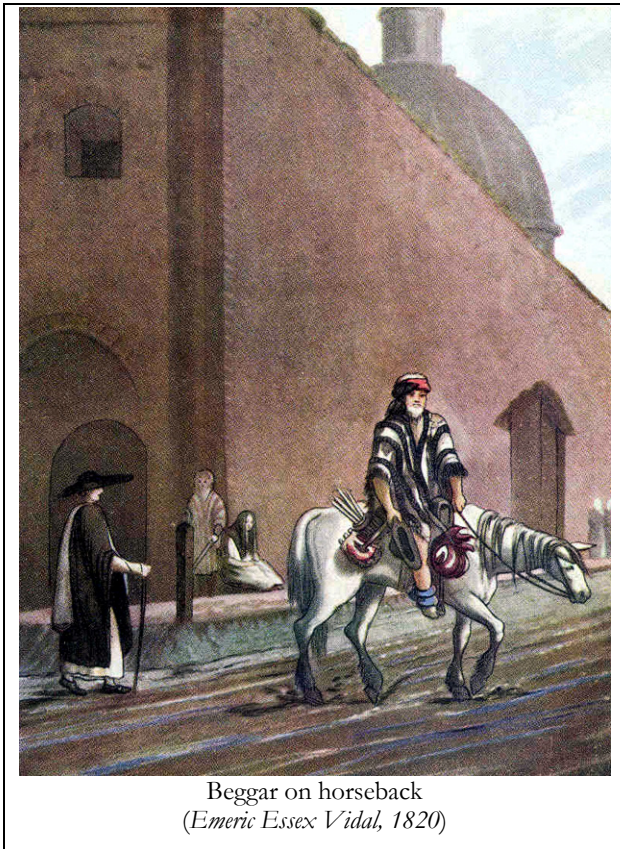
In the early 1820s, a visitor to Argentina chronicled: 'The Buenos Ayrian is continually on horseback: the nets in the river are drawn from the saddle, and the Gaucho bathes from the horse, and swims around it.' [...] Another visitor observed in 1853 that 'the natives, without a horse [...] simply assert that they are "without feet"; whatever work is to be done, either in collecting, marking, driving, or taming cattle, must be done on horseback' (William

MacCann in: Slatta, 1992: 25). Dismounted, a gaucho 'waddles in his walk; his hands feel for the reins; his toes turn inwards like a duck's' (Hudson 1922: 350). The failure of the English invasions of Buenos Aires in 1806-1807 prompted Sir Walter Scott to pour scorn on the Argentines as 'a sort of Christian savage called guachos [*sic*], whose principal furniture is the skulls [*sic*] of dead horses, whose only food is raw beef and water, whose sole employment is to catch wild cattle, [...] and whose chief amusement is to ride horses to death' (cited by Jones 1949: 78).

Regardless of social origin or class, work, recreation and travel were undertaken on horseback, or at least on a saddle. The enormous extension of uninhabited plains, the great quantity of wild horses, and the lack of a system of control that would prevent them from making these lands their own property without further formalities, gave the gauchos a liberty and opportunities which were not available to immigrants from Britain and Ireland in their home countries.

This aspect of the life in the Pampas levelled the whole population, rendering them a uniform horse-riding people, a fact that was amazing in the eyes of English and Irish visitors, accustomed to the familiar figure of landlords - and sometimes large farmers, but rarely peasants or labourers - on horseback. Moreover, in Buenos Aires 'the mounted beggar stands at the corner of the street, and asks charity; his horse is no more proof of his being undeserving of alms than the trowsers [*sic*] of the English mendicant' (Caldcleugh 1825: I, 172). '[H]is manner is essentially different from that of the real object of charity. He accosts you with assurance and a roguish smile; jokes on the leanness of his horse, which, he says, is too old to walk; hopes for your compassion, and wishes you may live a thousand years (Essex Vidal 1820: 52). Rather than social scandal, these views excited the imaginations of the Irish immigrants and, particularly, of their fellow countrymen and women at home. If anyone (even beggars) in the Pampas could own a horse, by analogy the dream of land ownership could be realised, and

upward social mobility - becoming a landowner - could become a reality for the industrious young tenant farmers of Ireland.



Beggar on horseback
(Emeric Essex Vidal, 1820)

Pato, maroma, and cuadreras

From the early seventeenth century, following the fashion of other Spanish and Portuguese colonies, bullfighting was the most important social amusement among the people of Buenos Aires, Montevideo and other locations in the Río de la Plata region. Local versions of the corridas, in which the torero kills a bull assisted by lancers on horseback and flagmen, were developed. Wild bulls and cows were mounted by expert riders (toreo a la americana), and complementary fights between teams of smart horse-riders armed with canes were organised (juegos de cañas). The latter game was eventually replaced by pato ('duck'), in which two, three or four teams of several accomplished riders struggled for the possession of a rawhide bag containing a live duck, and to carry it to the big house of their own estancia. Among other popular pastimes among gauchos on horseback were pechadas, during which the players would violently shove

each other until the winner would be the only one still on the mount, and maroma, which consisted of jumping from a high gate or tree on to the back of a horse galloping at full speed. [4]

Certainly the most popular entertainment in the Pampas was horseracing. The local form, cuadreras, was performed during holidays or on the day after a successful round-up of wild cattle. The differences with British races were observed and accounted for by Essex Vidal:

Horse-racing is a favourite diversion of the people of Buenos Ayres, but it is so managed as to afford little sport to an Englishman. There are no horses trained for racing, nor is attention paid to the breed with a view to that object. No match is ever made for more than half a mile; but the ordinary distance is two quadras, or three hundred yards, and the race is decided in a single heat. To make amends for this, however, they will start more than twenty times, and after running a few yards, return, until the riders can agree that the start is equal (Essex Vidal 1820: 113).

There were never more than two horses in the same race, and the winner's advantage must always be con luz between the horses, that is, upon arrival there should always be a distance between the first's back and the second's nose. It was not allowed for racers to jostle the adversaries off the course, but they could throw 'one another out of their seat, which is allowed, if it can be accomplished; but with such expert riders it is extremely difficult, and therefore seldom attempted' (113). In 'The Defeat of Barragan', William Bulfin tells of the intense conclusion of a race between the hero Castro and the villain Barragan, who

closes in and tries to jostle as they race. Castro, holding the top of his head against the whistling wind, turns his face sideways and, looking into the face of his adversary, while he raises his right hand, shouts, "I defy you to do it." The other, flogging with all his might, edges in. It is an old dodge! He has done it scores of times before; but to-day he has met his master. As the breast of his horse touches Castro's right leg, my companion [Castro] lifts his whip, which in the meantime he has gripped by the tail. Two swift strong cuts and he is free, [...]

amidst the cheers of his hundreds of backers leaves the bayo nowhere. Barragan [...] is entirely beaten. Castro has the rest of the running to himself, and crosses the line twenty yards ahead of his rival (Bulfin 1997: 94).

In *cuadras*, no consideration was given to the horses' weight or age or to the riders' weight or height. They 'ride without saddle, whip, or spur, having only a bridle without a bit; and thus the spirit and speed of the animals have fair play' (Essex Vidal 1820: 113). Frequently, the *cancha* (course) was a common plain or road, and only three or four races were performed in an entire afternoon, 'which tire the patience of any person accustomed to English racing' (113).

Inextricably associated with gambling in Britain and in Argentina, 'great sums of money [were] often staked on these matches' (113). Essex Vidal adds that spectators were numerous, including friars who were 'remarked as great betters'. These and other persons from all walks of life were constant spectators at *cuadras*. However women were not allowed to attend this exclusively male entertainment. In Buenos Aires, there were frequent races at the Beach Road (the present-day motorway to La Plata), Calle Larga (Montes de Oca Avenue), and the low grounds of Recoleta and Retiro.

Horse Racing a la inglesa

In 1826, the Buenos Ayres Race Club was founded by a group of British and Irish merchants of that city. On 6 November 1826, the first races *a la inglesa* (English-style, that is, on a circular course), were held in Barracas. The winner was Thomas Whitfield's *Shamrock*, who won by many lengths, followed by *Baron* and *Teazle* in the first race, and *St George* and *Integrity* in the second one. Later, in 1835, races were organised with fifteen or more horses and betting was considerable: 'the first [race] will be for 100 dollar Stakes, and the second for 50' (*The British Packet*, 3 January 1835 cited in: Hanon, 2005: 52). Another novelty of the English-style races was that women were present among the audience, some of them in carriages and others on horseback. Races were also very popular in Recoleta.

By the mid-1840s, there were races *a la inglesa* organised in Barracas, Recoleta and Belgrano. On 31 October 1844, a 'picnic party' on James White's property in Belgrano attracted prominent spectators as well as 'respectable criollo and foreign families' (*The British Packet*, 31 October 1844 cited in: Hanon, 2005: 53). The afternoon races included for the first time several gentlemen sporting the jockey attire. In 1849 White opened a new course 'stretching along the base of a semi-circular inclined plane' (53). It was twenty-six metres wide and covered fifteen *cuadras*, with a straight of 150 metres before the starting line. The following year, the Foreign Amateurs Racing Society was established, and its members organised races in springtime and autumn. They met in the rooms of the Strangers Club of Buenos Aires, and supported the importation of thoroughbred horses.

In 1853, local mares began to be bred with imported stallions, like the bay *Azuel*, and James White's *Belgrano*. Their contemporary *Tam O'Shanter* was the great favourite in all races. The Racing Society, dominated by the British and Irish merchants of Buenos Aires, organised races until 1855, when local meetings in Capilla del Señor, Carmen de Areco, Pergamino and other towns of Buenos Aires province attracted the attention of the English-speaking and local public resident in the *camp*.

Irish on Horseback

Having been tenant farmers in Ireland, the Irish dreamt of becoming landlords in the Río de la Plata. Their use of horses as farming devices at home developed into a major interest in races and breeding as external symbols of landownership in the Pampas.

Early nineteenth-century races in Ireland were predominantly organised and attended by landlords or their associates, and followed the patterns of English racing. In County Westmeath, the famous Kilbeggan races were held for the first time in 1840. A group of landlords, professionals and administrators launched a Challenge Cup valued at forty guineas, with ten pounds added by the stewards. Racing was held in several locations

around Kilbeggan, including the present site at Loughnagore (*Kilbeggan Races*).

When the Irish went to Argentina and Uruguay, they largely settled in rural areas and were partially responsible for the cultural transfer that converted the local *cuadreras* into English-style races. Most of them learnt or perfected their basic riding skills brought from Ireland upon their arrival to Buenos Aires. In a few years they would be able riders and expert horse breeders.

In 1847, the *Revista del Plata* reported a discovery by an Irish settler in Monte of a new method of castrating horses. ‘The method in question was rather an introduction than a discovery, for according to the description of the performance of the operation it was nothing more or less than the form of castration in common practice in Ireland in such cases’ (Murray 1919: 214). Other stories were told of the ability of certain Irish immigrants to ‘set’ the bones of both horses and humans.

A story in Monte illustrates the accentuated learning curve in horse-riding experienced by some of the new Irish immigrants:

A native attacked an old Englishman, named Davy, trying to ride him down. Davy struck the native’s horse with his stick, the rider jumped off and stabbed the old man several times. A young Irishman named John Gilligan, attracted by the shouts of the old man, rode up to the scene and dashed between the native and his victim; the native at once turned on him; Gilligan rode his horse against him, knocking him down and then jumped off to assist the old man who was dying; while thus engaged, and entirely unarmed, the native got to his feet, ran at Gilligan and stabbed him in the stomach [sic], causing almost immediate death (Murray 1919: 215).

In 1864, sheep-farm owner John Murphy of Salto wrote to his brother in Wexford. ‘All the men are now taking care of the flocks on foot, though having sixteen horses. Yet there are only some one or two that would be safe to saddle as they can with difficulty support their own weight. I am getting ten or more young asses tamed in, and I shall then have a good

supply so long as they are left with me’ (Murphy to Murphy, July 1864). In that year, when two more Irish labourers arrived from Ireland to work at Murphy’s establishment, he sent them from Buenos Aires to his ranch on the railway to Luján and then on the post coach to Salto because they could not find docile horses for them. Just two years later, one of these workers came second in the races in Salto.

In 1865 Murphy commented on the news in *The Standard* newspaper of Buenos Aires, which was customarily included in his letters to Ireland. ‘You see by this paper that we have horse racing here, as well as at home’ (Murphy to Murphy, 25 March 1865). And later that year, he added that he was

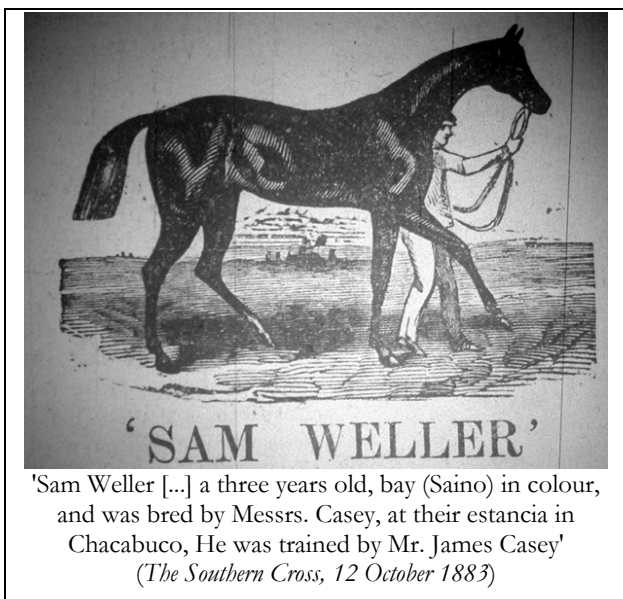
expecting some time ago to take a horse in to run in the English races, which you see advertised in the Standard for the 1st November, but owing to the shearing coming on I declined doing so. But I will have better time against the Autumn meeting, which generally takes place in March each year. I don’t recollect if I sent you a paper with some letters in it about our races last March, by which you may have seen that my horse beat at his ease some very crack-horses that was brought from far off to beat all before them (Murphy to Murphy, 25 September 1865).

For Murphy, it was important to let everybody know at home and among his friends and neighbours in Wexford that he owned racing horses. He mentioned this in several letters, and some years later he proudly announced the organisation of races on his own land, where ‘we are to hold some Races at the Estancia on next Monday. I take out the prizes with me, two saddles, bridle, whip & spurs. They are to be private Races for horses of the neighbourhood, for our own amusement, & to be followed by a dance that night’ (31 August 1873). Owning racing horses and organising private races were marks of social prestige among the Irish in Ireland and in Argentina.

Among the Irish residing in the rural areas of Buenos Aires, the races were the most important social event of the year. The horse-racing meeting of 1867 in Capilla del Señor

'may be taken as the starting point in what was for a number of years the most important and successful Irish race-meeting in the country. The names of some of the race horses and their owners are worth preserving. First in the principal race, Matthew Dillon's *Chieftain*; Second, John Shanaghan's *Fenian Boy*; Third, Patrick Murray's *Shamrock*; Fourth, George Bird's *Clear-the-Way*, and last, Martin Fox's *Volunteer*' (Murray 1919: 224).

Vigilant Roman Catholic priests were present at the racing meetings to alert the people about the dangers associated with gambling, drinking and dancing, and to collect funds to support the building of rural chapels, schools, libraries and other works. In 1872, Fr. Patrick Dillon and Fr. Samuel O'Reilly opened St. Brigid's chapel in La Choza, on John Brown's land (district of Luján) (*The Southern Cross*, 1975: 33). 'The day of its inauguration was one of great feasting in the district, with horse-racing, dances, etc., when the religious ceremony was over. Canon Dillon of Buenos Aires, who was a noted preacher, delivered the inaugural sermon which was said to be a very brilliant one. Mr. Browne was not alone forward in advancing religious and charitable institutions, he also took a leading part in promoting social pleasures and pastimes, and some of the first annual race-meetings in the camp were held on his estancia' (Murray 1919: 219).



'Sam Weller [...] a three years old, bay (Saino) in colour, and was bred by Messrs. Casey, at their estancia in Chacabuco, He was trained by Mr. James Casey' (*The Southern Cross*, 12 October 1883)

The priests also sought the association and collaboration of the Irish in Argentina, who

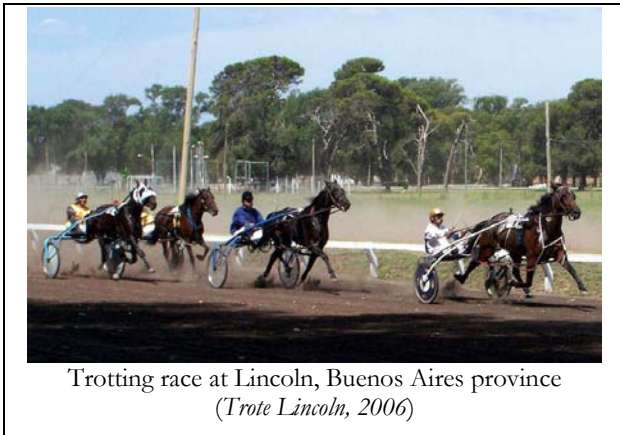
came from different counties and social origins. The traditional feuds between the immigrants from southeast Ireland and those of the Irish Midlands owed less to geographical reasons than to social standing. Many Wexford people had a manifest contempt towards the Westmeath, Offaly, Longford and other Irish immigrants, and perceived themselves as better educated and of a higher cultural and moral standing.

This aspect of social life was manifest in social meetings in which both groups came together, as in

our English races [that] passed off on the 25th last month. There were about two thousand foreigners and all the respectable natives of the surrounding partidos. Partido, or parish, is a district of country extending ten or twelve leagues in diameter each way, say a space of 100 square leagues. We whipped all before us. I won the Cup and brother William won the Plate with one of my horses. Wexford won all that was seen for our namesake Murphy. Tom won the saddle, which so much enraged the Ballinacarryas [5] (Westmeath people), that they collected in a ruffianly mob and so much disturbed the peace that the races had to be broken up. I could have won some hundreds of pounds had I been a gambler, mine being a young horse untrained and his antagonist a celebrated racer. Peter Cormack rode. The mob headed by the owner of beaten horses (I mean the horse that pushed mine as there were only one out of the six that run done any thing) got so ruffianly excited that they insulted the people of all nationality. Even the Clergy did not escape their bigotry and I am glad to say that there were not a single individual of any other county mixed in. Our clergyman of both parishes has on these last two Sundays told them what they are, and the disgrace they have been to all Irishmen in this country (Murphy to Murphy, 20 October 1867).

As in Salto and other provincial towns, horseracing was frequently organised and led by Irish settlers and their families, who were keenly involved in breeding and other phases of the activity. In Lobos, Santiago Casey (1843-1899) became a distinguished *turfman* (breeder) and owner of one of the most important studs in his time. Other Irish families, like Duggan,

Dowling and Gaynor, were prominent in the organisation of races and in breeding.



In Venado Tuerto, a place with large Irish and British populations, Dublin-born *estanciero* John Macnie observed that 'riding amongst the peons has deteriorated, and much improved among the leisured classes in the Argentine. The first is due to the use of bretes and corrales for working cattle, smaller paddocks, improved methods in marking, etc., and tamer cattle in consequence. [...] As regards the leisured classes, [...] they are now bitten with polo and racing, and the time which the "joven distinguido" gave to Calle Florida is now often spent on training polo ponies and race-horses; and as the time passes on, there is little doubt that the better class Argentine will give himself wholeheartedly to polo, just as the less wealthy has given himself to football and tennis' (Macnie 1925: 142-144). For the first English races in Venado Tuerto only polo ponies were used. Among the first breeders to get a better class of horse for the races and train them were George O'Connell, F. Bridger, Pancho Thompson, and J. Hearne. Thanks to their pioneering work, some twenty years later the Coronation Cup was held to commemorate the coronation of King Edward VII in 1902 (800 metres for any horse or mare, weight 75 kilos). Three horses belonging to one owner (Pancho Thompson) arrived first, second and third. At another race meet, riding in a steeplechase, [6]

Notes

[1] 'Enough of horseracing, no more gambling / a hard-contested ending I will not see again / but if on Sunday a pony looks like a sure pointer / I'll bet everything again, what can I do?'

Thompson 'broke a girth at the first jump and the other went at the second jump. Feeling the saddle slipping, he realized what had happened, and leaning forward he pulled the saddle from under him and put it over his right arm. He took the rest of the jumps barebacked, and although hampered by carrying the saddle, he manage to scrape home a winner' (Macnie 1925: 148).

In the 1880s the activity was mature enough to be undertaken at a national level, which took place with the inauguration of the Stud Book in Argentina. Names like Duggan, Maguire, Murphy or Gaynor are intimately associated with the development of thoroughbred activities in the last decades of the nineteenth century. Eduardo Casey (1847-1906), himself an exceptional rider, was a passionate breeder and importer of famous stallions, as well as a key member of the committee that commissioned the construction of the La Plata race course in the capital of Buenos Aires province. [7]

Eduardo Coghlan observed that almost twenty of the one hundred founders of the exclusive Jockey Club of Buenos Aires in 1882 were Irish or descended from Irish immigrants (Coghlan 1987: xxv). This disproportionate figure illustrates the social and economic advancement of some of the former farming families who left Wexford and the Midlands in the first half of the nineteenth century to join the landed elites of the Río de la Plata. However, the vast majority of the Irish in Argentina remained landless peasants who could never hope to be anything other than labourers on an *estancia*. The dream of being landlords had to be abandoned, even if they succeeded in riding the beautiful horses of the Pampas.

Edmundo Murray

[2] The first time the word gaucho appeared in print was in *Noticias secretas de América* by Antonio de Ulloa and Jorge Juan y Santacilia (1743), to describe the rural inhabitants of the Chilean mountains. Furthermore, one of the most curious – and indeed Anglo-centred – of the many etymological interpretations is that of the English painter Emeric Essex Vidal (1820): ‘all countrymen are called by the inhabitants of Buenos Ayres gauchos, a term, no doubt, derived from the same root as our old English words gawk and gawkey, adopted to express the awkward, uncouth manners and appearance of those rustics’ (Essex Vidal 1820: 89).

[3] Crioulo in Brazil, costeño and morochuco in Peru, corralero in Chile, and llanero in Venezuela.

[4] Other games on horseback included the sortija, in which gauchos tried to stick a thin cane through a tiny ring while riding their mount at full speed, and tug-of-war between two or more riders.

[5] From Ballinacarrigy, a town on the Royal Canal in the parish of Kilbixy, County Westmeath. Hundreds, perhaps thousands, of young Irish farmers and labourers emigrated from Ballinacarrigy and its environs to Argentina in the mid-nineteenth century.

[6] Steeplechase is a horse race (originally with a steeple as the goal) across the countryside or on a racecourse with ditches, hedges, and other obstacles to jump.

[7] The race course at La Plata was inaugurated on 14 September 1884 with an attendance of 4,000 persons. Casey’s fillies won the two opening races ‘Premio Inauguración’ and ‘Gran Premio Ciudad de La Plata’. The current ‘Premio Eduardo Casey’ is an important clásico, celebrated every year at La Plata race course (1,400 metres, reserved for horses aged five or more years who have won at least three races).

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From Shepherds to Polo Players Irish-Argentines from the First to the Last Chukker

By Guillermo MacLoughlin Bréard

It is almost impossible to delve into the history of polo in Argentina, from its introduction to the present day, without noting the influence of Irish-Argentines.

The origins of the game itself are disputed. Some records show that it was played by the Persians as far back as 2,500 years ago, but the Chinese also claim that their playing tradition goes back as far. The modern word for the sport is derived from the word for ball in the Tibetan language, ‘pulu’. By medieval times the game was popular in India and was fostered by the Mogul dynasty in the fifteenth century. During the British Raj, the first polo club was founded by British tea planters at Silchar, in Assam state in 1862. The first club outside India, the Malta Polo Club was founded in 1868 by British army and naval officers who had come from India.

The game was first played in Britain at Hounslow Heath in West London in 1869. The game quickly spread with the first polo club in England, founded in 1872. The All Ireland Polo Club was also founded in the same year by Horace Rochfort of Clogrenane, County Carlow. Soon, an enthusiastic American of Irish origin, Gordon Bennett, having seen the game played in Hurlingham, England introduced the game to the United States of America. The Irishman Captain John Watson (1856-1908) of the British Cavalry 13th Hussars, formulated the first rules for the sport. Like many traditional sports, it had up to then been practiced in India without any limitations on time or space or a fixed amount of players.

Polo was introduced by British landowners in Buenos Aires in the mid-1870s, although it is not known precisely the exact date of the first match. There are references to games being played in the Caballito neighbourhood, in the

city of Buenos Aires, as well as on the estancia (ranch) ‘La Buena Suerte’ in Azul in the province of Buenos Aires, on 8 January 1874, as noted in the Polo Encyclopedia by Horacio Laffaye. However, the first recorded match was held at the famous estancia ‘Negrete’, in Ranchos in the province of Buenos Aires, on 30 August 1875, between the teams ‘Ciudad’ and ‘Camp’. It was organised by the owner of the property, David Shennan, a Scottish landowner.



Roberto L. Cavanagh (1914-2002), member of the Argentine team that won the gold medal at the 1936 Olympic Games (Berlin). During his career Cavanagh won the 1949 USA Open (Hurricanes), the Argentina Open in 1944, 1946, 1947, 1948, 1949, 1950 and 1951, the Pan American Championship (1951)

and the America Cup (1950). He achieved a 10 goal handicap in 1954 and maintained it until 1963
(*Archivo El Gráfico*)

The Standard, an English-language newspaper edited by the Mulhall brothers from Dublin, in its issue of 2 September, reported that ‘Shennan’s estancia could not be more beautiful with its grounds filled with flags to celebrate a match of Polo. [...] Each player used two horses: one to play and another as back-up. [...] Campo dominated the whole match and made three goals in less than one hour. Some of Ciudad’s players had never seen a match before, which explains why it was so hard for them. Shennan and King had excellent performances, well supported by their fellow teammates. After the game, both quarters were cheered with hoorays by all thousands who travelled to enjoy such new event’.

While none of the players had Irish ancestry, the land belonged to Peter Sheridan from County Cavan, an Irish pioneer in sheep breeding, who had owned the place for many years, in partnership with John Hannah. Also, it should be noted that one of the farm managers was Dennis O'Keefe, who was responsible for the sheep herd.

The sport rapidly expanded, both in the province of Buenos Aires and in southern Santa Fe province, known as 'la pampa gringa', and other regions of the country. Over time, two distinct styles developed - 'polo-estancia', played in the country, and 'polo-ciudad', played in the urban areas. The first polo clubs began to emerge in the later 1870s. Among those in the first wave were Venado Tuerto and Cañada de Gómez in Santa Fe province, and Flores and Quilmes in Buenos Aires province. Venado Tuerto Polo & Athletic Club, founded on 14 May 1887, is the only one still in existence. Throughout its history it has been the nursery for some of the most distinguished players in the sport, including its current president, Guillermo Cavanagh, whose great-grandfather, Edward Cavanagh, came to the country in 1851, aboard the emigrant ship the William Peele. Although most of the founders of the club were British, there were also some Irish people among them, including George O'Donnell and James De Renzi Brett, the latter being the agent for Eduardo Casey, the most prominent Irish-Argentine founder of colonies and promoter of horse racing in Argentina.

The following year the Hurlingham Club was founded on the outskirts of Buenos Aires. Named after the famous London club, it was initially founded to organise horse races 'a la inglesa', but later became a centre of excellence for polo, with players becoming renowned nationally and internationally. Today it is one of the most prestigious institutions in the country and annually organises one of the most important tournaments in the polo calendar, Campeonato Abierto de Hurlingham.

Finally, in 1892, a governing body, the 'Polo Association of the River Plate' was founded and gave rise in 1922 to the establishment of the Argentine Polo Association.

The Dominance of Traill

First held in 1893, the Argentine Open Polo Championship has become the most prestigious and important competition in world polo. Every year thousands of people travel from many different countries to Buenos Aires in November to witness this spectacle, turning the Palermo grounds where it is played into a veritable tower of Babel.

In the early years the Championship was won by teams composed of British players, with names such as 'Hurlingham', 'The Casuals', and 'Flores'. One exception to this was 'Las Petacas', a team formed by criollos (natives) including the brothers Joseph and Sixto Martínez. Indeed, for two consecutive years, 1895 and 1896, the team won the Open. One of their players, the number three, [1] was Frank Kinchant, born in 1868. It remains unclear whether he was born in Ireland or in Argentina, but he was certainly of Irish parentage. The year before, in 1894, the Open had been won by Frederick Bennett, who was also a founder member and board member of the 'Polo Association of the River Plate', and who is also believed to have Irish roots.

In 1898 The Casuals won the Open for the second time, having first won it three years previously, with a team formed by the brothers Roberto and Eduardo Traill. Six years later, in 1904, 'North Santa Fe', achieved their first victory and would go on to be one of the most successful teams of the era. The victory was noteworthy as the team comprised three brothers and a cousin: Roberto, Eduardo, Juan and José Traill. Thereafter, a Traill appeared on the winners' podium in the Open on six occasions. An all-family affair again ensued in 1908 when the three Traill brothers and their cousin José won the Open.

The Traills owed much of their success to their pioneering pony breeding, as *The Polo Monthly* recorded: 'They were the first breeders in the Argentine to play ponies bred by themselves for polo, and their ponies by their first stallion, Spring Jack, marked a change between the old-fashioned Argentine pony and the blood of today'.

The most outstanding member of the family was Juan A. E. Traill, the first to obtain the maximum handicap in Argentina of ten goals, in 1913. Although Argentina claims Johnny Traill as her own, he had, in a sense, triple nationality. By descent, he was a member of an old Anglo-Irish landed family, settled in County Down, by upbringing he was Argentine, and by birth English, as he had been born in London. He was born on 8 December 1882. All of his brothers and sisters were born in Argentina, on the family estancia 'La Esterlina', in the north of Santa Fe province.

The 1911 polo season was memorable for Johnny. Playing for North Santa Fe, with his cousin Joe, Francis Geoffrey and Leonard Lynch-Staunton (a native of County Galway, who was three times winner of the Argentine Open), they took part in thirteen matches, winning every one, scoring a total of 175 goals to 11. The fame of the 'asesino latinoamericano', [2] as he was known, transcended national borders and he soon began playing abroad.

In the 1920s, after marrying Irish-Argentine Henrietta Roberts, he settled in England, where he had a distinguished career and was considered one of the best players of the era. He won numerous tournaments, such as the Ranelagh Championship in London, the Westchester Championship in New York, and others. Along with his cousin Joe, he joined the Ireland team, which represented the country in the Patriotic Cup. With his sons Jim and Jack he formed his own team, 'The Traillers', winning a number of tournaments in the 1930s. He died in 1958 and the family polo tradition continues to this day with his grandchildren and great-grandchildren. One of his descendents Lucía Escriña Traill features in the current Argentine handicap list.

The Era of Luis Lacey

Another outstanding player who excelled in the early years of the twentieth century was Luis (Lewis) Lacey (1887-1966), who also achieved a ten goals handicap. Born in Canada to a family of Irish origin, his father, William Lacey, a former cricket player, had been hired by the

Hurlingham Club in Buenos Aires to teach sports to the members of the newly established entity. What Lacey did not know was that his son would learn to play polo at the club, becoming one of the best polo players in Argentine history. His first major victory was in 1915 when he won the Argentine Open with his team 'El Palomar', formed with Lindsay Holway, Samuel Casares and his brother Charles (who replaced my grandfather Saúl Bréard on the team).

Subsequently he interrupted his career to enlist in the King Edward Horse Regiment during World War One, where he reached the rank of first-lieutenant and was known for his courage and bravery. He then continued his brilliant career in the post-war era in Argentina and England. In Argentina he won the Open six times and also won the most prestigious British tournaments, such as the British Open, Whitney Cup and Roehampton Open Challenge Cup. Such was his brilliance that the Hurlingham Polo Association in England also awarded him the ten goals handicap in 1922.

He declined to participate in the Olympic Games in Paris in 1924, when he was invited to join both the Argentina and the Great Britain teams. He decided that it would be inappropriate to divide loyalties and play for either of the two countries. He lived in Argentina but spent long periods in England where the Prince of Wales, (following his abdication as King Edward VIII, he became known as Edward Windsor), always wanted him to play on his team.

Lacey's last game of competitive polo in 1937 was particularly memorable. His team Hurlingham won, once more, the Argentine Open, having last won it in 1929, featuring Eduardo Rojas Lanusse, Jack Nelson and Roberto Cavanagh. General Agustín P. Justo, [3] Argentine President, attended the final to pay tribute and homage to this great player. His last years were spent in Argentina, devoted to teaching the sport to younger generations. The main field in Hurlingham Club in Buenos Aires is named in his honour.

The Irish-Argentine Duel between ‘Venado Tuerto’ and ‘El Trébol’

The reign of the dominance of British-born players in Argentine polo was beginning to come to a close by the 1930s, giving way to the younger criollo generation. No longer would the surnames be exclusively British, indicating that the insularity of the community was being eroded by inter-marriage, and also that other players of non-British origin had arrived on the scene.

Among these new criollo players were a number of people of Irish origin including Kenny, Kearney, Nelson, Harrington, Lalor, Cavanagh and Duggan, who for over forty years between the 1920s and 1960s appeared among the winners of the Argentine Open and foreign competitions. They also made a name for themselves as sports ambassadors, or simply as breeders, forging the strong contemporary Irish roots of Argentine polo.

A great moment for Argentine polo was winning the first gold medal for the country in any sport in 1924, during the Summer Olympic Games in Paris. The team was formed by Enrique Padilla, Juan Miles and two Irish-Argentines Juan Nelson and Arthur Kenny. They defeated the teams of France, England, Spain and the USA in succession, demonstrating the excellence the country had achieved in the sport. The feat was repeated in Berlin at the Summer Olympic Games in 1936, with a team comprising Andrés Gazzotti, Manuel Andrada and Irish-Argentines Luis Duggan and Roberto Cavanagh.

Jack Nelson (1891-1985), the son of John Nelson from County Kildare, came to Argentina to build up the meat-packing business. He was an outstanding player and rancher. According to his obituary, published in *La Nación*, Buenos Aires' leading daily newspaper, 'he excelled in whatever sport he took up: polo, golf, tennis, rowing, cricket, show jumping, gentleman rider, athletics.' As president of the Argentine Polo Association he continued promoting the sport, locally and abroad. He recalled his own experience when with his brother Luis/Lewis Lacey and other

Argentines, he played in the 1922 English season. Their reception was quite frosty, but the English were forced to acknowledge the Argentine teams' superiority as they won almost every match they played.

The 1940s was characterised by a duel of titans between the teams of Venado Tuerto, formed by Juan and Roberto Cavanagh and Enrique and Juan Alberdi, and El Trébol (the shamrock) formed by Luis and Heriberto Duggan and Julio and Carlos Menditeguy. Both teams played many a memorable final in the grounds of Palermo, alternating on winning the Argentine Open Championship. Also, Cavanagh, together with Alberdi, won the Polo World Cup in 1949, as well as Argentine Open on several occasions and the Cup of the Americas (several other players of Irish origin excelled in these competitions as well). Luis J. Duggan of El Trébol was only the second Argentine, and the first Irish-Argentine, to attain the ten goals handicap, in 1943.

Recent Times

Passion for polo is passed down from generation to generation among Irish-Argentines, who excel at various levels of the game. Indeed many have achieved success and recognition in European and American competitions, demonstrating the excellence of Argentine polo. Irish-Argentine surnames such as Maguire, Donovan, Ham, Dowling, Moore, Donnelly, O'Farrell, Morgan, Rooney, Hope, Cullen, Schoo (Shaw), Hearne and many others, form a legion of players, of different ages, who are considered outstanding in the sport.

On different family estancias with Irish connections many teams and clubs have been formed, as was the case with 'La Alicia', a team that won the Bartolomé Mitre Cup in 1968. The team was composed of Miguel and Juan Lalor, Alberto O'Farrell and Douglas MacDonald, all Irish-Argentines.

A player who merits special mention is Eduardo 'Gordo' Moore, who not only excelled as a player, but was instrumental in the development of professional polo in Argentina. His best pupil was, without a doubt, Gonzalo

Pieres Garrahan, who won many championships with his family club 'La Espadaña' and with 'Ellerstina', including winning the Argentine Open eight times and achieved the highest handicap of ten goals. Following his retirement from playing, he has become an important promoter of the sport in Argentina and abroad, and is at the same time the most important breeder of polo horses in Argentina.

Pieres is the grandson of Thomas Garrahan, owner of the estancia 'La Espadaña', and a member of a large extended family, who excelled in the sport. Other surnames inextricably linked with Argentine polo and who are descendents of the Garrahan family include: Crotto, MacDonough and Buchanan. Also among them are Alvaro Pieres, national-team coach, Gonzalo (Jr.) and Facundo Pieres, both sons of Gonzalo and possessing the maximum ten goals handicap. Last year Pablo MacDonough joined their ranks, obtaining the maximum handicap.

Besides being a polo player, Alfredo Lalor, grandson of John Lalor, a native of Blessington, County Wicklow, who arrived in the country in 1880, became involved in the administration of the sport. Alfredo Lalor was Chairman of the Argentine Polo Association (APA), the governing body of the sport in Argentina, and for many years, president of the Jockey Club. He promoted both national and international competitions. The Jockey Club's main field, where the 'Mundialito Cup' is played, bears his name. His brother Luis Lalor, also an Open winner, and Jorge O'Farrell, have presided over the APA. Another Irish-Argentine Carlos Lacey was the first secretary of the APA in 1922. As it was mentioned before, Jack Nelson had three tenures as president of the Association.

In women's polo, Irish-Argentines have also made their mark, not only on the playing field, but also as writers and chroniclers of the sport. One such writer was Isabel Hope de Harrington, author of *An Irish Criollo*, a biography of her husband, Alfredo Harrington, winner of the Argentine Open in 1930 with the 'Santa Paula' team. Another was Laura Isabel

(Betty) Cárdenas Lynch de Boadle, author of *The Tale of the Hurlingham Club, 1888-1988*.

Schools with Irish links have also been avid promoters of polo, such as the prestigious Cardenal Newman school. The school recently won the annual intercollegiate Santa Paula's Cup, which included some players of Irish origin. Indeed many of the players from other schools in the competition also have Irish roots. In the field of polo journalism, Luis Garrahan Jr. is the director of the magazine Buenos Aires International Polo, promoting the successes of Argentine polo to an international audience.

Though he has no Irish roots himself, Juan Carlos Harriott (Jr.), the Argentine considered the best polo player of all time, is married to Susana Cavanagh, the daughter of Olympic champion Roberto Cavanagh. Another Olympic champion, Manuel Andrada, known as the 'Paisano', was married to Isabel Barrett. His grandchildren played a match in the 2007 Argentine Open in Palermo, but did not participate in the Argentine Open itself. Agustín and Juan Manuel Jr. Andrada both have a handicap of two goals.

'La Dolfina', winners of the last three Argentine Opens, has in its ranks Mariano Aguerre, who also has a ten goals handicap and is married to Tatiana Pieres, great-granddaughter of Thomas Garrahan and sister of Gonzalo Jr. and Facundo Pieres. Her brothers are members of the 'Ellerstina' team, who, with their cousins Paul and Matias MacDonough, were runners-up in the 2007 open.

New Generations

Polo in Argentina continues to have a disproportionate number of Irish-Argentines in its ranks. The latest Potrillos' Cup for Under-14s and Potrillitos' Cup for Under-11s [4] brought together many Irish-Argentines. The same was the case with the Juniors Cup, hosted by the Argentine Polo Association, which in 2006 was won by the team 'Glascorn', recalling the name of the ancestral home of the MacLoughlins in County Westmeath. The team

was formed by brothers Guillermo and Francisco MacLoughlin, Guillermo Cavanagh Jr. and Nicolás Ruiz Guiñazú. In the 2007 Competition, Francisco MacLoughlin was also a member of the winning team.

In addition to those named, there are many younger Irish-Argentine players with official handicaps, including Ina Lalor, Santiago Kelly Jr., Dylan Rossiter, Edmundo Donnelly,

Santiago Trigo Achával O'Farrell, Marcelo Garrahan Jr., Felipe Llorente, Pedro Harrison and Eduardo Seré Kenny. There are also many other players in the under-16 level bearing Irish surnames and assuring Irish links with the sport for many years to come.

Guillermo MacLoughlin Bréard



'Glascom', the winners of the Argentine Junior's Cup 2006.
(left to right): Nicolás Ruiz Guiñazú, Guillermo MacLoughlin (jr.), Guillermo Cavanagh (jr.) and Francisco MacLoughlin.
(Alicia MacLoughlin, 2006)

Acknowledgements

I wish to acknowledge Mr. Chris Ashton's support and assistance, to whom I am greatly indebted.

Notes

[1] The number three is the pivot man, and he is usually the long ball hitter and play-maker for the team, and also hits the penalty shots.

[2] The Latin American murderer.

[3] General Agustín Pedro Justo Rolón (1876-1943) was President of Argentina from February 1932 to February 1938.

[4] A junior polo competition held at Club de Polo Los Indios in San Miguel in Buenos Aires annually in December.

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Appendices

a) List of 10 handicaps

The Argentine Polo Association has given the highest valuation, a ten goals handicap, to the following players with Irish roots:

- 1913 - John A. E. Traill
- 1919 - Luis Lacey
- 1943 - Luis J. Duggan
- 1954 - Roberto Cavanagh
- 1984 - Gonzalo Pieres Garrahan
- 1984 - Alfonso Pieres Garrahan
- 2005 - Gonzalo Pieres (Jr.)
- 2005 - Facundo Pieres
- 2007 - Pablo MacDonough

Also, Eduardo 'Gordo' Moore, deserves mention. He obtained the ten goals handicap in 1978 in England although he only obtained a nine goals handicap in Argentina.

b) Open Winners

Throughout the history of the Argentine Open, many Irish or Irish-Argentines were among the winners. On a number of occasions, the four members of the team had Irish backgrounds, and these are as follows:

- 1904 - North Santa Fé: Joseph E. Traill, Eduardo Traill, Juan A. E. Traill and Roberto W. Traill.
- 1908 - North Santa Fé: Joseph E. Traill, Eduardo Traill, Juan A. E. Traill and Roberto W. Traill.
- 1913 - North Santa Fé: Joseph E. Traill, Leonard Lynch-Staunton, John A. E. Traill and Roberto W. Traill.
- 1925 - Hurlingham: Arturo J. Kenny, John D. Nelson, Eustace Leonardo Lacey and Luis Lacey.

‘Rugby gives you values: they aren’t written but they are for life’ Interview with Felipe Contepomi

By Edmundo Murray

Talking to Felipe Contepomi evokes exciting moments in our sporting lives, whether as players or supporters. It is also a way to learn, in a peculiar way, about playing professional rugby with the enthusiasm of an amateur. Born in Buenos Aires, Contepomi went to study at Cardenal Newman School, run by the Irish Christian Brothers, in the outskirts of the city. He started playing rugby at the school, and was quickly picked for the junior selections in Buenos Aires and later at the national level. He has played more than fifty games with The Pumas. His twin brother Manuel is also a player in the national team. A star of the Leinster Rugby team in Ireland, Felipe is also a medical doctor, having graduated from the Royal College of Surgeons. He lives in Dublin with his wife Paula and their daughter Catalina.

Edmundo Murray (**EM**): What influence has your Irish school education had on your life and on your rugby-playing?

Felipe Contepomi (**FP**): [Cardenal] Newman was and still is important in my life. It was my second home, and had a great effect on my educational and life values, and of course on my rugby-playing. Today when you speak of my career, the first milestone is always *el Newman*. It is an Irish school with high standards, and I was conscious of the Irish character of the school from the beginning, for instance during the Irish tournaments. Indeed, having studied at Newman school was important in later decisions that I made, like when I was offered the chance to play for Leinster.

EM: You studied to be a medical doctor, and were awarded MB, BCh and BAO degrees by the Royal College of Surgeons in Dublin. How difficult do you find studying and playing professional rugby in Ireland?

FP: Some consider that being a good player and a good student is not possible. And perhaps medicine is not the most common of university studies for a rugby player. But there are many professional players who are studying. Of course sometimes it is difficult to do both things together, but I don’t think it is a sacrifice. I didn’t study just for the sake of it. If you want to be a medical doctor you need to make some concessions, but you can also make some good choices to link both activities. I selected orthopaedics as my speciality.



Felipe Contepomi during British & Irish Lions vs Argentina, Cardiff, May 2005
(Prensa Unión Argentina de Rugby)

EM: If rugby becomes professional in Argentina, do you think it would lead to the demise of vibrant club-level rugby, as is claimed to have happened in Ireland and Wales?

FP: In my view, professional rugby must be built on the foundations of the amateur activity and its values. It's not just money that counts, as so many people think in Argentina. As I learnt at Newman School, education and values are key elements of rugby, whether professional or amateur. In Argentina we have the advantage of being late entrants to professional rugby. We can learn from others to avoid mistakes. Our greatest fault is to think that we need to reinvent the wheel. However, we need to keep the amateur infrastructure in order to develop professional rugby.

EM: Even if the adjective is a little strong, do you consider yourself a nationalist?

FP: Yes, it is strong and ambiguous too. In a way, I can't uproot myself from my origins. One has to be aware of the place one comes from. On the other hand, I am very open to changes ... to the future. I do believe in the common good for anyone, independently of the society in which you are born or educated. In rugby, this means that I must play at 100 percent of my strength and passion, whether for Bristol, Leinster or The Pumas. And yet, your country's jersey is so powerful! Playing rugby means that you must respect others, and your team-mates. Compared to other sports, rugby gives you values, not just entertainment. At least in Argentina, from an early age you are linked to a club, a group of friends, a society. If there are good relationships amongst the group, the results will be seen in the field. We have to consider that rugby has a long history of amateurism. Football started to be professional in the 1930s, while rugby didn't eliminate restrictions on professionalism until the 1990s. We had a century of amateur values in our activity before becoming professionals.

EM: Why was the image of The Pumas singing the Argentine national anthem the one that you wished to give to the public?

FP: We sang spontaneously what we felt at the time. It was our mood. We always sing out loud

and intensely. Some journalists made a big deal of it, but we liked it that way. And the musical version that they played helped us to sing in that way.

EM: Rugby has adapted to diverse cultures in different places. While in southern France, for instance, it has a strong rural character, in Argentina is more urban and has been traditionally upper-class.

FP: Yes, it is true that before rugby was more-or-less an elite entertainment. But since 1999 there has been a complete change in the situation, and the activity has grown enormously. Now it is more popular, and more people from diverse social origins are attracted to rugby.

EM: During the 2007 World Cup you publicly criticised the embattled Irish coach Eddie O'Sullivan. Was this motivated by a personal enmity against the coach?

FP: I did not criticise Eddie O'Sullivan. At that time, people in Ireland were certain that they would reach the semi-finals, and they did not consider otherwise. Professional coaches are hired to build successful teams. If they don't, they are fired the day after losing the match, and that is what I said about Eddie O'Sullivan. This doesn't happen only with the Irish coaches. Take a look at the Australians, the French. Professionalism requires getting results. That's all I said. However, I guess I did not like O'Sullivan's comments after his team lost to the Pumas. It is always easier to blame others instead of recognising what you yourself have done wrong.

EM: Do you think that night in Lens in 1999 (when Ireland lost the chance for a place for the world cup semi-final in Dublin) has created a long legacy of bitterness and begrudgery, particularly among the Irish coaching staff and management, towards Argentina, or do the roots of the enmity run deeper than that?

FP: What happened is that the Pumas shocked Ireland. The Irish players and coaches couldn't believe that they were losing to Argentina. When we checked in at the hotel that evening we saw the luggage left by some of the Irish

players who couldn't conceive of the idea that they would have to check out, because they were certain that the boys in green would secure the semi-finals. There isn't such an enmity towards Argentina; I actually experienced the opposite from players, management and supporters. You should see how well they consider us when we win over Ireland. They really understand fair play, and you can see their good feelings especially when they aren't so lucky.

EM: That's something you definitively don't see among the French supporters.

FP: (laughs) Not at all.

EM: Do you find a condescending attitude among the IRB and established home unions towards Argentina?

FP: No. I think that the IRB wants to help Argentina to establish an international rugby infrastructure. But there are two important factors we need to take into account. Today's rugby is professional and consequently, it is a business. If Argentina does not present a potential business for the international community it will be very hard to break in.

EM: Jorge Búsico, the famous rugby journalist, wrote a piece during the rugby world cup on the Pumas being a metaphor for the country that Argentines would like their country to be: orderly, non-corrupt and respectful. He wrote that football represented their country as it actually is: corrupt, disorderly and characterised by random violence and lack of respect. Would you agree with these sentiments?

FP: I would challenge those comparisons between football and rugby. Most of the Argentine football players give their best in the

field. They travel frequently and to remote locations, keeping to crazy schedules, and they have to play a few hours after landing. Then they try to deliver an excellent game. Some people in Argentina say that football players 'earn millions', and in some cases this may be true. But the physical and psychological effort must be contributed either way. Every sporting activity has its own idiosyncrasy, and we have to respect that.

EM: How did you adjust to life in Ireland? Did you have to adapt to professional rugby?

FP: It was - and still is - difficult to be far from home. Of course we miss family and friends in Argentina. However professionalism wasn't new for me. I came from Bristol and even before that, as an amateur, I always played in a responsible and professional way. People should realise that, whether professionals or amateurs, we must respect and try to fulfil players' and supporters' expectations.

EM: Unless you suffer an injury, you will be on the first Argentine team to play in Croke Park in November this year. What are your views on this?

FP: I am aware of Croke Park's historical background and I understand its symbolic significance to the Irish, as well as its associations with national pride in Ireland. Indeed, playing there will be very important for me personally, especially now that I have so many friends here. This is a sport that gives you a lot of rewards. But more than anything else, rugby gives you values. They aren't written, but they are for life, and I wish to maintain them beyond the activity itself.

Edmundo Murray

Profile

Felipe Contepomi, born on 20 August 1977 to Carlos Contepomi and María Elena Ferrante in San Isidro, Greater Buenos Aires, is an Argentine international (Pumas) rugby union outhalf and centre, who plays club rugby for Leinster in Ireland.

Felipe was educated at the Irish Christian Brothers school, Cardenal Newman, in Bolougne, Buenos Aires, where he honed his rugby skills. His passion for rugby was inherited from his father, Carlos, a former Puma captain and coach and member of Buenos Aires Cricket and Rugby Club (Bici), who himself started playing rugby at Cardenal Newman.

Initially Felipe began his rugby career as flanker, before switching to outhalf in the Junior Divisions, following in the footsteps of his father, who had also been an outhalf. In the Junior Divisions he was a member of a number of teams that won various under-age competitions, including Under-15, 16 and 19. He also played rugby Sevens at under-age level. Following his return from the Under-19 World Cup, he joined Club Newman's team, alongside his twin brother Manuel, making his debut against Deportiva Francesa. Following the completion of his secondary schooling he started medical school at the Universidad de Buenos Aires, whilst continuing to play amateur rugby for Newman. Among his achievements at senior amateur level were reaching the national club semi-finals in 1997 and a championship. He was appointed captain of the team in 2000.

Enticed by his fellow Puma Agustín Pichot, he moved to the English West Country to play professional rugby with Premiership team Bristol in 2001. In the 2001-2002 season Bristol finished the season with the most bonus points in the Zurich Premiership, and reached the final of the Zurich Championship at Twickenham, securing a place in the Heineken Cup for the 2002-2003 season. In the semi-final against Northampton, Felipe scored all 32 points. His tally for the season was 221 points.

The following year, ownership problems caused by the pullout of an investor created a crisis at the club and Bristol were relegated. Following the 2003 Rugby World Cup, with offers from Leinster, and English and French clubs, he opted for Leinster as it allowed him to combine his professional career with the resumption of his medical studies. In his first two seasons at the club, Felipe alternated between outhalf and centre, playing a less influential role in the team. With the arrival of a new head coach Michael Cheika and assistant coach David Knox, Felipe became the indisputable outhalf. The 2005-2006 season was particularly memorable, with Leinster coming second in the Celtic League and reaching the semi-final of the European Heineken Cup. Felipe was the top points scorer in both competitions. He won the Irish Rugby Players Association 'Best Rugby Player of the Year' award for the 2005-2006 season, as well as the Leinster 'Best Player of the Year' award.

Since making his international debut for the Pumas against Chile in 1998, Felipe has played in three World Cups (1999, 2003 and 2007). He was one of the stars of the Argentine team during the 2007 Rugby World Cup, helping the team to beat Ireland and favourites France to reach the top of their pool and reach the quarter finals of the World Cup, subsequently winning the quarter-final against Scotland. In the third-place play-off against France where Argentina won 34-10, Felipe scored two tries, three conversions and one penalty. He was the second highest points scorer in the tournament, just behind Percy Montgomery of South Africa. Other international honours include the captaincy of the Pumas in their historic 25-25 draw against the British and Irish Lions in Cardiff in May 2005.

In October 2007, he was one of five people short-listed for the ultimate accolade in the sport, the International Rugby Board (IRB) 'Player of the Year Award', along with team-mate Juan Martín Hernández. The award was eventually won by Bryan Habana of South Africa. In recognition of his outstanding performance both at Leinster and in the Rugby World Cup, he was awarded the 'Guinness Rugby Writers' Player of The Year Award' in Ireland. Not only on the sporting front was 2007 a year of achievement for Felipe, but also on the educational front, as he graduated with his medical degree from the Royal College of Surgeons. The Irish current affairs magazine *Village* named him as Person of the Year for 2007, not only for his accomplishments on the rugby field, but also for his achievement in qualifying in medicine at the same time as being a professional player.

Alfredo Di Stéfano, football player

By John Kennedy



Alfredo Di Stéfano (b.1926), 'a god of the stadium, a magician of the ball, a perfect football master' (Michel Platini, 2008)
(*Archivo El Gráfico*)

Di Stéfano, Alfredo (1926-), considered to be one of the greatest centre-forwards in the history of football, was born in the Barracas neighbourhood of the city of Buenos Aires on 4 July 1926. He is descended from Italian, French and Irish immigrants, with the Irish connection being through his maternal grandmother. In a recent interview he said of his Irish links that “the Irish blood means there is something of Great Britain in me, for that I am very grateful, as England has done much for football and continues to do so” (Galliard 2008). [1]

At the age of seven he joined his first team, ‘Unidos y Venceremos’, and when the family moved to the Flores neighbourhood, he joined another junior team, Imán. In 1940 the Di Stéfano family moved to a farm in Los Cardales, in the Northwest of the province of Buenos Aires, where his father started an agricultural business as a potato grower and distributor and honey producer (Segovia 2003). The young Di Stéfano continued to play football, joining the Unión Progresista club and competing in the Campanense regional football

league, which was a league for the district of Campana.

Following a recommendation from his mother to a River Plate scout (Torres 2008), he was signed by River Plate in 1944, initially making the ranks of the lower teams. Incidentally, his father had played for the club between 1910 and 1912. The following year he was promoted to the first team, making his debut against Huracán. However, he was kept mainly on the bench, as Adolfo Pedernera was the preferred centre-forward. In 1946 he was loaned to Huracán, at the insistence of his father, so that he would have the chance to properly display his talent.

Di Stéfano returned to River Plate in 1947 where he won the League title, as part of a team whose forwards had become known as *la Máquina* (the machine). He won the top-scorer trophy, with twenty-seven goals. He soon acquired the moniker *la Saeta Rubia* (the blond arrow) because of his speed and precision, which was first coined by the journalist Roberto Neuberger. He primarily played as a forward, but was known for his versatility, also playing in defence and even in goals in a *Superclásico* against Boca Juniors. That same year, Di Stéfano made his debut with Argentina, and helped them to win the Guayaquil Championship in Ecuador, scoring six goals.

A players strike in Argentina in 1948 led Di Stéfano to move to Colombia to play for Los Millonarios of Bogotá, which was the most successful and richest team in the country. He played over 294 games, netting 267 goals. Following his debut in a tournament in Madrid’s Chamartín Stadium in 1952 to celebrate Real Madrid's fiftieth anniversary, he was approached for his services initially by FC Barcelona and later by Real Madrid. After a protracted dispute between the two clubs, he was eventually signed by Real Madrid, a club he would go on to be synonymous with. This was

a turning point in the history of the two teams (Burns 1998:155).

Di Stéfano's debut was against the French team Nancy on 23 September 1953. He went on to play 510 matches for Real Madrid, scoring 418 times. The honours included eight Spanish league titles, five consecutive European Cups between 1956 and 1960 and an Intercontinental Cup. Di Stéfano scored in all five European Cup finals, the most memorable being his three-goal hat-trick against Eintracht Frankfurt in May 1960, which Real won 7-3. This has gone down in the annals of sporting history as one of the best European finals of all time. He was also five times winner of the Pichichi Trophy, which is awarded to the top goal scorer each season in the Spanish League. Other honours included the *Ballon d'Or* in 1957 and 1959, awarded by the magazine *France Football* and considered the most prestigious individual award in football.

At an international level, Di Stéfano played four times for Argentina, six times for Colombia and, following his acquisition of Spanish nationality in 1956, he played thirty-one times for the Spanish team, though he never got the opportunity to play in the World Cup. He captained the 'Rest of the World' squad against England to commemorate the Centenary of the Football Association in 1963.

Di Stéfano retired from international football in 1964 and in the same year played his last match for Real Madrid against Inter Milan in the European Cup final. The following season he signed for Espanyol of Barcelona and after one season retired. Di Stéfano said his final farewell to football in a testimonial match

between Real Madrid and Glasgow Celtic in 1967.

After his retirement, Di Stéfano embarked on a career as a coach. His first foray into management was with Elech in the Alicante region in the 1967/68 season, which he left midway through the season to return to Argentina and coach Boca Juniors. Under his management, Boca won the National Championship in 1969, only losing one game. The following year he returned to Spain to take over the management of Valencia. He spent stints at Sporting Lisbon and Rayo Vallecano el Castellón, before returning to Valencia for the 1979-80 season, leading the team to victory in the European Cup Winners' Cup (now the UEFA Cup) against Arsenal of London.

In 1981, Di Stéfano returned to Argentina to manage River Plate and guided them to a National Championship. The following season, 1982-83, he was appointed coach of Real Madrid, where he remained for two years, however they were only runners-up in *la Liga* in both years. Another stint at Boca Juniors, albeit brief, followed, before returning to Valencia for the 1986-87 season, with the team being promoted to the premier division. Di Stéfano came back to coach Real Madrid in 1990/91 before retiring. In 2001 he was named Honourary President of Real Madrid. Other honours include the Golden Players award from UEFA in 2004, UEFA President's Medal awarded in February 2008 and inductee into the International Football Hall of Fame in 1997.

John Kennedy

Notes

[1] Many of the earliest Irish immigrants in Argentina were perceived to be part of the British community, and this may be the reason for the comment.

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Fabián O'Neill, football player

By Conrad O'Neill Malcolm

O'Neill, Fabián Alberto (1973-), former professional footballer, was born in the city of Paso de los Toros in the Uruguayan Department of Tacuarembó, on 14 October 1973. He is the eldest of five children born to Luis Alberto O'Neill and Mercedes Domínguez.

His Irish connections can be traced back to his great-great-grandparents, Elizabeth Murphy and Thomas O'Neill from County Cork, son of Isabel and Michael O'Neill. In early 1837 Michael O'Neill and Isabel Sullivan emigrated to Uruguay and their only son Thomas was born the same year in Las Piedras, Canelones. Thomas married Elizabeth and built up a farm in 'Marincho', Flores, some 200km north of the capital city, Montevideo. This marriage produced eleven children. Benito, the youngest, married María White Cogley, and was Fabián's great-grandfather. From this point onwards the family spread throughout Uruguay, with some members emigrating to Australia. They were mainly involved in livestock farming (O'Neill n/d).

Fabián O'Neill began his professional football career playing for the Montevideo Club Nacional de Fútbol, one of the most successful clubs in the country, in 1992. As a midfielder he quickly gained the nickname of "Mago" (Wizard), as he was very good at dribbling and kicking with both feet.

In 1996 he moved to Europe to play for the Italian Series A team Cagliari-Calcio, following in the footsteps of other Uruguayan stars such as Enzo

Francescoli and Daniel Fonseca. After the club was relegated to Series B in 2000 he transferred to Juventus FC where he played from 2000 until the end of 2001. Unfortunately, with Juventus, 'his form dipped as he found himself starved of first-team chances' (Vickery 2002). In 2002 he moved to Perugia as part of a transfer deal. In Perugia he began to play more regularly and was finally able to show the Italians his wizardry. He was released at the end of the 2002 season and returned to Cagliari-Calcio, who have again been relegated to Series B.

After this, O'Neill decided to retire and return to Uruguay to take an active part in the running of his cattle ranch. In January 2003 Club Nacional de Fútbol convinced him to join their ranks again. A few months later, O'Neill, who was combining his job as a footballer in Montevideo with that of a rancher and racehorse-owner, decided to retire from high-level professional football at the still young age of thirty, though the club did try to dissuade him. After his retirement he played part-time for a club in the interior league and now coaches a local team.

O'Neill first played for the Uruguayan national team in June 1993. He represented his country in nineteen matches, scoring three goals. He was selected and played for Uruguay at the FIFA World Cup 2002.

Conrad O'Neill Malcolm

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Santiago Phelan, rugby player and coach

By John Kennedy



Santiago Phelan (b.1974)
(*Prensa Unión Argentina de Rugby*)

Phelan, Santiago [*Tati*] (1974-), former Argentine rugby player and the present coach of the national team, was born on 31 March 1974 in San Isidro, Greater Buenos Aires. San Isidro is an area synonymous with Argentine rugby and home to two of the most prominent rugby clubs in the country, Club Atlético San Isidro (CASI) and San Isidro Club (SIC). The Irish link stems from Phelan's paternal grandfather, Miguel (Michael) who was born Waterford city (*Prematch*: n/d).

Phelan began playing rugby as a child with CASI, the most successful club in Argentina, and progressed to the senior team, eventually becoming its skipper. He retired from club rugby at the young age of twenty-nine. Among the honours Phelan achieved with CASI was a National Club winner's medal in 1995, a National Sevens Club winner's medal in 1998, and Argentine Champions medals in 1998, 1999 and 2000. The one honour that eluded him was the Unión de Rugby de Buenos Aires (URBA) Championship, which CASI won against arch-rivals SIC in 2005 after a twenty-year gap.

Phelan began his international career in Argentina's Sevens squad in 1994 and was called up by the Pumas in 1997, making his international debut in Montevideo against Uruguay in the same year. Playing the position of flanker, he was a mainstay of the Puma forwards from the late 1990s until 2003 and was known for his fearless tackling. He played in two World Cups, Wales in 1999 and Australia in 2003. One of his most memorable achievements was the famous game in 1999 when Argentina beat Ireland 28-24 in Lens, France and achieved a place in the quarter finals of the World Cup for the first time. He was also called up by the Barbarians in May 2003 in a side coached by Philippe Sella.

Plagued by a recurrent shoulder injury, Phelan announced that the 2003 World Cup would be his farewell to international rugby. In recognition of his contribution to the Pumas, the coach, Marcelo Loffreda, appointed him skipper for their final world cup game against Romania in Sydney, ending his career with a 50-3 victory. This was not his first experience of the captaincy. Earlier in 2003, he had had the honour of captaining the Pumas against the Springboks in a one series test in South Africa. He also captained the Pumas in 1992 and 1993, and the Puma Under-21s in 1995.

Unlike some of his contemporaries, such as Gonzalo Longo who played for rival club SIC, Phelan did not follow the professional trail to clubs in France or England. In an interview with the magazine *Prematch*, he said that he had never been interested in playing abroad and that he wanted his children to experience the same environment and lifestyle that he had grown up in (*Prematch*: n/d). [1] In the professional era he stood out as being one of the few international captains who adhered steadfastly to the principles of amateurism, which in many ways captured the essence and tradition of rugby (Busicó 2003).

Since his retirement from club and international rugby, Phelan has built up a

successful coaching career at his beloved CASI. His coaching philosophy is based on player empowerment rather than any rigid game plan (IRB 2007). He has also embarked on coaching at an international level along with José Orengo. Phelan coached the Argentine 'A' team in the IRB Nations Cup in Romania in 2007 where they came second. It had been suggested by many commentators, including the Puma star of the 2007 World Cup, Mario Ledesma, writing in the Argentine daily *La Nación*, that Tati could be a suitable successor to Pumas coach Marcelo Loffreda (Balinotti 2007). As an affirmation of his coaching talents and popularity among the players, the Unión Argentina de Rugby (UAR) appointed him the

new full-time coach of the Pumas on 13 March 2008, on a four-year contract.

Aside from Rodolfo 'Michingo' O'Reilly, a former CASI player and Pumas coach, Phelan has been one of the few Argentines of discernable Irish ancestry who has played such a prominent role with the Pumas in recent times. With his appointment as the new Pumas coach, he is destined to make a significant contribution to Argentine rugby well in to the future.

John Kennedy

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Pablo MacDonough, polo player

By Guillermo MacLoughlin Bréard

MacDonough, Pablo (1982-), polo-player, was born on 21 February 1982 in Buenos Aires, and is a fifth-generation Irish Argentine. He completed his secondary education at San Martín de Tours school and did a degree in Business Administration at the Universidad Del Salvador. At the end of 2007, at the age of 25, the Argentine Polo Association awarded him the ten goals handicap, continuing a tradition of outstanding Irish-Argentine polo players who attained the highest handicap in the sport, which had begun with Juan Traill in 1913.

He can trace his Irish roots back to his great-grandfather, James MacDonough, from County Sligo, who arrived in the River Plate in 1865 and married Jane Watson from County Clare. The MacDonoughs settled in the extended Pampas, initially managing *estancias* and eventually becoming substantial landowners themselves, as well as becoming closely associated with the equine sector.

There is a long polo-playing lineage in the family. Pablo's father Jorge is a former player himself, as well as being a qualified Veterinary Surgeon. His grandfather Thomas Garrahan was the owner of the *estancia* "La Espadaña", which was prominent in the development of polo. Garrahan was himself the founder of a long line of polo-players. His great-grandfather, James Garrahan, was considered a true 'gaucho'. When he died, an obituary in *The Southern Cross* (the oldest Irish newspaper printed in Argentina) said of him: 'It was rare to find a man of any nationality who could

throw the loop as dexterously and as surely as "Don Santiago"'.

Pablo began playing polo as a child in the 'Nueva Escocia,' training centre in Pehuajó in Buenos Aires Province, under the tutelage of the renowned former player, trainer and breeder of polo horses, Eduardo 'Gordo' Moore. As part of the 'Nueva Escocia' team he won the 'Potrillos' Cup, the most prestigious worldwide tournament for Under-14s, which takes place every December in the Club de Polo Los Indios de San Miguel in Buenos Aires.

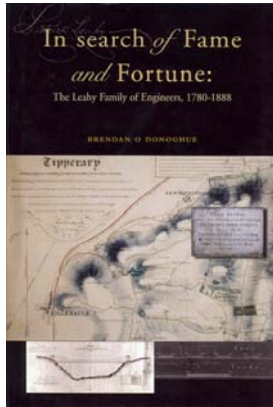
MacDonough played in different teams during his teenage years. In 2001 he won the Chamber of Deputies Cup with his team 'La Irenita', which included his brother Matías, Martín Garrahan and Gonzalo Von Wernich. He joined his brother Matías and second cousins Gonzalo Jr. and Facundo Pieres to form the 'Ellerstina' team in 2003. They have won almost every important competition, including the Tortugas Open and Hurlingham Club Open. Although appearing in two finals, the Argentine Open has eluded them to date. They narrowly lost by 15-16 goals in the 2007 final against La Dolfina. 'Not yet', said Pablo after the 2007 Argentine Open, who after reaching two finals is looking forward to his third opportunity.

Guillermo MacLoughlin Bréard

**Review of Brendan O Donoghue's
*In Search of Fame and Fortune:
The Leahy Family of Engineers, 1780-1888***

By William H. Mulligan, Jr.

Dublin: Geography Publications, 2006.
340 pp. ISBN 0-906602-920.



In Search of Fame and Fortune: The Leahy Family of Engineers is an intriguing book based on a great deal of research of a wide range of sources. The Leahy family was composed of some very interesting individuals, whose careers reveal much about the emerging Catholic professional middle class both within Ireland and in the British Empire. Patrick Leahy (1780-1850) was a modestly successful surveyor in County Tipperary. He developed a successful practice and three of his sons, Edmund, Matthew and Denis followed him into that career, as well as the emerging profession of civil engineering. The oldest son, Patrick (1806-1875), became Archbishop of Cashel and Emly in 1857 and was among the most prominent Roman Catholic churchmen in Ireland.

Patrick Sr. and Edmund were among the first county surveyors appointed in Ireland in 1834. The post had been created as part of a reform of the Grand Jury system. Patrick was appointed to the East Riding of County Cork and Edmund to the West Riding. Patrick also held the post of surveyor for the City of Cork. The county surveyor's duties involved overseeing a broad range of public works projects - roads, bridges, canals, harbour improvement and public buildings - as well as reviewing plans and proposals for projects submitted to the Grand Jury. The 1830s and early 1840s were an especially busy period for such projects and Cork was a large county. Even divided into two ridings, there was a great deal of work for the surveyors. Patrick did

reasonably well, although he was dogged by controversy over the concurrent city surveyor appointment. Edmund, the less experienced of the two, had a more difficult time. While serving as county surveyors, Patrick and Edmund developed an extensive private practice, including promoting the Cork & Bandon Railroad. For Matthew and Denis this became increasingly controversial due to their official duties, leading to conflicts of interest.

In 1847, they left Ireland and attempted to establish themselves as civil engineers in South Africa and the Ottoman Empire with mixed, short-term success. Patrick Sr. died in South Africa. Matthew and Denis served successively as colonial engineers in Trinidad, each dying after less than a year in the job. Edmund used his experience and connections to obtain an appointment as colonial engineer and architect in Jamaica. This ended disastrously amid charges of fraud. He returned to Ireland to play a central role in the Cashel election of 1868, a notoriously corrupt election and another scandal for Edmund. He died in 1888, somewhat ironically from being hit by a train. O Donoghue has also provided information on the daughters of Patrick Leahy and the brothers' wives, but it is quite perfunctory. They were middle-class Victorian women who did not pursue careers and were supported by their male relatives.

The Leahy family's search for fame and fortune as engineers was an interesting quest, even if it was ultimately unsuccessful, and following it is a good read. Patrick Sr. had some success as a surveyor in County Tipperary, but experienced less good fortune when he moved into the nascent field of civil engineering. None of his sons, apart from the archbishop, can be judged a success by any standard. O Donoghue does

not gloss over this and his assessment of the Leahy engineers is sober and well-grounded in the evidence cited.

O Donoghue's focus is very much on the family and its members' search for success. It is only in the last chapter, when he assesses each man's career, that he explicitly addresses the broader issues that their experiences touch upon. The Leahys saw the expanding British Empire as an opportunity for success; they were strong supporters of British Imperialism, even to the point of being somewhat in advance of the British Government. Neither Patrick Sr. nor his three engineer sons ever displayed sentiments of Irish nationalism. Only the Archbishop subscribed to this ideology - he was reputed to be a staunch nationalist and was very active in politics. Did the others subsume Irish nationalist views or even "Irishness" (at least one married an Anglican woman) in their quest for success? It is difficult to view the Leahys as part of the Irish Diaspora, despite their residence outside Ireland. They did not associate with a distinct Irish community in the cities they resided in. It is interesting to note that many of their contemporaries, especially those writing letters of reference, referred to them as English.

Two of the most interesting aspects of the book are the emergence of civil engineering as a distinct profession with roots in architecture, surveying and military engineering, and the insight provided into how the British Empire functioned. The Leahys' careers illustrate how the transition to civil engineering occurred, and how increasingly difficult it became for men like them who were surveyors with practical

experience in aspects of civil engineering to handle the increasing technical complexities of the range of projects they were expected to manage. The way in which the various Leahys obtained positions in the colonial service offers an interesting insight into how the empire operated during its formative period. Connections were much more important than competence. Edmund was able to obtain a favourable reference for a position after being dismissed from his Jamaican position for fraud. Meanwhile, he was also evading testifying before the commission investigating the 1868 Cashel election.

O Donoghue did not have an easy task in putting together the history of the Leahy family. There is no single corpus of papers, except for those of the Archbishop. What does exist is located scattered among numerous very large collections and other sources such as censuses, directories and registers of civil engineers, local Grand Jury records and local newspapers. All of this required a great commitment in terms of time and patience in locating information. O Donoghue has succeeded in putting together the Leahy story in a coherent way, while acknowledging where the gaps lie. Further to his credit, he has organised their story in an orderly manner that is easy to follow and enjoyable to read. In the end, it is a rather sad story of failed hopes and ambitions unmet. But a story well told.

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Author's Reply

I am very grateful to Dr William Mulligan for his positive and detailed review of my book on the Leahy family. Dr Mulligan's comments are accurate and fair and the review provides an excellent picture of the scope and content of the work and of some of the issues it throws up. I propose therefore to confine this response to just a few points.

In my introduction to the book, I expressed the hope that, while the Leahys do not deserve to be remembered for their actual achievements in engineering, the documentation of the lives and careers of this one family might help to promote interest in the activities generally of Irish engineers and other

professionals in the administration of the British Empire during the second half of the nineteenth century. I made the point also that the large numbers of Irish-born engineers who worked in the colonies in the nineteenth century have attracted very little attention in published work, notwithstanding the enormous volume of valuable documentation which is readily available in the records of the Colonial Office at The National Archives (PRO) at Kew in London, and elsewhere. Against this background, I am very pleased that IMSLA will help to bring the subject to the notice of those involved in Irish Latin American studies.

Dr Mulligan rightly notes that while I have provided information on the female members of the Leahy family, the details are sketchy. In researching this facet of the family history, I was struck by the fact that, despite the veritable explosion of interest in women's studies in recent years, little attention appears to have been given to the options – or the lack of them – available throughout most of the nineteenth century to the unmarried daughters of professional and other middle-class families in Ireland, whereas the lives of women in industry and in agriculture, for example, have been well covered. In the case of the Leahy family, three unmarried daughters had to be supported (grudgingly at times) throughout their entire lives by their three engineer brothers and the fourth brother – the Roman Catholic Archbishop of Cashel. Was this the norm in families of this kind, and what happened if brothers were unable or unwilling to provide financial support?

Finally, Dr Mulligan's reference to the Leahys' tenure (1834–46) of positions as county surveyor in Ireland is of interest in that these positions, established by law in 1834, were the first public offices in England or Ireland –and for many years, the only such offices – to be filled on the basis of merit. By contrast, positions in the civil service and in the colonies were generally filled through patronage until the 1860s and later in some cases, a situation from which the Leahys themselves were able to benefit. A few of the other people who served as county surveyors in Ireland during the nineteenth century also left the country to pursue careers abroad, including one man who had the misfortune to find himself engaged on a railway survey in Cawnpore (now Kanpur, Uttar Pradesh, India) in 1857 when the mutiny broke out. However, I have found no record of any other ex-county surveyors who opted to work in Latin America, as the Leahys did (on this, see my book *The Irish County Surveyors 1834-1944*, Four Courts Press, Dublin, 2007).

Dr Brendan O'Donoghue

Note

Brendan O Donoghue was formerly Secretary of the Department of the Environment and Director of the National Library and Chief Herald of Ireland.

Review of Iván Alejandro Portela Bonachea's *Cantos de Tír na n-Og*

By Olwen Rowe

Mexico: CONACULTA, 2004

191 pages. ISBN 9703506410.

Iván Portela's latest collection of poetry, *Cantos de Tír na n-Og*, was published in 2004 by CONACULTA, the Mexican National Council for Literature and the Arts. As the title suggests, the Irish myth of *Tír na nÓg*, the Land of Eternal Youth, and Ireland are the principal inspiration for these poems. Portela is a university lecturer and since 1981 has taught at the Universidad Iberoamericana, a private Jesuit university in Mexico City, where he has been recognised for excellence in teaching. He is also a key participant in a variety of poetry workshops. Among his published books are *La otra cara de Irlanda* (The Other Face of Ireland) (1986), *Cantos Ivánicos* (1992) and *Cantos de fuego* (Songs of Fire) (1998).

Portela is a delightfully anomalous poet. Born in Santa Clara, Cuba in 1944, he moved to Mexico when he was nineteen years old, was subsequently naturalised as Mexican and has made ancient Ireland his poetic homeland. He has taken on the cloak of the 'bard of the Mexican Irish', a Cuban-Mexican Oisín, in search of his true homeland. He must be the only Latin American poet to have written so passionately and extensively about Ireland and Celtic mythology.

Pura López Colomé, a key contemporary Mexican poet and the official translator of Seamus Heaney into Spanish - from whom Portela takes a number of epigraphs for poems in this collection - establishes in her introduction to the collection *Fervor por Irlanda* (A Passion for Ireland) that there is no better legend or place than *Tír na nÓg* to characterise Portela's poetic undertaking:

Ancient Erin has always been the exclusive vehicle for his poetic explorations, whose purpose is none other than to find a mirror which reflects his true God, he who lives in him and in all that surrounds him, God of meanness and generosity, of pleasure

and misery. In order that the atrocities of the world do not silence him, he returns time and time again to the one true source, the lyric [...]. (11). [1]

The lyrical poem, like *Tír na nÓg*, represents for Portela the land of possibility, the land of beauty and truth, where he feels closest to God.

Cantos de Tír na n-Og, his latest offering of *cantos*, which translates as 'songs', like the titles of his other collections, emphasises his faith in the lyrical form. The collection comprises just over a hundred poems, all of which are dedicated to Ireland and its Celtic mythology. The collection is divided into two sections, 'Cantares para Oisín de Tír na n-Og (Poems for Oisín from Tír na nÓg)' and 'Como la dorada *Fáinne Óir* en el Reino de Erín (Like the Golden *Fáinne Óir* (Ring) in the Kingdom of Erin)'. The epilogue is taken from W.B. Yeats: 'There is a country called Tír na n-Og, which means the country of the young for age and death have not found it' (from *Fairy and Folk Tales*), thus setting the parameters for Portela's poetic exploration of the land of eternal youth. Yeats is an explicit influence throughout the poems, with direct quotations taken from his better-known poems. Seamus Heaney also features in these poems, amongst a colourful array of historical and mythological personalities who amicably inhabit the mystical world created in *Cantos de Tír na n-Og*, alongside the embodiment of the beloved for Portela, Teresa Cuddy.

The first poem sets the tone for the collection, as Portela invokes important figures from the past, lamenting his own absence from their country:

¡Oh, canto de Irlanda, canto de Tara,
canto de Daedra,
canto de Ulster, canto de Erín!,
¡canto de Patricio, canto do Aimirgín, canto
de Munster,

canto de Connacht, canto de Leinster ...
canto de Oisín!

(Oh, song of Ireland, song of Tara,
song of Deirdre,
song of Ulster, song of Erin!
song of Saint Patrick, song of Amergin, song
of Munster,
song of Connacht, song of Leinster ... song
of Oisín!)

Along with Yeats and Heaney, Amergin, the poet warrior of Conchobar Mac Nessa, who was to become the chief poet of Ulster, frequently appears in the poems, and Portela takes a quotation from Amergin as the epigraph for a later poem. The geographical expanse of this stanza, encompassing all four provinces of Ireland, is reflected in the following poems in the collection, which extend, as the title of one poem suggests, from New Ross to Salthill, taking in key literary sites including Ben Bulbin and Joyce's Martello Tower in Dublin.

The poems and their notes bear testament to the poet's belief that being in key locations in Ireland grounds his vision, so to speak, and lends his words the authority of experience, of having been there. The vibrant synthesis of Irish myths, legends and history in these poems suggests that these stories are not only taken from written material, but also from local oral storytelling, thus explaining the poet's insistence on having been there and the authenticity this seems to give his vision. It also links these poems to this tradition of storytelling as a way of affirming and celebrating identity, in this case, the adopted identity of the poet.

Portela takes on the role of the bard by invoking the mythical and historical voices on his travels. His experiences in Ireland seem to have given his poetry the decisive focus that he desires. In one of the more revealing poems, 'Estoico (Stoical)' (28), we understand that for Portela travel and memories of travel renew the heart. The experiences are implicitly connected to the desire to survive the darker side of the world, and to do so without regret. 'Estoico' ends with the image of the soul being liberated between Tara and the plenitude of God, thus

giving us an essential key to the way in which Tír na nÓg and Ireland are places not only of mythical significance, but are, more importantly, mystical.

The collection is sadly blighted by orthographic errors, particularly in place names, which are often unnecessarily and irritatingly misspelt, thus detracting from the authenticity which the poet stresses he derives from the geographical location, such as Pulatomish (Pollatomish, County Mayo) which was almost unrecognisable.

In this first poem, while the poet invokes the heroes of the past, he also experiences an exile from their country 'Soy hijo de Usnach, voz de Cuchulain / levanta tu cetro (I am Uisneach's son, the voice of Cuchulain, raise your sceptre)'. He feels both at home in and excluded from their country. The refrain throughout the poem is '¿Por qué no estoy allí? (Why am I not there?)'. While the poems celebrate a definite period in Ireland, they also lament Portela's ultimate separation from the country and its 'invisible regions'. The poems in the collection take up this theme time and time again, as the poet laments that while being filled with memories of Ireland, 'No despierto en Irlanda ... (I don't wake up in Ireland ...)' (81). Sadly, while he is full of his experience in Ireland, it is but a blip in universal time, so small as to be almost inconsequential. In a salute to Joyce's *Finnegan's Wake*, he describes a day in Dublin as 'un fragmento de quarks (a fragment of quarks)' (86).

As Pura López Colomé has insightfully argued, for Portela the lyrical poem plays a redemptive role, and, like Tír na nÓg, it creates a space where he can retreat from violence and evil in the world and attempt to become one with nature. In one poem, it is the pull of the waves which lead to poetry - 'y las olas arrastrando la poesía (and the waves drawing out the poems)'. He hears the lyre in Heaney's voice (27). Portela embraces an Orphic tradition which believes in the power of the poem to heal and redeem. He follows in the footsteps of the Romantics who sought to address and remedy our loss of spiritualism and the increasing reliance on technology as our present and

future salvation. Portela explicitly joins Yeats, who, though classified a Modernist, considered himself to be one of 'the last Romantics'.

In addition to the overarching lyrical and mystical tone of the collection, there are welcome moments of irony and self-conscious humour. Frequent references to 'Irish Mist' and the description of the house of the beloved Eileen, which 'como todas las casas irlandesas, / aromatizada de pollo frito, té negro y spray de cabellera (like all Irish homes, / was fragranced with fried chicken, black tea and hair spray)' (71), provide an effective contrast to the mythological framework.

An effectively ironic poem is 'De Cerro Calvo a Ben Bulben (From Cerro Calvo to Ben Bulben)' (128-9). For me this was one of the more interesting in the collection and it initially caught my attention because of its use of a children's rhyme and the resonance of its singsong quality in the poem overall. In 'De Cerro Calvo...', Portela playfully converses with Yeats and compares Yeats' memories of a waterfall by Ben Bulben with his own memories of the sound of the river Ochoa, which courses over the Cerro Calvo mountain beside his native town Santa Clara. Expanding on the Yeatsian romantic image, Portela adds his own personal vision, including an abandoned fridge, and the bombs and dreams of 1958, the year Batista was overthrown by Castro and fled to the US with Rivero Agüero. Agüero is parodied in the poem, in an adaptation of the children's rhyme 'Mambrú se fue a la guerra' (a French children's song which made fun of the Duke of Malborough after the French defeated the English in 1709. This song arrived in various forms to Latin America. We presume this is the Cuban version). What is remarkable about the poem is that the romantic vision prevails in the end, in spite of the brutal reality and loss conveyed in the poem. Yet as this and other poems insist, this is not mere escapism. And it is in Ireland and in his vision of Ireland that the poet most profoundly experiences release and connection, refuge and redemption.

Portela is well versed in Irish literature, mythology and folklore. He moves with ease

between a variety of forms and contexts. However, at times I wished for a more complex engagement with Ireland and even Mexico. While the poems insist on the poet's attachment to Ireland, and his sensations of finding his home there, the poems sometimes fail to communicate why his attachment is so intense and enduring. A number of times Portela bring his images of Ireland into sharp contrast with the grey Megalopolis, both representing his place of residence, the sprawling Mexico City, but also other giant urban developments, such as New York and Beijing (Peking), 'las monstruosidades de asfalto (the asphalt monsters)' (p.106). These repeatedly appear in his poems as the antithesis of the spirit of Ireland.

Though Portela admits that he believes there is something deep and good in the 'sea of asphalt' which has tried to kill him but cannot, because 'the honour of Diarmuid is sacrosanct' (106), the binarism of the poems often felt restrictive. Having lived in Mexico City and being Irish, I wished to escape the opposition between Ireland and the megalopolis, as it prevents one from seeing Ireland in all its complexity as a country with a complicated history as both a colony and a source of imperialism, and the badly named 'Troubles' which have plagued Northern Ireland. This vision also negates the vibrancy and colour of Mexico City, which for me was also a place of surprising spirituality.

But these are personal preferences, and the vision in *Cantos de Tír na n-Og* is definitively personal. Indeed, it is on the power of finding a homeland other than one's own that the poems are most insistent. That Portela is an exile from his original homeland, Cuba, explains some of the poignancy of his poetic vision of a mother country to which he can belong. Thus this passionate search for a true homeland leads to an idyllic mythical Ireland, an image which inevitably does not account for an anomalous state, as David Lloyd describes it. That Oisín was not content to stay in Tír na nÓg, for he yearned to see friends and family, is also a poignant reminder of the pain involved in exile.

It is in the idea of Tír na nÓg being his spiritual and mystical homeland that we come closest to

understanding Portela's obsession with Ireland. While the geographical location recedes, Portela's memories of Ireland stay with him in Mexico: 'Dublín quedaste ... / sueño sellado / en el secreto / de mi canción (Dublin you remain ... / a dream sealed / in the secret / of my song)'. Ireland becomes a place created within him and within his poems. He twice (28, 102) returns to the image of his heart being renewed and his faith reaffirmed, with the moving expression 'el calor de la fe se renueva (the warmth of my faith is renewed)', attributing this mystical experience both times to 'el Canto de Ciervo (the Deer's Cry)', also known as 'St Patrick's Breastplate'. The beautiful

words of this song give him the resilience he needs to survive the atrocities of the world.

In one of the poems from the second half of the collection, the poet appeals to St. Patrick, asking him to pray for all of us, to pray for him. Pura López Colomé concludes her introduction with characteristic eloquence when she says of these poems: 'The curative capacity of poetry is clear, whether we call it an adopted land, an illuminated insularity or youth which is being perpetually renewed. It is the true Tír na nÓg.' [2]

Olwen Rowe
NUI Galway

Notes

[1] Desde siempre ha hecho de la antiquísima Erín el vehículo exclusivo de sus búsquedas poéticas, cuyo objeto no es otra cosa que un espejo que refleje a Dios, el que vive dentro suyo y en todo lo que rodea, Dios de la mezquindad y la bondad, del placer y la miseria. Para no dejarse enmudecer por la atrocidad del mundo, recurre una y otra vez a la fuente única, el canto [...]. p.11.

[2] Clara resulta la capacidad curativa de la poesía, llámese a ésta, tierra de adopción, insularidad iluminada o juventud en renovación perpetua. Tír na n-Og de la verdad. p.12.

Author's Reply

The author thanks the reviewer and does not wish to comment further.