

03/04

IRISH RUGBY FOOTBALL UNION
ANNUAL REPORT





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GUINNESS

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OFFICE BEARERS AND COMMITTEE





President
J.K. Quilligan

Junior Vice President
D.A. Crawford

Chairman of Mgt. Committee
J.D. Hussey

Committee
P.J. Boyle
D.C. Glass
C.C. Powell
J.R. Callaghan

Branch Representative Members
F. Crowley
P. Fitzgerald
T.H.N. Jackson
G. Quaid
C. Watson

International Rugby Board Representatives
Dr. S. Millar

Trustees
A.R. Dawson
Dr. S. Millar

Chief Executive
P.R. Browne

Director of Rugby Development
E. Wigglesworth

National Coach
E. O'Sullivan

Assistant Coach
D. Kidney

Accountant
C. O'Brien

Senior Vice President
B.T. Keogh

Hon. Treasurer
J.P. Lyons

Immediate Past President
D.M. Crowley

D.V. Healy
R.P. McConkey
P. Whelan (Co-opted)

C. Fitzgerald
W.B. Glynn
F. MacLoughlin
J.F. Smith

N.A. Murphy

T.J. Kiernan
W.S.H. Lavery

Operations Director
M.P. Murphy

Rugby Administrator
G.C. Spotswood

National Manager
B. O'Brien

National Fitness Director
Dr. L. Hennessy

Facilities Manager
D. O'Brien

Promotion and Marketing Manager
P. Power

Office Manager
L. Hart

National Squads Administrator
J. Breslin

Director of Referee Development
O.E. Doyle

National Coach Development Manager
S.J. Aboud

National Youth Development Manager
H. Kruger

National Schools Development Manager
J.F. Murphy

Elite Player Development Manager
M. McDermott

Provincial Development Managers
A. Brown T. Conneely
P. Lawlor U. O'Callaghan

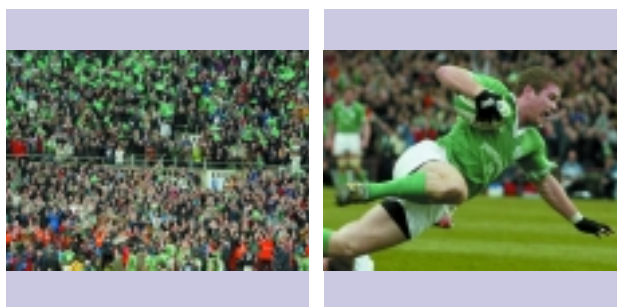
Provincial Directors of Coaching
G. Ella M. Bradley
A. Gaffney A. Solomons

Rugby Development Officers
M. Black D. Suffern
N. Carolan D. Callaghan
E. Collins D. Corkery
J. Lacey C. McEntee
R. Murphy I. Sherwin

Referee Development Officer
D.M.A. Keane

SUB COMMITTEES





Management

J.D. Hussey, B.T. Keogh, J.P. Lyons, Dr. S. Millar, N.A. Murphy, T.H.N. Jackson, D.V. Healy and P. Browne.

Representative Game

T.H.N. Jackson, N.A. Murphy, C. Watson, R.P. McConkey, P.J. Boyle, W.B. Glynn, P. Whelan, P. Browne, E. Wigglesworth, G.C. Spotswood, N. Eyre and E. O'Sullivan.

Domestic Game

D.V. Healy, D.A. Crawford, D.C. Glass, J.R. Callaghan, G.C. Quaid, C.C. Powell, P. Fitzgerald, F. Crowley, J.F. Smith, E. Wigglesworth and G.C. Spotswood.

Finance

J.P. Lyons, B.T. Keogh, D.A. Crawford, D.C. Glass, R.P. McConkey, P.J. Boyle, W.B. Glynn, P. Whelan, P. Browne, M. Murphy and C. O'Brien.

Commercial and Marketing

B.T. Keogh, J.P. Lyons, C. Fitzgerald, P. Fitzgerald, J.F. Smith, P. Browne, M. Murphy and P. Power.

Academy

P. Whelan, E. Wigglesworth, E. O'Sullivan and M. McDermott.

Charitable Trust

J.F. Smith, J.R. Callaghan, G.C. Quaid, C. Fitzgerald, P. Fitzgerald, R. Boston, J.B. Stevenson, S.O. Campbell, P.F. Madigan, Dr. L.N. O'Mahony, J.E. Gallagher, M.A. Quinn, T. Ringland, W. Dawson, Dr. C. Beirne and Dr. M. Molloy.

Contracts

P. Browne, J.P. Lyons, C. Watson, R.P. McConkey, P.J. Boyle, W.B. Glynn, E. Wigglesworth, C. O'Brien and N. Eyre.

Discipline

P.J. Boyle and G.C. Spotswood.

Exiles

B.T. Keogh and F. MacLoughlin.

Grounds and Properties

B.T. Keogh, J.P. Lyons, P. Whelan, P. Browne and D. O'Brien.

Medical

W.B. Glynn, G.C. Spotswood, Dr. L. Hennessy, Dr. M. Molloy, Dr. W. Rainey, Dr. B. O'Driscoll, Dr. H. Beauchamp, Dr. C. McCarthy and Dr. W. O'Flynn.

Referees

J.R. Callaghan, T. Aplin, J. Irvine, B. Smith, D. Templeton and O.E. Doyle.

Regulations

D.C. Glass and G.C. Spotswood.

Representative Team Appointments

Dr. S. Millar, N.A. Murphy, P. Whelan, P. Browne and E. Wigglesworth.

Schools

C.C. Powell, P. Fitzgerald, G. Quaid, J.F. Smith, B. Derrane, M. Foley, Fr. J. Gough, D. Harty, S. Huey, B. McGonigle, F. Mulligan, J. Murphy, K. Patton and P. Rossiter.

Youth

J.R. Callaghan, J.F. Smith, G.C. Quaid, P. Fitzgerald, H. Kruger, D. Eakin, W. Gribben, B. Mescal, H. Woodhouse, W. Doran and J. Best.

PRESIDENT'S REPORT

Irish rugby has made significant progress during the season and is in a strong position to face the future. It will require our total focus to meet the ongoing challenges and maximise the new opportunities that lie ahead.





J.K. Quilligan



The 2003/04 season has been exceptionally busy but equally rewarding and productive for Irish rugby both on and off the field.

Last June at our Council Meeting, I spoke of the challenges and opportunities facing Irish rugby and highlighted the following areas as particularly crucial:-

- Success of our national team
- Competitiveness of our provinces
- Energising our club and school game
- Development of top class facilities particularly at national level
- Management of finances
- Development of a strategic plan

I am happy to report that significant progress was achieved in each of these areas.

Our international team has played thirteen games since last August with another two due to be played in South Africa in June.

Rugby World Cup provided the focus for the first part of the season and following three successful warm-up matches, we set off for Australia in good spirits but, unfortunately, without the services of Geordan Murphy who sustained a serious leg injury in the Scottish game. The squad were tremendous ambassadors for our game and our country and having won their two opening games comfortably, defeated Argentina in a nail biting game in Adelaide to guarantee our direct qualification to R.W.C. 2007, this game was also memorable for the huge Irish support in the Stadium. The final pool game against the host nation, Australia, left us with a feeling of great pride in our teams performance and disappointment that we had failed by the narrowest of margins to secure victory. In the quarter final against France we never recovered from a poor start but the team displayed great resolve and character to fight back and scored three fine tries in the process.

Following that match our captain, Keith Wood, announced his retirement from the game, Keith has been one of the true giants of world rugby in the past decade, I thank him for his huge contribution to Irish rugby and wish him well on his retirement and in his future career.

The Six Nations opened with disappointment in Paris and finished in a blaze of glory at Lansdowne Road six weeks later. The highlight was undoubtedly the wonderful victory in Twickenham when the

world champions were defeated for the first time since their success in Australia and all those privileged to be present will never forget the excitement of the day. The victory opened up the prospect of our first Triple Crown in nineteen years as Wales had already been defeated. After beating Italy in horrendous weather conditions in Lansdowne Road we faced up to Scotland a week later and after what proved to be a very competitive encounter we secured the elusive Triple Crown and the reaction of the Lansdowne Road crowd to the team on their lap of honour clearly expressed what the success meant to all Irish rugby supporters.

It also secured second place in the Championship for the second successive year and I believe we are in a strong position to build on this success in the coming years.

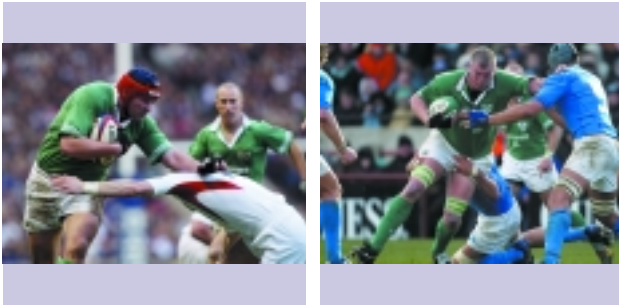
I wish to thank and pay tribute to our highly talented and committed squad of players, their three captains during the season, Keith Wood, Paul O'Connell and Brian O'Driscoll, and our management team led by Eddie O'Sullivan for their outstanding efforts throughout the season.

Our referees also performed exceptionally throughout the year and the appointment of four Irish officials to referee games in the Six Nations Championship was a great source of pride to this Union and testament to the success of our development structures.

The performances of our U.21s, U.19s, Schools and Youths also gave much hope for the future. Details of their games are covered later in this report. I would like to thank each of the teams and their management for their commitment and dedication during the season and hope that these players will continue to enjoy their rugby for many years to come.

The season at this level was overshadowed by the tragic death of John McCall during the opening game of the F.I.R.A. U.19 tournament in South Africa. John was a fine young man who brought credit to his family, his school and his country. His untimely death shocked the entire rugby community and I again convey the condolences of all in rugby football to his parents, Ian and Carolyn McCall and their family. His funeral service in Armagh was a striking reminder of the solidarity that binds rugby people throughout the world.

This was the first year of the expanded Celtic League and provided our professional teams in the provinces with regular competitive



games all through the season for the first time. It imposed a large strain on those provinces who had a large number of players represented in the national squad especially with the commitment to R.W.C. this season. The optimum number of games in the competition is an area which will be a cause of debate for chairman, John Hussey, and his colleagues in the coming months.

I would like to congratulate Ulster on their success in the inaugural Celtic Cup. Their victory over Edinburgh in the final in appalling conditions was also notable for their large support in the Murrayfield crowd. At the time of writing Ulster also lead the Celtic League and they carry our very best wishes as they seek to achieve the Double.

The Heineken Cup continues to go from strength to strength providing the level of competition necessary to prepare our best players for the step up to international rugby. Our teams were again highly competitive and while Ulster and Leinster missed out narrowly on qualification for the knock-out stages, Munster continued their outstanding record in the competition and as I write are preparing to meet Wasps in the semi final at what is sure to be a packed Lansdowne Road.

Connacht have performed exceptionally in the Parker Pen Challenge Cup and are facing the second leg of the semi final against Harlequins as I write.

Congratulations go the provinces on their performances and our best wishes to Munster and Connacht in their remaining games.

The AIB League continued to provide competitive football at club level throughout the year. This year we will, for the first time, have the finals in all three divisions take place on the same day in Lansdowne Road which will provide a worthy finale to the club season.

Irish rugby has always been very fortunate in the people who have represented us in the international administration of the game. The election of Dr. Syd Millar as chairman of the I.R.B. last November is a tremendous honour for his family, his club and this Union and well deserved recognition for his outstanding work as a player, coach and administrator over many years. Syd has the best wishes and total support of all in Irish rugby as he faces the many challenges that lie ahead.

This season saw the implementation of a new governance structure incorporating a Management Committee and four Standing Committees working to implement the policies agreed by the Union Committee. The new structure has worked very well, providing more time for focused debate on the key issues and a more streamlined decision-making process.

The publication of our Strategic Review Consultative document in July and the exhaustive consultative process that followed including nine public and Branch meetings throughout the country was both enlightening and informative. I have to say that these meetings provided a graphic illustration of the interest in and passion for rugby in Ireland. Extensive debates followed at Standing Committee, Management Committee and Union Committee which have led to

The long awaited announcement during the season of Government funding to facilitate the redevelopment of Lansdowne Road to a world class fifty thousand all seated stadium is a huge boost to our game.

the formulation of a Strategic Plan to be published in May which will set out clearly the strategies and policies to guide and drive Irish rugby for the next four years. This plan will be fundamental to our ongoing development and sustainability and I would like to thank everyone who gave of their time and energy to get it to this stage.

The long awaited announcement during the season of Government funding to facilitate the redevelopment of Lansdowne Road to a world class fifty thousand all seated stadium is a huge boost to our game. It will preserve the unique atmosphere which is such an intrinsic part of international match days at Lansdowne Road in addition to giving us the financial certainty necessary in planning for the future.

Finance continues to be a constant source of concern. Our Hon. Treasurer, John Lyons, will outline our current position and I would like to thank John and the Finance Committee for their excellent management of this crucial area. This has incorporated the identification and implementation of necessary cost savings in conjunction with the other Standing Committees and the generation of extra income to guarantee our long term sustainability.

Irish rugby has made significant progress during the season and is in a strong position to face the future. It will require our total focus to meet the ongoing challenges and maximise the new opportunities that lie ahead.

It has been an honour and a privilege to have been your President for this year, I have received the most marvellous hospitality and welcome throughout the country and indeed beyond.

I wish to thank my fellow Officers and Committee members for their loyalty and unstinting support and for the sterling work they continue to undertake on behalf of Irish rugby. Thanks also to the Provincial Presidents and their Officers in this regard.

I also thank our C.E.O., Philip Browne, and his highly committed staff for their tremendous efforts and support during the year. The ongoing partnership between our elected representatives and our professional staff is crucial to the future development of our game at all levels.

HONORARY TREASURER'S REPORT

The key challenges going forwards at provincial level are the development of professional players and the further professionalisation of the management and operation of the professional teams.





J.P. Lyons



I am pleased to present my report on the Union accounts for the year ended 30th April, 2004.

In my report last year, I indicated that the Union was facing a significant deficit for the year to 30th April, 2003, due mainly to the cost of participation in R.W.C. 2003 and loss in revenue from the Autumn internationals. The year under review marked the final year of a four year cycle and while a substantial deficit was anticipated, the final outcome has proved more costly than originally envisaged. The cause of the escalation in the budgeted deficit can be attributed mainly to the following factors:

1. Increased costs of preparation for and participation in R.W.C. 2003.
2. Loss in revenue due to not having Autumn internationals.
3. Increasing costs in the Professional Game.

Despite increasing costs in the Professional Game, significant savings have been effected where appropriate in both the Domestic Game and general overheads, and following implementation of the strategic plan it is not anticipated that the Union will incur significant deficits in season 2004/05 and subsequent years.

The financial pressures of operating viable Professional and Domestic Games cannot be over emphasised while the pursuit of success and excellence cannot be sacrificed for short term expediency.

REVENUE ACCOUNT

Revenues from the international game have declined from €32m to €28m. The reasons for this are the loss of income referred to above due to RWC which amounted to some €3.5m arising from the loss of television income and the net gate and ancillary receipts from Autumn internationals.

It was also decided to leave most of the gates from Provincial matches with the Provinces and reduce the amount of financial support for the professional teams by a corresponding amount. This has the effect in the accounts of reducing both income and expenditure. I am pleased

to report that three of the Provinces exceeded their target gates by a very significant amount and credit must go to the Branch CEO's and their support teams for this.

ERC income fell significantly in the year under review due to a reduction in television income. This is anticipated to be offset to some extent by the better than expected attendances at the semi-final matches.

The Union's commercial revenues increased significantly during the year due to the increased marketing and commercial activities of the Union.

Other income increased significantly from last year due in no small part to an increase in income from non-Rugby uses of Lansdowne Road.

Expenditure on professional Rugby fell from €26.5m last year to €25.6m this year. However cognisance must be taken of the fact referred to above that the Union reduced the level of financial support to the Provincial teams in exchange for allowing the Provinces to retain most of their gate receipts.

The direct cost of preparation for and participation in RWC was in excess of €1m net of a RWC contribution and the commercial programme undertaken by the Union in relation to the tournament. A further €450k net of gate receipts was incurred in 2002/03 in respect of qualifying matches and the preparation for same. When these additional costs are added to the loss of income referred to above the total cost to the Union of participating in RWC - net of any amounts received in respect of the tournament - amounts to some €5m, of which €4.5m relates to the 2003/04 accounts. Thus if the effects of RWC are excluded the Union deficit for the current year would be of the order of €1.9m rather than the €6.4m reported.

Marketing costs increased by c. €410k but still amount to only €1.3m inclusive of website costs and communications. As I referred to above significant additional revenues have been generated by the marketing function and it is important to at least maintain our investment in this vital area.



BALANCE SHEET

The addition to fixed assets figure in the accounts reflects the final costs for the corporate boxes together with the purchase of an additional property on Havelock Square.

The Union's remaining long-term financial investment is now valued at in excess of €8.1m as against a book value of just over €5m. The Union's cash balances amount to some €24.9m due in large part to the issue of ten year tickets and the forward sale of corporate boxes and discussions are ongoing as to how to ensure the best possible return from these funds.

The creditors figure is inclusive of the first portion of the Irish Sports Council grant for 2004/05 and I would take this opportunity to thank the Council for their continuing generous support. In addition there are also significant amounts of television monies received in advance.

OUTLOOK

Financial planning for the immediate future against the background of new stadium construction and the necessity to play home fixtures at overseas venues is not made easier but a pragmatic approach must be paramount. Detailed forecasts have been prepared and indications are that the Union should not suffer significant deficits in the foreseeable future subject to assumptions regarding television income holding true and tight control being exercised over costs.

Finally may I express my sincere thanks and appreciation to my fellow Officers and Committee members for their support and assistance throughout the year. I must also express my sincere appreciation to the professional staff of the Union and especially those in the Accounts Department for their courtesy and unremitting commitment during the year.



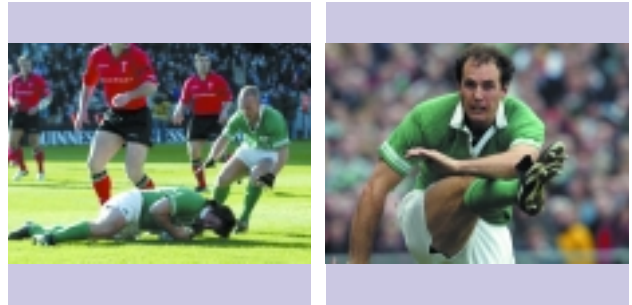
CHIEF EXECUTIVE'S REPORT

The critical issue for the game going forwards is not the fine detail of any particular aspect of the strategic plan but more a recognition by all in Irish rugby of the issues facing the game as a whole.





P.R. Browne



The past twelve months have been marked by significant activity both on and off the pitch and in many ways 2003/04 will be seen as a seminal year for Irish rugby. The successes on the field, in particular, achieving the first Triple Crown for Ireland since 1985, are highlighted elsewhere in this report and suffice to say that it was a highly successful year for the Irish professional game at both national and provincial levels, albeit tinged with some disappointments such as the lost opportunities at Rugby World Cup to progress further in that competition, the failure of Leinster to reach the knock-out stages of Heineken Cup and another magnificent campaign by Munster ending in their semi final exit from Heineken Cup. The regard in which Irish teams are held internationally has probably never been higher and the challenge now is to ensure that this is not a temporary phenomenon but rather the norm of consistency and competitiveness based on a well structured approach to the management of the game at all levels.

Fundamental to achieving this aim will be the adoption and implementation of the new strategic plan. A huge amount of work has been put into the strategic planning process and an extensive consultation took place in autumn 2003 with the stakeholders of Irish rugby to inform them of the current state of the game in Ireland, the key factors that impact the game going forwards and the critical issues to be addressed. This process was very rewarding for the I.R.F.U. in that valuable feedback was received in relation to all aspects of the game and its management and this feedback formed a vital input to the formulation of the strategic plan. The emphasis in the strategic plan will be to refocus on the clubs and schools game and ensuring that the correct balance is achieved between professional rugby, which helps to promote and finance the game, and the domestic game where the majority of participants are active and from where future international players will come. There is no doubt that the strategic plan will be the subject of much discussion when it is published shortly and already the proposed future domestic competition model is the subject of much debate. The critical issue for the game going forwards however, is not the fine detail of any particular aspect of the strategic plan but more a recognition by all in Irish rugby of the issues facing the game as a whole, a setting aside of narrow focus and agenda, and an alignment of all in the game to the broad objectives laid out in the strategic plan to ensure that it is implemented for the benefit of all. Only in this way can we ensure a secure future for our sport in the face of the increasingly complex environment in which the game must operate.

Two inter-related issues have dominated the debate on the strategic plan over the past twelve months – finance and the international stadium. The Hon. Treasurer has outlined the current financial situation of the I.R.F.U. in his report and this is laid out in the annual accounts attached. The I.R.F.U. has recorded a deficit of over €6 million this year – a situation that has been well flagged and is no surprise. The financial commitments involved in the preparation and participation in Rugby World Cup exacerbated by the associated loss of autumn international income has been the significant factor in this financial result. This comes on top of maintaining our investment in the domestic game and the escalating cost of the professional game. The continued and increasing financial demands of ensuring the professional support structures, players and coaches are in place to effectively staff our current professional structure have placed a heavy financial burden on the I.R.F.U. Whilst there has been some success in generating new commercial revenues, the key international broadcast rights and sponsorship markets have been flat. The current position is unsustainable even taking account of the one-off effect of Rugby World Cup.

The strategic planning process has taken place in this financial context and it was clear from the outset that to maintain our current level of activity relying on our existing revenue streams and infrastructure would not be possible. Lansdowne Road is a significant financial engine for the game but compared to the revenue generating potential of our competitors' stadia, Lansdowne Road pales into insignificance. Equally the provincial stadia in Ireland hamper the commercial progress of the provincial teams. In parallel with the strategic planning process the I.R.F.U. has been working closely with the Football Association of Ireland (F.A.I.) in finding a solution to a common problem – the lack of an adequate international stadium. A feasibility study for a 65,000 seated stadium at either Abbotstown or Lansdowne Road was turned down by the Government for cost reasons in the summer of 2003, the cost lying between €472 million and €515 million.

A further study was commissioned by the I.R.F.U. in autumn 2003 to investigate the revamping of the existing stadium at Lansdowne. This study showed that a revamp would result in a facility of 40,000 seats with inadequate revenue generating potential. The alternative is to build a completely new 50,000 seated stadium on the site providing all the facilities required at a cost that the Government, I.R.F.U. and F.A.I. could cover. The Government in January 2004 approved this concept allocating €191 million to the project with the I.R.F.U. and F.A.I. contributing the balance of €101 million.



This development is to be carried out as joint venture between the I.R.F.U. and F.A.I. through a jointly owned development company. The I.R.F.U. will lease the appropriate tranche of land to the development company for the useful life of the stadium after which the land will revert to the I.R.F.U. Both Lansdowne F.C. and Wanderers F.C. have been supportive of the project given its importance for Irish rugby. Procurement of consultancy services is imminent to bring the project to planning application stage and assuming planning permission is achieved a likely completion date is end of 2008. The efforts of Noel Murphy must be acknowledged in helping to bring this key issue for Irish rugby to a conclusion as well as the efforts of many others, including Ronnie Dawson, Tom Kiernan and Syd Millar, who over the past fifteen years have been involved in trying to find a solution to this particular problem. The role played by the Minister of Arts, Sport and Tourism, John O'Donoghue T.D., in helping to bring a workable solution to the Government should also be acknowledged.

The key outcome of this decision is that the new stadium can be developed without the I.R.F.U. taking on a significant level of debt, the I.R.F.U. capital contribution being derived from sale of box and premium seats. The new stadium when completed will then provide the I.R.F.U. with an increased revenue stream which will allow us to sustain our support of the club and schools game. It will also allow us to maintain the current structure of the professional game. To achieve this will require prudent cost savings and tight cost management over the next few years and also an encashment of investment reserves. This also allows the I.R.F.U. to roll out a positive strategic plan aimed at expanding the game rather than a strategic plan which in other circumstances would have been about survival and radical restructuring of the game.

The success of the strategic plan and the financial wellbeing of the I.R.F.U. and Irish rugby are inextricably linked to the success of the Lansdowne Road redevelopment. The key priority over the next two years is to ensure planning permission is achieved. There will be financial challenges in the meantime in terms of trying to sustain and maintain all that has been achieved in Irish rugby over the past six to eight years. These challenges can be met through financial prudence, careful prioritisation of resources and continued focus on generating more revenues through our commercial programmes at I.R.F.U. and provincial level. There are undoubtedly concerns in relation to the adult game at club level that must be addressed but on the positive side the profile of rugby in Ireland has never been higher and participation numbers at under-age level are increasing.

The real challenge is to keep building on what has been achieved to date and to use it to strengthen and grow the game at all levels.

The National Team

Under the direction of Eddie O'Sullivan, the national team enjoyed another successful season culminating in winning the Triple Crown and coming second in the Six Nations Championship. Sixteen international fixtures were played and twelve were won – a success ratio of seventy-five percent. This schedule of matches arose from an onerous summer tour to Australia, Tonga and Samoa followed by three pre-World Cup warm-up fixtures against Wales, Scotland and Italy. With three wins in the warm-up fixtures, the squad travelled to Australia for the Rugby World Cup. In a well-run tournament, Ireland had two key fixtures in its pool against Argentina and Australia, both fixtures proved to be titanic struggles with a nervy but successful performance against Argentina ensuring qualification to the quarter finals. A more relaxed and assured performance against Australia a week later was one of the most exciting matches of the tournament with Ireland pressurising Australia to the end and in many ways Ireland were unlucky to narrowly lose the match having led for much of the game. Regrettably, these performances were not matched in the quarter final against France, where France overwhelmed Ireland in the first half and despite a second good half by Ireland the match was beyond them at that stage. All in all a World Cup that in hindsight Ireland could have progressed further in and whilst there are many positives, including the wonderful Irish supporters at all venues, it was tinged by disappointment that we could have progressed further. It is clear that with our current level of performances and self-belief, we must set our sights higher in the next World Cup.

The Championship could have been difficult as a result of the effects of World Cup but a squad training session over the Christmas period and the professional approach by management and players ensured that the Championship was one of our best in many years. The opening performance against France in Paris was always going to be difficult and so it proved and despite competing to the end, a couple of mistakes leading to French tries resulted in a loss. There followed a comprehensive defeat of Wales in Dublin and then to Twickenham where a sublime display of tactics, skill and commitment combined to allow Ireland record one of its finest victories over the reigning World Champions. A good display against the rapidly improving Italians and a final victory hard fought with the dogged Scottish

The Union is now spending over €12 million on player salaries and is at the limit of what it can afford without radically restructuring the professional game.

team allowed Ireland to record four victories in the Championship, to come second and also to record a “Triple Crown” win for the first time in nineteen years.

Credit must go to the coach, Eddie O’Sullivan, and his team management, the fitness staff and of course the players themselves. A reorganisation of the national team management for next season sees Declan Kidney moving on to Gwent Dragons and we wish him well and acknowledge his contribution to the national team’s success over the past two seasons.

Critical to the continued success of the national team is the need to ensure that our international players do not play too many fixtures and have a sufficient pre-season development period to allow for recovery and development year on year which has proved difficult given the international and provincial fixture list. This summer the national squad will have a ten week development period before being available to the provincial teams and it is believed that this will be for the benefit of players and the national/provincial teams performances alike.

Provincial Teams

With the introduction of an expanded twenty-two match Celtic League, Celtic Cup of four rounds and a withdrawal of players involved in the Rugby World Cup squad, it was a difficult and challenging season for the provincial teams, particularly those with international players. The Irish provincial system has an inherent tension between the needs of the national team and the needs of the provincial teams. Managing the balance of this tension is critical for success at both levels - this is the aim of the Union. Despite the challenges, Ulster won the Celtic Cup in a convincing style against Edinburgh at Murrayfield and Connacht, with the benefit of no disruption to their squad from Rugby World Cup player demands, reached the semi final. The current state of play at the time of writing sees Ulster holding second place in the Celtic League and mid table performances by the other provincial teams. There is no doubt that the twenty-two match format is demanding but it provides the professional teams with a full season of professional rugby. The need for squad and player management to ensure that players are not over-played is critical. There are significant opportunities afforded to young players in terms of exposure through this competition format. Discussions have taken place with Scotland and Wales regarding the format of the Celtic League for the next two seasons and it is now agreed that the twenty-two

match format will remain with a review of the Celtic Cup. Whilst it may have been preferable from an Irish perspective to fewer fixtures than this, there were a number of other influencing factors including the commercial aspects and the need to satisfy the differing priorities of the three nations involved – inevitably compromise was required on all sides.

The provinces’ fine record in European competition continues with Munster reaching the semi final of Heineken Cup against London Wasps, played in front of a full house at Lansdowne Road. The match was memorable for its intensity and the incredible sea of red support. However, Wasps prevailed leaving Munster once again disappointed. Ulster and Leinster had some great performances but failed to qualify from their pools. Leinster, devastated by injuries and by the lack of an outhalf due to administrative shortcomings in relation to the registration of F. Contemponi, were unable to find the form shown at times in the previous season. However, they played their pool fixtures at Lansdowne Road and recorded the highest pool match attendance in Heineken Cup history of twenty-four thousand patrons against Cardiff in January. Ulster showed a degree of inconsistency which thwarted their efforts but the marvellous support of Ravenhill continues. For Connacht it has been a successful season in the Parker Pen Shield with the team reaching the semi finals losing narrowly to Harlequins. The Connacht team has shown character and skill which hopefully can be harnessed to an emerging commercial programme needed to ensure the viability of the team in the future.

The professional support structures on the coaching, fitness and playing side continue to bed-down and it is good to report that at the end of Alan Solomon’s tenure as Ulster coach, two Irish coaches, Mark McCall and Alan Clarke, have been appointed as Director of Coaching and Assistant Coach of Ulster, respectively. Together with Michael Bradley in Connacht, Willie Anderson in Leinster and Brian Hickey in Munster, there is Irish coaching talent at provincial level.

The key challenges going forwards at provincial level are the development of professional players and the further professionalisation of the management and operation of the professional teams. Both these challenges are key aspects of the Union’s new strategic plan which will see the roll-out on a phased basis of a devolved academy structure, closely linked to the professional playing structures and underpinned by provincial foundations for emerging talent at schools and youth levels along with a new national high performance unit. This initiative is seen as

essential to provide the future players for national and provincial teams and to provide players with the support systems necessary to help them achieve their ambitions. The urgent need to expand our base of professional players will also be helped by the appointment of John Hunter as Exiles Development Officer. The role of the Exiles has adjusted, in light of the new needs of Irish rugby, to complement the elite player development process and the hope is that the Irish professional game can be promoted in a positive way to Irish qualified players from the U.K.

Complementary to this new structure is the formation of the Player Advisory Group that will take an overview of the entire playing resource in the foundations, academies and professional game, to ensure that there is positional succession planning on a national and provincial level and to ensure that the Irish provinces conform with player recruitment and development policies. It will control and monitor the recruitment of overseas players in the provincial teams to ensure the interests of the national team are not compromised and it will also monitor the development of key players. This group includes the National Coach and the I.R.F.U. Academy Manager and the new post of Performance Manager – Age-Grade rugby.

The other critical issue is to ensure that the professional game at provincial level in terms of both on-field and off-field activities is the responsibility of professional employed staff who are accountable for the performance of the professional game both on and off the field. The emphasis over the past six years had been very much on-field and now it is time to ensure that the commercial, marketing and financial management systems are in place to move the professional game towards self-sufficiency in terms of operational costs other than player contract costs.

In terms of player contracting, the handover of much of the responsibilities of player contracts to provincial Chief Executives under the guidance and in liaison with the I.R.F.U. Human Resources Manager has proved to be a successful formula. The trend of ever-increasing player salary levels driven by market forces in the U.K. and France is problematic, particularly when placed against a background of static revenues and the sluggish commercial environment in the European Sport economy. The Union is now spending over €12 million on player salaries and is at the limit of what it can afford without radically restructuring the professional game. The Hon. Treasurer's Report and the Accounts outline the financial position clearly and we will in future have to be realistic in that it may not be possible to retain all our professional players in Ireland though we will

attempt to achieve the best balance in terms of ensuring the continued success of the national and provincial teams.

Other Representative Teams

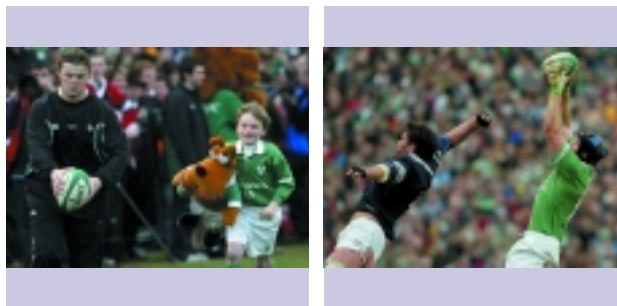
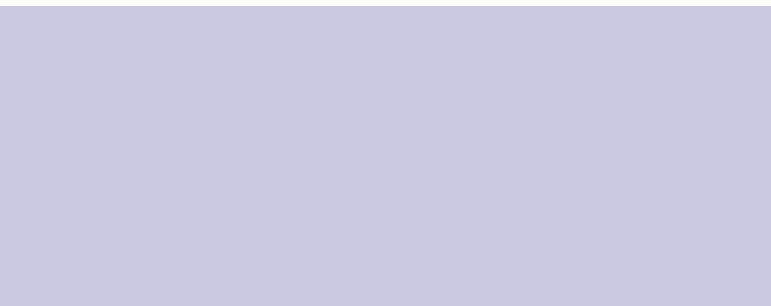
There were, as we have become accustomed to, some excellent performances by our age-grade representative teams, but these were over-shadowed by the tragic death of the U.19 player from Royal School Armagh, John McCall, whilst playing in the I.R.B. U.19 World Championship in Durban, South Africa. An outstanding player for his age with all the potential to progress to the top of the game, his loss is immeasurable to his family and friends but also to Irish rugby, with the rugby community here and worldwide shocked and saddened. The U.19 team understandably withdrew from the tournament and returned home. Our appreciation must go to the team management under Michael Cunningham who handled the very difficult circumstances with the large group of youngsters and our deepest sympathies lie with the McCall family for their huge loss.

At U.21 level under coach, Mark McCall, and manager, David Haslett, an excellent set of performances led to victories against Scotland, Wales and Italy, a draw against France and a loss to England. This promising group now look forward to the U.21 World Championship in Scotland in June.

The Home Unions U.18 tournament was held in Belfast under the direction of John Callaghan and the Ulster Branch. Despite home advantage and good performances against England and Wales, the Irish team were unable to record a victory. There has been considerable debate within the Home Unions and international community about the make-up of age-grade teams and this tournament may well change in nature next season.

At schools level, the Irish Schools recorded successes against Wales and England but losing to France. Following agreement with the Schools Standing Committee, the forthcoming tour to Australia will be with a team selected from schoolboy players not only from rugby playing schools which has been the case up to now, but also schoolboy players who are not from rugby playing schools but play youth rugby in clubs. This follows the emerging international trend and the changing face of age-grade rugby.

For practical reasons of player availability and finance there has been little commitment to Sevens rugby but with Rugby World Cup Sevens



approaching next year and the possibility of a future inclusion of Sevens in the Olympic Games, this policy has been reviewed and a Sevens team under coach, Ryan Constable, will participate in a Rugby World Cup qualifying tournament this summer.

The Irish Women's rugby team made up of a group of committed amateur players with an equally committed coaching and management team continue to show improvements in their Six Nations performances this season, albeit without a victory. There is no doubt that given the level of personal and group commitment that success will come the way of the Irish Women's team in the near future.

The Domestic Game

The new Domestic Game Committee has spent much of its time this season involved in analysing the results of the strategic consultative process and in developing strategies to support and grow the clubs and schools game in to the future. The I.R.F.U. spent some €9.5 million on rugby development programmes and domestic game support programmes in 2003/04 and gratefully acknowledges the financial grant of €3.5 million received from the Irish Sports Council which again has been targeted at youth and under-age rugby.

The financial support from the Irish Sports Council brings with it significant levels of accountability in terms of meeting performance targets identified in respect of participation, coaching referees, facilities, etc. The I.R.F.U., Branches, clubs and schools will benefit from this vital funding but successful retention of this funding into the future will be dependent on the measurable performance of the sport at all levels. This will obviously be a new working environment for many in the game and will take some adjusting to. The I.R.F.U. Rugby Department, through its staff, will work with Branches, clubs and schools to assist in these new processes.

The comments made in relation to the Domestic Game in last years report apply equally this year and there is no doubt that some clubs are struggling to survive financially, others struggling to field the same number of adult teams as in the past and yet others finding it difficult to retain their volunteers. Another key challenge for clubs is their capacity to absorb the increasing numbers of under-age players in the schools and youth sectors. The Unions strategic plan will be addressing these very relevant issues and some key initiatives will be put in place through the implementation of the plan over the next twelve months. This will include a review of the current supports to clubs through the Clubs of Ireland Scheme.

Similar issues pertain in schools rugby where the availability of coaches is a significant issue. The changes in the education system and the teaching profession have resulted in a shortage of coaches and the need to pay part time coaches to deliver rugby in some schools as a necessity has brought its own financial pressures. The need to work more closely with schools and support the rugby programmes whilst respecting their core philosophy of providing well-rounded education to the pupil will be the focus of a small group to be set up by the Domestic Game Committee which will be looking at the challenges facing under-age rugby at schools and club level.

At university and colleges level, through the Irish Universities Rugby Union and Irish Colleges Rugby Union, we have a huge through-put of population in the critical eighteen year to twenty-one year age group where there is the greatest drop-off in playing numbers. The student sector is one of rich potential and it must be supported to maximise the retention of players who will hopefully populate our clubs and support the game as a whole. Whilst colleges play in mid-week competitions, many reverting to their clubs at weekends, the universities play in provincial and All Ireland League competitions. The hard work of volunteers and staff in universities has seen a new vibrancy in university rugby with considerable success epitomised by Dublin University who achieved promotion to Division I of the AIB League.

One of the challenges facing our clubs is to broaden their appeal and to bring people back to the clubhouse and the game. The continued expansion of women's rugby, generally as sections of established clubs, is greatly welcomed, and there are now over forty teams playing regularly. The I.R.F.U. is working closely with the I.W.R.F.U. to promote the game in clubs and schools and to this end in Ulster and Leinster dedicated development staff have been employed for this purpose. The key challenge for women's rugby is to develop age-grade rugby to support the adult game. The high numbers of women playing tag rugby is also an encouragement.

Tag rugby continues its successful expansion at primary school level through the Coca Cola tag rugby programme, with over thirty thousand children involved in five hundred primary schools. At adult level, tag rugby has been a huge success in bringing people into clubs playing this enjoyable form of social rugby. Five hundred and thirty teams are registered for this summers competitions catering for four thousand men and women of all age groups and which bring social and health benefits to the participants, as well as



meeting the commercial needs of the clubs in which the tournaments are held. Craig and Simon Bewley who started tag rugby in Ireland on a formal basis deserve great credit for the way in which this form of the game has expanded.

The game at club, schools, university and college level is so important to the wellbeing of rugby's future. The Union is committed to ensuring that the hard work of volunteers throughout the game at this level receives the support of the I.R.F.U. and that volunteers receive the recognition for their efforts. The new strategic plan will be instrumental in setting the new initiatives for the domestic game.

AIB League

The AIB League ran smoothly this season thanks in part to the mild winter which led to few cancellations and also in part to the fact that the teams largely played without I.R.F.U. contracted players and there were consequently less demands for postponements. The concerns which had been expressed last year about imbalances arising because of I.R.F.U. contracted players being concentrated in some clubs was also addressed by these players not being available. The results of the League are detailed in the attached appendices. Congratulations to the winners of Division I - Shannon, Division II - Dublin University and Division III - Greystones, all of whom played their finals at Lansdowne Road on 8th May making it a great day for club rugby.

An emerging concern this season is the increase in verbal abuse of referees and it is perhaps more a reflection of society than anything specific to rugby. However, it is an unacceptable offence and undermines the authority of referees if it is tolerated. The Union undertakes to ensure that any such incident will be treated most seriously.

The high number of non-nationals involved in domestic competition at AIB League and provincial level is a continuing concern and the Domestic Game Committee will be reviewing the regulations of domestic competitions with the aim of reversing this trend.

The future structure of the AIB League from 2005/06 onwards is a matter of hot debate at present given the recent proposals put

forward by the I.R.F.U. as part of its strategic plan to restructure the domestic competition model with a greater emphasis on provincial competitions leading to annual qualification to an All Ireland League. The subject is being discussed at Union, Branch and Club level and it is possible that this proposal may be reviewed in light of any practical adjustments put forward.

Our thanks to AIB for their continuing support for the competition and club rugby.

Medical/Anti-doping

The Medical Committee proposed the employment of a Director of Medical Services on a part time basis, initially to put in place a range of co-ordinated medical reporting systems and to develop the medical services provided to the professional and amateur games. Interviews have taken place and the appointment will be filled over the next few months which will lead to a more efficient and cost effective medical service, ensuring a proper level of responsibility and accountability in this area. It will also release the Medical Committee from involvement in medical operations and it will revert to its advisory/policy making role.

The adoption of the World Anti-doping Agency (W.A.D.A.) Anti-doping Regulations and Code by the Irish Sports Council and I.R.B. requires that the I.R.F.U. adopt these regulations by 1st June, 2004. These regulations provide a comprehensive and internationally uniform set of protocols. The Irish Sports Council has also set up a National Anti-doping Tribunal and a panel of experts to serve it. This will result in the I.R.F.U. Anti-doping Tribunal and Anti-doping Appeals Tribunal no longer being necessary.

The controversy over the Frank Sheahan case last summer highlighted the inadequacies within the international regulations on occasions and also the inadequacies of administrative procedures. His correct use of salbutamol inhaler for asthma was upheld. The new W.A.D.A. regulations require therapeutic use exemption forms to be completed in such circumstances and where notifiable medication is taken. There will be an awareness campaign over the summer in this regard.

The achievement of the team in winning ten matches in succession was enormous, and in finishing as runners-up in the 6 Nations Championship, while perhaps disappointing, was a major improvement on recent years.

The table below outlines the extent of the Irish Sports Councils Anti-doping programme in rugby, some forty extra tests were commissioned by the I.R.F.U. The only offence recorded was in respect of failure to complete exemption forms in the Frank Sheahan case.

2003/04 Anti-doping Programme

Team	No. of Players tested
<i>In Competition Testing:</i>	
Senior XV	06
U.21 XV	07
Provincial XV's	08
AIB League Club XV's	24
Sevens	01
Rugby World Cup 2003	10
<i>Out of Competition Testing:</i>	
Senior	20
Provincial Squads	32
Club	20
Academy	05

Coaching

The new I.R.F.U. coaching pathway is in its second year and the I.R.F.U. continues to strengthen its links with the National Coaching and Training Centre (N.C.T.C.) with a further seven coaches involved in N.C.T.C. tutor training programmes. This year some five hundred coaches have been assimilated into this new pathway.

The Level Three course, developed in conjunction with the I.R.B. and N.C.T.C., will be held for ten coaches over the summer, catering for elite coaches in the club and professional game.

An expanded programme of coaching courses at Foundation, Level One and Level Two as well as Level Three has necessitated the deployment of a further member of staff, Colin Moran, to assist in course delivery. Along with an expansion in the number of coaching

courses is an increase in the number of participants which reflects not only on the demands for course content but also a recognition that proper coach accreditation is prudent in an increasingly litigious sporting environment.

Number of Courses 03/04	Mini rugby	8
	Foundation	19
	Level One	5
	Level Two	1
Number of Accredited Coaches	Mini rugby	270
	Foundation	504
	Level One	191
	Level Two	34

Fitness Department

Aside from the critical role of the Fitness Department under Dr. Liam Hennessy in relation to the delivery of tailored fitness programmes for the national and provincial teams and the academy, there is also an important role in knowledge transfer to ensure modern fitness methodologies are applied in the club and schools systems. The Club Conditioning Coach programme has been in great demand amongst clubs and schools coaches with sixty coaches to graduate this summer and an intake of a further forty to fifty coaches to a second year of this programme in the autumn.

With the sponsorship of VHI, the Fitness Department has also rolled out a "Fit for Fun" project aimed at introducing fitness and monitoring concepts at primary school level which has proved to be most successful and popular with primary schools in those areas served by the programme.

The importance of speed and power allied to rugby skills in the professional game has placed a great emphasis on the delivery of fitness and conditioning. A methodical and scientific approach to this challenge by Dr. Hennessy and his staff at provincial and national level has seen a significant and measurable improvement in speed and power of Irish professional players over the last number of seasons.

Referees

The refereeing system was put under significant pressure due to the demands of Rugby World Cup, European and Celtic competitions and with Ireland having four referees in the international panel last season, it is important to develop the next tier. New development and coaching structures under Owen Doyle have ensured that the new group of match officials are performing well and underpin the tier beneath that of our leading referees.

The four provincial referee associations continue to play a vital role in recruitment, coaching and assessment of referees which are critical if we are to continue to achieve the high standards of Irish refereeing currently enjoyed. The importance of the recruitment initiatives cannot be overestimated as we must maintain sufficient numbers of referees to cover the demands of the domestic game.

There have been four Irish referees on the I.R.B. panel during the past season and this now drops to three with the recent retirement of Dave McHugh who has been an outstanding representative for Irish rugby. He now takes up a position as Referee Development Officer.

International Relations

The table below shows I.R.F.U. representation on the various international bodies:-

International Rugby Board	Dr. S. Millar and N.A. Murphy
Six Nations	Dr. S. Millar and N.A. Murphy
European Rugby Cup	N.A. Murphy and P.J. Boyle
Celtic League	J.D. Hussey and P. Browne

Dr. Syd Millar was elected chairman of the I.R.B. in November 2003, a great honour for both Dr. Millar and Irish rugby and we wish him well in this position of great responsibility. Issues that have exercised the I.R.B. over the past twelve months have largely revolved around the financial wellbeing of the game where, outside of the Six Nations and S.A.N.Z.A.R. Unions, most Unions cannot financially sustain the professional game and indeed some of the top tier Unions are now facing financial difficulties as well. This could jeopardise the future

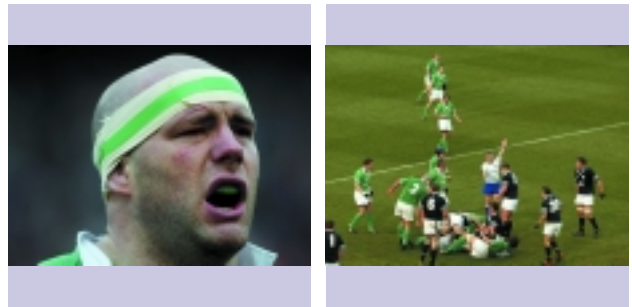
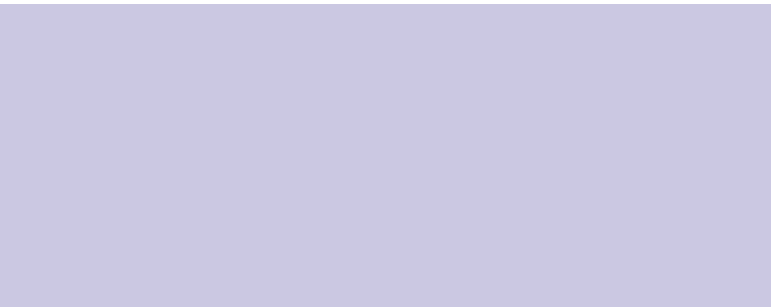
growth of the game and the competitiveness of these nations. This is linked to the international fixture schedule and the structure of the global season and these issues are on the top of the I.R.B. agenda along with a review of its own governance and operations.

At Six Nations level, the constitution copper-fastening participation of the Six Nations into the future has been completed and an extension of the BBC contract to 2010 has been agreed subject to contract. Negotiations in relation to future sponsorship partners continue.

At European Rugby Cup Ltd. the competition structure for 2004/05 has been agreed with a reversion to the pool games being played in blocks of two weekends in October, December and January. With the change to five Welsh regional sides, Wales will drop to four Heineken Cup sides. Despite making a good case for a guaranteed third Irish side in Heineken Cup, this request was turned down and Ireland will continue to have two guaranteed places with a third place dependent on attaining a better position than either Scottish or Italian sides in the Heineken Cup.

In the Celtic League the two key issues have been the search for a sponsor, to date with no success, and the format of the competition for the next two seasons. The appointment of a tournament director has ensured that the competition ran more smoothly than in previous seasons, while the competition itself was bedevilled by fixture clashes with Rugby World Cup and Six Nations weekends. Despite this it has seen some good matches and has provided professional teams not only with games but also revenue generating opportunities. The competition will remain at a twenty-two match format with some form of knock-out competition or rounds for both commercial and rugby reasons.

Close working relationships with our international partners are essential and it is through these relationships that we can maximise rugby revenues to the benefit of all. The ability to work with people and to recognise when compromise is necessary for the greater good and equally to be firm when necessary are vital attributes for international representatives and Irish rugby is fortunate in this regard.



Marketing and Commercial

The Commercial and Marketing Committee through Padraig Power have been engaged in leveraging the high profile of the national and provincial teams to promote the game at various levels. There has also been closer co-operation with the Branches in this regard. A number of new initiatives were launched including:-

- Fit for Fun programme in association with the VHI – promoting a healthier lifestyle in the primary school population.
- Launch of Broc, the Irish national team mascot, during Rugby World Cup and which is now part of the I.R.F.U. merchandise programme.
- Powerade Skills Challenge promoting rugby skills at secondary schools level.
- Introduction of AIB League Finals Day where all three divisional finals are played at Lansdowne Road creating a special rugby day.

The RTÉ weekly magazine programme, “Against the Head”, has provided a useful vehicle for promoting the club and schools game and the Broadcast partners of the Six Nations (BBC/RTÉ), Heineken Cup (Sky) and Celtic League (TG4) have also ensured that rugby is part of the staple diet of television sports fans.

Looking forward, the strategic plan sees initiatives being developed by the Commercial and Marketing Committee to assist clubs in marketing themselves and the game as the preferred sporting club and sport in their locale as well as a range of initiatives to ensure that clubs have the capacity to deliver on that proposition.

The Commercial/Marketing Committee, again through Padraig Power, have reviewed the commercial programme and ways in which it can be enhanced both from an I.R.F.U. perspective and from the perspective of Irish rugby as a whole through greater co-ordination between the I.R.F.U. and Branches. The new I.R.F.U. strategic plan will address how the Union intends to enhance its commercial activities into the future – a critical element of this will be dependant on the improvement of stadium facilities and commercial use of tickets to key events both of which lie outside the direct remit of the Commercial and Marketing Committee.

There has been a significant amount of activity over the year with new sponsorships in place as follows:-

O ₂	- sponsoring the Irish Schools team
VHI	- sponsoring the Fit for Fun programme in primary schools
Coca Cola	- sponsoring under-age tag rugby
Sunday Tribune	- sponsoring adult summer tag rugby
Energia	- sponsoring research programmes
Gilbert have also renewed their contract as Official Ball Supplier to the I.R.F.U.	

In addition, a commercial programme was put in place specifically for Rugby World Cup which generated some €300,000 from a range of activities and functions in Ireland and also during Rugby World Cup in Australia. This was set-up in co-operation with the team management and players who supported the programme.

The new Corporate Boxes in the East Stand were successfully sold for a three year period which will cover their cost and they have proved to be most successful for the Union and the box holders, most of whom are sponsors of Irish rugby.

The website continues to show great potential with 2.2 million page impressions and 75,000 unique users in March 2004. The exploitation of the website for revenue generation has not been maximised but new contractual arrangements will help in this regard.

As I write the roll out of a commercial programme around the Triple Crown success is taking place with a commemorative video/dvd, magazine and a corporate function to take place in June.

It was also pleasing that the I.R.F.U. was acknowledged in the annual Amarach report on sponsorship as an example of best practice in Ireland in respect of its approach and management of sports sponsorships. Great credit is due to Padraig Power, Marketing and Promotions Manager, and his department for their work in helping achieve this accolade.



Grounds

The completion of the corporate hospitality boxes in the East Stand, all of which have now been sold for international rugby fixtures and have also been used for both soccer internationals and Leinster rugby fixtures generating additional revenues for the Union.

The international pitch has proved successful in its first full season, providing a firm dry surface for both rugby and soccer with a much lower maintenance input.

Leinster Branch have submitted a revised planning application for the complete redevelopment of Donnybrook and are currently awaiting an outcome from that process. The new facilities at Galway Sportsground which include both the headquarters for the Connacht Branch and spectator facilities in the new Bord na gCon stand have proved to be successful. At Ravenhill a phased development plan has been prepared for improved spectator facilities and there are also some health and safety works to be completed in the ground. The Munster Branch has submitted a development plan for Musgrave Park and the I.R.F.U. itself is developing plans for further development of Thomond Park.

In relation to training facilities, discussions are taking place with Campus Stadium Ireland Ltd. in relation to I.R.F.U. involvement in elite training facilities proposed for Abbottstown for a number of different sports. This may provide a solution for the lack of such facilities for the national team or alternatively the Union may develop these facilities at its property at Newlands in west Dublin. The matter of training facilities for provincial teams also needs to be addressed.

These various capital projects will be co-ordinated under a capital expenditure programme to ensure that development finance can be prioritised to ensure that the best return on investment for each project is achieved.

Administration

Another busy season saw the hardworking staff at Lansdowne Road once again delivering the wide range of services that sustain the activities of the I.R.F.U. and its Committees. These services including, ticketing, accounts, match arrangements, event management, facilities management, travel, accommodation, human resource management, general administration, squad administration, kit management and information technology.

This backroom staff has grown to match the level and range of activities currently being undertaken by the I.R.F.U. The I.R.F.U. as an organisation has become significantly more complex and central services are currently split over three office locations adjacent Lansdowne Road. It would be preferable to house these services under one roof and options continue to be investigated for future office facilities including the potential to locate outside the central business district of Dublin where office rental and land is at a premium value.

Over the last number of years there has been a significant investment in information and communications technology (ICT) and this investment is likely to continue as systems can be exploited further for both communication within an increasingly complex organisation and also with our constituent clubs and schools. The potential of ICT to make our business and organisation more effective and efficient is actively being pursued. The whole ticketing area is an example as the I.R.F.U. ticketing system has been upgraded allowing for 370,000 tickets to be processed for matches at Lansdowne Road and Thomond Park since January 2004. This system has now been rolled out to Leinster Branch in a pilot installation and is to be rolled out to the other Branches on a phased self-financing basis given the savings to be made through use of the system.

The imminent implementation of the strategic plan will require that the administrative structures are in place and aligned with the strategic plan to ensure effective implementation. I am confident that our excellent and hardworking staff will rise to the challenge and my thanks to them for their commitment this past year.

Committee

The members of the I.R.F.U. Committee have made a huge commitment in terms of time and energy to the strategic planning process over the past twelve months with many more meetings taking place than would normally be the case. This has been absolutely necessary to finalise the strategic plan. The new governance structure introduced at the 2003 Annual Council meeting has been successful as there is considerably more focus within the four standing committees (Representative Game, Domestic Game, Finance and Commercial/Marketing), addressing the pressing issues facing the game. This has been allied to a greater devolved responsibility to each standing committee which will ensure more efficient and effective decision-making. The new structure will come into its own next season when the standing committees can concentrate on the implementation of the strategic initiatives in their particular brief. The co-ordinating role of the new Management Committee has been important and it has taken on responsibility for the implementation of the strategic plan.

As mentioned earlier in the report Dr. Syd Millar takes up the post of chairman of I.R.B. The consequence of his appointment is that he is obliged to resign his posts in the I.R.F.U. including his position on the I.R.F.U. Committee. Syd Millar has been synonymous with Irish rugby since he first emerged as an international player of renown. He has been on the world stage as an international coach and manager of both Ireland and the Lions and over the last ten years as an international administrator. His commitment to Irish rugby and rugby football has been immense and his experience and wise counsel will be missed. We wish Syd and his wife, Enid, well as he undertakes his new responsibilities.

Dion Glass retires from the I.R.F.U. Committee where he has been a very active member. He has made a significant contribution to students rugby and has assiduously represented the I.R.F.U. at Ireland U.21 matches during his term. He also has been a valued member of the I.R.F.U. Finance Committee, taking on responsibility for the Clubs Financial Assistance Scheme. Best wishes to Dion and his wife, Sandra, on his retirement from the I.R.F.U. and the Ulster Branch Committees.

Likewise, Don Crowley leaves the I.R.F.U. Committee after many years of service, most notably as President in 2002/03 and chairman of the Charitable Trust. He made a valuable contribution to the original feasibility studies for a new rugby stadium as a member of the Grounds Committee and also represented Ireland on F.I.R.A. Best wishes to Don and his wife, Vicky, on his retirement from the I.R.F.U. Committee.

Obituaries

R.H. Thompson	Instonians, capped 11 times 1951–56, Captain of Ireland 3 times, Lions Captain on Tour to S. Africa in 1955 and played in 3 tests.
Sir Peter Yarranton	President R.F.U. 1991/92.
Jimmy McNeil	President S.R.U. 1989/90.
R.R. Butler OBE	President of Ulster Branch and former I.R.F.U. Trustee.
A.A. McConnell	Collegians R.F.C., Capped 7 times 1947–1949, Triple Crown winners.
W. George Morgan	President W.R.U. 1987/88.
John McCall	Ireland U.19 International.
John Tallent CBE TD	President R.F.U. 1959/60.
John Simpson	President R.F.U. 1988/89.
Mick Doyle	Blackrock College, U.C.D., Cambridge University, Edinburgh Wanderers, capped 21 times 1965-68, Lions Tour to South Africa 1968 1 cap, National coach 1985-87.

THE I.R.F.U. WISHES TO ACKNOWLEDGE THE FOLLOWING SPONSORS OF IRISH RUGBY



Sponsor of Ireland Senior Squad
Match Sponsor of Non Six Nations Internationals



Sponsor of the Six Nations Championship



Sponsor of AIB League



Official Kit Supplier to the I.R.F.U.



Official Supplier of Transport to the I.R.F.U.



Official Beer Supplier to the I.R.F.U.



Official Soft Drink of the I.R.F.U.
Sponsor of Coca-Cola Tag Rugby



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