

# ON THE SEVENTH DAY

THIRTY YEARS OF GREAT SPORTS WRITING FROM THE  
*Sunday Independent*

EDITED BY  
JOHN GREENE



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MERCIER PRESS



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# INTRODUCTION

‘People’s backyards are much more interesting than  
their front gardens.’

John Betjeman

One December day the phone rang in the office of the *Sunday Independent* editor, Aengus Fanning. Eamon Dunphy was calling from a pub in Croydon. He was in the company of George Best and his wife, Mary. Dunphy had travelled to London with no real plan, other than to meet with Best to see how he was doing and write a piece for that weekend’s paper.

Denis Compton had earlier come into the same pub and taken a seat at the bar. He and Best acknowledged each other. Best sent a drink over to Compton, who then returned the compliment. ‘Here’s one of the greatest footballers of all time and one of the greatest cricketers of all time in a pub in Croydon,’ Dunphy recalled years later.

As darkness began to fall on that winter afternoon, Compton joined the trio for a while. It was then that an idea popped into Dunphy’s head, and he couldn’t shake it. He wanted to call Fanning, whose passion for – and knowledge of – cricket was well known by all who knew him. He found a payphone in the back of the pub and asked Compton if he would say hello to his boss. If this legend of English cricket thought the request strange, he didn’t show it, and a short conversation with a thrilled cricket enthusiast back in Dublin ensued.

In the end, the chance encounter made it into Dunphy's piece, which in turn has made it into this collection of articles written for the *Sunday Independent* sport section over the last thirty years. It is without doubt one of the finest pieces I've read about Best, capturing a side to the man that was seldom observed. Dunphy had, in a manner, gone rummaging in Best's back yard and found the innocence and sadness behind the façade; he is full of caring and concern, and maybe even hope for his fallen hero.

Dunphy's piece on Best proves the truth of Betjeman's observation, an observation which makes a good starting point for this anthology – it's a good finishing point too. The last section takes its title from it, and the three pieces (including Dunphy's) which make up the closing pages demonstrate the writer's art of getting to know people better, people who really interest us – people like Best and Rory McIlroy – by looking a little deeper.

The idea behind *On The Seventh Day* is a simple one. We have always respected the intelligence of our readers. This respect manifests itself each week in how we look at the world of sport. The cliché that sports fans are some kind of one-dimensional bozos is largely a creation of people who know little about sport and less about those who are passionate about it. These are the kind of people who have espoused a ban on alcohol sponsorship in sport but not in the arts because, well, the more refined types are wiser to the dangers of alcohol than the ruffian hordes who go to football games. That is why there is a literary quality to the

best of sports writing all over the world; a refusal to dumb it down.

In an exchange of letters over several years, later published in a book entitled *Here and Now*, writers Paul Auster and J. M. Coetzee touched on their passion for sport and tried to rationalise how it intruded so much on their literary world. 'Is sport simply like sin: one disapproves of it but one yields because the flesh is weak?' asks Coetzee at one point. In his reply, Auster observes: 'Of the many hundreds of baseball games I have watched – perhaps even thousands – nearly every one has had some small detail or event I have never seen in any other game. There is pleasure in the new, but also pleasure in the known. The pleasure of eating food one likes, the pleasure of sex. No matter how exotic or complex one's erotic life might be, an orgasm is an orgasm, and we anticipate them with pleasure because of the pleasure they have given us in the past.'

And it is this philosophy which has underpinned how the *Sunday Independent* has approached sport for a very long time, giving strong-minded and talented writers the platform to express themselves in a way designed to stimulate readers, who are thus invited to agree or disagree. We have always been keen to entertain, to produce good reads, but never to pander. There is a sometimes devilish quality to the writers, in that they enjoy provoking and challenging people, but not in some kind of cheap, attention-seeking play; it is more to engage readers in the argument, cajoling them to look beyond the conventional wisdom which tends to permeate all sporting reactions. There is also always room for humour, passion and even for

a little exaggeration for rhetorical effect. Irreverence is important.

*On The Seventh Day* is not an anthology of memorable moments in Irish sport over the last thirty years, although some are there. Nor is it intended as a chronicle of those years. It is intended to cast a light on the world of Irish sport in all its forms, which is what the *Sunday Independent* strives to do every week. The pieces have been chosen to reflect this. These are my choices, based on what I think the paper has brought to the sporting landscape over those three decades, how it has criticised, praised, challenged or even cheered. As much as possible, articles have been reproduced as they originally appeared. There may be references or usage of language which appear a little dated, but I felt it was important for the integrity of the book to avoid the temptation of updating them to account for the passage of time, or even allowing the benefit of hindsight to colour my judgement. In some instances, footnotes have been used to explain a contemporary reference, but otherwise every effort has been made to keep the pieces intact.

There is anger, joy, humour, sadness, pity, tragedy, beauty; there are memories, controversies and celebrations; tales of addiction and tales of redemption. The book opens with Paul Kimmage's opus from the winter of 2001 on the story behind Ireland's memorable win over Holland in September of that year, a game that – as it turned out – as good as sealed our place at the World Cup the following year. The central figure in that game, of course, was Roy Keane, who also became the central figure in a different way



when storming out of the Irish camp at that World Cup the following summer, and Kimmage's famous interview with Keane, which he conducted in Saipan just before the storm erupted, also features here.

There are only four women writers represented in this anthology, an imbalance that is bound to raise questions. Going through the newspaper archives of the last three decades, it was striking how long it has taken for women to become established in the world of sports writing. Cliona Foley was among a very small group of women who made the first breakthrough in the early 1990s and her insight into a very young Catherina McKiernan is included here, but, otherwise, the remaining contributions from women are from much later. The situation has improved, thanks in part to the emergence of a new and talented group of female journalists, but there is still a way to go to see the same kind of representation in sports writing as we do in other areas.

The belated emergence of more women writing about sport, though, has come at a time when the newspaper industry as a whole is under threat. Fewer people are buying newspapers, which is not the same thing as saying that people are not interested in what good writers have to say. It is just that the habit of buying a paper each day, or on a Sunday, is dying. There was a time, not too long ago, when hundreds of thousands of newspapers were sold in Ireland every Sunday. On the seventh day Irish people had an extraordinary custom, which seemed to set them apart from other nations, of buying several papers and catching up on the week's events in politics, sport and whatever else

tickled their fancy. And as the newspapers grew in size in response to their growing popularity, buying the Sunday paper almost became an event. The *Sunday Independent* was the first choice of many and enjoyed a massive weekly sale. There was a stable of writers who were setting the agenda in the national discourse each week, including in sport. In the late 1980s and early 1990s, the voices of the likes of David Walsh, Eamon Dunphy and Mick Doyle led the way; then came Paul Kimmage and Colm O'Rourke; later, into the noughties, Dermot Gilleece, Dion Fanning, Neil Francis, Joe Brolly and Eamonn Sweeney, whose award-winning 'Hold The Back Page' column has been ever-present since 2006, were among the prominent voices.

Despite the changes in the media landscape, and the gravitation of journalism to online platforms, sports fans still have the same voracious appetite to read good pieces and so we continue to produce them. The principles of what we do haven't changed – we are bound to inform and entertain – and the *Sunday Independent* is still the largest-selling weekend paper in the country.

I hope you enjoy this collection from our sports pages. Some of you will be more than familiar with the *Sunday Independent* and our ideology; others may be coming to us for the first time. I hope whichever bracket you fall into that you enjoy reading these pieces as much as we enjoyed producing them. We have always endeavoured to give our writers the freedom not just to express themselves but to have fun while doing so. There has never been a party line. All the writers are free to express their own varied and often contrary opinions. Indeed, it is not uncommon for different

writers to put forward diametrically opposed views on a subject in the same issue. There is room in our church for all. As Walt Whitman said, 'Do I contradict myself? Very well then I contradict myself, I am large, I contain multitudes.'

We like to be serious about sport, but not solemn; we like to talk about sport the way Irish people talk about it ... especially on the seventh day.

John Greene

**I.**

## **INSIDE THE TEAM THAT MICK BUILT**

‘Who’s Friedrich Nietzsche? What team did  
he ever play for?’

# 01.

## INSIDE THE TEAM THAT MICK BUILT (PART 1)

PAUL KIMMAGE

On 1 September 2001 the Republic of Ireland produced one of the most memorable displays in the history of Irish sport. How was this remarkable performance achieved? From the hotel room to the dressing room; from the tunnel to the final whistle; every stride, every breath, every thought ... here is the full story.

28 OCTOBER 2001

Barry Murphy was almost there. After a week of reading the sports pages and shooting the breeze with punters in queues, the *Après Match* comedian had placed his finger on the pulse of the nation. Nobody, but nobody, expected Ireland to get a result in the World Cup qualifying game against Holland and the opening sketch during the RTÉ live broadcast on Saturday would have to reflect this. He picked up the script and began to tweak it again. He was almost there. It was almost perfect.

Take One: *Après Match*, 1 September, 14.53.

*(As thousands of Irish fans make their way to Lansdowne Road, one jersey-clad supporter with a strong Dublin accent*

*seeks refuge in a bar and is handed a pint of stout by his friend.)*

‘Can we switch on the match?’ the friend inquires.

‘We’re not watching the match, that’s why we came here, right?’ the fan replies tetchily.

‘What are ye talking about, we’re not watching the match?’

‘We’re not watching the match. We’re going to get destroyed! We’re going to get annihilated! You don’t need to see that, right?’

‘What are you talking about?’

‘Have you seen the team they have?’

‘I have, yeah.’

‘Yeah?’

‘Yeah.’

‘And what? You want to watch them stuff us nine or ten nil? What are you, Oliver Cromwell?’

‘What are you talking about? The Duffer’s in great form.’

‘The Duffer’s in great form ... they’ve got van Nistelhooks, Kluiverts, Hasselbainks, Overbooks ... who have we got, The Duffer! His real name: DAMIEN BLEEDIN’ DUFF! Sums up our chances! It will be like watching your man, Gary O’Shaughnessy, at the Eurovision. Do you remember? He got us relegated. I don’t want that humiliation, right? I’m not having that blood on me hands.’

(A pregnant pause ensues.)

‘Who’s Gary O’Shaughnessy?’

‘Exactly!’

Mick McCarthy has never appreciated his phone ringing on Saturday. Phone calls on Saturday mean ...

‘He’s out.’

‘He’s injured.’

‘He’s done his hamstring.’

‘His ankle’s gone.’

‘It’s his knee.’

He lost Stephen Carr on a Saturday. He lost Kenny Cunningham on a Saturday. He lost Mark Kinsella on a Saturday. He lost Gary Breen on a Saturday. Saturdays are bad news for international managers and the last Saturday of August would prove the same. A friend, Aidan Kelly, had just sent a text message from the West Ham/Leeds game at Upton Park: ‘Hartey injured and doubtful.’ McCarthy glanced again at his mobile and tried to figure it out. ‘Doubtful’? What did doubtful mean? But he knew. He knew.

2

Ian Harte sat in the dressing room at Upton Park and studied the gash in his leg. The real damage had been done, not in the seventy-eighth minute when Paolo Di Canio’s studs had ripped into his ankle, but a week earlier in the 2-0 defeat of Southampton when the ankle had been badly bruised. He had struggled all week to be fit for West Ham and probably shouldn’t have played but it was a Catch-22. Would Leeds release him to Mick McCarthy if he wasn’t fit for David O’Leary? That’s not how the game was played. So he gritted his teeth and suffered in silence and almost pulled it off.

Gary Kelly and Robbie Keane came over to take a look. Keane knew Harte was struggling even before the game. ‘At

half-time he was icing his leg in a bucket. I wouldn't be able to do that. I find it hard to get going when I ice my leg but full credit to him, he stuck with it.' The plan had been to fly home from London later that evening but the plan had suddenly changed: Kelly and Keane would be travelling on to Dublin, Harte would be returning for treatment to Leeds. 'I'll see you during the week,' Kelly offered by way of encouragement. But he wasn't sure. The ankle looked a mess.

### 3

The following afternoon, as Ian Harte spent his first day on crutches, a crowd of 42,632 were streaming through the turnstiles at Villa Park for the first clash of the season between Aston Villa and Manchester United. For 42,631 of them, the winning of the game was all that mattered, but one spectator had come with a different agenda. His name was Stephen Staunton and he would spend the ninety minutes sitting in the stand studying Ruud van Nistelrooy.

Staunton, Ireland's most capped international, wasn't happy that John Gregory, the Villa manager, had left him out of the team. He never is. 'Stan loves playing,' Gregory told *The Daily Telegraph* recently. 'He is always banging on the door saying, "Why wasn't I on the bench? Why wasn't I in the team? I can't believe you've left me out."'

Staunton hates when he isn't involved. He hates it so much that he often feels like registering his protest by staying at home. On any other Sunday he might have, but his pending appointment with van Nistelrooy in Dublin had become an obsession. So he joined the queue of traffic to



Villa Park. The Dutchman was good. The Dutchman was very good. There could be no falling asleep with this guy on your shoulder. Staunton drove home and packed his bags for Dublin. The game was six days away but already his pulse was starting to race.

4

Mattie Holland was also learning Dutch that afternoon.

‘Magic the shirt heaven algebra, Patrick?’

No, didn’t sound right.

‘Ma gick je shirt hebban algebreest, Patrick?’

No, it still wasn’t right.

The Patrick in question was Patrick Kluivert, the star of the Netherlands football team. The ‘shirt’ was the brilliant orange tunic he would wear at Lansdowne Road. From the moment Mattie had announced why he was travelling to Dublin, the pressure had come on from his seven-year-old son. Jacob Holland loved Kluivert. He was the star of FIFA 2000, Jacob’s favourite Playstation game.

‘WHAAT! YOU’LL BE PLAYING AGAINST KLUIVERT! AW DAD, PLEASE, PLEASE, YOU’VE GOT TO GET ME HIS SHIRT.’ So Mattie started making plans. He was sure Kluivert spoke English and knew ‘May I have your shirt please?’ was the easiest path to tread. But what if he asked in Dutch? Kluivert couldn’t but be impressed. He started taking lessons.

‘Mag ik je shirt hebben alsjebliest, Patrick?’

Hmmm, he was almost there but it still wasn’t perfect. He needed to roll it out with a bit more gravel in his throat. It needed more arrogance, more confidence, more ... Dutch.

5

Jason McAteer stood staring at his reflection in the bathroom mirror. It was Sunday evening at the Dublin Airport Posthouse Hotel and he was just about to head into the city to meet Damien Duff.

*Don't look at me like that. I know what you're thinking. You're thinking 'a night, on the town is the last thing you need.' You're thinking 'he hasn't started a game for Blackburn in yonks.' You're thinking 'Saturday is only six days away, you should be wrapped up in bed.' You're thinking 'Spice Boy! Waster! After all that's happened you haven't bloody changed!' But you're wrong. I have changed. I have. I'm a father now. I'm in a relationship now. I'm older now and harder now and ... okay, so I'm probably not as wise as I ought to be but I'm getting there. I'm getting there. I'm trying to be good.*

6

Mick Byrne went striding into the lobby like his trousers were on fire. It was Monday morning at the Posthouse Hotel and the team's physiotherapist, psychotherapist and Mother Hen had a million things to do and as much on his mind.

'Has the gaffer arrived yet?'

'I better phone Hartey again.'

'I'd better phone Roy.'

'The first training session is scheduled for 4.00; some of the lads will need treatment and strapping.'

'There's Ciaran. I hope he has organised the drinks and medical supplies. And I see Jason is in. Has Clinton arrived yet? Got to keep working on Clinton. I wonder does he mind

us calling him “Brother”? Have to make sure he is feeling at home.’

‘Jaysus the rooms! We’re moving to Citywest tomorrow. Has Eddie faxed them the rooms I wonder? Did I give him the list? Alan Kelly with Shay Given; Kevin Kilbane with Niall Quinn; Steve Staunton with Dean Kiely; Gary Kelly with Ian Harte; Robbie Keane with Richard Dunne; Damien Duff with Lee Carsley; Jason McAteer with Mark Kennedy; Steve Finnan with Gary Doherty; Clinton Morrison with Stephen Reid; Andy O’Brien with Dave Connolly; Mattie on his own; Roy on his own. Have I missed anyone?’

‘Ahh Packie! Great to see you! Gaffer! There y’are. Wait till I tell you about the dream I had last night, it was definitely an omen. I’ve a good feeling about this week. We owe them Dutch.’

‘Jason me oul flower, great to see you son. Come ’ere till I give you a hug.’

## 7

Damien Duff wasn’t sure what hurt the most: the pain in his head from the night on the town with Jason or the look on his twelve-year-old brother’s face when he’d informed him he was going out. Jamie had planned a night in front of the telly. It wasn’t every weekend his famous brother was home. They could nestle down on the couch with a bucket of cake and chocolate and watch the Spanish League football on Sky, just like old times.

But Damien wasn’t having it: he’d scored a brilliant goal for Blackburn against Spurs the day before and fancied a little R&R before answering Ireland’s call. But now he felt

desperate. His head was pounding like a jackhammer and Jamie was giving him the eye. 'Okay Jamie,' he said, 'I'll make it up to you. Win, lose or draw on Saturday against Holland and I'll come home.'

'Is that a promise?'

'It's a promise. We'll sit down and watch the England game on Match of the Day.'

'Okay,' Jamie smiled.

8

*It was a wave. It was a wave that picked me up and carried me on its crest for almost a decade. One moment, I was just an unknown Scouser playing for a bunch called Marine and the next I was sitting in a dressing room in Giants Stadium, New York surrounded by boyhood heroes: Ronnie Whelan, Ray Houghton, John Aldridge and Paul McGrath. We were playing in the World Cup! That's how incredible it was. Six caps for Ireland and I was playing in the World Cup! Sprinting up and down the line against Paolo fuckin' Maldini. And, overnight, I was a hero too.*

*It was a dream. It was a dream that picked me up and carried me away to a different planet. Planet Popstar. Celebrity fare. Girls throwing their knickers; a mansion with electric gates; shampoo commercials à la Ginola; supermarket openings like Jack. Walking out at Anfield for my beloved Liverpool. Walking out at Wembley to play United in the final of the Cup. Walking up the catwalk in Armani. Peeling off those crisp new bills to Enzo Ferrari ... one hundred, two hundred ... revving up, slapping them*

*down. Meet Jason and The Three Amigos. Thought it would last forever. Thought it would never end.*

*It was a crash. It was a crash that knocked the air out of my lungs and brought the world tumbling down around my ankles. We were training at Liverpool one morning and Stan Collymore gave the ball away in five-a-side. 'Don't worry Stan,' Roy Evans, the manager, says. 'Come on, win it back, you'll be alright next time.' A few minutes later I lost possession and was rewarded with an unmerciful bollocking and stormed off the training ground.*

*The manager pulled me in. 'What's the matter with you?' he asks. 'Fuck you,' I reply, absolutely livid. 'I give the ball away once and you read me the riot act! Stan gives it away all the time and it's "That's okay Stan!"'*

*'Yeah,' he says, 'but a manager has got to know his players. I know I can do it with you. I know you'll respond positively but Stan will go the other way.' And then he put his arm around me and everything was fine.*

*I needed that. I needed an arm around my shoulder. I needed reassurance that I was a valued member of the team and could play. And when I got it, I could play and in return I gave it all: 100 per cent commitment, absolute loyalty to the cause.*

*Everything changed when Gérard Houllier came in. The first time he sees me, he calls me to the touchline: 'What's your name?' he asks. I couldn't believe it. A World Cup with Ireland! A hundred appearances for Liverpool! 'What's your name?'*

*I was dropped shortly afterwards. Hit me like a bomb. And then things started to slide: transfer to Blackburn, wage cut,*

*broken leg and suddenly my value was falling faster than an IT share. Nobody would touch me. Couldn't get a game. And the only thing that kept me going was the loyalty of family and friends and the faith shown in Ireland.*

*Mick Byrne and the way he might hug you; Mick McCarthy's defiant belief; Ian Evans and Packie Bonner's prompting on the training ground; Johnny Fallon's tireless grin; Joe Walsh laying out the kit; Tony Hickey laying down the law; Ciaran Murray in the treatment room; Derek Carroll on the bus. Doctor Martin, Father Liam, the inimitable Eddie Corcoran and the lads: Sparky, Duffer, Kells, Alan Kells, Quinny, Carso, Breeny, Stan, Shay, Hartey, Robbie, Dunney, Mattie, Stevie, Kendo, Kev, Kince, Deano and yeah, sometimes even Roy.*

9

25 August 1996, Eschen, Liechtenstein.

A reporter places a glass to the wall of his bedroom. On the eve of Mick McCarthy's first World Cup qualifying game as manager, two of his most experienced players are discussing the plight of the team on the other side of the wall ...

'So, what do you think then?'

'Of Mick? Well, at least we're playing football. I thought he'd have us lumping it forward like Jack. I thought it would be a lot more direct.'

'Yeah, but what about the results? How many games have we lost?'

'Five.'

'And won?'

'One.'

'Draws?'

'Two.'

'And he's what ... five months in the job?'

'Yeah.'

'Not easy is it?'

'No, but it was never going to be. What age is he? Thirty-seven? And how does anyone follow an act like Jack?'

'I can't believe I'm still here to be honest.'

'No, me neither. Bryan Adams concerts! Travelling everywhere as a group! Eleven o'clock curfews on Sunday evenings! For fuck's sake we used to be only driving into town at that time in the old days. It was a lot more fun under Jack.'

'No, I don't mean that.'

'What do you mean?'

'I can't believe he keeps calling me into the squads. As soon as he got the job I was sure "that's me gone".'

'Naah, he needs all of the old boys on board, doesn't he? Look at the ages of some of these kids! What's Hartey? Nineteen? And Shay Given and Keith O'Neill can't be that much older. He's not going to win much with a team of kids. You've got to get the blend right. It has to be a gradual transition.'

'Yeah, I suppose.'

'I do think he's going to struggle with Roy though.'

'In what way?'

'Well, do you remember that row they had in '92? I thought Mick was going to chin him. And look at how it's started: Mick makes him captain for his first game in charge

and not only is Roy sent off but he then goes AWOL for the US Cup!’

‘Yeah, but what’s new? Jack struggled with Roy; Alex Ferguson struggles with Roy. Even Roy struggles with Roy!’

‘Yeah, true enough.’

‘I tell you what has surprised me – the training and how well organised it is. I didn’t ever see Mick as a coach.’

‘Fuck me, you can say that again. What about all these cones?’

‘The pitch this afternoon was like the M25.’

‘There was none of that with Jack.’

‘No, you’re wrong, there was two at each end to make the goals.’

‘Hah, yeah.’

‘Have you heard the latest innovation?’

‘No.’

‘He’s showing us a video tomorrow.’

‘What? A Liechtenstein game! No thanks, I was here last year.’

‘No, an instructional video on how to sing the anthem.’

‘You’re joking!’

‘I’m not. He wants us to act more patriotic. He wants us to show more respect for the shirt. He wants us to learn the words of the national anthem.’

‘What? In Irish!’

‘Yeah.’

‘Naah! Are you sure?’



Things were looking up by Monday evening. Roy Keane had picked up a knock at Villa Park but had phoned to say he was fine and would be staying in Manchester for treatment until Wednesday. Kevin Kilbane, Niall Quinn, Andy O'Brien and Shay Given had arrived relatively (O'Brien had a slight foot injury) unscathed from the Sunderland/Newcastle game.

There had been no worrying calls from Manchester, Birmingham, Coventry or Wimbledon where Richard Dunne, Alan Kelly, Lee Carsley and Dave Connolly were involved in evening games. And there was better news of 'Hartey', who was off the crutches and responding to treatment.

Mick McCarthy pulled back the sheets and climbed into bed. The hotel lobby had been humming. He had noticed the tension as soon as he'd stepped off the flight. The way people had looked at him walking through the terminal, the words of encouragement: the desperation to succeed.

'All the best Mick.'

'Good man Mick!'

'This is it Mick.'

Yes, this was it, and yet with just five days to go he had never felt as calm. He smiled and thought of his wife, Fiona, and the prayer she kept pinned to the kitchen wall: 'God grant me the serenity to accept the things I cannot change, the courage to change the things I can and the wisdom to know the difference.' He was trying. It wasn't easy.

Fiona. That's when it started: two years before his debut for Ireland in the summer of 1982. She had relatives living in Portmarnock, it was his first time to visit and they spent the evening in a pub. He can still see them now, gazing in

wonder through the smoke-filled haze from a seat in the corner: the guzzling, the laughing, the singing and then, at the end of the night, the strangest part of all, EVERYBODY STANDING BOLT UPRIGHT FOR THE SINGING OF THE NATIONAL ANTHEM!

He had never seen that before. No one ever stood up for the national anthem in England. And just as curious as the act itself was the song and the sound of the words.

*Sinne Fianna Fáil, atá faoi gheall ag Éirinn,  
Buíon dár slua ...*

What exactly did it mean?

For the next fifteen years, the question was to haunt him. He remembers the summer of 1990, leading the team out onto the pitch in Cagliari to play England at the World Cup finals. He remembers the lump in his throat and the tear in his eye; bursting with pride that Jack had awarded him the captain's armband. Bursting with pride for his teammates and the shirt on their backs.

Bursting with pride for Charlie, his Co. Waterford-born father. Bursting with pride for Fiona and their three children at home. Bursting with pride for the fans who had travelled and the people of Ireland. Bursting with pride. And then they turned to face the flag for the playing of the national anthem and he found himself frustrated again. He was bursting with pride but unable to express it.

*Sinne Fianna Fáil, atá faoi gheall ag Éirinn*

He had tried to learn the words but it didn't sound the same in his broad Barnsley accent.

ability to deliver an insightful and thought-provoking view. The Co. Sligo native, who now resides in West Cork, is informative, emotive, humorous and a master in his field. His 'Hold The Back Page' column has been a continuous presence in the paper since 2006.

## DAVID WALSH

One of Ireland's most famous journalists, best known for his role in uncovering Lance Armstrong's doping programme, David began his career with the *Leitrim Observer*, but quickly rose to prominence on the national scene. In the late 1980s and early 1990s he became associated with Irish cycling's golden era, but his weekly pieces in the *Sunday Independent* delved into all areas of sporting life.

# ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I've been fortunate in my career to have worked under some brilliant editors, beginning in the 1990s in the *Longford Leader* with Eugene McGee, to my mind one of the greatest provincial newspaper editors the country has ever seen. He has a rare understanding of local life, which he brought to bear in the paper. Aengus Fanning, who was the editor of the *Sunday Independent* from 1984 until his death in January 2012, was an extraordinary man who transformed the paper – and the Irish newspaper landscape. He believed in people, those who worked for him and those who bought and read the paper. His infectious spirit permeated the pages. He promoted good writing; he challenged the consensus; and he always looked for the other side of the story.

The influence of Eugene and Aengus is everywhere in how I chose the pieces which I thought best reflected the *Sunday Independent* sport section over the last three decades.

Aengus was succeeded as editor by Anne Harris, and she by Cormac Bourke, and both helped keep the flame burning.

When I first mooted the idea for this book to Patrick O'Donoghue of Mercier Press, he was enthused by it and worked hard to make it happen. He and the team at Mercier deserve enormous credit for the work they have done not just on this book, but in promoting Irish writing and Irish writers.

Adhamhnán Ó Súilleabháin became the paper's sports editor in 1988. He had a vision, and with the backing of Aengus, created an environment that allowed good writers to flourish, to question, to probe and, most importantly of all, to tell stories. The sport section of today is as much his legacy as anyone's. Adhamhnán was of enormous help with this book, as was Fergus McDonnell, the current deputy sports editor at the *Sunday Independent*, who encouraged the idea from the start, pored over drafts and offered invaluable feedback through the whole process.

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And a final thank you to the writers who have made the sport section what it is over the last thirty years. My starting point was Euro '88, my finishing point the 2018 World Cup. In the initial trawl through the archives, I set aside almost 700 articles by forty-six different writers before beginning the task of whittling those down to what appears on these pages. There is a rich archive of material in the *Sunday Independent* vaults, and hopefully the pieces chosen give a fair and accurate reflection of the standards which I believe have been consistently maintained by the paper.

John Greene

# ABOUT THE AUTHOR

John Greene is the sports editor of the *Sunday Independent*. He was previously deputy sports editor for the *Irish Independent*, having begun his career with *The Longford Leader*. John was educated at St Mel's College, Longford, and has a BA from Trinity College Dublin and an MA from DCU.