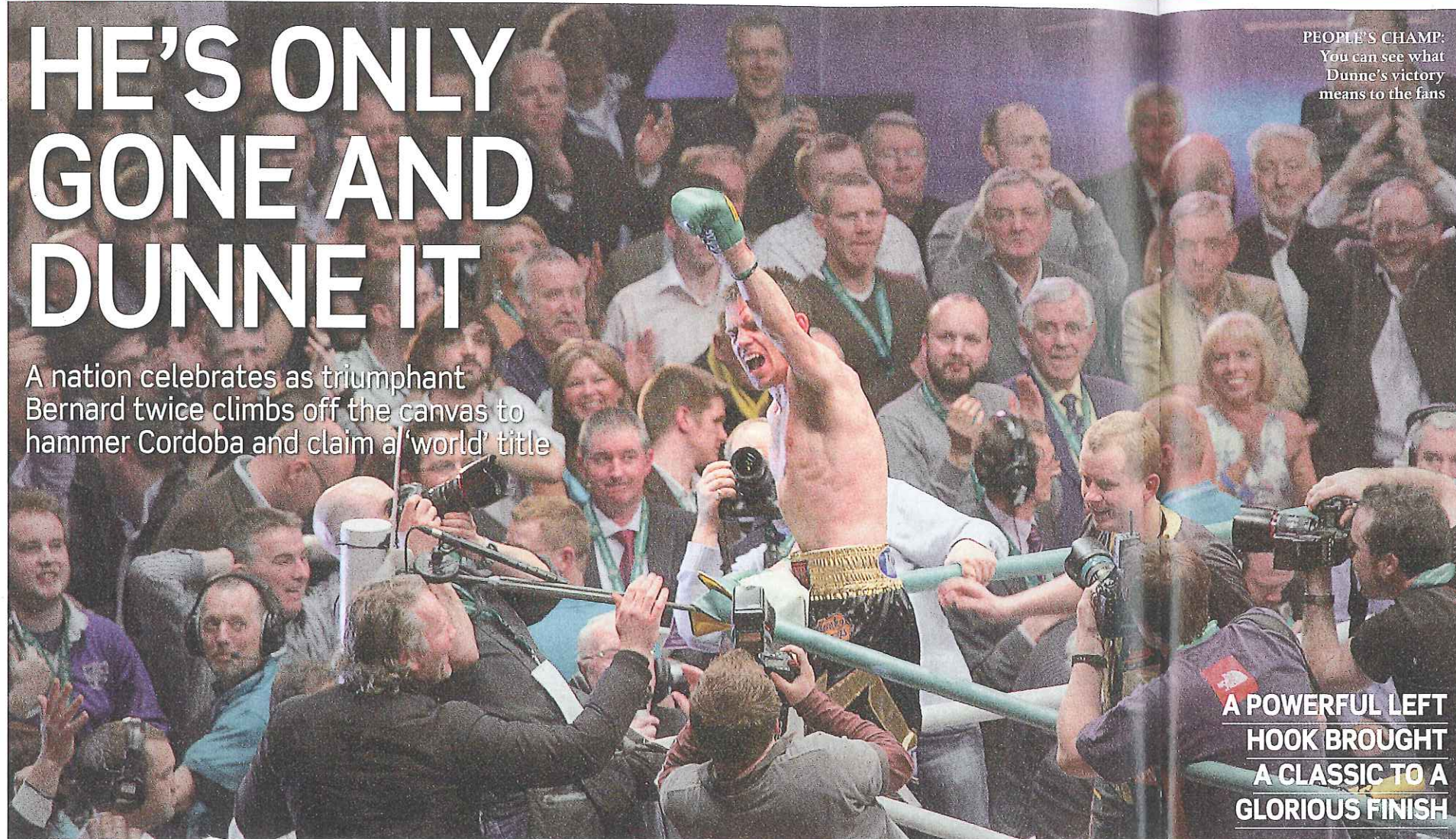


HE'S ONLY GONE AND DUNNE IT

A nation celebrates as triumphant Bernard twice climbs off the canvas to hammer Cordoba and claim a 'world' title



PEOPLE'S CHAMP: You can see what Dunne's victory means to the fans

A POWERFUL LEFT HOOK BROUGHT A CLASSIC TO A GLORIOUS FINISH

THOMAS MYLER
RINGSIDE

DUBLIN
March 21

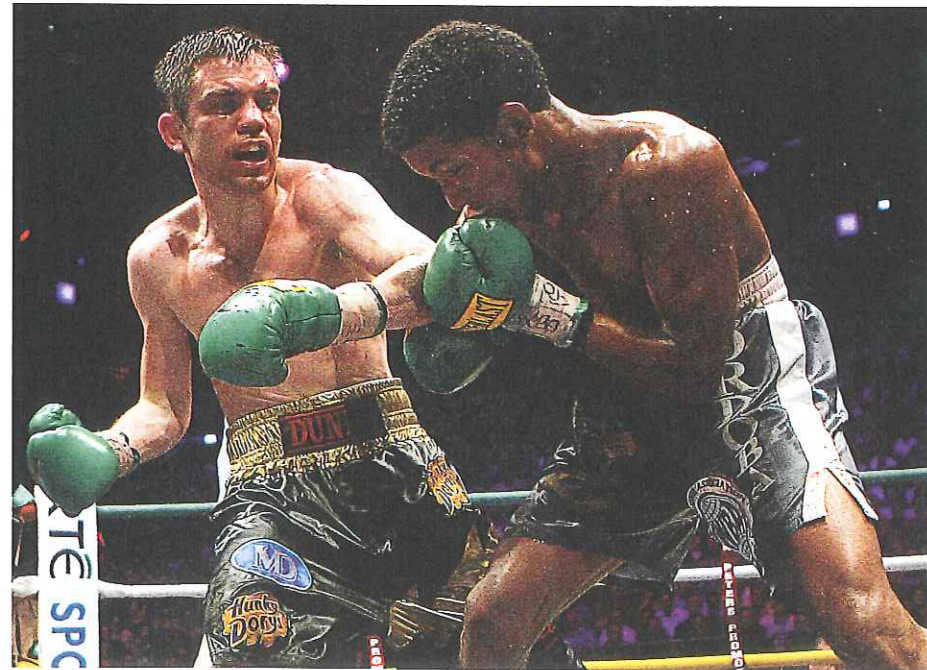
THE Irish do not need much of an excuse for partying, but there was full justification for merriment following Bernard Dunne's

sensational 11th-round stoppage of Panama southpaw Ricardo Cordoba to capture the WBA super-bantam title at the new O2 arena.

Canadian referee Hubert Earle called it off at 2-52 after the "Dublin Dynamo" had dropped his man three times in the round with crushing left hooks.

Coming just a few hours after Ireland's spectacular Grand Slam rugby win in Cardiff, it meant double celebrations for a nation, like the rest of the world, in deep recession and badly in need of a boost. Dunne's victory was all the sweeter as Cordoba came into the ring a prohibitive 1/3 favourite, with the local a 9/4 outsider. But Dunne was not going to allow the underdog tag deter him.

With the capacity 9,000 crowd yelling him on even before the sounds of the first bell had echoed around the



INSPIRED: Dunne fights through the blood to victory

Photo: Julien Behal/PA/PA Wire/PA Photos

cavernous arena, Dunne made up his mind to rip up the script and dump it in the wastebasket.

US judges Ted Guinza (95-92), Tom Miller (96-91) and John Poturaj (97-90) all had him trailing at the time of the stoppage. Dunne's coach Harry

Hawkins told him in the corner before the first bell: "This is it, Bernard, this is the big one. Go out there and show him who's boss."

He did just that in one of the most thrilling, even brutal, battles ever seen in an Irish ring. He dumped Cordoba in

the third before being floored himself for two counts in the fifth.

With defeat now staring him in his blood-spattered face from a bad cut over his left eye, caused by an accidental clash of heads and which bled intermittently from the fourth, Dunne

went to work and never let up.

A final, smashing left hook in the 11th dropped Cordoba in the champion's corner to mark the end of a real thriller.

Cordoba left the ring on a stretcher and was taken to hospital for observation but released inside several hours, possibly more hurt psychologically in losing his prized belt than any physical damage.

The new champion and his manager-promoter Brian Peters visited Cordoba in hospital and were relieved to find he was all right. Dunne, now 28-1 (15), got to bed around 5am and slept for a few hours before waking with "aches and pains". "I was focused", said Dunne, who learned much of the pro game during his two-year apprenticeship in the US with Freddie Roach.

"Cordoba had everything to lose and I had everything to gain. You get one shot at the big one, so go for it.

"Our tactics from the start was that every round was a new round. It helped me focus that way. I thought after the knockdown in the third he wouldn't get up but he did and I was ready for him.

"Now I'm going to take a short break."

Peters said the team would sit down over the next few weeks and weigh up their options. While he did not reveal any specific names, he hinted at a possible unification fight with Celestino

Caballero, the WBA Super champion and IBF boss, to unify the belts.

The O2 was built on the site of the old Point, where Dunne was demolished and deprived of his European title in 86 seconds by the clubbing fists of Spain's Kiko Martinez 18 months ago.

This time, however, the scenario was going to be different. Dunne opened cautiously before going on the attack towards the end of the round.

In the second Cordoba used his snapping right jabs to make way for his damaging left and right hooks. He built up points as Dunne came in seeking openings. With 25 seconds left in the third, a smashing left hook to the chin bounced Cordoba off the canvas and sent him reeling across the ring for a count.

Dunne emerged from a clinch in the fourth with his left eyebrow cut but he continued to press, though the South American had success with his pop-pop right jabs and moved quickly out of range of counters. It was almost all over for Dunne in the fifth as he was floored twice by fast right hooks to the jaw. When Bernard got to his feet after the second knockdown, Cordoba waded in and was pounding the Dubliner on the ropes just as the bell went.

Dunne was fighting for survival in the sixth, but survive he did, catching his rival with long left hooks to the body and chin.

The seventh seemed even, and by the eighth Dunne had recovered his composure and his confidence to match the champion blow for blow – much to the delight of the cheering, delirious fans.

The ninth was another thriller, Dunne's best round, and a cracking left hook definitely hurt Cordoba, who glanced to his corner for guidance. Or maybe it was to convince himself he still had a few friends nearby amid a swelling sea of Irish faces that seemed to be growing by the minute.

In the 10th, both battled furiously, if a little tired, in a fight that will surely be impossible to top at year's end as Ireland's Fight of 2009.

By the 11th the crowd were ecstatic as Dunne summoned up one last great effort to save the fight, and connect with that final, powerful left hook that brought a classic to a glorious finish.

At the last bell, coach Hawkins leaned over the top rope and called down to this writer: "You were wrong," a reference to my newspaper preview that morning.

The incident recalled to mind the then Cassius Clay in 1964 shouting from the ring to the ringside reporters who picked Sonny Liston to beat him: "Eat your words".

Cordoba fell to 34-2-2 (21).

Both weighed a pound inside the limit at 8st 9lbs.

On an evening of sheer joy for the Irish, Cavan's Belfast-based Andrew Murray won the vacant EU lightweight title with a unanimous decision over Spain's Daniel Rasilla, billed as "La Cobra". Freddy Christensen (Denmark) had it 119-109, Bela Florian (Hungary)



RUSTY: But the 10 rounds will stand Lee (right) in good stead

116-112 and Leszek Jankowiak (Poland) 115-113. With the strong team of chief coach John Breen and Eamonn Magee in his corner, Murray, 15-0 (7), used his skills to outbox the Spaniard. Rasilla had a dangerous right but seldom got a chance to land it. Murray (9st 9lbs), reigning Irish light and light-welter champion, constantly frustrated Rasilla, 12-2 (4), with his bobbing-and-weaving, keeping the Spaniard at bay with his jab.

Rasilla (9st 8lbs) put in a strong finish in the last two rounds with heavy hooks to the head and body, but it was a little too late and Murray coasted to victory. Italy's Adrio Zannoni was referee.

Limerick middleweight Andy Lee (11st 8lbs), who boxes out of Emanuel Steward's Kronk gym in Detroit, came back from an eight-month layoff following surgery to his right eye to outscore German hardman Alex Sipos (11st 9lbs) over 10. Referee Emile Tiedt seemed over-generous with his 99-91 scoring for London-born Lee, who boxed as an amateur for Repton BC. This writer had it 97-95. Southpaw Lee, 17-1 (13), was understandably rusty and walked into a lot of hooks and uppercuts from the capable German, 19-6-2 (9). But Andy's better boxing, chiefly a stabbing right jab, was enough to stay in front.

"Those 10 rounds will stand to me," said Lee (11st 8lbs). "I needed a fight like that. Sipos was tough and I expected a hard fight."

Four-weight Irish champion Jim Rock, 30-4 (23) and still going strong at 37, beat another resilient visitor in Italian middleweight Alessio Furlan, winning on points over 10 rounds.

Referee David Irving scored 97-94. The Dubliner (11st 9lbs) mainly used a left jab and right uppercut to stay ahead. Furlan (11st 9 1/4lbs) is now 21-12-5 (8).

Biggest shock on the undercard was the third-round defeat of promising Dublin's Anthony Fitzgerald (11st 6 1/2lbs) by Latvia's Janis Chernouskis (11st 5 3/4lbs) in a scheduled four. Fitzgerald, 1-2 (0), did reasonably well in the first two rounds but when Chernouskis, 3-6 (3), opened up in the third, the end looked near. A hard left put the local down and when he regained his feet Mr Irving intervened at 2-38.

Dundalk's Michael Kelly (9st 9lbs) moved to 7-0-1 (1) against Latvian Valentins Morozovs (9st 3 1/4lbs) in an even four-rounder, with Tiedt calling it 38-38.

Reports of the three amateur bouts on this pro-am show can be found on page 39.

BN Dublin Notes

■ **IRISH President Mary McAleese said: "Bernard Dunne's win was a magnificent achievement, and I would like to pay tribute to his courage, skill and determination in winning like a true champion."**

■ **SPORTS Minister Martin Cullen said: "It was a sensational performance. With determination, power and stamina, Bernard boxed his way to a memorable victory."**

■ **THERE was a wide cross-section of Irish life in attendance, all caught up in the excitement of big fight night in Dublin town. The ladies were out in high fashion too. There were**

even a few priests, no doubt saying a silent prayer that the clean-living, teetotal Irish Catholic boy at the top of the bill would pull off a big win. Their prayers were answered.

■ **CORDOBA said before leaving Dublin: "It wasn't my best performance. My hands were slow. Dunne had a better offence than I had, and I could not finish it in the fifth after I dropped him twice.**

"I felt slow and my legs were very heavy. He is not quick, but I seemed to make him look quick and that was the problem. I will now take a short rest and decide with my team on my future."