

# Dunne/Dricco Good Battle Looms

THERE'S a bit of a sporting dilemma looming on the horizon, a sort of double booking if you like, that is pulling on the heart-strings right now.

In three Saturdays the great Bernard Dunne will fight a man from Panama called Ricardo Cordoba at the fantastic new O2 Arena in the heart of Dublin's ailing financial district.

Just over a year after his career was rocked by a killer punch from Spain's Kiko Martinez in the same stadium, then known as the Point, Dunne gets a shot at redemption.

It's an enthralling prospect, not just for the Neilstown scrapper but also for those who have stayed loyal to his cause in the doubting months since Martinez made off with Dunne's European title belt.

There are many at home who currently question Bernard's ability to take a coveted world title off a fighter who has come up the hard way, and shows every sign of it when he steps into the ring.

Others, myself included, believe and indeed hope that Dunne's first professional defeat was a one off, a mere blip on an otherwise unblemished professional record.

We'll find out on March 21 when the Dubliner faces the toughest test yet in his bid to regain lost ground and win over the doubters.

I'd love to be there. In fact I'd even pay to be there, which is quite a statement as those who know me will verify coming from someone who normally gets paid to watch such events and is always grateful for that privilege.

The problem I have is a simple one — they haven't yet discovered a means to be in two places at the same time. It is impossible, a bit like expecting Fianna Fail to win the next general election.

Trouble is, you see, Ireland play Wales in a rugby international on March 21 in the magnificent sporting venue that is the Millennium Stadium in Cardiff.

In the normal course

Brian O'Driscoll scores Ireland's one try against England on Saturday.



## the CATHALDERVAN column

of events my employers at *Star Sunday* would rate a world title fight in his home city for a Dublin-born thoroughbred like Dunne ahead of a rugby match on the other side of the Irish Sea.

Boxing, after all, is a *Star* sport. Rugby is more the preserve of *The Irish Times* and its really long words.

That's how things would work if this was a normal year. The *Star* would send one of their men to the old Point — i.e., me — and another by the name of John to the Welsh capital.

This ain't no normal year for Irish rugby, however. If anything, it promises to be a very special year that threatens to be crowned in glory on the very day that Dunne's world title dream can come true.

Ireland's rugby heroes can win a first Grand Slam in 61 years, and the first of the Six Nations era, if they beat Scotland in Edinburgh on Saturday, March 14, and Wales in Cardiff just seven days later.

That much became a reality when they survived a nail biting final five minutes to record a one point win over England at Croke on Saturday.

That win, albeit a fortunate one for all their second half dominance after a positively dreadful first half, leaves Ireland just two wins away from an historic Slam in Declan Kidney's first season in charge.

Just 18 months after Eddie O'Sullivan's team crashed and burned at the 2007 World Cup finals in France — when some even foolishly tipped them to win the tournament — Ireland's rugby team are on the verge of something very special.

Naturally the interest in the men on the brink of unprecedented achievement is huge and growing by the day.

Croke Park was jammed to the gills on Saturday. Tickets were like gold dust, even if they were on the expensive side at over \$100 for the average entrance.

As with any Irish team doing well on the international stage, the rugby team is coming off the pages of *The Irish Times* and becoming public property all over again.

The World Cup disappointment has been forgotten thanks to Kidney's rejuvenation program. History beckons, and the man in

the street here at home wants to know what's going on and how they are going to achieve the breakthrough Slam at Kidney's first time of asking.

Hence the reality right now is that I will spend the third Saturday in March on Welsh soil, covering an Irish team that can go all the way now with skill and fortune on their side if Saturday's sweet win over England was anything to go by.

Instead of Bernard Dunne I will have to satisfy my sporting hunger with Brian O'Driscoll and, you know something, that's not such a bad thing.

At the start of this current RBS Six Nations season I did wonder if Dricco's goose had been cooked as one of the world's greatest players as he approached his 30th birthday.

That landmark birth date has passed now, and so have the doubts about his ability to play under Kidney and flourish under the new Ireland coach.

If anything, Kidney's arrival as the voice of authority in the Irish dressingroom has brought out the best in O'Driscoll.

We saw as much on the opening day against France when he was flamboyant. Second time out in Rome he was dogmatic and pragmatic when Ireland

needed to pull the game out of the fire.

On Saturday, in a game devoid of imagination for so long, O'Driscoll was the soul of invention, scoring Ireland's only try and a drop goal that was as effective as it was cheeky in a one point win for the home side.

O'Driscoll has scored a try in each of his three championship games this season, and if right is right he will score again in both Edinburgh and Cardiff

in the coming weeks.

He also deserves, on current form, to become the next Irish captain to lift the championship trophy and, hopefully, the Grand Slam in Cardiff on March 21.

If he achieves all that then it will be a pleasure to be ringside in the Millennium Stadium, so to speak, when Dricco rewrites the history books, even if it means missing out on Bernard Dunne's shot at world glory. Problem solved!

## HERO OF THE WEEK

NO contest this week. There's not even another contender in sight next to Brian O'Driscoll on the sporting mantle. Ireland's captain was magnificent from start to finish in Saturday's win over England when he scored the try that could win the Grand Slam for Ireland. O'Driscoll deserves to make history and secure that Slam in the coming weeks.

## IDIOTS OF THE WEEK

U2 recorded a special version of their new "Get On Your Boots" single for the Croke Park crowd attending Saturday's rugby encounter between Ireland and England. The song was aired just before the two teams came out, another handy PR stunt for Ireland's so-called finest band. That's all it was though — a publicity stunt. Until they start paying all their taxes in Ireland they should be shunned and the GAA should ban them from using Croke in the summer. And yes, I do have a bee in my bonnet on this issue.

## Sideline Views

**BOXING:** Kenny Egan went missing last weekend and left the Ireland boxing team in the lurch for Friday night's international win over America at the Stadium. The story, as you can imagine, garnered huge attention in the media, the same media whose interest in him has almost driven Kenny to distraction since he won silver in China last August. Kenny doesn't like the intrusion into his private life, but he has to learn to live with it. It's the price to pay for becoming a national hero, and God knows we have few enough of them here at home right now.

**SOCCER:** The League of Ireland kicks off this coming Friday night and I'm looking forward to it. In times of recession we all need something to cheer, we all need to be entertained, and there is a huge opportunity for domestic football to fulfill all those needs right now. For what it's worth I'm putting my money on reigning champions Bohs to win the league again, with Shamrock Rovers the dark horses for honors this season.

**GOLF:** Nice to read the great Ernie Els predict in the *Sunday Independent* that young Rory McIlroy will one day be rated the best golfer in the world. The Ulster teenager may only have made it to the quarterfinals of the world matchplay in Arizona last weekend, but he is one hot prospect.

**GAA:** Came across "The Banks of My Own Lovely Lee" on the radio the other day, and they really do need to rewrite the Cork anthem considering the chorus features the line "where we sported and played," which clearly doesn't apply to the 2008 hurling squad who are still out on strike.