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**The End of ‘Sporting Apartheid’:
Newspaper reporting on the development of
rugby and nationalism in the Republic of
Ireland, 2006-2010**

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The End of 'Sporting Apartheid': Newspaper reporting
on the development of rugby and nationalism in the
Republic of Ireland, 2006-2010



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Introduction

When Irish rugby returned to its Dublin 4 address in November 2010, it had reached the end of a significant journey of growth and reconciliation for the sport and society. What was 'known' about rugby's place as a sport that challenged rather than celebrated nationalism had changed. With it, a new understanding of nationalism emerged which reflected a modern, developed and cosmopolitan Ireland.

The practice of using sports as a means of interpreting wider social and political developments in society is an increasingly recognised and respected historical approach.¹ In Ireland this is seen as particularly valid as Mike Cronin and Brian Ó Conchubhair outline, 'sport... is central to understanding Ireland's past and present. It is a space in which wider ideological, intellectual, and social debates are conducted that have meaning beyond the field of play'.² Many, such as Edmund van Esbeck in his histories of Irish rugby, have argued for the apolitical nature of sport, and as Alan Bairner and John Sugden outline, those who partake in sports are unlikely to see themselves as political actors.³ However, sport can be as potent in the creation of communities and divisions as the church, education and neighbourhood.⁴ Subsequently, sport and those who partake in it assume a significance within a community beyond simply playing a game. It is through these sporting communities that shared ideals and 'social interests' are cultivated, one of which is a collective understanding of nationalism.⁵ Nationalism as a concept is complex and therefore proves difficult to define, however in this dissertation it is understood as the bond between people from the same nation based on features such as a shared history, economy, culture, myths and desire for independence, which creates a sense of a common descent.⁶ As Neal Garnham discloses, in Irish sport these discussions of nationalism since the mid-nineteenth century have typically functioned along the identification of the Gaelic Games of hurling, camogie, football and handball, organised

¹ A. Bairner, 'Introduction', in A. Bairner (ed.), *Sport and the Irish: Histories, identities, issues*, (University College Dublin Press, Dublin, 2005), p.2.

² M. Cronin and B. Ó Conchubhair, 'Sport and the Irish', *Éire- Ireland*, Vol. 48 (2013), p.12.

³ E. Van Esbeck, *The Story of Irish Rugby*, (London: Stanley Paul and Co. Ltd., 1986); A. Bairner and J. Sugden, *Sport, Sectarianism and Society in a Divided Ireland*, (Leicester: Leicester University Press, 1993), p.9.

⁴ Bairner and Sugden, *Sport*, p.3.

⁵ Bairner and Sugden, *Sport*, p.44.

⁶ A. Triandafyllidou, 'National Identity and "Other"', *Ethnic and Racial Studies*, 21 (1998), p. 595.

through the Gaelic Athletics Association (GAA), as under the banner of being nationalist. In contrast, non-Gaelic games, the category which rugby falls into, are categorised as favoured by non-nationalists.⁷ Through the wider societal significance that sport is understood to have, these can therefore be correctly assumed to have influenced division in society, as well as reflecting the divisions.

Nationalism is based on the idea that there is something that the nation needs to distinguish itself from, with this 'significant other' often the thing that threatened or has prevented the nation from forming.⁸ In the context of Ireland the 'other' is understood to be Britain, as the nationalist GAA, was initiated in 1884 as a response to British influence in Irish culture and society. Although formed as a sporting association, its aims and popularity are seen to extend well beyond the confines of sport. Bairner and Sugden describe how it set out with a 'dual purpose', to promote Irish sports and pastimes, and to 'mobilise the mass population in the cause of a united and independent Ireland'.⁹ The ideal of nationalism, which will also be referred to as Irishness, that the GAA formulated was based on these aims, and became the dominant interpretation of nationalism demonstrated through the achievement of Irish Independence in 1919 and the central role GAA had in Irish society throughout the 20th century.¹⁰ Therefore rugby's history as a non-Gaelic game, and even more damning, as a sport that originated in Britain, meant it was not only seen to not fit with Irish nationalism, but exists as a reminder of the 'significant other' that almost prevented Irish independence being achieved.¹¹ By 2006, this can be seen to have prevailed in a less stringent form, however, the persisting restrictions imposed by the GAA which marginalised rugby and other 'foreign sports', and as Gemma Hussey noted in 1993, the continued 'element of the old national struggle and division' that existed within many of the major sports in Ireland, maintained these divisions.¹² However, with the rising popularity of rugby in this period, and its physical development these divisions came to be confronted. This presents a broad, brief and comprehensive explanation of the divisions in Irish sport and society, however, it is

⁷ N.Garnham, 'Rugby's Imperial Connections, Domestic Politics and Colonial Tours to Ireland before 1914', in Bairner (ed.), *Sport*, p.44.

⁸ Triandafyllidou, 'National', p. 594.

⁹ Bairner and Sugden, *Sport*, p.44.

¹⁰ G. Hussey, *Ireland Today: Anatomy of a Changing State*, (London: Penguin Group, 1993), p.448.

¹¹ Triandafyllidou, 'National', p. 594.

¹² Hussey, *Ireland*, p.446.

representative of the popular understandings of divisions in Ireland, and it is from this established basis of what nationalism means in Ireland, that discussion of rugby's relationship with it between 2006-2010 will be formed.

Although sport is seen as a means through which division is created, it is also understood as a means to challenge divisions.¹³ In the 2006-2010 period this work has focused on, the conclusion emerges that sport does challenge these divisions. The adapted interpretation of nationalism in Ireland not only sees an alignment between the GAA vision of nationalism and rugby, but also an acceptance that rugby too can be a valid vehicle for Irishness. This period provides an interesting window into the discussion of rugby and nationalism as over this four year period, the Irish rugby team were expelled from their home stadium, Lansdowne Road, due to the overwhelming need for physical redevelopment of this space. In the interim period rugby was played in the stronghold of GAA nationalism, Croke Park, whilst awaiting their return to the newly built Aviva Stadium. Over the course of the four years in which Irish rugby called these three different stadia 'home', the stereotypes and common associations of nationalism in rugby and the divisions between GAA and rugby were challenged through an unprecedented level of cooperation between the two codes, and the changing surroundings rugby was played in. The stadia are also understood to play a role in the discourse of Irish nationalism and rugby. Cues will be taken from the 'spatial turn' in humanities to inform this discussion particularly with regard to Henri Lefebvre's idea of 'representational space'. This sees analysis consider the meanings and symbols attached to the stadia, and understanding how these interacted with the sport played within them.¹⁴ The first chapter considers the departure from Lansdowne Road, which establishes how rugby was traditionally perceived, but also as demonstrating momentum for this to enter a new era of understanding. Next, the playing of rugby in Croke Park will be considered, which destabilized many of the dominant interpretations that had existed regarding Irish sport and nationalism. In this period not only are the divisions between rugby and GAA challenged, but rugby also gains recognition as a legitimate manifestation of its own version of Irish nationalism. Finally the transition into the

¹³ M. Cronin, *Sport and Nationalism in Ireland: Gaelic Games, Soccer and Irish Identity since 1884*, (Dublin: Four Courts Press, 1999), p. 190.

¹⁴ H. Lefebvre, *The Production of Space*, tr. Donald Nicholson-Smith (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1991), p.404.

brand new Aviva Stadium is considered, in which Irish rugby is tasked with transferring its new relationship with nationalism into a space where its previous relationship had existed for 130 years. Ultimately, by upsetting the traditional divisions of where rugby is played in Ireland we also see a challenge to how rugby is understood. What emerges from this study of newspaper reporting is a public consciousness of the expansion of what constituted nationalism in Ireland. This aligns with the work of Cronin who identifies nationalism in Ireland as functioning in a 'multi-faceted' manner, where multiple understandings of nationalism can exist and continuously interact and influence each other.¹⁵ Bairner and Gareth Fulton, also demonstrate this in their discussion of the abolishment of Rule 42 as a turning point in Irish nationalism.¹⁶ However, this dissertation discovers this in a new period, and through a focus on the reporting of the playing of rugby.

Rugby in this dissertation refers specifically to the men's Irish rugby union team, and the use of Ireland refers to the 26 counties which make up the Republic of Ireland. The Irish rugby team is one of only a few All-Ireland teams, which include players from north and south of the border. However, this piece is only concerned with the functioning of Irishness in the Republic, so therefore focus on nationalism in Northern Ireland is limited. This sport provides a male heavy interpretation, with the men's team as the focus in a sport dominated by males. However, as women's sport in this period is less well-known on the national and international stage, it would not prove as useful in discussions of national identity.¹⁷

Established authors such as Alan Bairner, Mike Cronin, Paul Rouse, Gemma Hussey, and Neal Garnham, whose work has already been touched on, feature as influential authors in discussions of nationalism in Irish society, and how this functions in Irish sport specifically. Their work proves vital in providing context and theories which are applied to the newspaper reporting. Nevertheless this study emerges as a unique examination of the partnership of sport, in this case rugby, and nationalism due to its critical engagement with the specific 2006-2010 period of development in Irish rugby history. Although the imminent destruction of the

¹⁵ M. Cronin, *Sport*, p.30.

¹⁶ A. Bairner and G. Fulton, 'Sport, Space and National Identity in Ireland: The GAA, Croke Park and Rule 42', *Space and Polity*, 11 (2007), p.57.

¹⁷ Bairner, 'Introduction', p.3.

old Lansdowne Road stadium saw histories of the grounds emerge which begin to consider this periodisation, none engage as critically with the evolution of nationalism during this three stadia movement of Irish rugby as this dissertation aims to do. Notable works include, Malachy Clerkin and Gerard Siggins', *Lansdowne Road: The Stadium; the Matches; the Greatest Days*, of 2010, and Edward Newman's, *Lansdowne Through the Years*, of 2006.¹⁸ The time period and focus of Clerkin and Siggins' work does in part cover this movement of rugby, however the focus remains largely on Lansdowne Road exclusively, whilst Newman's work ends at the beginning of the period considered in this work. This results in a particular dearth of material concerning the final transition for Irish rugby into the Aviva Stadium. Similarly, Paul Rouse's 2015 work, *Sport and Ireland: A History*, introduces the history of rugby up to the Aviva stadium, however his concern with all sport in Ireland, limits his engagement with the specifics of this move for rugby.¹⁹ Ultimately through combining the approaches of the more established critical work on nationalism in Irish sport, with this novel time periodisation, a new understanding emerges regarding the relationship between Irish nationalism and rugby, considered through the lens of newspaper reporting.

Due to the qualitative nature of newspaper reporting as a source base, attention will be paid to the language and sentiment of the reporting in order to assess the changes in the relationship between rugby and nationalism. There are often reservations about using newspapers as sources due to the highly subjective nature of their material and the 'tendency of publishers and editors to let their personal biases and partisanship influence the decision of what to print and what not to print'.²⁰ However, this is seen as a strength rather than a weakness in this work, as historian Jerry W. Knudson outlines:

history is concerned—or should be concerned—not only with what actually happened in any given time or place, but also with what people *thought* was

¹⁸ M. Clerkin and G. Siggins, *Lansdowne Road: The Stadium; the Matches; the Greatest Days*, (Dublin: The O'Brien Press, 2010); E. Newman, *Lansdowne Through the Years*, (Dublin, Hodder Headline, 2006).

¹⁹ P. Rouse, *Sport and Ireland: A History*, (Oxford University Press, 2015).

²⁰ J. Baumgartner, 'Newspapers as Historical Sources', *Philippine Quarterly of Culture and Society*, 9 (1981), p.256.

happening, as revealed to them through the means of mass communication, which may have conditioned their subsequent actions.²¹

Thus discussion in this dissertation will be led by what reporting focuses on and reveals, even if this may reflect a subjective interpretation of events, and will then be framed by relevant secondary literature. The use of newspapers allows us to understand the literature that was informing and reflecting contemporary popular opinion, which is of particular value when assessing what is the highly personal and emotive issue of nationalism.

The quantity of reporting that emerged in relation to this transient period in Irish rugby's history was enormous, and consequently this dissertation has narrowed in on the printed material of four major papers in the Republic of Ireland. When taken together they represent a variety of viewpoints and readership in Irish society, as well as maintaining large circulation figures, despite the falling popularity of print media in the four year period examined. The *Evening Herald*, now *The Herald*, and part of the Independent-group, employs a tabloid format, which is unique amongst the publications considered, with circulation in 2006 at 87,645, and in 2010 at 67,657.²² Also used were sister papers, the *Irish Independent* and *Sunday Independent*, which follow a compact and broadsheet format respectively, and are typically identified as demonstrating conservative opinions. As political analyst Heinz Brandenburg describes the *Irish Independent* is probably 'the only true national broadsheet, in that its readership is not concentrated in one particular region or city', with circulation figures of 162,582 in 2006 and 149,406 in 2010.²³ Weekly publication, the *Sunday Independent*, had the highest publication figures at 287,588 in 2006 and 268,140 in 2010.²⁴ Finally the *Irish Times*' reporting was also considered, which is a broadsheet best identified at

²¹J.W. Knudson, 'Late to the Feast: Newspapers as Historical Sources', <https://www.historians.org/publications-and-directories/perspectives-on-history/october-1993/late-to-the-feast> [accessed 10 April 2018].

²² 'Big Drop for the Evening Herald', <https://www.rte.ie/news/business/2006/0831/79847-abc/> [accessed 05 April 2018] ; 'Irish Evening Newspaper Circulation Jan June 2011', <http://www.ilevel.ie/media-blog/print/101831-irish-evening-newspaper-circulation-jan-june-2011> [accessed 05 April 2018].

²³ H. Brandenburg, 'Political Bias in the Irish Media: A Quantitative Study of Campaign Coverage during the 2002 General Election', *Irish Political Studies*, 20 (2005), p.300.

²⁴ 'Big Drop'; L. Slattery, 'Fall in Circulation for all of Republic's daily newspapers', <https://www.irishtimes.com/business/fall-in-circulation-for-all-of-republic-s-daily-newspapers-1.623745> [accessed 05 April 2018].

this time with a progressive, liberal middle-class audience and particularly respected amongst 'media and political elites', with circulation of 117,797 in 2006 and 106,926 in 2010.²⁵ Although talking about sport, the typical stances of these papers are interesting due to the highly politicised environment and significance that sport takes on in Ireland, especially between the GAA and the Irish Rugby Football Union (IRFU), which operates as the organising body for rugby in Ireland.²⁶ However, distinctions are not being made between the publications when referring to the coverage, and instead they are to be interpreted as a whole in order to give an overview of the range of reporting and opinions represented over this period. The reporting was approached by identifying key events in three of the stadia rugby played in during this time, and looking at the reporting in the month running up to the match and reporting in the month following. This ensured reporting included build-up and anticipation, as well as a period of hindsight and reflection regarding events. These snapshots of key moments in this journey for rugby in Ireland form the three chapters of this work, all focusing on either the first or last international rugby union matches played in each space. In total, over 400 articles were analysed, however only a small selection of these can be closely engaged with. Thus the articles included, and the trends of reporting discussed are selected as representative of the reporting as a whole.

There are clear limitations to this methodology through the highly selective nature of what sources are considered, and the inevitable exclusion of certain viewpoints and events. However by applying these boundaries, a more manageable source base emerges from the 'rainforests-worth' of writing on the topic, and one which can be seen to reflect popular opinion through the reach of these publications.²⁷ The value of the newspaper as a historical source was identified by Philip L. Graham, former publisher and co-owner of *The Washington Post*, as 'a first rough draft of history', and it is by piecing together numerous initial and contemporary 'draft[s]' we can determine how the relationship between rugby and nationalism was understood in this period.²⁸

²⁵ T. Garvin, 'The Irish Times: 150 Years of Influence by Terrence Brown'. *An Irish Quarterly Review*, 105 (2016), p.126; Brandenburg, 'Political', p.300; Slaterry, 'Fall'.

²⁶ Hussey, *Ireland*, p.446.

²⁷ Clerkin and Siggins, *Lansdowne*, p. 325.

²⁸ J. Shafer, 'Who said it first?', http://www.slate.com/articles/news_and_politics/press_box/2010/08/who_said_it_first.html [accessed 10 April 2018].

Chapter One: Lansdowne Road Era

The final rugby international staged in Lansdowne Road, in what had been the oldest continuous use rugby stadium in the world, was played against the Pacific Islanders on 26 November 2006. This was the concluding game in a match series against Southern hemisphere teams, the traditionally superior hemisphere for rugby, with the first match against South Africa on 11 November, and the second on 19 November against Australia. The victories for the Irish rugby team in these matches is further proof of the changing fortunes of Irish rugby, with a recognition of being in a 'golden era' for the sport.²⁹ The rebuilding of Lansdowne Road provided an opportunity for the relationship between rugby and nationalism to be re-evaluated as rugby took a break from the space, and therefore the history that had served as 'the epicentre of Irish rugby for 130 years'.³⁰

A clear thread that emerged from reporting was the cultivation of a stereotype of an Irish rugby fan as privileged and consisting of the upper echelons in society. Rugby supporters are referred to as 'alickadoos', the 'dollybird and prawn sandwich brigade', and supporters of 'rugger'.³¹ This draws on a well-established stereotype of rugby in Ireland identified by Hussey as 'solidly middle-class'.³² This characterisation emerged in the mid-19th century with the spread and popularity of rugby in Ireland facilitated by those who attended English boarding schools or English-style boarding schools in Ireland.³³ Sporting associations in Ireland were formed through an 'alliance of blood, land and commerce', and at the time of the inception of this stereotype those who were involved at the highest levels with 'land and commerce' were the wealthy British sympathisers in power, as opposed to those who supported Irish independence and nationalism who typically aligned with the GAA.³⁴ By 2006 rugby still retained an identity of a 'homogenous, middle class

²⁹ 'Time is Ripe for Ireland to take Grand Slam Claim', *Evening Herald* (hereafter *EH*), 17 Nov. 2006.

³⁰ Newman, *Lansdowne*, p.xvi.

³¹ 'It's worth tackling the cannibals', *Irish Independent* (hereafter *II*), 21 Nov. 2006; 'Battle of Lansdowne Road', *II*, 12 Dec. 2006; 'Rugger Receipts Blooming', *Sunday Independent* (hereafter *SI*), 05 Nov. 2006

³² G. Hussey, *Ireland*, p.457.

³³ L. O'Callaghan, 'Rugby Football and Identity Politics in Free State Ireland', *Éire- Ireland*, Vol. 48 (2013), p.150; A. Bairner, 'Irish Sports', in J. Cleary and C. Connolly (ed.), *The Cambridge Companion to Modern Irish Culture*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005) p.193.

³⁴ P. Rouse, 'Sport and Ireland', *Sport*, A. Bairner (ed.), p.20.

sport'.³⁵ This emerged from its association with wealth and British colonial power can be seen as an essential element of its exclusion from the ideal of nationalism supported by the GAA.³⁶ The term 'alickadoo' is a derogatory Irish term used to describe its rugby contingent, and 'rugger' is a British word for rugby.³⁷ This language highlights how the stereotype surrounding rugby not only still sees the sport as the preserve of the wealthy, but still seen to have British links, and therefore as continuing to challenge the Irish-centric interpretation of nationalism that the GAA supports.

The discrepancies between the GAA and rugby supporter in reporting is exemplified in a piece by Kevin Myers in the *Irish Independent* titled, 'It's worth tackling the cannibals to witness a rugby win in Croke'. In this he writes in a jocular tone about the prospect of this rugby stereotype mixing with the GAA stereotype, further differentiating rugby identity from what fulfils the ideal of GAA nationalism:

It is true that, for many of the alickadoos, this will be the first time they have entered that part of Dublin; they will probably be agreeably surprised not to be boiled in a pot by the natives and served with curried chips to the local bare-footed urchins.

Although this clearly relies on the use for hyperbole, the sensationalised language allows further understanding of the intense division that is believed to exist between rugby and GAA fans in Ireland. The comparison between the description of 'alickadoos' for rugby fans, and 'natives' and 'bare-footed urchins' for GAA fans demonstrates a vast gulf between them. He also demonstrates how the cultural and social differences between the two groups operates as a geographical divide too, as he refers to the GAA's 'scrawny residents of Dublin 7' in comparison to the rugby fans who are 'stout burghers of Sandycove and Monkstown'. Rugby fans are seen as inhabiting an entirely separate physical space, which represents their wealth and even gluttony, with the rugby fans seen as 'stout' due to their

³⁵ Rouse, *Sport*, p.187.

³⁶ Rouse, *Sport*, p.187.

³⁷ 'Alickadoo', <https://en.oxforddictionaries.com/definition/alickadoo> [accessed 15 April 2018]; 'Rugger', <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/rugger> [accessed 15 April 2018].

financial prosperity, and reflected in their exclusive addresses of Sandycove and Monkstown, compared to the 'scrawny residents' of Dublin 7 who identify with GAA.³⁸ This is even further entrenched by the location of the sports' headquarters, with rugby's at Lansdowne Road in 'Dublin 4, one of the most valuable regions of real estate in Europe', whereas GAA is found in Dublin 3, where the locals are characterised as potential 'cannibals'..³⁹ However, with the temporary closure of Lansdowne Road for renovations and rugby to be played in Croke Park, the physical separation is removed and these cultures are to be brought face-to-face. There is comedic value to be found in the prospect of this. One article notes the hilarity of 'Ross O'Carroll Kelly sharing bar space with a life-long GAA devotee from the wilds of the county Kerry', due to the 'language barrier' and 'clash of cultures' in such an encounter. This also reinforces division between these groups at this point of our periodisation, as the cartoon embodiment of the Southside rugby stereotype, Ross O'Carroll Kelly, a creation of the *Sunday Times*, and the devout GAA supporter emerging from the GAA diaspora, are not even understood to inhabit the same Irish culture, as well as demonstrating that spatial divisions exist beyond Dublin too.⁴⁰ Taken as a whole these stereotypes encourage a perception of rugby and GAA as polarised, not only in their relationships with Irish nationalism, but in the lived experience of those who support rugby and GAA too. This prevents them from being able to inhabit the same understanding of nationalism as the tenant of common descent which informs nationalism is seen to be missing in this reporting.⁴¹ However, reporting also demonstrated a sense of momentum to overcome these divisions emerging through the progress of the country as facilitated by the Celtic Tiger and wider social change. This is seen in the heralding of a new stadium for rugby, and with this comes the potential for rugby to not only change physically in this period, but also in its position in Ireland.

Descriptions of the Lansdowne Road stadium such as a, 'grotty, eastern-bloc monstrosity', 'the crumbling old place', 'dilapidated old ground', 'crumbling concrete edifice', and having 'outlived its usefulness', demonstrate how the stadium was out of touch with the Ireland

³⁸ 'It's worth tackling the cannibals'.

³⁹ 'Few Tears Shed', *EH*, 22 Nov. 2006; 'It's worth tackling the cannibals'.

⁴⁰ 'Few Tears Shed'.

⁴¹ Triandafyllidou, 'National', p. 595.

emerging around it.⁴² Especially as Rouse claims rugby was the main professionally franchised sport in Ireland and therefore needed a stadium that matched its importance.⁴³ In articles where this Dublin antique, is seen to exist alongside ‘the city [which] was bristling with cranes’, and that during ‘idle moments at Lansdowne Road you can look out over the South Terrace and survey the row of cranes with their blinking red lights’, it is easy to see how Lansdowne, physically and conceptually was incompatible with the momentum that is ‘helping to build what we like to call the New Ireland’.⁴⁴ This ‘New Ireland’ is of course the outcome of the economic prosperity that Ireland enjoyed at the height of the Celtic Tiger between the mid-1990s until the recession of the late 2000s. As one article muses, ‘perhaps it was inevitable that the Celtic Tiger would eventually sign the stadium’s death warrant, the country now awash with the millions needed to build the purpose-built arena’.⁴⁵ As Rouse concurs, the power of the Celtic Tiger soon made its way into the sporting world in Ireland and there were huge investments in sports in the country, including towards the rebuilding of the old Lansdowne Road stadium. In total, between 2002 and 2011 €2.05 billion was spent by the Sports Council, formed in 1999, towards sports, with an additional €114 million provided for the renovations at Croke Park not included in this figure.⁴⁶ It was no surprise that Lansdowne Road was targeted with funds as it had become increasingly clear that the structure as it stood in 2006 was no longer adequate, not just structurally, but as the vision of Ireland that was projected nationally and internationally through the popular sport of rugby. As Siggins and Clerkin outline, ‘the thing with a stadium that becomes the focal point of a country a few days each year is what goes on within its walls must reflect something of the state and the nation beyond them’.⁴⁷ It was noted that there was a ‘growing sense of shame that such a dowdy shack could be our sporting face to the world in the early years of the 21st century’ and ‘it’s as if the old rudimentary stadium is a bit embarrassing to us’.⁴⁸ The image of this outdated stadium

⁴² ‘Few Tears Shed’; ‘Bring on the new Lansdowne Road’, *Irish Times* (hereafter *IT*), 20 Nov. 2006; ‘Nostalgia to Rule’, *IT*, 25 Nov. 2006; ‘Misty-eyed farewell to a dump that doubled as the field of our dreams’, *II*, 20 Nov. 2006; ‘Goodnight, Lansdowne’, *SI*, 19 Nov. 2006.

⁴³ Rouse, *Sport*, p.314.

⁴⁴ ‘There are some things you can’t buy’, *II*, 16 Dec. 2006; ‘Sparkling Irish in comfort zone’, *SI*, 12 Nov. 2006.

⁴⁵ ‘Misty-eyed farewell’.

⁴⁶ Rouse, *Sport*, p.314,318-9.

⁴⁷ Clerkin and Siggins, *Lansdowne*, p.11.

⁴⁸ ‘Sun Sets on old tired stadium’, *SI*, 26 Nov. 2006; ‘Unpretentious Lansdowne will remain in our hearts’, *SI*, 26 Nov. 2006.

projected worldwide was seen to no longer reflect the physically modernising Ireland, and in this process of aligning the stadium with the 'New Ireland' of this period, the divisions of Irish society would also be modernised.

The new proposed stadium was much more appropriate for modern Ireland, as 'from the rubble will rise a paeon to 21st-century sports stadia', a 'state-of-the-art 50,000-seater stadium', an 'expensive piece of infrastructure', equipped with, 'gleaming corporate boxes (lots of them), as well as pristine toilets, fancy restaurants and giant video screens', all at the cost of €365m.⁴⁹ However it was also noted that with this redevelopment will come a change far beyond the physical structure rugby plays in. One article notes that 'within its must grey walls lay some of our most cherished sporting memories and sense of who we were', whilst another states that 'this year's model may be more comfortable and more in demand, but it will never quite have the same resonance'.⁵⁰ There is a sense of departure not just physically for rugby, but from the 'resonance and 'sense of who we were' that dominated the sport for so long. The difference between the old structure, and proposed new structure is almost incomparable, and with that in mind the scope of which rugby could change is also enormous. This momentum for transformation in all aspects was generally welcomed, as one article surmises, 'the old Lansdowne is gone. Long live the new'.⁵¹

So it is with this impetus for physical change, and a realisation that there will be a conceptual adjustment too, that Irish rugby takes its leave from Lansdowne Road and marches towards a period of modification. This therefore informs the first step towards our conclusion of an acceptance on a national and formalised scale of the existence and interplay of different interpretations of nationalism, which are not necessarily as polarised as early use of stereotypes in reporting would suggest.

⁴⁹ 'World Cup isn't a pipe dream', *EH*, 24 Nov. 2006; 'Misty-eyed farewell'.

⁵⁰ 'Sun sets on old tired stadium'; 'Unpretentious Lansdowne will remain in our hearts'.

⁵¹ 'Bring on the new Lansdowne Road', *IT*, 20 Nov. 2006.

Chapter Two: The Croke Park Era

Rugby in Croke Park commenced with the annual Six Nations tournament, where Ireland suffered a disappointing loss against France on 11 February 2007, and played England on 24 February, resulting in one of the most iconic wins of Irish rugby history. These matches appeared as a historic turning point in the GAA history with the lifting of Rule 42 in anticipation, and the commentary surrounding them demonstrates a turning point in the comprehension of nationalism in Ireland.

As already seen the GAA and rugby were traditionally regarded as opposing sports, which continued to dominate the stereotype of both codes' supporters. This, as already explained, had been based on the contrasting relationships with nationalism these sports had, with the GAA conceived as a specifically Irish sport and culture, and rugby seen as a reminder of colonial days. Limitations introduced between 1901-1911 served to further remove Irish rugby from nationalism, such as rules preventing spectators attending, partaking or socialising with what were known as 'garrison games', identified as rugby, hockey, cricket and football amongst others, or they risk the ability to partake in GAA sports.⁵² Many of these still existed by the time of the redevelopment of Lansdowne Road, with Rule 42 standing in the way of playing rugby in Croke Park, despite having at this stage allowed American football matches and concerts to have occurred in this space. This stated that, 'grounds controlled by Association units shall not be used or permitted to be used, for horse racing, greyhound racing, or for field games other than those sanctioned by Central Council'.⁵³ Bairner and Fulton in their comprehensive genealogy of the debate surrounding the reconfiguration of Rule 42, see its relaxing as a key turning point in the creation of a modern Irish nationalism, as its control over the ground had served to reinforce the traditional nationalism that had existed within the GAA.⁵⁴ This supports the findings of this work which agrees that a new understanding of nationalism emerges through the Croke Park alliance with rugby, however

⁵² Rouse, *Sport*, p. 210.

⁵³ GAA, *Official Guide 2003*, 2003, <https://web.archive.org/web/20110816230315/http://gaelicfootball.eusu.ed.ac.uk/documents/GAA%20Official%20Guide%202003.pdf>, [accessed 08 April 2018].

⁵⁴ Bairner and Fulton, 'Sport', p.69.

in this dissertation the focus instead is on the actual playing of rugby and the discussion that emerges in the media surrounding this.

Evident in reporting was a perceived normality in the overlap of fans and players between the two sports. In anticipation for the French match it was predicted that, 'many of those in the stadium tomorrow will be the same public that turned out for last week's national league match between Dublin and Tyrone', as well as 'every man who ever followed Munster Rugby is probably as familiar with Croke Park as he is with Lansdowne Road'.⁵⁵ Munster rugby serves as a particularly important example of this easy cultural and geographical crossover as it is explained that 'in Cork and Kerry and Limerick and other independent republics of Munster, rugby has never been considered a foreign game, just a different one', something which Rouse confirms as he notes that by the end of the 19th century many of those who engaged with rugby in Munster were also proud nationalists.⁵⁶ The statistic repeated in reporting was that '85% of the GAA's premium ticket holders took up their option to buy tickets for the rugby games', which further demonstrates people's abilities to move between the codes.⁵⁷ The affinity between rugby and GAA appears particularly strong as the 'the take-up for the soccer matches was 40 and 50pc', compared to the much more significant 85% for rugby.⁵⁸ This kinship exists in comparison to the earlier reporting on the departure from Lansdowne Road which presented an incompatibility between the sports and their supporters. Further, the playing of rugby in Croke Park also brought attention to those involved in the playing and organisation of the sports who moved between codes. Rugby player Shane Horgan is noted to have 'scored the Triple Crown try against England last year', but also 'has an All-Ireland minor football medal for Meath', Geordan Murphy 'could have done ditto as a hurler', and Denis Leamy is another 'who would fit into the category of a rugby player who grew up in a GAA household'.⁵⁹ This transition does not only go one way, as Eamon de Valera, one of the most prominent figures in the Irish nationalist movement and founder of Fianna Fáil, known as 'The Republican Party', was known to have been a 'fanatical rugby fan' and as having

⁵⁵ 'As Croker goes ecumenical, the real enemy now facing the GAA', *II*, 10 Feb, 2007; 'History and Ireland move forward as Croke Park opens up its gates', *SI*, 11 Feb, 2007.

⁵⁶ 'History and Ireland move forward as Croke Park opens up its gates'; Rouse, *Sport*, p.279.

⁵⁷ 'Records tumble in Croke Park sell-out', *SI*, 28 Jan. 2007.

⁵⁸ 'Ticket price for England Croke clash to hit €2k', *EH*, 06 Feb. 2007.

⁵⁹ 'There's more than one Irish identity the GAA realizes', *II*, 6 February 2007; 'In the eye of the storm', *SI*, 18 Feb. 2007.

‘publicly lamented that the GAA wouldn’t allow him to go to watch international rugby matches’.⁶⁰ It is also noted that ‘the GAA’s founder, Michael Cusack, actually played rugby 10 years before he sat down in Hayes’s hotel to navigate the way forward for Gaelic games’.⁶¹ As well as contemporary Ulster Council chairman for GAA, Michael Greenan, a vocal opponent of the repeal of Rule 42 is reported to have ‘dabbled in soccer and rugby during his playing days’.⁶² The ease with which people were acknowledged to be able to move between both codes demonstrates that the apparently polarised nationalisms that these sports were suggested to have in the previous chapter in reality is largely untrue. It appears that in the daily life of so many Irish this rumoured contrariety between rugby and GAA actually did not feature as an issue for them, and as Bairner acknowledged ‘it is relatively easy for citizens of the Irish Republic, especially men, to move between different sports’.⁶³ Thus, this period of change in the space where rugby was played, and the interest this provoked in reporting helped to bring this reality into the public’s knowledge, and in a way which formalised its existence. Reporting is self-reflective of its role in doing this, as one article states that this brought national and international attention to ‘the realisation that supporters unlike administrators, switch codes easily’.⁶⁴

Not only did reporting reveal an affinity between the nationalisms that rugby and GAA were perceived to represent, but it also legitimised the nationalism which Irish rugby embodied. These matches demonstrated that rugby could be an equally successful, if not superior vehicle for channelling Irish nationalism in sport and in Croke Park. The opportunity that this accommodation of rugby provided for the English to be beaten on ‘Croke park’s sacred turf’ of GAA and Irish nationalism clearly demonstrated a symbolism surrounding the match which extended beyond winning a rugby game.⁶⁵ Croke Park as a space had deep-rooted links with nationalism through its history and symbolism of the massacre of Bloody Sunday, and where the stands include the Cusack stand after Michael Cusack and Hill 16 called such after the 1916 Rising. The importance of this space elevated this match to a significance not seen in all

⁶⁰ ‘Gone from Bloody Sunday to playing ball at Croke Park’, *SI*, 18 Feb. 2007.

⁶¹ ‘Brothers in Arms’, *SI*, 11 Feb. 2007.

⁶² GAA break own rules by opening Croke Park before Lansdowne work starts’, *II*, 26 Jan. 2007.

⁶³ Bairner, ‘Irish Sports’, p.196.

⁶⁴ ‘As Croker goes ecumenical the real enemy facing the GAA’.

⁶⁵ ‘Gone from Bloody Sunday to playing ball at Croke Park’.

the other encounters between England and Ireland in Dublin. The language surrounding the match clearly acknowledges a symbolism for dealing with the legacy and feelings towards England in Ireland, as England served as the main antagonist for the resentment towards British colonialism. Frequent reference to the English team as the 'old enemy' or 'auld enemy', demonstrates the deeper significance attached to this match, in which the old adversary and suppressor could be faced.⁶⁶ Further, the language attached to the convincing victory Ireland secured over England presented a sense that this win meant more than most. Portrayals of Ireland's 43-13 victory included descriptions of England as 'pummelled', 'annihilated', 'steamrolled', 'wiped off the face of Croke Park', and the militaristic language of, 'English chariots go home battered', and 'two mighty armies doing battle'.⁶⁷ There is no denying the voracity in the sentiment attached to this language use, and this can be seen as indicative of Ó Conchubhair's supposition that international sports allows Ireland the ability to overcome its former master, which allows for people to unite and celebrate the nation on an international stage.⁶⁸ The opportunity that rugby provided through the international competitors it engages with, a prospect that GAA does not have, allowed for the context and history that Croke Park symbolises in terms of the Anglo-Irish connection to be utilised in a celebration of Irish nationalism. Bairner and Sugden outlined that Ireland has always used sport to distinguish itself from their former masters.⁶⁹ This has long been identified with the GAA, however here we see rugby doing this successfully and in a more direct manner than GAA potentially can.

Although nationalism is seen to have been inspired in many ways through the normative symbols of Irishness, of which Croke Park is one, there are also those specific to rugby which have provided another means through which the Irishness that rugby represents can be seen as legitimate. Playing in Croke Park, the singing of 'Amhrán na bhFiann', the Republic of Ireland's national anthem, and the flying of the Tricolour are the common tropes of Irish

⁶⁶ Such as; 'Brilliance at Croke reminiscent of '64', *EH*, 23 March 2007; 'Auld Enemy's visit sets Ireland a definitive test of its maturity', *IT*, 24 Feb. 2007; 'This was our "thanks" to GAA says O'Driscoll', *SI*, 25 Feb. 2007.

⁶⁷ 'English chariots go home battered', *EH*, 26 Feb. 2007; 'Croker Clash drew record TV crowd', *II*, 27 Feb. 2007; 'Happiness is... Ireland 43 England 13', *SI*, 25 Feb. 2007; 'Irish tide lead onto fortune', *SI*, 25 Feb. 2007; 'Aggression the key to phone again Ireland', *SI*, 25 Feb. 2007; 'Victory tinged with regret as Slam stays out of reach', *SI*, 25 Feb. 2007.

⁶⁸ Ó Conchubhair, B., 'Trying Irish in the Free State', *Eire-Ireland*, 48 (2013), p.10.

⁶⁹ Bairner and Sugden, *Sport*, p.61.

nationalism, and ones that are used by the GAA too. However as Jason Tuck contends, the IRFU presents its own version of Irishness, which although uses some of these features, also has its own unique elements. This of course emerges from the fact that this is an All-Ireland team, and therefore what informs GAA Irishness is not applicable for a team that also includes players from Northern Ireland. Compromise regarding which symbols were to be used in rugby fixtures have a tense history, but by 2007 the IRFU had adopted its own flag featuring symbols from each of the four provinces of Ireland, and an All-Ireland anthem named 'Ireland's Call', but that when they played in Dublin the tricolour and Irish national anthem would play.⁷⁰ As the match was played in Dublin the tricolour and 'Amhrán na bhFiann', or 'The Soldier's Song' as it is known in English were played, which further emphasises the spatialised functioning of Irish nationalism in Ireland. These normative symbols, although always seen to encourage national pride, were seen to function even more potently when attached to this important rugby moment. Reporting notes this and coverage includes, 'Paul O'Connell, John Hayes and Jerry Flannery crying as they belted out 'Amhran na BhFiann' [which] triggered plenty of other tear ducts in the 82,000 crowd', and "*Amhrán na bhFiann* has never received a lustier rendition'.⁷¹ Not only did rugby inspire an unseen level of nationalism through the traditional anthem of Ireland, but also through their own All-Ireland anthem, which was only sang in Croke Park as a result of rugby's involvement with the stadium. Reports include "*Amhrán na bhFiann* and *Ireland's Call* where belted out with such hair-raising intensity that men and women were crying as they sang' and reference to the 'hair raising cry of anthems fills Croker with pride and joy'.⁷² Even more interestingly, there was a sense of national pride conveyed in the reporting towards the singing of 'God Save the Queen' in Croke Park. Hearing the foe's anthem was even seen to intensify feelings of Irish nationalism, "it was when God save the Queen was finally sung in Croke Park that the history of the place came alive' and that 'it was a mere splash beside the tidal wave of Amhrán na bhFiann'.⁷³ The range of symbols for Irishness, beyond what was traditionally understood as Irish, demonstrated how a plurality of Irish nationalism functioned in this space and period.

⁷⁰ J. Tuck, 'Rugby Union and National Identity Politics', in Alan Bairner (ed.), *Sport*, (University College Dublin Press, Dublin, 2005), p.11.

⁷¹ 'Emotions ran high and soon Ireland would be running riot', *II*, 26 Feb. 2007; 'Ireland's Call', *II*, 26 Feb. 2007.

⁷² 'Hair-raising cry of anthems fills Croker with pride and joy', *IT*, 24 Feb. 2007.

⁷³ 'Occasion will stay in the mind a long time', *IT*, 26 Feb. 2007 'Players thank GAA in best way possible', *II*, 26 Feb. 2007.

The symbols used in the match demonstrated this emergence of a new understanding of Irishness, which represented a pluralised interpretation.

The reporting on the events proves those who thought 'English rugby boots on Croke as representative of 800 years' was likely to undermine Irish nationalism as incorrect, as it appears it was celebrated and expanded.⁷⁴ The reflections that reporting provides towards these momentous developments demonstrates how this period constituted a new understanding of Irish rugby and nationalism that as Cronin, Fulton and Bairner concur was a nationalism that reflected a modern Ireland and demonstrated a number of interpretations of nationalism that could benefit from and influence each other.⁷⁵ Although Cronin first suggested this interpretation in 1999, this did not exist as the truth and norm in Irish nationalism until this moment of highly publicised discourse surrounding the diversification of concept, and which allowed a very significant public demonstration of a privately evolving mindset.

Reporting clearly recognises this point that the playing of rugby in Croke Park expanded what was deemed as an acceptable interpretation of Irishness. Declarations that this period publicised included that, 'there's more than one Irish identity, as the GAA realises', that 'the GAA cannot claim proprietorship of Irishness' and that with the first rugby match to be played in Croke Park 'one of the great shibboleths' in Irish society will be invalidated; 'that Irishness only has one identity'.⁷⁶ Beyond just recognising this transition, the language used in conjunction with this realisation demonstrates the perceived importance of this transition for the fabric of Irish nationalism and society. It is stated that 'Ireland's Great Wall of sporting sectarianism has finally been breached' and 'the climate for sports apartheid had blown itself out'. The references to a 'Great Wall', 'sporting sectarianism' and a 'sporting apartheid', proves the extent to which these were seen to be polarised, and how far-reaching this change

⁷⁴ 'Calm down, lads, you do realise it's only a game?', *SI*, 18 Feb, 2007.

⁷⁵ Cronin, *Sport*, p.190; Bairner and Fulton, 'Sport', p.69.

⁷⁶ 'There's more than one Irish identity, as the GAA realises', *II*, 6 Feb. 2007.

in sport will infiltrate the framework of society too.⁷⁷ The language demonstrates a passionate and hopeful tone in the future that this holds for Ireland as a nation. This significance of this is seen in creating a nationalism that better aligns with modern Ireland, which Bairner and Fulton identify in the overturning of Rule 42, and this dissertation identifies in the enactment of this overhaul.⁷⁸ This is identified in reporting with comments such as, this ‘transformed a rugby match into a national occasion’, ‘it has become bigger than sport. It has become news, politics, sociology. Tomorrow it will be social history. It will be advanced as a symbol of the changing island’ and that ‘today’s match is a celebration of sporting ecumenism and a small stepping stone in the growth of this nation’.⁷⁹

The importance of these developments is located in so much more than simply providing an alternative venue for a sport in need, or even bridging the gap between rugby and GAA. This is a major development in the growth of the Irish nation as a whole and this moment provides Ireland with a new understanding of nationalism going forward and with it a new maturity in a nation having accepted and dealt with its past.

Chapter Three: Aviva Stadium Era

With the move back to its starting point of Dublin 4, but now in the guise of the Aviva Stadium, rugby faced another challenge. Difficulty arose when trying to balance the progress made through the period of Croke Park’s hospitality, which saw nationalism accepted and interacting in a new manner; and avoiding reverting to how nationalism had previously operated for rugby on this site, as explained in Chapter One. The reporting around Ireland’s loss to South Africa on 6 November 2010, provides an insight into how Irish rugby made this transition in the final stage of its four year journey.

Notable in the reporting surrounding this transition for Irish rugby, is the persistent use of the words ‘home’ and ‘homecoming’. This was a common occurrence throughout reporting, and

⁷⁷ ‘There’s more than one Irish identity, as the GAA realises’; ‘History and Ireland move forwards as Croker opens its gates’, *SI*, 11 Feb, 2007.

⁷⁸ Bairner and Fulton, ‘Sport’, p.57.

⁷⁹ ‘Sporting Apartheid abandoned and at last we’re normal’, *SI*, 11 Feb, 2007; ‘History and Ireland move forward as Croker opens its Gates’.

descriptors such as ‘swanky revamped southside home’, ‘kind homecoming’ and ‘glorious homecoming’ were used to further emphasise how this was Irish rugby returning to where it belonged.⁸⁰ Whilst this is perhaps not surprising, as the arrangement between the IRFU and GAA was only ever temporary, the suggestion that emerges through this language is that of coming back to where they belong, and with this appears the threat of not only seeing the move as temporary but the changes endured as temporary too. Reporting appears to confirm these suspicions through commenting on how this sentiment also appeared in official channels of Irish rugby. This was seen in revelations such as ‘a specially commissioned light and pyrotechnic display with the theme “Rugby is Coming Home” will take place before kick-off at 5.30pm’, a quote from Irish captain Brian O’Driscoll stating “‘this is where we belong... this is the home of Irish rugby’”, and the account that, “‘like coming home,” was how Declan Kidney [Head Coach] summed up the experience of Ireland returning to Lansdowne Road after three years in exile’.⁸¹ Language use such as ‘exile’ and ‘where we belong’, demonstrates how Irish rugby had been through a period of limbo, and whilst it was upset to the status quo that facilitated a new understanding of nationalism, the move to their ‘expensive new home’ operates as a potential threat to this newfound understanding of nationalism and rugby.⁸² As one article summarises, the Aviva is ‘the new version of what is an old memory’, and whilst it may be new, the existence of any ‘memory’ risks a return to old habits in this space.⁸³ This presented a risk of reverting back to the former support base of rugby, whose shared ideals of nationalism created around divisions of money, class, power and identity influenced by rugby’s British foundation in Ireland, had seen rugby understood as a game enjoyed by those of doubtful national character.⁸⁴

These fears are realised in reporting of the ‘ticket fiasco’, that dominated the move into the Aviva Stadium.⁸⁵ ‘The Rugby Ticket Rip-Off’ as one article designates it, saw the IRFU demand ‘whopping’ and ‘outrageous’ sums for tickets to the first matches in the new Aviva Stadium

⁸⁰ ‘IRFU given a harsh lesson in economics’, *EH*, 03 November 2010; ‘Kidney has a strong hand for a kind homecoming’, *IT*, 03 Nov. 2010; ‘Tickets Fiasco’, *Evening Herald*, 05 Nov. 2010.

⁸¹ ‘No sign of last-minute ticket scrum as game not a sell-out’, *II*, 06 Nov. 2010; ‘Kidney Brews his own storm’, *EH*, 06 Nov. 2010; ‘Kidney to stick with tried and trusted for Boks battle’, *II*, 03 Nov. 2010.

⁸² ‘IRFU given harsh lesson in economics’.

⁸³ ‘Kidney Brews his own storm’.

⁸⁴ Rouse, *Sport*, p.141, 216.

⁸⁵ ‘IRFU rue ticket fiasco as fans are priced out’, *SI*, 07 Nov., 2010.

and as a result demonstrated a ‘total disconnect between the IRFU and its members’.⁸⁶ As one article outlines the prices for the four games, as the initial scheme saw that tickets had to be bought in bundles of four, ‘started at €425 for premium level, €340 for the stand and a whopping €135 for schoolboys- a hike of 25 per cent on last year’s youth tickets at Croke Park’.⁸⁷ The articles demonstrate a clear contempt and disbelief at this strategy by the IRFU, and exhibit that when removed from the space which challenged the stereotypes of nationalism and forced collaboration, this emerging understanding of nationalism does not operate as seamlessly. Instead, a return to a reliance on the old rugby stereotype occurs, where support was in part determined on the basis of wealth. In 2010, when the country is ‘in the middle of the darkest recession in more than 70 years’, unlike the prosperity that existed in 2006, when rugby last subsisted in this space, this was especially divisive.⁸⁸

Instead, the section of society that reporting identifies as being able to partake in this new dawn for Irish rugby encourages a sense of déjà-vu to the reporting of the Lansdowne Road Stadium days of rugby and othering of rugby’s embodiment of nationalism. This is despite the acknowledged growth of the support base for rugby, as the IRFU’s annual report for 2010-2011 outlines. Their research had shown 2.1 million Irish people came to describe themselves as rugby fans, of which more than 900,000 would call themselves ‘avid fans’, with the proportion of Irish men describing themselves as rugby fans was identified at three quarters.⁸⁹ With Ireland’s population estimated to be 4,470,700 in April 2010, this meant that almost half of Ireland’s population was a rugby fan, as the IRFU understood it.⁹⁰ It is clear therefore, that rugby had a broad appeal before its return to Dublin 4, however the strategies adopted upon return are seen as alienating many of the new, as well as existing fanbase. Reporting identifies the effects of the prices as making ‘rugby the preserve of the wealthy’, attended ‘by those who can afford to go rather than those who want to go’, and that ‘you’d want to be a big fan

⁸⁶ ‘The Rugby Ticket Rip-Off’, *IT*, 25 Oct. 2010; ‘IRFU rue ticket fiasco as fans are priced out’; ‘Donncha feels Fan Pain’, *EH*, 08 Nov. 2010; ‘Tickets Fiasco’.

⁸⁷ ‘IRFU rue ticket fiasco as fans are priced out’.

⁸⁸ ‘The Rugby Ticket Rip-Off’.

⁸⁹ IRFU, *IRFU Annual Report 2010/2011*, (2011), http://www.irishrugby.ie/irfu/annual_reports.php [accessed 08 April 2018] p.20.

⁹⁰ Central Statistics Office, ‘Population and Migration Estimates, April 2010’, 2010 <http://www.cso.ie/en/media/csoie/releasespublications/documents/population/current/popmig.pdf> [accessed 08 April 2018].

with big pockets to shell out such sums'.⁹¹ As George Hook, a rugby broadcaster is quoted as saying, "'trying to bundle the tickets as a package of four in the current economic climate was outrageous and made the IRFU look greedy and grasping, and made the sport look middle-class'".⁹² This draws specific memories of Hussey's description of the 'the rugby community seen as solidly middle-class', which was used in reference to the pre-Croke Park era.⁹³ This period appears to be further framed by the same characterisations and limitations of rugby that had existed in the Lansdowne Road Stadium period, as there is a return of the term 'alickadoo' to describe those able to attend rugby in this space. Whilst this term now appears alongside the 'new disciples from the "sticks"', who also want to attend the matches, the now 'fur-lined alickadoos' are still an important feature amongst the rugby Irishness.⁹⁴ However, this reliance on a certain group in society, which sees an alienation of the support of many others, now comes with a new warning. The consequence of exclusionary practice saw that in the new 50,000 capacity Aviva stadium, attendance only reached 35,517, seen as an 'embarrassing situation for the IRFU given that 75,000 attended last year's fixture at Croke Park'.⁹⁵ Already the expansion and acceptance of nationalism that had emerged through the unique situation that rugby in Croke Park had created, had been somewhat limited. In order to continue with the momentum that had been gathered, and for rugby to maintain its position in Irish society the IRFU and rugby in general needed to remain open to all.

However, the almost immediate recognition of this ticket strategy as threatening a return to the old ways of rugby, and the reporting on how this is recognised amongst those running the union demonstrates how it is possible for the future of rugby to be put back on track. The problem is identified as existing within the organisation of the IRFU, but with fan support still prevalent. The IRFU is seen to make an 'unprecedented climbdown', 'humiliating climbdown', 'the biggest climbdown in its 131-year history' and to have eaten 'a large dollop of humble pie', which saw a review of their ticket pricing strategy.⁹⁶ There is an 'unprecedented' novelty

⁹¹ 'Tickets Fiasco'; 'The Rugby Ticket Rip-Off'; 'Search Party for solution to Ireland's problems', *SI*, 24 Oct. 2010.

⁹² 'Rugby Ticket Rip-Off'.

⁹³ Hussey, *Ireland*, p.457.

⁹⁴ 'IRFU given a harsh lesson in economics'.

⁹⁵ 'Letting Supporters bring drinks out to their seats might be considered', *IT*, 08 Nov. 2010; 'Don't Desert Us', *II*, 03 Nov. 2010.

⁹⁶ 'Tickets Fiasco'; 'Trying times for rugby as fans vote with their feet', *II*, 08 November 2010; 'IRFU climb down over ticketing error', *IT*, 02 Nov. 2010; 'Cheaper Tickets will come at a price', *SI*, 05 Dec. 2010.

that reporting identifies in the union having admitted its mistakes, where it traditionally had 'never done humility or remorse'.⁹⁷ This demonstrates a sense of hope in reporting that rugby will ensure it remains open to all, and therefore continue its new central position in Irish society. The appetite for watching the sport, and therefore engaging with its nationalism is still identifiable throughout society according to reporting, as it is noted that 'thousands of fans voted with their feet on Saturday and watched Ireland's 23-21 defeat in pubs and at home' and the 'sojourn to Croke Park proved an appetite for more than 30,000 more seats'.⁹⁸ Thus it can be seen that there was a return to the physical exclusion which had operated in rugby, upon the initial use of the Aviva stadium. However, there is an appetite for rugby still throughout society and the new stadium is described as 'fantastic, jaw-dropping and beautiful. It is something to be immensely proud of. It is set to be the cornerstone of the future of Irish rugby'.⁹⁹ Should the union get in line with the other modernised aspects of the sport and its culture, then rugby will no doubt remain as a central feature in the story of Irish nationalism.

Conclusion

Nationalism has always been a potent and loaded concept in Ireland, where centuries of subjugation had engendered an understanding of nationalism heavily based on the promotion of a distinctly Irish culture and symbols. This created a sporting culture where games were politicised and loaded with significance, more than can perhaps be seen in other nations. This heralded the GAA as the ultimate embodiment of this nationalism, and created a culture of a monolithic interpretation of nationalism, and one in which rugby did not fit. However, as argued in this dissertation the challenging of the spaces in which rugby was played, and therefore upsetting the culture and symbols associated with these spaces, saw a development of Irish nationalism that would finally be seen as a more accurate reflection of the modernising and prosperous Celtic Tiger nation. An unsettling of Irish rugby stereotypes was seen in the movement from Lansdowne Road to Croke Park, which also saw the disrupting of symbols of nationalism that Croke Park perpetuated. This not only

⁹⁷ 'Money Making Month', II, 06 Nov. 2010.

⁹⁸ 'Trying times for rugby as fans vote with their feet', II, 08 Nov. 2010; 'Tickets fiasco'.

⁹⁹ 'Game risking suffocation by raw greed', II, 04 Nov. 2010; 'Tickets Fiasco'.

challenged the outdated dominance of the GAA over nationalism, but aided a re-formulation of the concept in sport which was inclusive of more than just one interpretation.

Finally, the explanation of nationalism in sport was formalised in line with the work of Cronin, and Bairner from 1999 and 2005. They both had argued that Irish society, and sport in Ireland was faced with the dichotomy of an Irishness based on tradition and a conservativeness associated with the GAA; and a more open version of Irishness, associated with a modernising state.¹⁰⁰ This dissertation determined the superseding of the traditional meaning of nationalism to have been successfully completed in this period, as Irish rugby finally saw a new pluralist version of Irishness. The playing of rugby in Croke Park was the ultimate demonstration of this, leading on from Bairner and Fulton's recognition of this in the overturning of Rule 42.¹⁰¹ Whilst this had in many ways existed in the everyday lived experience of those on the Irish archipelago, the events of this period allowed this to be ratified in an unprecedented way. Long overdue and embraced, Irish society and sport 'finally abandoned sporting apartheid', and with it Ireland took another step towards becoming a mature, progressive and receptive nation.¹⁰²

¹⁰⁰ Cronin, *Sport*, p.190; Bairner, 'Irish Sport', p.198

¹⁰¹ Bairner and Fulton, 'Sport', p.57.

¹⁰² 'Sporting Apartheid abandoned and at last we're normal'

Appendix



Figure 1: Julian Behal, *General view of Croke Park during the RBS 6 Nations match between Ireland and England at Croke Park, Dublin, 2010*, PA Archive.

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