

By **Mark Gallagher**

IN the summer days of his childhood, Patrick Murray nailed a lot of last-minute points to win Ulster finals, usually against Cavan or Tyrone. This was when the young Murray would be transplanted back to Monaghan from New Jersey for a couple of months every year and he was kicking ball with his cousins in the shadow of St Tiernach's Park, pretending to be his uncles Ciaran or Brendan, who won provincial medals in the 1980s.

Murray might have never experienced what it was like to play in the cauldron of Clones on a sweltering midsummer's afternoon, but he recently reprised his childhood role as a last-gasp matchwinner. He just did so in America's most popular sport with the state of Florida watching on.

With seven seconds remaining in Tampa Bay Buccaneers' regular NFL season joust with the Miami Dolphins, the score was tied at 20-20 when he attempted a 35-metre field goal. It sailed through the posts.

'That was amazing. The first time I kicked the winning field goal and to do it against the Dolphins, yeah it was pretty special,' he says. It gave the Bucs a rare win in a mediocre season, which was all the sweeter because it was against State rivals.

However, last week's disappointing home defeat to the Detroit Lions extinguished any faint play-off hopes for Tampa Bay. When they meet the Atlanta Falcons tomorrow night — in a game live on Sky Sports — the Bucs, owned by the Glazer family which also owns Manchester United, will only be playing for pride.

In a poor season for Tampa Bay, Murray has been the one bright light. He is now statistically the best kicker in their history, the last-second kick against Miami indicative of how he has played all year.

'It has been going well. When the ball is going through the posts, things are always going well,' Murray says.

He insists that he didn't think of the magnitude of the kick and just went through his normal routine. 'You do the same thing all the time. I went through my same routine. It was the same for Dean Rock when he lined up that winning free against Mayo in the All-Ireland final. He went through the same thing he had done a thousand times before, because he knew it worked.'

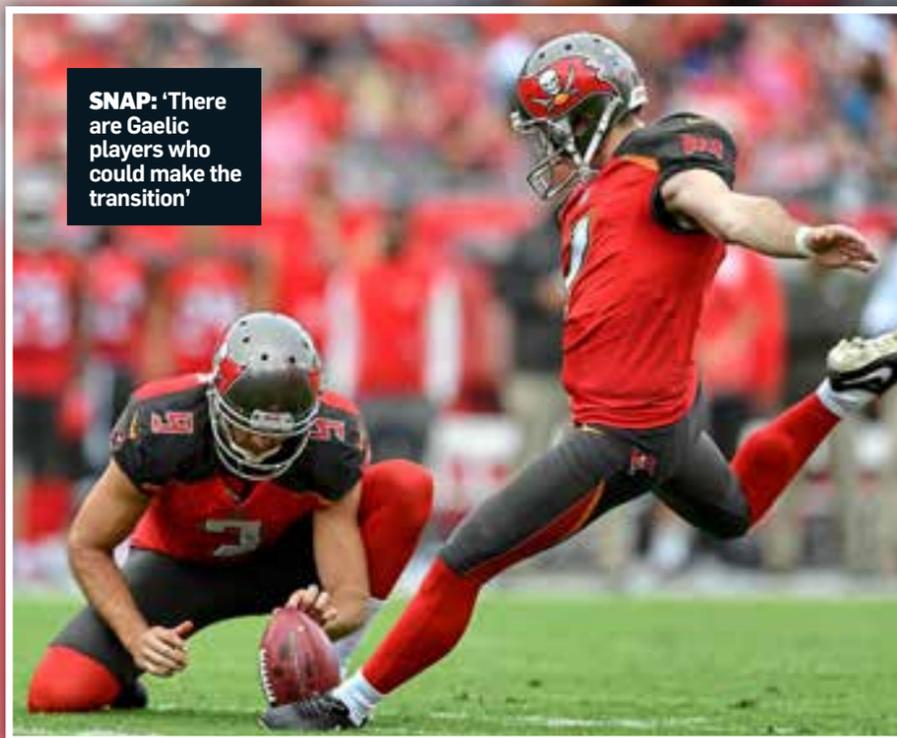
It seems strange to listen to a player immersed in the multi-million dollar industry of the NFL using Dean Rock's winning free in this year's All-Ireland final as a parallel to his own kicking. But Murray is no ordinary NFL player.

The Tampa Bay kicker may have been brought up in New Jersey but this is a man who bleeds Monaghan GAA and credits his kicking style — which has made him the most successful field-goal kicker in the club's history with an 87 per cent success rate — from his formative years kicking Gaelic football.

And even though his current contract precludes him from playing with his Rockland GAA club, he intends to return to his first love when he finishes in the NFL.

Before the Bucs' practice every day, Murray can be seen kicking an O'Neill's ball around. 'Just to loosen my leg up before practise,' he explains.

'The way I kick a ball is the same way I would have kicked a Gaelic ball because that is how I was brought up. The Gaelic ball is obviously a lot heavier. That has helped me create that strength, power and whip I brought into this game. When it comes down to it, I used the exact same routine I had when I stand over a free in Gaelic Park, three



SNAP: 'There are Gaelic players who could make the transition'

HARDY B

Patrick Murray credits deep roots in Gaelic football for his rise to become the best kicker in Tampa NFL history

steps back and two steps over. That's how I kick.'

Having emerged as a stellar kicking talent in his college football career with Fordham University, he was snapped up by Tampa Bay in the 2014 draft. And he had an excellent rookie campaign, kicking over 80 per cent of his field goals. Until disaster struck when he tore his cruciate — an injury so common in GAA.

'I had a great rookie year and then tore my ACL. Came back, went to Cleveland Browns and tore my patellar tendon in the same knee. From never having an injury before in my career, I had two really bad knee injuries, one straight after another. When you are lying on an operating table, preparing for a second serious knee surgery, you find out a lot about what kind of man and what kind of athlete you are.'

“ Martin O'Neill is the biggest NFL fan I ever met in my life... he knew all my stats

Murray's uncle Ciaran has been the physio to the Irish soccer team for the past two decades and when Ireland played Mexico in the MetLife Stadium this past June, he organised a meeting with Martin O'Neill and Roy Keane.

'Martin O'Neill is the biggest NFL fan I ever met in my life,' Murray says almost in disbelief. 'He knew all of my stats from all of my games, and knew stats from basically every team. Honestly, I haven't met a bigger NFL fan. He was obsessive about it. When Tampa Bay re-signed me, Martin was able to tell Ciaran that it had happened before he found out.'

'And Roy gave me some good insights into coming back from a serious

knee injury. It was great to meet them both.'

Murray was a free agent at the time and although he got some work with New Orleans Saints in pre-season, he remained so until early in the season when Nick Folk's travails as the Buccaneers' kicker meant that he came back to his first NFL club.

And he claims that he came back a different player. 'This is my fourth season now, as opposed to my first. I feel I am a stronger person, mentally because of the injuries I had to come through. And a stronger person emotionally too because those injuries give you a different perspective.'

Within the Bucs, there was talk of a curse afflicting their kickers. Not only did Murray do his cruciate but Connor Barth tore his Achilles tendon, another kicker, Lawrence Tynes, contracted MRSA while Folk couldn't kick snow off a rope in the first five games of this season.

'I never bought into that. I don't believe in curses,' Murray states baldly. However, the local press seized upon his Irish ethnicity as a curiosity and ran with a story that the kicker had been using a medium to ease fears ahead of his return to Tampa Bay. Murray is keen to dismiss that story.

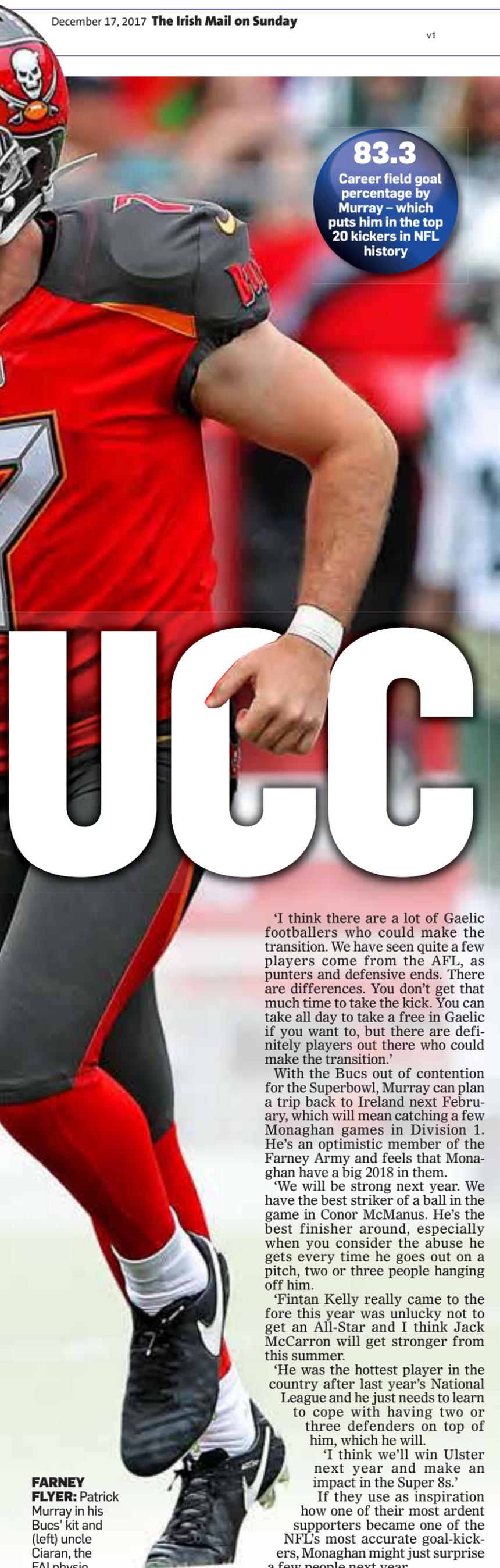
'People were thinking that I was talking to the dead and trying to raise them when that story came out. It was nothing of the type. I just did a bit of work with a sports psychologist. I thought I needed to because I was coming back from a serious knee injury. But I wasn't talking to a medium or trying to raise people from the dead. I honestly don't know where that story came from.'

Of course, maybe they are just looking for answers as to how Murray has settled seamlessly back into his role and turned out to be the most accurate kicker in the franchise's history. The 26-year-old feels it all goes back to his Gaelic footballing past.

Murray reckons that more Gaelic footballers could make the transition to American football. In the mid-1990s, there was a strong rumour that Atlanta Falcons tried to coax Maurice Fitzgerald over as a kicker while Offaly's Tom Furlong almost had an NFL career in the 1960s as a goal-kicker, only for a serious knee injury.

A number of AFL players have been brought over to the NFL now and Murray believes the examples of how Australians, such as Jordan Berry (punter for the Pittsburgh Steelers) have made the transition, shows it can be done.





83.3
Career field goal percentage by Murray – which puts him in the top 20 kickers in NFL history

UCC

'I think there are a lot of Gaelic footballers who could make the transition. We have seen quite a few players come from the AFL, as punters and defensive ends. There are differences. You don't get that much time to take the kick. You can take all day to take a free in Gaelic if you want to, but there are definitely players out there who could make the transition.'

With the Bucs out of contention for the Superbowl, Murray can plan a trip back to Ireland next February, which will mean catching a few Monaghan games in Division 1. He's an optimistic member of the Farney Army and feels that Monaghan have a big 2018 in them.

'We will be strong next year. We have the best striker of a ball in the game in Conor McManus. He's the best finisher around, especially when you consider the abuse he gets every time he goes out on a pitch, two or three people hanging off him.'

'Fintan Kelly really came to the fore this year was unlucky not to get an All-Star and I think Jack McCarron will get stronger from this summer.'

'He was the hottest player in the country after last year's National League and he just needs to learn to cope with having two or three defenders on top of him, which he will.'

'I think we'll win Ulster next year and make an impact in the Super 8s.'

If they use as inspiration how one of their most ardent supporters became one of the NFL's most accurate goal-kickers, Monaghan might just surprise a few people next year.

FARNEY FLYER: Patrick Murray in his Bucs' kit and (left) uncle Ciaran, the FAI physio

Former UCI President Cookson was aware of Froome's salbutamol test

CYCLING

By Matt Slater

BRIAN COOKSON was made aware of four-time Tour de France champion Chris Froome's adverse analytical finding in his final hours in office as head of cycling's governing body.

Froome is under scrutiny after a test during his La Vuelta win in September showed elevated levels of the asthma drug salbutamol, which could result in an anti-doping rule violation and a ban.

Cookson, then the UCI president, lost his bid for re-election to France's David Lappartient who won the vote on September 21. A former member of Team Sky's supervisory board, on Thursday he said he had 'no role or influence' in how Froome's case, or that of any other rider, had been handled.

Yesterday, however, he issued a further statement, which read: 'I was informed that Chris Froome had provided an A sample with an anomalous result for a substance that did not result in an immediate provisional suspension the last 24 hours of my tenure at UCI.'

'When I left the UCI the following day, the matter passed to the new president and, rightly, I was no longer informed about the matter.'



SPOTLIGHT: Froome had elevated levels of salbutamol in his system and (inset) Brian Cookson

'I cannot comment further on this or any other ongoing case.'

Cookson had said Froome's adverse analytical finding was a matter for the independent CADF (Cycling Anti-Doping Foundation) and the Legal Anti-Doping Service supervised by an external lawyer.

His statement on Thursday added: 'As UCI president, I therefore had no role or influence in any individual case.'

'I had then, and still have today, confidence in the integrity of all those involved, that they would always follow the correct procedures in every case, and that no rider was treated in any way differently from any other.'

Froome had double the permitted level of salbutamol in a urine test taking during his

victory in La Vuelta, the Tour of Spain.

The result is not automatically classified as a positive test and the 32-year-old has not been suspended, but he must provide a satisfactory explanation.

News of Froome's adverse test came soon after the inconclusive investigation into the contents of the mystery medical package delivered to Bradley Wiggins at a race in 2011, and revelations over Wiggins' use of therapeutic use exemptions before major races, including his 2012 Tour de France win.

Cookson defended Team Sky and Wiggins after the UK Anti-Doping investigation ended without charges, saying their reputations should be 'reinstated'.



RECORD: Sligo's Mona McSharry

McSharry finishes fifth in record

MONA McSHARRY capped an incredible year in the pool with a new Irish record and fifth-place finish in the 100m breaststroke at the European Short Course Championships in Copenhagen.

An outstanding performance from the Sligo 17-year-old saw her just two tenths of a second away from the bronze medal in an Irish

SWIMMING

record time of 1:05.01, breaking her own record of 1:05.27, in what was her first final at senior international level. The race was won by Lithuania's Ruta Meilutyte in 1:03.79.

McSharry returns to the pool today for the 200m breaststroke heats where she'll be looking to close

in on Fiona Doyle's Irish record, the only junior and senior breaststroke record McSharry doesn't currently hold.

Also in action will be Jordan Sloan and Conor Ferguson in the 50m backstroke. Danielle Hill (50m freestyle), Brendan Hyland (200m butterfly) and the men's 4x50m medley relay team will also swim in this morning's heats.

WORLD OF SPORT

GOLF: Justin Rose held a three-stroke lead after eight holes of the third round of the Indonesian Masters yesterday when play was suspended for the day due to bad weather.

Rose was three-under on the day and led his playing partners Kiradech Aphibarnrat and Scott Vincent. The Englishman (right) led both players by a stroke after the second round was completed in the morning due to weather delays on Friday.

Brandt Snedeker withdrew with apparent heat exhaustion on

Rose has a three stroke cushion before weather suspends play



Friday on the 11th hole. Ranked 51st in the world, he flew to Jakarta looking to move inside

the top 50 by the end of the year and ensure a spot in next year's Masters

SNOOKER: Cao Yupeng will play in his first ever ranking event final after a hard-fought 6-4 victory over Judd Trump at the Dafabet Scottish Open. Yupeng, who hit a stunning 147 on Tuesday opened the match with a great long-range pot and never really looked back.

DARTS: Day three of the World Darts Championship saw two shocks as Benito van de Pas and Mervyn King were dumped out.

World No 14 Van de Pas was beaten 3-1 by Steve West (right), who sealed the win with a 141 checkout. Zoran Lerchbacher beat King 3-2, while Robert Thornton beat Fermanagh's Brendan Dolan 3-1.



SKIING: American Lindsey Vonn won the Super G at Val d'Isere to claim her first victory in a World Cup race for nearly a year. The four-times overall World Cup champion completed the course in one minute and 4.36 seconds and showed no signs of the back pain which troubled her in St Mortiz last week. It was the 78th World Cup race win of Vonn's career but the first since the downhill at Garmisch in January. Meanwhile, Aksel Lund Svindal dominated the 50th anniversary edition of the Saslong Classic downhill, leading a 1-2 finish ahead of Norwegian teammate Kjetil Jansrud. It was Svindal's second straight downhill win after a victory in Beaver Creek, Colorado, and the 34th victory overall.

McCaskill is convinced that her hectic schedule will pay dividends

By Mark Gallagher



EARLY Monday morning in the Windy City. A blanket of fog hangs over Lake Michigan as the final revellers of this Chicago weekend stagger home. Nobody, however, notices the young woman with a gym bag slung over her shoulder, weaving her way to the first train of a very long day.

Jessica McCaskill has already been up for a while. Since getting confirmation of a world title shot, her alarm has been set for four every morning. But she usually wakes before that to prepare the home-made cocoa butter snacks that sustain her on a journey she believes will end with her taking Katie Taylor's WBA lightweight belt in York Hall on Wednesday.

If any crumb of doubt enters her mind, all she does is stare at one of the posters in her Chicago apartment that proclaims: 'Anything is

'TAYLOR IS SEEN AS THE BEST AROUND, I WANT TO FIGHT THE BEST

possible if you have the courage to make it happen.'

Taylor has spent the past seven weeks happily ensconced in a Connecticut training camp. Her opponent, on the other hand, is trying to become world champion while also holding down a day job as an investment banker. Following the first of two daily stints in the gym, McCaskill is at her desk by seven, crunching numbers in her role as a regulatory reporting specialist for RJ O'Brien in the heart of Chicago's financial district.

All this is grist to the mill for the trolls who like to dismiss the bonafides of women's pro boxing. Imagine Vasyl Lomachenko or Guillermo Rigondeaux spending eight hours behind a computer each day before their blockbuster bout in Madison Square Garden last night.

McCaskill shrugs it off. Her career and her boxing feed off each other. She feels she has found the perfect balance between the two. It means she must forsake the latest Netflix show that friends and colleagues are talking about, but that's a small sacrifice.

'It is long hours, late nights and early mornings. But I have a pretty set schedule so I am able to flow from one to the next,' she explains. It becomes more problematic, though, when she helps her coach Rick Ramos train young fighters in their gym.

'That is when it is a little more difficult because I need to adjust my training for the amateur fights. Rick and I both coach and corner the amateur fighters out of our gym [Body Shot Boxing Club]. It's not the end of the world, I just need to make minor adjustments to my timing. I wouldn't give up being there for my fighters, they need someone to guide them and Rick needs a helping hand. I want to support him the way he supports me.'

There is a lot to admire in McCaskill's story. Raised

Meet the investment banker and part-time model looking to add Katie's crown to her expanding portfolio

with three older brothers in a single-parent household in Southern Illinois – a part of the state nicknamed 'Little Egypt' – she was a talented high school athlete, in basketball and softball. After graduating from Southern Illinois

University, she moved to St Louis

where she first started boxing.

She was a latecomer to the sweet science. 'It was only in 2008 when I started boxing,' she says. But she had a gift for it. Within a couple of years, she was the female Golden Gloves champion of Missouri and followed that up with another title in Illinois.

'I have definitely progressed fast. I have only been in the sport for less than 10 years and maybe only a couple of those as a professional. But it is my competitive nature that has allowed me to progress so fast.'

Having moved to Chicago from St Louis for work, McCaskill strolled into Ramos' gym and her career accelerated at an even greater pace. 'Once I came up here, I found Rick and he just pushed me every step of the way. He didn't let me rest, kept setting new goals for me, for us to achieve. And it has worked out pretty well.'

It was only during the summer that the 33-year-old came to prominence in Ireland after calling Taylor out. She had just become the first female fighter to headline a boxing card in Chicago (or in the state of Illinois) and wasn't impressed with the noises coming from Taylor's camp as manager Brian Peters and

promoter Eddie Hearn both described the difficulty in getting suitable opponents for Bray's golden girl.

'Nobody asked us,' McCaskill points out. So, she decided to have a little fun, enlisting the help of a friend, who was a graphic designer to put Taylor's image on milk cartons as a missing person.

'The missing person milk carton was my idea. Rick said I needed to get in front of the camera more and that I should make my own video calling out Katie. I hadn't seen any response to our McCaskill-Taylor campaign so it seemed to me that she was missing in action and that's what spawned the milk carton video.'

These attention-grabbing campaigns might give the wrong

'I HAVE SEEN A LOT OF MISTAKES THAT KATIE HAS MADE'

impression of McCaskill. The toxic trash-talking that so often taints professional boxing is not her way. She just wanted to get noticed. And it worked as she has been given the opportunity of a lifetime in York Hall.

'Katie is seen as the best around and I want to fight the best,' McCaskill explains. This is a risky fight for Taylor to take as her first defence. It is clear that McCaskill can punch and she is evidently viewing this bout as her big chance. She claims she has seen some chinks in the armour of the Wicklow native and plans to go on the front foot from the opening bell in Bethnal Green.

'I haven't watched a full fight of

hers but I have seen plenty of highlights and I have spotted a few mistakes that she has made. But it is not so much about what I see in her. It is what I see in her opponents. They have all been scared of her. The fight is over before it even starts.

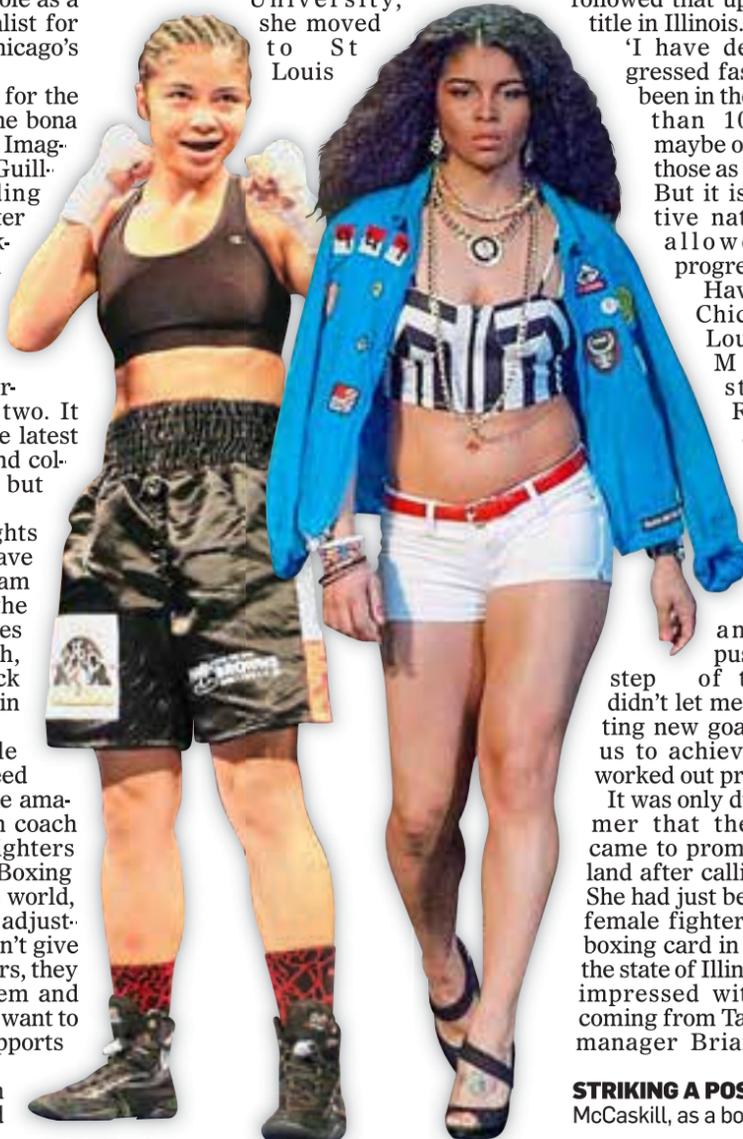
'I won't be frightened of her. Katie won't see any fear in me. Just from what I watched, everyone else seems terrified to engage her. They were scared to go on the front foot and just showed up. I promise that I will fight until the last bell.'

Having already made history by headlining that card at Chicago's UIC Pavilion in July, McCaskill is aware that this Wednesday, the first live television card headlined by a women's title bout, can be another shot in the arm for the sport – Hearn and Sky are putting their money where their mouth is with their promotion of Taylor. If you have a Sky Sports package, it will be hard to miss the bout on Wednesday as it is going out on three channels – Sky Sports Arena, Sky Sports Mix and Sky Sports Main Event.

'I know this fight is making history as the first females headlining a show on Sky Sports. This is just another time where women are breaking barriers. And we will continue to do so in this sport,' McCaskill says.

'I am very conscious of the opportunities to make history when it comes to the sport and lead the way. And after I take this opportunity, I will look for more ways to continue to build up the sport.'

McCaskill, who somehow also fits part-time modelling into her hectic schedule, is conscious of the image projected by women's boxing and does her best to control her own



STRIKING A POSE : Jessica McCaskill, as a boxer and model

in time



brand, with her own website and line of clothing based on the CasKILLA nickname dreamt up by a former work colleague. 'It was seen as a mix of McCaskill and Godzilla,' she explains. Like Taylor, McCaskill is well aware that she is carrying the flame for the sport and she can actively encourage other females to come into boxing. She insists: 'Even in the 10 years that I have been in the sport, I have seen a much greater female presence in boxing and in gyms.' There will be a predominantly Irish crowd at the London venue on Wednesday. But McCaskill can

INVESTING TIME: Jessica McCaskill fits training for a title fight with Katie Taylor (inset top) around her job as an investment banker

count on some support, as her firm has London offices and they snapped up tickets before it all sold out. It means she won't feel completely on her own when she boxes outside the United States for the first time. Not that is likely to bother her. It's the chance she has been waiting for, the reason she's in the gym every morning before Chicago wakes up. And she believes that when she rejoins the Windy City's early morning rush at some point next week, she will do so as the lightweight champion of the world.



Ireland chase series win in coach Bracewell's farewell

CRICKET

By Ian Callender

THE Ireland players have a double incentive to beat Afghanistan in Sharjah today in John Bracewell's final game as coach.

Not only would it allow the Kiwi to sign off a largely unsuccessful reign on a high but it would give Ireland a perfectly-timed first series victory over the Afghans, just 10 weeks out from the World Cup Qualifying tournament, when Ireland must beat two of West Indies, Zimbabwe and Afghanistan to reach England 2019.

Bracewell may have won just 22 of his 61 completed games at the helm but you would be hard pushed to find a player with a bad word to say about him and they have the extra motivation of impressing his successor who has been observing everything in the UAE for the last three weeks.

A superb comeback victory on Thursday after a horror



PULL OUT: Incoming Ireland coach Graham Ford has worked on William Porterfield's batting

batting collapse in the first game on Tuesday sets up today's decider and gave Graham Ford, who takes over tomorrow, an accurate summation of the squad he is taking over.

But, with Bracewell's permission, his South African successor has already adopted a hands-on approach and in the nets yesterday he had a long one-on-one session with skipper William Porterfield, concentrating on the pull shot which has brought his downfall in his last three innings.

'It's been a great opportunity for Graham and the specialist coaches to have a good look at the players going into the most important phase in the next year and a half, the World Cup Qualifiers. It's essential they get as much information as possible,' said Bracewell.

'It's not about finishing with a win, it's about winning the series. After that, there's nothing I would love more than being sitting back in New Zealand and seeing them qualify for the World Cup. It would be just fantastic.'

Rory plans major push in 2018

RORY McILROY has announced he will play at least seven events in early 2018 in a busy build-up to the US Masters, where he will attempt to complete

the grand slam of major titles in April.

McIlroy said on his website that he would start his campaign with two events in the Middle East in January – the Abu Dhabi HSBC Championship and Dubai Desert Classic.

The Irishman will then switch his focus to the US where he will contest five tournaments in six weeks, starting at Pebble Beach in February.

His schedule includes no mention of the WGC-Mexico Championship, which falls in the middle of his busy stretch.

GOLF

By Phil Casey

All of the events will be part of his preparation for the April 5-8 Masters at Augusta National, an event he needs to win to complete the modern grand slam of all four majors.

Former world No.1 McIlroy (below) is currently having an extended break from competition after an injury-hampered 2017 during which he did not win a tournament anywhere in the world for the first time since 2008.

The four-times major winner also sacked long-time caddie JP Fitzgerald and replaced him with close friend Harry

Diamond, who is expected to stay on the bag.

McIlroy, 28, has slipped to 10th in the world rankings.

He faces an important season as he attempts to keep pace with the likes of Jordan Spieth, Justin Thomas and Brooks Koepka, who all won majors this year.

Meanwhile, India's Shubhanker Sharma shot a 65 to claim a five-shot lead at the Joburg Open to enter the final round with an excellent chance of claiming a maiden pro title.

Sharma, 21, who carded a 61 on Friday, sank seven birdies and has a total of 20 under par, five shots ahead of second-placed Swede Christofer Blomstrand.



WORLD OF SPORT

Maguire left to rue failed comeback as O'Sullivan scrapes through to final

SNOOKER: Stephen Maguire admitted he 'left it too late' to rescue his Betway UK Championship semi-final clash with Ronnie O'Sullivan.

The Glaswegian went into the interval 4-0 down to the game's greatest frontrunner at York's Barbican yesterday. He fought back valiantly before eventually being



knocked out 6-4 by the five-time world champion. Deflated Maguire (above) reflected: 'I just didn't settle until 4-0 down at the interval and I left it too late. 'I put up a bit of a

fight but I'd lost it in the first four frames. I was always positive because I felt as if I was cueing okay and potting the balls. 'Nobody likes to see somebody coming back at them and I really fancied the job at the end.' O'Sullivan admitted: 'I feel fortunate to be in the final. I've not played well all week. I've been scraping through.'

ROWING: Bradley Wiggins finished in 21st place on his competitive rowing debut at the British Indoor Championships in London. Wiggins, who retired from cycling in December 2016, began slowly after mistakenly believing he had false started as winner Adam Neill won in 5:48.2.

CRICKET: Batsman Ben Duckett, 23, was dropped from an England tour match in Australia yesterday after reportedly pouring a drink over fast bowler James Anderson in a Perth bar. It's the latest controversy in an increasingly troubled Ashes tour for England.

Irish participation in the Winter Olympics wasn't a talking point until six

GERRY Macken is looking forward to catching some of the bobsleigh event at the forthcoming Winter Olympics. It will give him a chance to tell his children that he was once one of those athletes hurtling down an ice-track at break-neck speed. Even with the photos to prove it, they still find it hard to believe.

In Ireland's Olympic history, Macken is one of the six pioneers who ventured into the great unknown in the French Alps back in 1992. Along with Pat McDonagh, Terry McHugh, the late Malachy Sheridan, Garry Power and John Farrelly, Macken was part of the two Irish bobsleigh teams that competed at the Albertville Olympics.

The story of how Macken – and McDonagh – got involved goes back to the Henley Regatta of 1986. The pair were renowned international rowers and competed in the race – ‘we actually won it,’ Macken recalls. At the end, there was an envelope waiting for both of them from a London-Irish businessman called Larry Treacy, wondering if they would be interested in representing Ireland in bobsleigh.

Treacy, whose parents hailed from Fermanagh and Kildare, had tried bobsleigh during a holiday in Switzerland and was interested in set-

‘IT WAS VERY SCARY, A NUMBER OF GUYS WERE KILLED’

ting up an Irish federation with a view to qualifying for the 1988 Olympics in Calgary. In order to compete, athletes needed a driving licence, which was governed by the International Bobsleigh Federation (FIBT).

So, Macken and McDonagh had to go to school in Innsbruck, Austria – site of the 1976 Winter Olympics. Among those who were in the same class was Prince Albert of Monaco, who became a big supporter of the Irish team's efforts. At the end of the first week, all the competitors had a race and the Irish team came first, ahead of the US, New Zealand and Prince Albert.

There was optimism in the Irish camp that they could do well. But there was also a bit of fear and trepidation. Crashes were common and stories of serious injuries and fatal accidents could be heard at the circuit.

‘It was scary when you were at the top of the tracks. There were a number of guys who were killed,’ Macken recalled. ‘I remember one race in Italy, when the bobs from Japan and Yugoslavia crashed in the same spot and we were next up. The race just continued.’

Bankrolled by Treacy, Macken and McDonagh joined the circuit in '87, where the Jamaican team – later enshrined in folklore in the movie, *Cool Runnings* – were becoming celebrities. ‘We were competing with them, but they were much more switched on. They had merchandising and everything,’ Macken remembers.

The pair stored the bob in Islandbridge and set about trying to qualify for the '88 Olympics. They were recording solid times on the circuit.

By **Mark Gallagher**



‘We were competitive. We wanted to be the top B nation, of the smaller nations who had only joined bobsleigh,’ Macken says.

The Irish team did enough to qualify for the Winter Olympics in Calgary. The Irish tricolour was among the flags of all the competing nations. But Ireland didn't send any athletes. Ten days before the opening ceremony, the Olympic Council of Ireland sent a letter to the bobsleigh team, saying they wouldn't be going to Calgary. Despite Treacy and the team going to the High Court to seek an injunction, no reason was ever given.

As the world fell in love with the charismatic Jamacians in 1988, the Irish bobsleigh team seethed at home. They vowed to make the next Olympics in France. Treacy cast his net beyond rowing towards track & field.

McHugh, the long-time Irish javelin champion, decathlete Sheridan and discus thrower Power were all convinced to join the efforts to make the Games.

McHugh was part of the Irish team at the Summer Olympics in Seoul, as was McDonagh, who told him about bobsleigh. ‘Pat was competing in rowing. He asked did I ever think about competing in bobsleigh? Pat convinced me to give it a go. There were trials in UCD a few weeks later. I went along and finished top of the trials.’

Within a few months, McHugh was at the European Championships in West Germany. ‘It was in a place called Winterberg. It was pretty surreal, especially coming from an athletics background where you train for years, striving to get the chance to compete at a major championships. But with bobsleigh, if you have the equipment, money and a small bit of training, you can get there.’

McHugh had delusions of being competitive at the time. More than 25 years on, and speak-



PIONEERS: The Ireland bobsleigh team that competed in Albertville 1992



WINTER READY: heading for the 1992 Games (from left) Malachy Sheridan, Terry McHugh, John Farrelly, Garry Power, Pat McDonagh and Gerry Macken

BREAKIN

ing from Switzerland, where he has lived for more than a decade, he realises that it was a major uphill task.

‘I was coaching a shot putter here in Switzerland and he was asked to join their national bobsleigh team. He finished third in his first event. That opened my eyes to how much it was equipment. It was like we were going to Mondello with an ordinary Renault,’ McHugh says.

‘But both myself and Pat were coming from backgrounds where we were competitive in our chosen sports of javelin and rowing. And we wanted to take that into bobsleigh. Obviously, we couldn't finish in the medals or anything but we wanted to finish the top of the smaller nations.’

Following the debacle of Eddie ‘the Eagle’ Edwards at the 1988 Olympics, the International Olympic Committee had to ensure that any athletes who qualified were able to compete. And with the continued financial support of Treacy and some donations from Pittsburgh Steelers owner [and later US ambassador to Ireland] Dan Rooney, over a couple of years, the Irish team proved themselves with some

decent finishes.

Unfortunately, at the time that the two bobsleigh teams embarked on their journey to France, RTE were in the midst of a strike. So it didn't make as big an impact on the national psyche as it should.

But Garry Power, who was the first reserve to the McHugh/McDonagh combination, remembers the utter madness of the Olympic village.

32
Pat McDonagh and Terry McHugh finished 32nd in a field of 45 sleds at the 1992 Winter Olympics

‘There were so many different nations. I remember rubbing shoulders with Herschel Walker, the NFL player, who was part of the American bobsleigh team.’

The pair of McDonagh and McHugh finished 32nd out of 45 sleds while Macken and Sheridan finished in 36th. McHugh, who also represented Ireland in four summer games, says there is a bit of difference between the two Olympics.

‘The Summer Olympics are spectacular. There are over 200 nations competing,’ McHugh says. ‘The Winter Olympics is great, but it was like a bobsleigh world cup event with better food and more nations.’

Having broken down the barrier in 1992, McHugh and McDonagh were determined to build on it for the 1994 Olympics. They continued

Novice bobsleighters forced the issue in 1992



GET THE ICE

to improve on the circuit and booked their ticket to Lillehammer with a bit of ease. However, two days before Christmas 1993, a letter arrived from the OCI, informing them that there would be no Irish competitors at the '94 Olympics. It felt like déjà vu.

As Larry Treacy discovered a few years earlier, officialdom weren't too taken by the winter Olympic dream. 'It took time for the sports administrators to see the value in sending an Irish team,' McHugh reckons.

There will be a team of five Irish athletes who will be walking behind the Irish Tricolour at the opening ceremony this Friday. It is a long way from the ground-breakers 26 years before, and the dream of a businessman called Larry Treacy.

'We were always conscious of the fact that we were representing Ireland and we wanted to do the best that we could,' says Macken. 'And it will be the same for these athletes now representing Ireland. It is great that we are able to send a team like that to the games.'

And each of those Irish athletes – competing in sports as diverse as cross-country skiing and half-pipe snowboarding, owe something to Macken and the other athletes who made a piece of history in the French Alps 26 years ago.

FIVE FLY OUT TO SOUTH KOREA

Tess Arbez

Age: 19

Discipline: Alpine ski, giant slalom

Born: France. She represented Ireland at the 2017 Alpine world Championships.

Experience: She finished 29th at the 2016 world junior championships in Sochi.

Patrick McMillan
Age: 25
Discipline: Alpine ski, super-G & downhill
Born: Letterkenny. Currently living and training in Austria
Experience: Represented Ireland at the 2015 and 2017 Alpine World Championships



Seamus O'Connor

Age: 20

Discipline: Snowboarding (halfpipe)

Born: America (his father is from Tyrone)
Experience: Competed at the 2014 Winter Olympics, reaching the semi-final. Was 10th at the 2015 Slopestyle World Championships.

Thomas Westgard

Age: 21

Discipline: cross-country Skiing

Born: Norway (his mother is from Dunmore, Co Galway)
Experience: Represented Ireland at the 2017 FIS Nordic World Championships in Lahti

Brendan Newby

Age: 21

Discipline: Freeski (halfpipe)

Born: Cork. Currently lives and trains in Utah
Experience: Won the USASA nationals two years in a row and finished 25th at the 2017 FIS World Championship.

JERNIGAN CLEARED TO PLAY AS FAVRE FIRES UP EAGLES

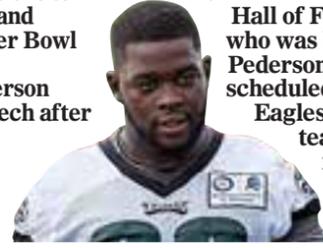
PHILADELPHIA EAGLES starting defensive tackle Tim Jernigan (below) returned to practice on Friday after missing two days last week due to illness.

The NFC champions had everyone participate as they continued preparations to face the New England Patriots in the Super Bowl tonight.

Coach Doug Pederson gave a lengthy speech after practice.

'Play loose, have fun, enjoy the moment,' Pederson said he

told his players. 'These opportunities, as you know, don't come around every year. Also, make sure just to reflect on this season, reflect on the journey that got us here. But just play for one another, have fun and enjoy it.'



Hall of Famer Brett Favre, who was backed up by Pederson in Green Bay, was scheduled to address the Eagles yesterday and the team will hold a 30-minute walkthrough at the US Bank Stadium.

WORLD OF SPORT

GOLF: Lee Westwood couldn't emulate his second-round 62 but did enough to stay in contention at the Maybank Championship after shooting a 70 to trail the leaders by three strokes.

The Englishman (right) managed only three birdies in comparison to his mammoth 11 on Friday. Jorge Campillo and Dylan Frittelli are the joint leaders after both shot 66s for 15 under overall at the European Tour event.

'I had a few tough holes, but I managed to make the putts so overall I played solid,' Campillo said.

Henrik Stenson (73)

Westwood on the wane as leaders edge three clear



and defending champion Fabrizio Zanotti (75) trail the leaders by 11 shots.

It was a day of low scores, with six golfers – including Campillo – firing an eagle on the par-5 first hole.

With 18 golfers separated by only three shots at the top, competition will be rife today.

Khalin Joshi and Berry Henson trail the leaders by one shot after matching

65s. Henson is a self-proclaimed 'Mr. Sunday' after shooting 65 and 64 at the Singapore Open and Myanmar Open, respectively, and will be out for another low score.

Overnight leaders Phachara Khongwatmai (70) and Nino Bertasio (70) are 13 under, along with Prayad Marksang (67), Hideto Tanihara (68) and Ryo Ishikawa (63) and Marc Warren (69).

Djokovic's intervention

TENNIS: Former world number one Novak Djokovic has had a 'small medical intervention' on his troublesome elbow and says he is now on a 'good road to full recovery'. The 30-year-old Serbian (right) suffered a recurrence of his elbow problems in a fourth-round loss to 21-year-old South Korean Chung Hyeon at the Australian Open last month.

He posted on Instagram: 'There were many different opinions, different diagnoses... It was not easy for me to choose what to do.'



SPORT IN BRIEF

Cricket

SECOND WOMEN'S INTERNATIONAL – Harare, Ireland 207-5 (50 overs); Ioyce 91no, R Delaney 68 beat Zimbabwe 195 (47 overs); M Mupachikwa 51, Delaney 3-33, A Keneshy 2-17 by 12 runs.

U19 WORLD CUP FINAL – Australia 216, India 220-2 (M Kalra 101no).

Gaelic Games

ALLIANCE FOOTBALL LEAGUE
Div 1: Tyrone 1-11 Dublin 2-13; Mayo 2-9 Kerry 1-15.
Div 2: Cavan 3-17 Louth 0-13.
ALLIANCE HURLING LEAGUE
Div 1A: Tipperary 1-20 Waterford 1-11.
Div 1B: Laois 0-17 Galway 2-18.
Div 2A: London 1-14 Meath 1-24.
Div 3A: Warwickshire 1-14 Longford 0-11.
All-Ireland club finals – IFC: Michael Glavey's 0-7 Moy 1-10. JFC: Multyfarnham 3-9 Knocknagree 3-13.

Golf

EUROPEAN TOUR Maybank Ch'ship, Saujana G&CC, Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia. Third round leaders (Gbr & Irl unless stated, par 72): 2011 Campillo (Spa) 69 66 66, D Frittelli (Rsa) 69 66 66; 202 K Joshi (Ind) 67 70 65, B Henson (USA) 69 68 65; 203 P Khongwatmai (Tha) 68 65 70, R Ishikawa (Jpn) 74 66 63, M Warren 68 66 69, P Marksang (Tha) 71 65 67, N Bertasio (Ita) 68 65 70, H Tanihara (Jpn) 71 64 68. Irish: 219 D Clarke 72 68 79.

USPGA TOUR Waste Management Phoenix Open, TPC Scottsdale. 2nd rd leaders (US unless stated, par 71): 132 B DeChambeau 66 66, R Fowler 66 66; 133 D Berger 68 65, C Reavie 68 65; 134 C Kirk 66 68, S Stallings 69 65, C Hadley

66 68; Irish: 141 S Lowry (Irl) 70 71.

Hockey

MEN'S INTERNATIONAL: (Spain) Ireland 4 (Sothern, Caruth, Glassey, McKee) USA 2 (Cicchi, Kaeppler).

WOMEN'S EY LEAGUE: Loreto 0 UCD 1; Trinity 0 Railway Union 2; Ards 2 Monkstown 1; Cork Harlequins 4 Belfast Harlequins 3; Pegasus 2 Pembroke 0.

Rugby Union

NATWEST SIX NATIONS
Stade de France: France 13 (T: Thomas, P: Machenaud 2, C: Machenaud) Ireland 15 (P: Sexton 4, DG: Sexton), HT: 3-9.
Cardiff: Wales 34 (I: G Davies, Halfpenny 2, Evans; C: Halfpenny 4; P: Halfpenny 2) Scotland 7 (T: Horne, C: Russell) HT 14-0.

NATWEST WOMEN'S SIX NATIONS
Toulouse: France 13 Ireland 1.
Friday: Wales 18 Scotland 17.

ULSTER BANK ALL IRELAND LEAGUE
Div 1A: Buccaneers 20 Terenure 24, Clontarf 19 UCD 8, Cork Con 41 Dublin University 6, Garryowen 24 Lansdowne 16, St Mary's 26 Young Munster 38.
Div 1B: Banbridge 15 Shannon 15, Dolphin 13 Old Wesley 13, Naas 20 Ballynahinch 27, UCC 58 Ballymena 12, UL Bohemian 34 Old Belvedere 19.
Div 2A: Blackrock 15 Queens 14, Cashel 44 Corinthians 10, City of Armagh 18 Malone 34 Galwegians 27 Greystones 17, Highfield 15 Nenagh Ormond 13.
Div 2B: Belfast H 22 Sundays Well 26, City of Derry 12 Navan 37, Dungannon 5 MU Barnhall 10, Skerries 20 Old Crescent 26, Wanderers 22 Rainey 31.
Div 2C: Bective 29 Tullamore 15, Bruff 10 Bangor 10, Malahide 15 Thomond 8,

Midleton 35 Sligo 18, Omagh 12 Seapoint 0.

Danske Bank Ulster Schools Cup Rd 4: Enniskillen RS 10 Ballymena A 28, Bangor GS 12 Rainey 3, RS Dungannon 5 Wallace HS 38, Campbell 41 Dal Riada 0, Cambridge H 0 RS Armagh 45, Sullivan Upper 20 Down HS 13, RBAI 17 Ballyclare HS 0, Coleraine GS 3 Methodist 38.

Tennis

DAVIS CUP World Group Round 1: Australia v Germany: T Puetz & JL Struff (Ger) bt M Ebdon & J Peers (Aus) 6-4 6-7 (1-7) 6-2 6-7 (4-7) 6-4. Germany lead 2-1.

Japan v Italy: S Bolelli & F Fogni (Ita) bt B McLachlan & Y Uchiyama (Jpn) 7-5 6-7 (4-7) 7-6 (7-3) 7-5. Italy lead 2-1.

Kazakhstan v Switzerland: T Khabibulin & A Nedovyesov (Kaz) bt M-A Huestler & L Margaroli (Swi) 6-4 6-4 3-6 3-6 6-4 7-5 6-2. Kazakhstan lead 3-0.

Spain v Britain: P Carreno-Busta & F Lopez (Spa) bt D Inglot & J Murray (Gbr) 6-4 6-4 7-6 (7-4) Spain lead 2-1.

Croatia v Canada: M Cilic & I Dodig (Cro) bt D Nestor & V Pospisil (Can) 2-6 3-6 6-4 7-5 6-2. Croatia lead 2-1.

France v Netherlands: PH Herbert & N Mahut (Fra) bt R Haase & JJ Rojer (Ned) 7-6 (8-6) 6-3 6-7 (3-7) 7-6 (7-2). France lead 2-1.

Europe-Africa Group Rd 1: Denmark v Ireland: F Nielsen (Den) bt S Carr (Irl) 6-3 7-6 (7-2); P Bothwell (Irl) bt S Hessel-Olesen (Den) 5-7 6-1 6-3. Match tied 1-1.

Today's sport

RUGBY UNION – NatWest Six Nations (3.0): Italy v England. Women's Six Nations (5.30): Italy v England.