

Tipping Point

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Nascar might be too redneck for elite but it's racing at its purest

This Sunday 250,000 people are expected to attend the Daytona 500, the most famous race in America's Nascar series. It's interesting to speculate how many might be from the US political elite surreptitiously getting a handle on 'Trumpism'. Because Nascar is Trump country. It's the 58th year of this salute to the uniquely American obsession with stock car racing, a 500-mile stamina test both for the drivers manoeuvring around a massive oval in what are, by Formula 1 standards, crates, and those inside that oval who get to raise a little hell. They used to be America's ignored, or at least felt like they were. But not anymore. If elites used to scoff at the easy Nascar caricature of white yokels steering loud rickety death-traps through the rust-belt in a none too subtle nod to the sport's bootlegging roots, who's laughing now? That disaffected, angry white blue-collar vote has got a billionaire bullsh*t artist into the Oval Office: ignoring such a stark retort to those prepared to dismiss a vast swathe who get their thrills from the unfashionable is difficult. The Daytona 500 was once admirably

labelled "Redneck Super Bowl" by, of all people, Kid Rock, the faux-Lynyrd Skynyrd rock star who, in a reflection of the turbulent political times we live in, has even been mooted as a possible Republican candidate for the US senate next year. And Nascar might well be the venue of choice for those who think the Kentucky Derby infield is too classy; but simply labelling it some dumb sweet home Daytona for good ole boys does it an injustice. On Sunday, there will be those who argue the real story is in the stands, like that's some original idea and not recognition of sport's perpetual reality. Without an audience sport is just activity. What's always fascinating is the relationship between the two, and Nascar is particularly so in motor-racing terms because of what it doesn't do. **Flame-outs** Because if F1 is primarily about technology, Nascar is about entertainment. It always has been, ever since an Irish-American mechanic, Bill France, decided to put a formal sheen on the all-American impulse to bling-up cars and race 'em loud and proud: and if there were

fighters and flame-outs along the way, well, all to the good. Depending on which set of stats you want to believe, Nascar comes second only to the NFL in terms of numbers flocking to watch US sport. And if both seem incomprehensible to many of us here, that hardly matters to a constituency that has always vehemently believed in America first. "Nascar and the Daytona 500 are about as American as you can get," said the former senator and Republican presidential hopeful Rick Santorum, whose book, *Blue Collar Conservatives*, is apparently the closest thing to a political bible Trump has. But if Trump is in the White House through pandering to a nostalgia for supposedly better and simpler times, where technology was an aid rather than an exercise in cutting the modernist ground out from underneath your own feet, then Nascar's retro instinct is a lot less cynical. It's still mostly about finding the best driver, not the best car, which makes it a throwback within the 'brmm-brmm' game and all the more refreshing for it. Sure it's cheap too which helps, but it's

with an Astra than the space shuttle. But they are cars that Tex in the stands can relate to since the most important computer inside the car remains the driver. This is racing where starting outside the first three rows doesn't automatically make victory impossible. Overtaking actually happens – a lot. Different people actually get to win sometimes. Cars get close to each other, sometimes even touch. The rules are relatively straightforward and the jargon involved doesn't require an engineering degree to understand. It's motor racing as it used to be, a hopelessly retro hark back to when competition was about drivers and those in charge recognised it behoved them to produce a product that ordinary people actually loved to watch for the excitement of watching drivers take dangerous jolopies close to the edge. Of course, there can barely be an F1 fan worldwide who hasn't at some stage looked down on Nascar as some interminable common-as-muck exercise in engineering vulgarity. Technically there is certainly no comparison; even culturally it's the same. The idea of a fleet of expensive hot-to-trot

Eurotrash types diverting their uber-yachts from Monaco to 'Yeekaw-ville' is as incongruous as stock car racing exerting as firm a grip on the public imagination anywhere else but the US. **'America First'** Perhaps that's why the France family's recent attempts to prettify aspects of Nascar appear to have backfired. Fiddly rule changes don't seem to have worked. The use of exotic foreign drivers to attract more overseas attention has instead seemed to alienate the sport's core base, which is hardly an unfamiliar concept anymore. Such 'America First' instincts only strengthen the Nascar caricature and make it a sideshow for much of the rest of the world. But scoffing isn't going to loosen its hold on the popular imagination in the US for the simple reason that it remains a competitive test and sporting spectacle based on driver rather than machine. That might make it hopelessly unfashionable but there's an honesty about this particular retro instinct that makes it refreshing.

Gaelic Games All-Ireland JF and IF Club finals

GAA without adornment and in so many ways the best day it has going for it



Malachy Clerkin at Croke Park

Glenbeigh-Glencar and Westport were the teams celebrating after two dramatic games

To Croke Park for the junior and intermediate All-Ireland finals, a chance to see the GAA without its make-up on. The last surviving big day out that can still feel like it hasn't had its edges planed or its droopy bits nipped and tucked. A raggedy-arsed outpost in an ocean of slickness. Four teams – north, south, east and west. Two games decided by the kick of a ball. Red cards, yellow cards, black cards, some given, some not. Stretchers and stoppages, halves that ran 10 and 12 minutes over. Referees booted, as ever. Scenes and snapshots. Glenbeigh-Glencar of Kerry taking the roof off their dressing room under the Cusack Stand screaming odes to Kolo and Yaya Touré. Rock St Patrick's of Tyrone down to 12 men and sending 38-year-old goalkeeper Seamus Donaghy forward for one last attack. Niall Ronan of St Colmcille's in Meath, formerly of Munster and Ireland in rugby, disappearing from the game for 20 minutes only to reappear in injury-time with a head-wrapping bandage that would put Willie Joe Padden to shame. Lee Keegan's father bear-hugging Westport and Mayo's footballer of the year across the advertising hoarding, their embrace only separated by a lady in a Croke Park steward's bib looking for a selfie with his son. A crowd of 9,075 rattled around in the Hogan Stand, most of them related to someone on the pitch. They saw two belters of games. Actually, that's wrong. We saw two belters of games – the folks in the stand below us saw the game they came to see and not a penny more. This was four strictly local concerns criss-crossing purely by happenstance. The odds of them ever sharing the same stage again at the same time must amount to moonshot numbers. Ask someone in Westport this morning who won the first game and they'll look at you with pity and probably order you a pint. This wasn't that kind of event.



Lee Keegan celebrates with a Westport team containing five minor players after they won the All-Ireland Intermediate Final against Meath's St Colmcille at Croke Park yesterday. PHOTOGRAPH: TOMMY GREALY/INPHO

three All-Irelands in the rearview mirror. They had Aidan Girvan, who has been hopping over and back from Australia as Rock's campaign endured longer than it was supposed to. Above all, they had Conor McCreesh, the full-forward carrying a bit of a gut and a bit of an arse and pure poetry in his boots. It was very nearly enough. The Kerry side led by four after 10 minutes but Rock had far more quality to their

shooting and went in level at the break. Both sides were down to 14 by now and the Tyrone champions looked like smart money. But with O'Sullivan carrying a limp, O'Grady took it upon himself to go and win the day for Glenbeigh-Glencar. He scored three from play, three more from frees, played men in for two more and set-up O'Sullivan for his goal. Can't ask for any more than that. **Son of Jacko** Afterwards, Aidan O'Shea, son of Jacko and manager of Glenbeigh-Glencar, addressed a broken Rock dressing room. "Lads, ye fought like hell out there. We watched all your videos and we knew that the one thing ye wouldn't do was give up.

Ye've done yourself proud. Ye'll go and have a drink together tonight and all I'd say lads is to stay tight with each other because ye'll go a long way together." The intermediate game went Westport's way but only in the end and only just. In the sixth minute of injury-time, St Colmcille's corner-forward James Conlon kicked the last bit of energy out of his leg and his high shot into the Hill end dropped onto the crossbar and hopped clear. Game over, Westport 2-12 St Colmcille's 3-8. Again, all human GAA life was here. Five of the Westport team are teenagers. All five are Mayo minors. And only for mid-term break, all five would be due in school at Rice College this morning. Three of them, Oisín McLaughlin, Paul Lambert and the excellent Colm Moran, played in the full-forward line and tore St Colmcille's to shreds. "Kids with big balls, that's what they are," said Lee Keegan, Westport's oldest starter at the grand old age of 27. "I could be very easy for young lads to come to Croke Park and, not freeze or anything, but try to do something different. They don't know how to lose"

Keegan was arm in arm with his brother Phil afterwards. It wouldn't have taken much for life to work out differently for either of them. Phil's first love is soccer, Lee's earliest promise was in rugby. Their dad is a Cheltenham man who never heard of the GAA until he met their mother working in a pub under Wembley Stadium in the 1980s. Yet there they all were, kings of Croke Park for a day. In so many ways, the best day it has going for it.

Insurance point For what it's worth, Glenbeigh-Glencar did, a 1-14 to 1-11 victory over the Tyrone champions. Darran O'Sullivan scored a goal after two minutes and fisted the insurance point six minutes into injury time. Sandwiched in between was a game of compelling to-and-fro that could just as easily have tilted the way of the northern side. This is junior football and every sort of footballer gets his go. Glenbeigh-Glencar had O'Sullivan, the four-time All-Ireland winner. They had Fergal Griffin, who played on the same Kerry minor team as the Gooch and Declan O'Sullivan and has spent the 16 years since showing that a good solid club midfielder is something to be. And when they really needed carrying, they had Gavan O'Grady, a Kerry minor, under-21 and junior player in his time but having his day of days here when it mattered most. Rock had Ciaran Gourley, 37 now and

Club finals Match facts
ALL-IRELAND INTERMEDIATE CLUB FINAL
Westport (Mayo) 2-12, St Colmcille's (Meath) 3-8
WESTPORT: P O'Malley (0-1, 45); K Dever, K Keane, N McManamon, B McDermott, L Keegan, J Walsh; B O'Malley, S Scott (0-3); F McDonagh (0-3, 0-2 frees), P Keegan (0-1), L Staunton; C Moran (0-4), P Lambert, O McLoughlin (2-0). Subs: D Horan for Keane (11 mins); R Geraghty for Staunton, (half-time); A Dunne for P O'Malley (black-card, 57 mins).
ST COLMCILLE'S: J Brown, A Lynch, C Ward, J McDonnell, E Woods (0-1), J Mullin, J Sweeney, D Sheeran, R McCloskey, C Hillard (0-1), B Brennan (1-2), D O'Byrne, G Reilly (0-3, 0-2 frees), N Ronan, J Cantlon (1-0). Subs: C O'Byrne for D O'Byrne (41 mins); J Reynolds (1-0, pen) for Sweeney (41 mins); C Kelly (0-1) for Ronan (44 mins); J Kavanagh for McDonnell (53 mins); N Ronan for Hillard (63 mins).
Referee: Niall Cullen (Fermanagh).

ALL-IRELAND JUNIOR CLUB FINAL
Glenbeigh-Glencar 1-14, Rock St Patrick's 1-11
GLENBEIGH-GLENCAR: R O'Connor, S O'Sullivan, C Doyle, J Hoare, J Brosnan, P Kilkenny, C Teahan, C McGillicuddy, F Griffin (0-1); Danny O'Sullivan, Darran O'Sullivan (1-3), T Cahill, K Courtney (0-2), G O'Grady (0-6, 0-3 frees), D Griffin. Subs: B Murphy (0-1) for Cahill (50 mins); J McKenna (0-1) for Danny O'Sullivan (60 mins); V Hoare for Fergal Griffin (62); P Griffin for Darran O'Sullivan (black-card); D McGillicuddy for S O'Sullivan (71).
ROCK: S Donaghy, M McAleer, N Mullin, N McWilliams, C Gourley (0-1), S Mullin, A Girvan (0-1); E McWilliams, D Carroll (0-1); T Bloomer, E Ward, C McWilliams, R O'Leary, A McGarrity (0-5, 0-4 frees), C McCreesh (0-3). Subs: P Ward (1-0) for S Mullin; D Reid for N McWilliams (33); L Nugent for Cathal McWilliams (52); Cathal McWilliams for Ward (64); S Litter for McGarrity (72).
Referee: Jerome Henry (Mayo)

Gaelic Games Sigersen Cup

St Mary's hold on for shock win over holders UCD

St Mary's 0-13
UCD 2-6
St Mary's, Belfast were crowned Sigersen Cup champions for 2017 after pulling off a shock win over holders UCD in a superb final at Claremorris on Saturday. The Belfast side did it the hard way as they recovered from a nightmare start when they conceded two goals in the opening three minutes. But by half-time they had edged in front by 0-9 to 2-1 and never looked back. Champions UCD kicked eight wides in the second-half and St Mary's deservedly held on for a famous win. UCD's dream start came despite playing against the strong wind, with Dublin footballer Colm Basquel rattling the net on two occasions in the opening three minutes. St Mary's responded well to the challenge however, and Oisín O'Neill got them moving after 10 minutes with their first score of the match. Conall McCann, Conor Meyer and O'Neill again found their range to cut the gap to 2-0 to 0-4 after 13 minutes. Cathal McShane and McCann then hit the target to tie the match after 20 minutes, before O'Neill edged them in front with a couple of frees, and Ciaran Corrigan pointed to make it 0-9 to 2-0 approaching the interval. Paul Mannion eventually ended a 26-minute scoreless spell for the champions when he raised a white flag after a short kickoff was intercepted. McShane extended the St Mary's lead after the restart before Barry McGinn and Conor McCarthy responded for the Dublin students. But the reigning champions couldn't find an equaliser, as



St Mary's Kyle Mallon celebrates after Saturday's final victory over UCD

Kieran McKeary added another for St Mary's. Meath half forward Eamon Wallace cut the gap, but the Belfast side hit back again through Corey Quinn with the score of the match, to open up a 0-12 to 2-4 lead with 11 minutes left on the clock. McKeary extended the lead to three with two minutes remaining, and while Basquel and McCarthy cut the gap to the minimum, the holders still couldn't find another.

ST MARY'S: M Reid, R Mooney, A McKay, K Mallon, C Byrne, C MacLomhar, C Meyer (0-1); C McCann (0-2), O'Neill (0-4, 0-3 frees); C Corrigan (0-1), K McGearry (0-2, 0-1 frees); S McDonnell, K McKenna, M Fitzsimons, C McShane (0-2). Subs: C Quinn (0-1) for McConville (45 mins); Harrigan for Mallon (63 mins).
UCD: C Horan, M Fitzsimons, R McDavid, E Murchan, C Mullally, S Coen, J McCaffrey, B O'Sullivan, J Barry, C McCarthy (0-2, 0-1 frees), A McDonnell, E Wallace (0-1); P Mannion (0-1), C Basquel (2-1), B McGinn (0-1). Subs: L Casey for McDonnell (30 mins), T Hayes for Mannion (56 mins), L Moran for O'Sullivan (58 mins, black).
Referee: Conor Lane (Cork).

Dr Harty Cup Munster Schools SH final

Templemore bridge 39-year gap at last

Templemore 2-22
St Colman's 1-6
In their third final appearance in five years, Our Lady's, Templemore finally bridged a 39-year gap by winning the Dr Harty Cup in Limerick on Saturday. Having lost four finals in the previous 16 years, there were scenes of jubilation as St Colman's, Cork were dismissed in a 19-point win. Powered by several members of the All-Ireland winning Tipperary minor team the Templemore side led from start to finish in what became a very one-sided affair. Our Lady's had five points on the board before Eoin Roche scored the first point for St Colmans – and by half-time they led by 11-12 to 0-4. Their goal came after 17 minutes when Andrew Ormonde blasted to the net, and only for some great work by St Colman's goalkeeper Eoin Davis, Ray McCormack would have added another shortly after. An indication of the dominance of Our Lady's was that they could afford to hit eight wides in the first half and still lead by 11 points at the break. Brian McGrath, captain of the Tipperary minors last year, gave a huge performance. He scored 1-7 and played a big part in creating a number of other scores. Jerry Kelly and midfielder Stevie Nolan also shone for the victors.

OUR LADY'S, TEMPLEMORE: E Collins, S Ryan, P Campion, E Ryan, N Quinlan, P Caddell, cont, A O'Meara, D Ryan, S Nolan 0-4; D O'Shea 0-1, B McGrath 1-7 (0-2 frees), 0-2 (6's), J Kelly 0-5; A Ormonde 1-1, R McCormack, L Fairbrother 0-4 (3). Subs: S Doyle for McCormack (52), J Ryan for D Ryan (53), J Gilmarin for Ormonde (57), G O'Connor for O'Shea (58), D Byrne for S Ryan (59).
ST COLMAN'S, FERMIOY: E Davis, E Wallace, J O'Leary, K Neville, S McCarthy, N O'Leary (1-1), E Roche 0-1; S O'Connor, D Lenihan 0-3 (2); J Sheehan, B Murphy, D Lardner 0-1; C Ryan, B Roche, A Cress. Subs: P O'Sullivan for Neville (24), R Galvin for Ryan (41), G Lardner for Cress (41), J McHugh for Sheehan (46), F Hickey for Murphy (60).
Referee: R McCann, Clare.