

HOGAN



VINCENT HOGAN
vhogan@independent.ie

THIS WEEK'S SPORT ON TV HIGHLIGHTS

TODAY
Soccer: Senegal v Algeria, Eurosport, 7.0. Zimbabwe v Tunisia (Africa Cup of Nations), Eurosport 2, 7.0
Tennis: Australian Open, Eurosport, daily from 6.0am

TOMORROW
Soccer: Morocco v Ivory Coast, Eurosport, 7.0. Togo v Congo DR (Africa Cup of Nations), Eurosport 2, 7.0. BT Sport 1, 7.45. Napoli v Fiorentina (Coppa Italia), Sky Sports 1, 7.45. Bordeaux v PSG (Coupe de la Ligue), BT Sport 2, 8.0

WEDNESDAY
Soccer: Egypt v Ghana, Eurosport, 7.0. Uganda v Mali (Africa Cup of Nations), Eurosport 2, 7.0. Juventus v AC Milan (Coppa Italia), Sky Sports 2, 7.45. Liverpool v Southampton (EFL Cup Semi-Final), Monaco v Nancy (Coupe de la Ligue), BT Sport 2
Cricket: South Africa v Sri Lanka (Twenty20 Series), Sky Sports 2, 4.0

THURSDAY
Soccer: Hull City v Man Utd (EFL Cup Semi-Final), Sky Sports 1, 7.45
Cricket: India v England (Twenty20 Series), Sky Sports 2, 11.0am
Golf: Commercial Bank Qatar Masters, Sky Sports 4, daily from 6.30am & 11.0am, Farmers Insurance Open, Sky Sports 4, daily from 8.0

FRIDAY
Soccer: Schalke 04 v Eintracht Frankfurt (Bundesliga), BT Sport 3, 7.30. Aberdeen v Dundee (Scottish Premiership), BT Sport 1, 7.45. Osasuna v Malaga (La Liga), Sky Sports 1, 7.45. Derby County v Leicester City (FA Cup), BBC1, 7.55.
Rugby: World Rugby Sevens - New Zealand, Sky Sports 2, 9.50

SATURDAY
Soccer: Villarreal v Granada, Sky Sports Red Button, 12.0. Eibar v Deportivo La Coruna, Sky Sports 1, 5.30. Leganes v Celta Vigo (La Liga), Sky Sports 1, 7.45. Motherwell v Rangers (Scottish Premiership), Sky Sports 1, 12.30. Liverpool v Wolves, BT Sport 2, 12.30. Southampton v Arsenal (FA Cup), BT Sport 2, 5.30. Africa Cup of Nations quarter-final, Eurosport, 4.0 & 7.0. Bayer Leverkusen v Borussia Monchengladbach (Bundesliga), BT Sport 1, 5.30. Heracles v PSV Eindhoven (Eredivisie), Sky Sports 3, 7.45. Inter Milan v Pescara (Serie A), BT Sport 1, 7.45.
Rugby: Toulon v La Rochelle, Sky Sports 4, 1.45. Lyon v Racing 92 (Top14), 7.45
Ping Pong: World Championship, Sky Sports 2, daily from 12.0

SUNDAY
Soccer: Real Betis v Barcelona, Sky Sports 2, 11.0. Espanyol v Sevilla, Sky Sports 1, 3.15. Athletic Bilbao v Sporting Gijon, Sky Sports 1, 5.30. Real Madrid v Real Sociedad (La Liga), Sky Sports 1, 7.45. Millwall v Watford, BBC 1, 12.0. Sutton United v Leeds United, BT Sport 2, 2.0. Man Utd v Wigan Athletic (FA Cup), BBC1, 4.30. Sassuolo v Juventus, BT Sport 3, 2.0. Udinese v AC Milan (Serie A), BT Sport Extra 3, 2.0. Africa Cup of Nations quarter-final, Eurosport, 4.0 & 7.0. PSG v Monaco (Ligue 1), BT Sport 3, 8.0.
Boxing: Carl Frampton v Leo Santa Cruz (WBA Super featherweight title), Sky Sports 1, from 1.0am
Cricket: India v England (Twenty20 Series), Sky Sports 2, 1.30

World sits on its hands as death toll rises in Qatar's vanity project



The Khalifa Stadium in Doha where a British worker fell to his death last week – perhaps the only reason last week's tragedy even registered as international news was the nationality of the victim

THE wreath inside Palermo's La Favorita stadium eventually withered and died, replaced by a green plastic seat, embedded into the concrete.

Commerce supplanting sentiment I suppose. By the time Italia '90 pitched up in Sicily, there was no plaque, no visible memorial to the five deceased workmen. Ten months earlier, they had been crushed by what was described as an "inexplicable" collapse of a partially constructed roof. Work was suspended for two months after, colleagues refusing to return to a site they fervently believed to be cursed.

It meant a desperate rush in the end to finish the venue that would host Ireland's World Cup games against Egypt and Holland.

But La Favorita found a bewitching beauty by the time the eyes of the world settled upon it. Separated only by a harness-racing track from the foot of Monte Pellegrino, the work of a battalion of gardeners had flowers exploding into brilliant colour behind each goal and parallel to each tramline.

It looked gorgeous yet, occasionally during those games, I found myself glancing up at the reconstructed roof, trying to imagine the horror of such heavy steelwork tumbling down upon humans below. I'd visited La Favorita that March, workmen endlessly blessing themselves each time they walked past the flowers placed in honour of fallen colleagues. The word then was that senior FIFA officials had taken to "expressing serious doubts" about whether or not Palermo should remain a World Cup city.

CONSCIENCE
But then 19 other people had perished in the construction of stadia on the Italian mainland, so where exactly was the deployment of a conscience going to lead football's governing body?

"We can never be happy until finished with this place," one Sicilian workman told me in broken English during that March visit. He said they believed that the ghosts of those who died would haunt La Favorita forever more.

Perhaps that's why it was eventually renamed Stadio Comunale Renzo Barbera, the Wikipedia page of which makes no reference today to the tragedy of August '89. La Favorita and its ghosts have all but been air-brushed from history.

I was reminded of those workmen last week when the wretched toll of Qatar's hosting of the 2022 World Cup slipped into sharp focus again with the death of a British worker at the Khalifa Stadium in Doha. For "unknown reasons" a suspended catwalk platform collapsed, causing the 40-year-old to fall from a height.

In a sense, the world has been turning an increasingly bleary

eye towards Qatar of late after initial revulsion at the findings of international camera-crews, filming the squalid camps in which migrant workers are, effectively, imprisoned by unscrupulous contractors.

Two of those crews were subsequently imprisoned for telling a modern-day story of slavery. But disgust seems to have mutated into a kind of resigned acceptance that no matter the injustices ventilated, nothing will stop Qatar hosting the biggest sporting event in the world. The Disneyfication of this tiny gulf emirate is already much too far advanced.

In fact, a suspicion finds stubborn traction that perhaps the only reason last week's tragedy even registered as international news was the nationality of the victim. The incident is officially registered by the organisers, The Supreme Committee for Delivery and Legacy no less, as only the second confirmed death of an employee working on a Qatar World Cup site in the last three months.

Which, presumably, means either that working conditions are exemplary or those recording the fatalities have the arithmetic skills of a potted plant.

Last June, the Washington Post

published a graphic displaying the number of construction fatalities broadly accepted as having occurred before some of the world's biggest sporting events. The toll for the Sochi Winter Olympics was a sobering 60.

Next up? The Brazil World Cup with 10. Then the Beijing Olympics, six. The South African World Cup? Two. The London Olympics? One. And their estimate for the last three years of frantic construction in Qatar? Twelve hundred.

Those with a taste for semantics might argue that not all of these largely Nepalese, Indian and Sri Lankan victims actually died inside what will, technically, be World Cup venues. But to host the

QATAR WILL GET ITS WORLD CUP EVEN THOUGH NOBODY OVER THE AGE OF TEN BELIEVED IN THE PROBITY OF THE PROCESS THAT AWARDED IT

tournament, Qatar is building 20 new skyscrapers, a new airport, new roads, sewerage systems, even the equivalent of an entire new city, the total infrastructure budget reputedly running to \$260 billion.

This might sound like rather a lot of money but Qatar is, per capita, the world's richest country.

It is also an "open jail" according to the Nepalese ambassador who was sent home for questioning the morality of what he saw happening there. FIFA's language is, of course, more circumspect. They use expressions like "ongoing processes" and "challenges remaining".

They could be talking about stocks and bonds rather than humans going home to their impoverished families in boxes.

How reassuring then to hear John Delaney come under such, em, rigorous questioning about FIFA's conduct in Kildare Street last week when the FAI boss sat before a Joint Committee on Tourism, Transport and Sport. Did he think, asked one TD, that FIFA's decision to expand the World Cup to 48 teams might "dilute the quality of the finals?"

Another, presumably with a view to more immediate travel possibilities into racist, homophobic, habitually violent Russia for the 2018 tournament, apparently wondered if an

embassy might be a good idea "going forward".

I trust they received suitably ecumenical messages to bring back to their people.

When it comes to global sport, the great, clanking machinery of commerce eventually anaesthetises everything and everybody. No matter what way you hold it up to the light, Qatar will get its World Cup.

It will get it even though nobody over the age of ten honestly believed in the probity of the process that awarded it to them, not to mention the integrity of the body qualified to make that award.

RAMPANT
Remember, in May of 2015, the US indicted 14 then current and former FIFA officials and associates on charges of "rampant, systemic and deep-rooted corruption."

Sepp Blatter is, of course, no longer President, but – apart from super-sizing future World Cups – Gianni Infantino seems to do little apart from embracing assorted luminaries at celebrity football games.

So a country, in which a Dutch woman who last year reported a rape found herself convicted of having sex outside marriage, passes the only test that – ultimately

– matters in the broad global conscience for a suitable World Cup host. Is it willing to pay?

A country where the consumption of alcohol can be punished by 40 lashes. Sex outside marriage? A hundred. No football history, a climate that has already forced a winter rescheduling of European club football and irrefutable evidence of forced labour on the construction sites, yet Qatar knows for certain that nobody will lay a glove on it.

They tell the world that the welfare of migrant workers is a "top priority", promising a dramatic revision of the "kafala" labour system that so facilitates exploitation. That revision – unveiled last December – left "the same basic system intact" according to Amnesty International. Still, contractors confiscate passports and withhold wages. Still, corpses accumulate.

History tells us it's nothing new and, in time, the world will come to swoon at Qatar's futuristic architecture. There will be no moral awakening because there is no more global compunction for the dead than if they'd been cockroaches crushed under human feet. The argument against Qatar feels burnt-out.

Wonder will they have fan embassies?

WEEKEND TAKEAWAY

When the 'Rocket' fires he's on a different planet

WHEN Ronnie O'Sullivan is in full flow there are few sportspeople in any code, maybe Roger Federer aside, that make their craft look quite as easy as he does.

And like most flayed sporting geniuses there's a vulnerability about him that compels people to tune in because you never really know what's going to happen.

Widely lauded as the most natural cue man of all time, the 'Rocket', a professional since 1992, continues to make snooker relevant into his 40s. Case in point his magnificent 6-4 Masters semi-final victory over Marco Fu on Saturday which nearly brought the house down at Alexandra Palace.

Trailing 2-1 and clearly agitated against an in-form Fu, O'Sullivan split his cue tip, something which would deter even the best players. No problem, he immediately fires in an effortless 95 break en route to five of the next seven frames. Pure genius. **MV**

Munster in the clear over Murray's HIA in Glasgow

APART from earning a quarter-final home draw against Toulouse on Saturday, Munster received an added bonus when it was announced they were cleared of any wrong-doing over Conor Murray's HIA case against Glasgow.

The EPCR (European Professional Club Rugby) had asked its Outward Incident Review Group to investigate the matter and found that there was no case to answer.

"The Group, whilst acknowledging its role is to review the application of the Head Injury Assessment (HIA) protocol, has player welfare at its core.

"The opinion of the Group is that Murray did not demonstrate any criteria that should have led to his immediate and permanent removal from the field of play. The player underwent further assessment by Munster's medical team and its specialist advisors and, as such, the decision as to when the player returns to play rests with Munster."

Mahon signing local boys will give Drogheda fans a lift

DROGHEDA fans have not had much ammunition with which to slag their Dundalk rivals in recent seasons but things are looking up by the Boyne.

And, whereas the Lilywhites did not have one local player on their regular starting 11 last season, the Drogheda have taken admirable steps to ensure that their side will be full of Drogheda lads ahead of their return to the Premier Division.

The veteran Pete Mahon has an excellent backroom team in John Gill and Mark Kinsella. As well as Killian, Sean and Gavin Brennan, they have the hugely influential Sean Thornton and recent signing Thomas Byrne – all hometown boys.

Byrne, 18, is an Irish under-19 international.

To have five local lads of that quality will mean a great deal to everyone at Drogheda United. **JW**

Federer has more to give following Connors' path

ROGER FEDERER became the oldest man to make a grand slam quarter-final since Jimmy Connors after his Australian Open win over Kei Nishikori on Saturday.

It was in the 1991 US Open, during which Connors celebrated his 39th birthday, where the American made it as far as the semi-finals and called the tournament "the best 11 days of my tennis career".

Connors' glittering career saw him hold on to No 1 spot for 160 consecutive weeks and was the first man to hold five US Open titles, records broken and equalled respectively by Federer (pictured).

If the 35-year-old Swiss continues to follow Connors' path he has much more to give. **BL**

Another game, another vase goes to CJ Stander

HE is pretty much the default choice for the man of the match award in every game he plays, but it's impossible to ignore CJ Stander when he's regularly the top ball carrier and top tackler on the pitch.

On Saturday he picked up his fourth award (in 11 starts) of the season and the 18th of his Munster career (93 games). That's an average of one in every five games.

"I've started a system where I need to buy four bunches of flowers because there is four on the table at all times," he said recently.

When Stander first arrived in Limerick five years ago, there were some who questioned whether or not he had the required work rate to cut it in the famous red jersey.

Now, 18 vases later and with the florists in Limerick thriving, the South African has had the last laugh. **CT**

Keane appearances offer insight into his ambitions

ROBBIE KEANE was a busy man this weekend, moving from the Soccer AM studios on Saturday to Goals on Sunday yesterday as he re-introduced himself to a British audience.

Keane has now indicated that his next move in football will be to the UK – a surprise when there was an initial expectation that he would stay in the MLS after leaving LA Galaxy.

Clearly, the 36-year-old is moving towards the next phase in his career. He has previously said that he is keen to progress to management and views England as the natural place to start.

He will still be determined to make an impact on the pitch in the short term. But coming back to this part of the world indicates that the Tallaght man wants to put himself back in the spotlight in an environment where he hasn't featured since a loan spell at Aston Villa in January 2012.

The media appearances might just be the first step en route to his longer-term ambitions. **DMcD**



Less can be more at mini-golf's Irish Open

FOR some, mini-golf may seem like one of those sports most enjoyably pursued after hours in a drunken stupor with similarly sozzled adults. Or as a means of occupying bored kids.

Others pursue it more seriously, however. Some of them can be seen next month when Ireland's only indoor venue, Rainforest Adventure Golf in Dundrum, hosts the inaugural Irish Open on February 18 and 19.

A £3,500 prize fund is aptly dwarfed by the €4m on offer at golf's Irish Open. However, Rory McIlroy's (pictured) gig will be exclusive; anybody can take part in the mini-golf version.

So even if you're the world's best players, Thomas Downes and Olivia Prokopova, line up, you can do so too by simply paying the €20 entry fee. **DK**

An Post season warm-up hit by Spanish cold front

THE An Post-Chain Reaction team launch has developed into a slick affair in recent years. The event takes place at the end of their January "warm-weather" training camp in Calpe, Spain, at a base shared by many of the World Tour teams.

There's the usual audio-visuals, Eurosport MC and a ramp laid out at the front of the stage to allow the An Post class of 2017 ride on to the stage. After the riders depart, back down the ramp, the long list of sponsors and connections are wheeled out, giving you the sense that nothing is being left to chance with the Sean Kelly-backed team. Apart from the weather.

For the first time since 1982 Calpe was hit with snow last week, creating havoc for the teams who had travelled out to take advantage of their, usually, more suitable weather. Not that that would bother Kelly himself, always regarded as a man for all seasons. **CL**

ON THIS DAY

IN 2013
Eden Hazard (right) was shown red for kicking a ballboy as Chelsea crashed out of the Capital One Cup to Swansea losing 2-0 on aggregate.



ALSO ON THIS DAY IN 2011
Kilmacud Crokes claimed Leinster club SFC title with a 0-15 to 1-7 win over Rhode. David Nestor's penalty save denied a rally from the Offaly men.

BORN ON THIS DAY
ARJEN ROBBEN
The Dutch footballer turns 33. **CS**

Dublin's production line sends chill through rivals

MUCH has been made of the fact that what is effectively Dublin's third-string side has made it to the O'Byrne Cup final, their defeat of a strong Kildare team in yesterday's semi-final really compounding the concern about the quality of the rest in the province.

But as Louth manager Colin Kelly noted after his side's win over Meath in Navan, there are a lot of "high end" players on that team as Dessie Farrell's 2012 All-Ireland-winning minors and the 2014 All-Ireland U-21s continue to fuel progress on all fronts.

From those two teams alone have come 11 of the 20 players used against Kildare – Robbie Gaughan, Conor Mulally, Niall Scully, Niall Walsh, Michael Deegan, Conor McHugh, Robbie McDaid, Shane Cunningham, Gavin Ivory, Shane McGowan and Shane Boland.

It's a chilling thought for the chasing pack that this quality lies outside the 30-plus senior squad. **CK**