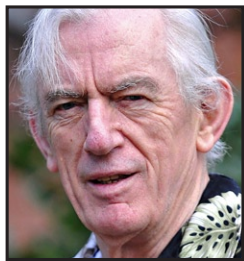


SHAY HEALY



SETS THE CAT AMONG THE PIGEONS

A case of flute in the mouth Sir James, but who will win 1916 song contest?

ONLY days ago, I heard Sir James Galway, being interviewed for The Stephen Nolan Show. He was forthcoming and daring in his answers, but unfortunately and unconsciously, a potential hit interview went sour because his responses sounded like a script that had been written by Gerry Adams.

'Wouldn't you say it is immoral for one country to take over another country just because the other country is not so well armed?' asked Sir James. 'Well, let me put this to you - would you not think that 800 years ago what the British did was immoral and kept doing it and it is still immoral?'

Invoking the 800 years of British rule in Ireland was both sweet and nostalgic and, though it wasn't a song, Sir James's interview should be thought of as an All-Ireland symphony.

Last week I wrote about the difficulties that lie ahead for whomsoever is put in charge of selecting the official music for the forthcoming 1916 commemorations. Fine Gael and Fianna Fáil should each get to nominate a couple of songs, with Labour taking one. And a couple of wild cards for the curator.

Possible Fine Gael Selection:

1. **Rising of the Moon** (Michael Noonan sticking his head above the parapet)
2. **Take Me Home To Mayo** (Napoleon heads West for the weekend)

Possible Fianna Fáil Selection

1. **Come to the Bower** (Tourism is important)
2. **Óró Sé Do Bheatha 'Bhaile** (Help is on the way)

Possible Labour Selection

- 1 **The Maid With The Bonny Brown Hair** (As long as you remember to dye it like Joanie)

Before we begin to analyse the music in more depth, can we decide what we're going to suggest they call this extravaganza.

So far we've got: Celebration of 1916, Easter Rising Commemoration, The Rising 1916, Rebel Heroes, The Easter Scuffle... I think something hot, like REBELAZZA.

In 1916, Britain was fighting The Great War on several fronts and thousands of young Irishmen joined up and went off to the continent.

The British army uniform was a red rag to any amount of bullish denizens of Dublin city centre. There was no love lost between them uniforms and civvies.

Should he decide to approach flautist Sir James, Gerry Adams will not find it easy if he hopes to take him to his bosom.

'We grew up as Protestants and we were brainwashed to the Protestant ethic, and to their way of thinking,' said Sir James.

'For example, we knew all the sights of London, Trafalgar Square, Buckingham Palace

and all that but we didn't know Stormont.'

Up pops former Mayor of Belfast Sammy Wilson with a riposte.

'During the interview with Stephen Nolan, Sir James Galway indicated that he doesn't take much interest in politics and perhaps he should have kept it that way,' quipped Sammy.

'I have always admired Sir James's work but some of his comments were offensive, inaccurate and downright disgraceful.'

Then Sammy's bitterness truly kicks in. 'Everyone is entitled to develop their unique political viewpoint but if they express that view then they should also be prepared to defend it.'

'For Sir James to express his pro-republican viewpoint, criticise Northern Ireland for being part of the United Kingdom but then accept a knighthood from our monarch is hypocritical.'

'It is the typical hallmark of anti-British social climber who cannot resist our British honours system.'

'Sir James's interview will have discredited him with many admirers, avowed Sammy.'

'His incoherent claims will be viewed as the comments of someone who is out of touch with reality in Northern Ireland.'

Here's a thought. Is Sir James eligible, as a knight of the realm,

to become President of Ireland if he were of a mind to stand?

IF he's over 35 is the rule, and Sir James is 75. So, he'd be a worthy successor to Michael D, another cultured ambassador imbued with the love of a good session, and a year his junior.

The royals too are a sprightly lot and in their head of a state they have somebody even older, at 89. Does Lizzie mind about her age? Well, she doesn't have any heavy work and played a blinder when she visited here.

Back at the revolution, Sinn Féin will be very annoyed by the rules that are set for another great honour, winner of the great 1916 song contest.

The 'before 1969' embargo, would scupper their high hopes for Only Our Rivers Run Free and the talismanic Men Behind The Wire.

The Nordies are good ballad writers. And singers. Think Carrickfergus, Slieve Gallion Brae and Will Ye Go Lassie Go.

Down here we have The Fields of Athenry, Galway Girl and Carolina Rua.

It would make for an interesting contest.

Interview Shane Lowry

SHANE Lowry wanders into the bar of the Buncloody Golf Club in Co. Wexford, stopping every couple of seconds to meet and greet the small crowd of fans who have turned up to watch him play a round of golf. It's just days after his disappointing appearance at the Irish Open in Co. Down where, in a fit of pique, he damaged his putter by throwing it away before finishing up a long way down the field.

Fast forward to this weekend and Lowry has recovered his poise and is game to be in the running for the US Open title at the half-way stage at Chambers Bay, Seattle.

Should the Offaly man emulate McIlroy and become a US Open champion tomorrow night, his welcome back home could even surpass Rory's when he won.

'Everyone likes Shane,' declares his baby-faced manager, a rather confident chap called Kieron O'Neill. 'Rory [McIlroy] has never really had the same kind of appeal for some reason.'

Given that Lowry is signed to Horizon Sports Management, who McIlroy famously and acrimoniously split from in 2013, this particular assessment of the Northern Irish player's appeal should probably be taken with a grain of salt.

There is no doubt, however, that Lowry is indeed universally well-liked. From the moment he burst on to the professional golfing scene in 2009, winning the Irish Open as an amateur, the 28-year-old has won a legion of fans, not only for his obvious talent but also for his down-to-earth and personable manner.

Reports from tournaments he plays at often mention the length of time he spends chatting to followers and the amount of golf booty he gives away as souvenirs.

Many journalists who have dealt with him since he hit the big time have been impressed by his approachability and politeness, while his interactions on social media are pretty much always good-humoured and self-deprecating.

Meeting him on Irish soil as he fulfilled some of his sponsorship duties for McGettigan's Irish Pub Group, who own the nearby Millrace Hotel and who he is there with to help publicise - he is every bit as amiable and unpretentious as promised.

At 6ft tall and with broad shoulders, he's a big guy, although not quite as large as photos would suggest. In fact, he's recently slimmed down thanks to a new training regime. He shrugs off the idea that he's been possibly influenced by his good pal Rory, whom he has known since they competed together as teenagers in boys' tournaments and who has noticeably buffed up in the last couple of years.

'Nothing to do with Rory, no,' he says. 'I've always been overweight and I've never cared, I'm happy in my own body. But I have started training a lot. I was getting a couple of injuries I probably shouldn't have been getting at my age. So I started using a physio and a trainer.'

'It's something I have to do to prolong my career. I'll never have a six-pack,' he adds with a twinkly grin. 'But I do want to keep injury-free.'

Shane is the middle child of three. Younger brother Alan, 21, is studying maths and finance at the National University of Ireland in Maynooth, and he also plays golf. 'He's doing okay, he's doing well in the east of Ireland,' Shane says, adding with a hearty laugh: 'I always say Alan got the brains and I got the looks.'

'My sister Sinéad is 30 and she has a baby boy called Cian and one on the way. She's married to Niall, a guy from Tullamore whom I've known for years.'

Shane's parents Brendan, who worked for Eircom, and Bridget raised their family in the town of Clara in north Co. Offaly, where they still live. A GAA stronghold, Brendan was a member of the Offaly squad when they won the senior All-Ireland final in 1982.

'That was back in the day,' Lowry says of his father's sporting career. 'I wasn't born until 1987 so I didn't really notice any adulation he might

BY JENNY FRIEL

have got. He stopped playing when I was six and then got into management, he was over Westmeath for a couple of years in the late Nineties. I used to go training with him and I'd go to every game with him.'

But Shane's love for sport didn't come from his father's side alone.

'I probably got a lot of my competitive spirit from dad alright but it was but also from my mum's side,' he explains. 'She was a Scanlan and all her brothers were good footballers, but they came up around in the Nineties, when Offaly football wasn't all that great.'

Although he played rugby, football and hurling, Lowry proved to be truly gifted at golf. Yet, compared to some other superstars, he came to the sport at the relatively late age of 13.

'Golf was never in the family really, my uncles would have played a bit,' he says. 'I started playing pitch and putt in Clara when I was a kid and from there, I got decent at that and my uncles started bringing me out [on golf courses] when I was 13.'

Joining his local club, the Esker Hills Golf Club, after just one year of playing, he was down to a 12 handicap and by the time he was 15 that figure was down to single digits.

After school he went to the Athlone Institute of Technology where he got a Higher Certificate in Sport and Recreation and then won a sports scholarship to UCD where he studied Sports Management.

BY 2007 he was the Irish Amateur Close Champion and, two years later, at the age of 22, he won the Irish Open in 2009, only the third amateur winner of a European Tour event. At the time it was hailed by the Guardian as 'a remarkable victory by a chunky 22-year-old whose biggest ambition last week was to make the cut and then get back to his preparation for the Walker Cup'. Because of his amateur status he had to forfeit the €500,000 first prize but later that year he turned professional.

Since then he has been a regular on the golf tour circuit, winning the Portuguese Masters in 2012. In 2014 he finished in second place at the BMW PGA Championship and, that same year, tied for ninth at the Open Championship. He is currently ranked 50th in the world.

And it's not just his professional life that seems to be going swimmingly. Last November he proposed, reportedly down on bended knee, on a beach in Dubai, to his girlfriend of two years, Wendy Honner.

'I met her on a random night out, nobody introduced us or anything and no, it wasn't in Copper's [a popular nightclub in Dublin],' he laughs.

The couple just recently moved into a house they bought in the salubrious suburb of Rathgar on Dublin's southside. 'We're planning to get married next year, no date is set as yet,' he says.

How does Wendy, a nurse from Co. Laois, cope with the fame and attention that goes with being attached to one of the best golfers in the world? 'She's OK with it, we keep it as nor-