

IN THESE opening days of 2007 we on the sports desk often find it difficult to come up with new stories because we have the nagging feeling we haven't fully understood the year gone by yet.

And the best way to chronicle that year is surely the tried-and-trusted, if illogical, A-Z format. So here goes: **A is for Autobiography.** Rooney, Ferdinand, Gerrard and the magnum opus that was Ashley Cole's *My Defence*. Each one chronicled the fascinating story behind England's World Cup of the Golden Generation. Many trees that could still be alive are not. Talking of trees, there was at least Paul McGrath, better known for being locked out of his.

B is for beer. Astounding amounts of this stuff was consumed at Cheltenham. With 10 Irish winners there was more drink spilled at Prestbury Park than there was drunk at Royal Ascot.

C is for Cry Babies. Aussie, Aussie, Aussie! Cry, Cry, Cry! The International Rules Series has been called off for the foreseeable future because of those big brutes from Down Under, It's our ball and we're staying at home.

D is for Drugs. Floyd Landis wins the Tour de Farce. Justin Gatlin sprints to the jacks and out of the record books. The fastest runner and cyclist in the world are caught using performance-enhancing drugs. The biggest disappointment is that it isn't a surprise.

E is for England. Shite performances in the group after overhyped run-in. Lucky second round win followed by defeat on penalties after their most popular player is sent off, Magnificent, if clichéd.

F is for Freddie Flintoff. Are we enjoying England's demise in every major sport they enjoy a bit too much? Probably. When we saw this guy locked during the celebrations for the Ashes victory in 2005 we felt he would be the right man to lead them to glorious defeat in Oz. The men in whitewash have not let us down. At least they are still World Rugby Champions.

G is for Graham Taylor. A fine replacement on our screens for Big Ron. Taking about Stuart Pearce's daughter's toy horse, which Pearce had been placing on the touchline: Commentator: "Did you ever have a lucky charm Graham?" Graham Taylor: "Yes, my wife. But I never laid her on the touchline."

Or after Paul Scholes had been hurt: "Scholes walks away a bit gingerly." Or even: "People need to understand what kind of goldfish Wayne Rooney lives in."

H is for Headbutt. Even his greatest fan must acknowledge that Zinedine Zidane's exit from the international stage will forever tinge his legacy. While Zidane saw red, Josip Simunic saw yellow and yellow and yellow...

I is for Incomprehension. The feeling of every England fan in Twickenham as Ireland were awarded dodgy try after dodgy try. Who cares, we beat the bastards.

J is for Jockeyless Rider. Best not forget when it comes to drugs that one of our own top sportsmen is banned for testing positive and a raft of other accusations. Another flawed Irish sporting genius, Kieran Fallon



TOUR DE FARCE: Floyd Landis with the urine sample that proved to be his downfall.



Maria Sharapova won the US Open in 2006. Here she is seen celebrating.



BOOZE AND WOOS: Darren and the boys celebrate victory Irish-style.

My A-Z of the sporting year



ROBERT O'SHEA

is bringing out his book next year.

K is for the K-Club. The American team, with their wives and God in tow, arrived in Kildare with revenge on their minds.

But the Europeans were swinging better than Saddam Hussein. Cue an impromptu drinking session on a roof and Paul McGinley throwing T-shirts, golf shoes, potted plants down to the adoring crowd.

L is for Losing to Cyprus. We lost 5-2 to Cyprus. Five-two to Cyprus. They scored five, we scored two. That's us scoring two goals and them scoring five.

John Delaney recently signed a six-year contract with the FAI.

M is for Maria Sharapova. She won the US Open. She's getting a picture.

N is for No Three-in-a-row. Everybody was kung-fu fighting. They were as fast as lightning. That has nothing to do with this year's All-Ireland hurling final but I thought it best not to remind everybody about

it what with the pain and all that.

O is for Own Goal. The best ever. Yes, Jonathan Woodgate scored one and then got sent off on his debut for Real Madrid, but Chris Brass's for Bury against Darlington in April must top even that. His overhead attempted clearance struck his own nose (which broke) and flew past keeper Kasper Schmeichel. Check it out on YouTube if you get the opportunity. A cracking finish.

P is for Perseverance. Munster finally pulled off the big one in their third final. Other contenders for P: Pride, Peter Stringer and Pissed for several days afterwards.

Q is for Question of Sport. This show is somehow still running 15 years after it stopped being funny. What happened next? Let's hope the answer includes the word "cancelled" and that the mystery guest is Sue Barker's assassin.

R is for Retirement. Corcoran, Moynihan, Lohan, Zidane, Agassi, Navratilova (for the fourth time), Schumacher and Thorpe.

As the Irish Times said of Schumacher: "He drove into the sunset" (not deliberately, it was an accident). Ian "Thorpedo" Thorpe hung up his flippers at the age of 24, and remains the only athlete for whom "act your

age and not your shoe size" was once a compliment on his maturity.

S is for Spanish-speaking Nations: Once again flattered to deceive in a World Cup. Argentina, Spain and Mexico each had a squad of players with enough talent for a decent tilt at the title. Yet each had to settle for "No Más!" before they should have.

T is for Tiger Woods. Tiger is the Sun and the other golfers are the moon. Expect a long eclipse. Can you remember who won the Masters. I think it was Phil Mickelson.

U is for Ubiquity. It's amazing Franz Beckenbauer didn't appear in any of the earlier letters. Because at the World Cup he was everywhere. And when he wasn't cut to by the director during a break in play, Maradona was. Get off our screen buddies, we want to see shots of hot chicks dressed only in flags.

V is for Vendetta. While they didn't exactly bury the hatchet under the centre spot, McCarthy and Keane eventually met. They both tried to play it down as media hype. Guys, come on, they wrote a musical about you, it was always going to be big.

W is for Winter Olympics. These apparently took place at some point this year. Can just about remember some woman falling over before she

crossed the line in some sport involving a snowboard. We did develop a new-found respect for ice-hockey however, which we knew was dirty, but not as dirty as according to the *Ottawa Citizen* newspaper which asserted that during an NHL game this season: "The Sabres outshit the Senators 32-28."

X is somewhat inevitably for Xabi Alonso. Scored two goals from inside his half in one season, against Luton and Newcastle. The first netted £250,000 for Adrian Hayward, who, after a vivid dream, placed a £200 bet at 125-1 on Alonso doing it once. On a technicality, he should have had the money taken off him when he did it the second time.

Y is for Yawn. The audience for the 1985 snooker final at the Crucible between Denis Taylor and Steve Davis peaked at 18 million. Graham Dott and Peter Ebdon were lucky to get 18.

Z is for Zara. British people vote for royalty shock! Joe Calzaghe (whose magnificent career hit its highest point this year) said of Zara Phillips winning the BBC Sports Personality of the Year: "I'm not surprised. If she wasn't the Queen's niece I would be. But fair play, she is a world champion at whatever it is she does."