



Alistair Cragg wrapped in an Irish flag after winning the 3000 meters final race at the European Indoor Athletics Championships in Madrid last year.

Unravelling a flag mystery

To us, it might look like a rag. But to the brave, embattled men of the fort it was more than that. It was a flag of surrender. And after that, it was torn up and used for shoeshine rags, so the men would look nice for the surrender.

Jack Handey

WITHIN minutes of passing the winning post in Saturday's Grand National, winning jockey 'Slippers' Madden had a tricolour around his shoulders.

You couldn't help but hear a hint of bitterness in the BBC presenter's voice when he said it was "a sight we have got used to at racecourses in Britain recently."

You only ever see a jockey parading with An Bhratach Náisiúnta after an Irish win in the National, or one of the big races at Cheltenham, so I was slightly vexed by the tone of the Beeb man's observation.

But then I got to thinking. What if Carl Llewellyn or one of the British jockeys whipped out the butcher's apron after a big win at Leopardstown?

How would I react? Would froth literally spill from of my mouth?

Flags — they're a tricky business.

Yet who can begrudge a winning sportsman the opportunity to display their nationalism after a great victory,

And it is better to flaunt that patriotism than not. Remember the



ROBERT O'SHEA

fore the night Sonia seemingly turned down the offer of a tricolour after her gold in the 5,000m in Gothenburg?

It turned out she was looking for a flag with a less heavy pole, but that didn't stop hundreds ringing in to Des Cahill on *Sportscall* complaining about her perceived lack of pride.

Now I consider myself as patriotic as the next fool.

When I was a kid, I would carve ROS loves ROI into barks of trees and stand up for the national anthem, even when I was only watching it on the telly.

But I can't say that I support Kerry North Fianna Fáil TD Tom McEllistrim's call for every primary school in the country to be given a tricolour and flag-post to mark the 90th anniversary of the Easter Rising.

Instead of a flag-post for every school couldn't we just buy one and get Sonia to run round to each one with it?

Although Thomas Francis Meagher brought a silk tricolour back from Paris in 1848 — and it was flown from the GPO during the Rising — it was not adopted until 1919 as the flag of the Irish Republic, before later becoming the flag of the Irish Free State.

Many believe its triband design was based on the French flag but it was also influenced by the green, white and pink of the Newfoundland flag — Meagher's father was born in Canadian territory.

Yet I have always had a soft spot for the old Irish flag of the gold harp on the green background.

It seemed more distinctive than the tricolour. And also, my opinion has been coloured a dozen arguments with seemingly intelligent people about the fact that the Irish flag is not green white and gold (once, I was outnumbered by three to one and had to bow before their ignorance.)

Now that this week's column is flagging (fully intended pun), is it time for the Q and A format that you are famous for?

It is.

Great. My first question about flags is how did all those extremists in Palestine get their hands on so many Danish flags to burn after the cartoon scandal?

Wily entrepreneurs from Dublin made their way south to Muslim strongholds to sell hats, flags and hijabs.

What is your favourite flag?

The Montserrat flag has a colleen in a green shawl holding up a cruci-

fix and a harp. Unfortunately, it is sullied by a Union Jack in the top-left corner. So I'll opt for the flag on the ninth hole at Youghal golf club instead.

Whatever happened to that new EU flag that incorporated 15 members' countries flags and looked like a barcode?

No one knows.

Twenty-one European countries have triband flags, yet not one of them features Heidi Klum. Why's that?

It's inexplicable. We also believe a country would benefit as being a peacemaker at United Nations meetings if Labrador puppies featured on its flag.

Have you had any amusing incidents involving a flag?

I sure have.

Were you drunk when the incident happened?

I sure was.

Expand.

The night before the Ireland versus Holland World Cup qualifier in Dublin I had to get my friend's sister to cut off with a scissors the tricolour that was tied tightly around my throat.

Does this count as desecrating the flag?

Yes. But only to save the life of a young gael. And the nick to my neck does count as a blood sacrifice.

Seriously though, on the issue of desecrating the flag: What should I do if my flag touches the ground?

Hand-wash it and silence the witnesses by any means necessary.

WORLD BOOK FESTIVAL April 21 - 23, 2006

Cork's World Book Festival will take place from April 21 to 23 in cork city centre.

The festival will be marked by free events on Grand Parade, in the City Library, Bishop Lucey Park and Triskel.

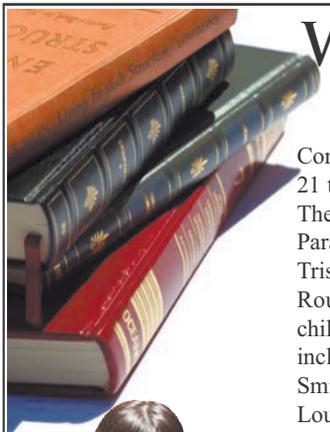
Round-the-clock readings will take place for children & adults by well known authors and poets including Paul Durcan, Rita Ann Higgins, Rommi Smith, Christy Kenneally, William Wall, Mary Leland, Louis de Paor, Conal Creedon, Stephen Boyd, as well as new Cork writers under the banner "New Voices".

FEATURES OF THE FESTIVAL

- Cork's Farmers Markets will serve world-renowned cuisine on Grand Parade
- Book stalls will be set up on Grand Parade
- The Central Library will stay open from 9.30 a.m. on Saturday, April 22 until 2.30 a.m. on Sunday, April 23.
- The evening readings (starting at 8 p.m.) at the Central Library will feature William Wall and Mary Leland.
- Street performers, storytellers, poetry workshops and other kids activities by Tigh Fíli in Bishop Lucey Park.



Des Smyth holds the Irish flag during the trophy ceremony after winning the final round of the Liberty Mutual Legends of Golf in Savannah, USA, in 2005.



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