

# The beginning of the end as Celtic Tiger breathed its last

## 2006

**T**HE year 2006 saw the Celtic Tiger tailing off and whatever chance you had of happiness had to be grasped and made a downpayment on before things began to slide in the direction of Connacht.

Every second supplement in a newspaper was devoted to how you could spend your money as five years of SSIA saving came to fruition. Speedboats, houses in Bulgaria, pyramid schemes ... it was going to be a hell of a party. (Note: In Eason's you can now buy Eddie Hobbs' *30 Ways To Spend Your SSIA* for €1.99.)

Not everyone was rubbing their hands together greedily. American financial genius Warren Buffett donated \$30 billion to the Bill Gates Foundation for charitable causes.

After 150 years in the city centre, our paper moved from Academy Street to the fifth floor of the City Quarter building on Lapp's Quay.

At the Oscars, *Brokeback Mountain* was a surprise loser to *Crash* for best picture. I tried to think up better titles for a gay cowboy movie, of which *Young Buns* and *The Good, The Bad And The Oh Be Nice!* were the best.

Munster finally ended years of heartbreak in the Heineken Cup when they beat Biarritz in the final in Cardiff, with Peter Stringer cheekily running under the legs of Serge Betsen for the winning try.

And if that was not exactly how the try was scored, you could always check it out on youtube, the internet phenomenon of the year. Without it we would surely never see a dramatic lemur or a skateboarding bulldog.

A new seven wonders of the world list was announced as 150 contenders were whittled down to the chosen few. Nobody noticed the competition because there was no telephone vote and you couldn't say 'You're fired' to a monument. Our own Spire (left) didn't get a look-in, but in its shadow, memories of the 1916 Rising were summoned up as a bunch of jobs rioted on O'Connell Street, supposedly in opposition to a 'Love Ulster' parade.



We sure showed them unionists.

Civil liberties took another hit in the global war on terror as security at airports across the world was stepped up. Better not carry any toothpaste in your hand luggage, you maniac.

Vice-president of America Dick Cheney shot a friend of his while out hunting, denying it happened because he mistook his 78-year-old friend Harry Whittington for the holder of his office under the first president Bush, Dan Quayle.

Rumours about Fidel Castro's ailing health continued to swirl following publication of a photograph showing Venezuelan President Hugo Chavez shaking his hand. The rest of Castro's body was nowhere to be seen.

Europe won the first Ryder Cup held in Ireland, but the tournament was somewhat overshadowed by some unseemly fake pictures of Tiger Woods' wife published in a Dublin magazine. Woods received an apology and the phone number of the woman whose body was photo-shopped on his wife's head.

None of this did any harm to the golfer's brand image and one of the most popular computer games was *Tiger Woods PGA Tour*, for the console of the year, the Wii, with which you could learn all the golfer's moves and his swinging technique.

Things were not going so well for the best footballer in the world, Zinedine Zidane, who eight years after heading France to their first World Cup triumph, used his noggin this time to butt Marco Materazzi after the Italian called his

*This week we reach the end of the first decade of the 21st Century, and all week ROBERT O'SHEA is casting an eye over some of the off-beat events of the last 10 years that may have passed you by. Today, he looks back on the major and minor milestones of 2006 and 2007*



**PROTESTS:** Crowds in Dublin's O'Connell Street during a demonstration against a 'Love Ulster' parade in 2006

sister a prostitute. Italy won on penalties after the player of the tournament was sent off.

Ireland appointed Steve Staunton as gaffer, and much hilarity ensued.

Cyclist Floyd Landis claimed he did not use drugs to help him to a surprise Tour de France win, instead putting it down to "pedalling a lot faster than the other guys".

It was the warmest summer since records began in Ireland, with Roscommon almost hitting 33 degrees Celsius at one stage. Global warming got a big thumbs up from everybody in this country and we could only look forward to hotter summers ahead...

Water was found on Saturn, though scientists warned that it was probably best not to drink it. An expedition to the planet was mooted, but the plan was scuppered when NASA were told they could only bring 100ml of water back through security and it must be in a sealable bag.

Bad news, however, for Pluto, which was down-graded from being a planet because of its size, thus confirming the smallest and newest kids in the neighbourhood will always be left out.

After Iran announced it had successfully enriched uranium, the US urged the UN to impose sanctions. Iranian president Mahmoud Ahmadinejad dismissed any concerns, saying

that if his country was going to develop an A-bomb, they would only be doing so for peaceful purposes, such as hunting quail.

### People who died in 2006

- Former Taoiseach Charlie Haughey.
- Saddam Hussein swings from a rope
- Steve Irwin gets killed by a stingray, after years of trying to get eaten by a crocodile.

## 2007

**W**HO can forget 2007? Obviously you can't or you wouldn't be reading this. Our economy was beginning to look like a goldfish in a sieve full of water. There were 33,000 millionaires in Ireland this year, according to Bank of Ireland. People were still buying houses. The good-looking people were taking cocaine; the stuff is literally washing up on our shores. But the party was almost over, even if most of us schmucks were not even invited.

Even if you weren't getting the second wind-fall of SSIA, you were buying a flat-screen TV, because who watched anything but the front bit of the television anyway? The joke response to "Is there anything on the TV tonight?" — "Yeah,

a vase" — became redundant as it was impossible to balance anything on top of the damn thing.

Dick Cheney defended the torture technique of waterboarding performed by U.S. secret services on terrorist suspects. However, he apologised to his good friend Harry Whittington, who accidentally underwent the treatment after the vice-president mistook him for one of the masterminds behind 9/11.

A duck in Florida survived being shot and kept in a freezer for two days. It made a miraculous recovery, even if it was said to be feeling a bit down.

The nation had grown up a little, proven by our ability to listen to a song before a major sporting event at Croke Park (right).



Former cover girl Anna Nicole Smith died of an accidental drug overdose one year after her own son died.

A person from England who was famous for no reason made racist comments about somebody no one had ever heard of from India in a house that belonged to neither of them. This became one of the major news stories of the year.

The surge began in Iraq as 30,000 extra troops were sent into the country from the U.S., although support for the war over there was at an all time low as the Dixie Chicks won best song, album and record at the Grammys.

The unveiling of the London Olympic logo (right) was greeted with controversy, after hundreds of thousands was spent on its design, only for the public to roundly turn on it. What doesn't help was its resemblance to a *Simpsons* character doing something unseemly.



On the subject of *Simpsons*, OJ eventually got jail.

But heading to LA after sporting stardom was David Beckham, who hoped to teach Americans how to play soccer.

The biggest sporting surprise of the year occurred on St Patrick's Day at the World Cup, when the Irish cricket team beat Pakistan, a country where the majority of the population knows that their country has a cricket team. Stranger again, their coach, Bob Woolmer, died that night.

Another tragedy happened in the Algarve, when Madeleine McCann was abducted from her family's holiday home.

There was a comeback by Fine Gael at the polls after their 2002 disaster, but Fianna Fail, the Greens and independents cobbled together enough seats to get a majority.

The Writers Guild in LA went on strike and the top programmes in the U.S. were cancelled for months. *Lost* mysteriously continues.

U.S. astronaut, Lisa Nowak, drove 1,000 miles from Houston in Texas to Florida to kidnap another female astronaut over a relationship they were both having with a third astronaut. In a hurry and not wishing to stop, Nowak wore a nappy for the entire journey. On arrival, she was arrested for confronting her love rival with a gun and (yes, this is why we included this story) possibly took one giant leak.

### People who died in 2007

- A minute's silence was actually merited for once as the world's most famous mime artist, Marcel Marceau, passed through the invisible wall.
- Former Russian president Boris Yeltsin finally reaches the departure lounge.

**TOMORROW: Robert O'Shea ends his series with a look back at 2008 and 2009**