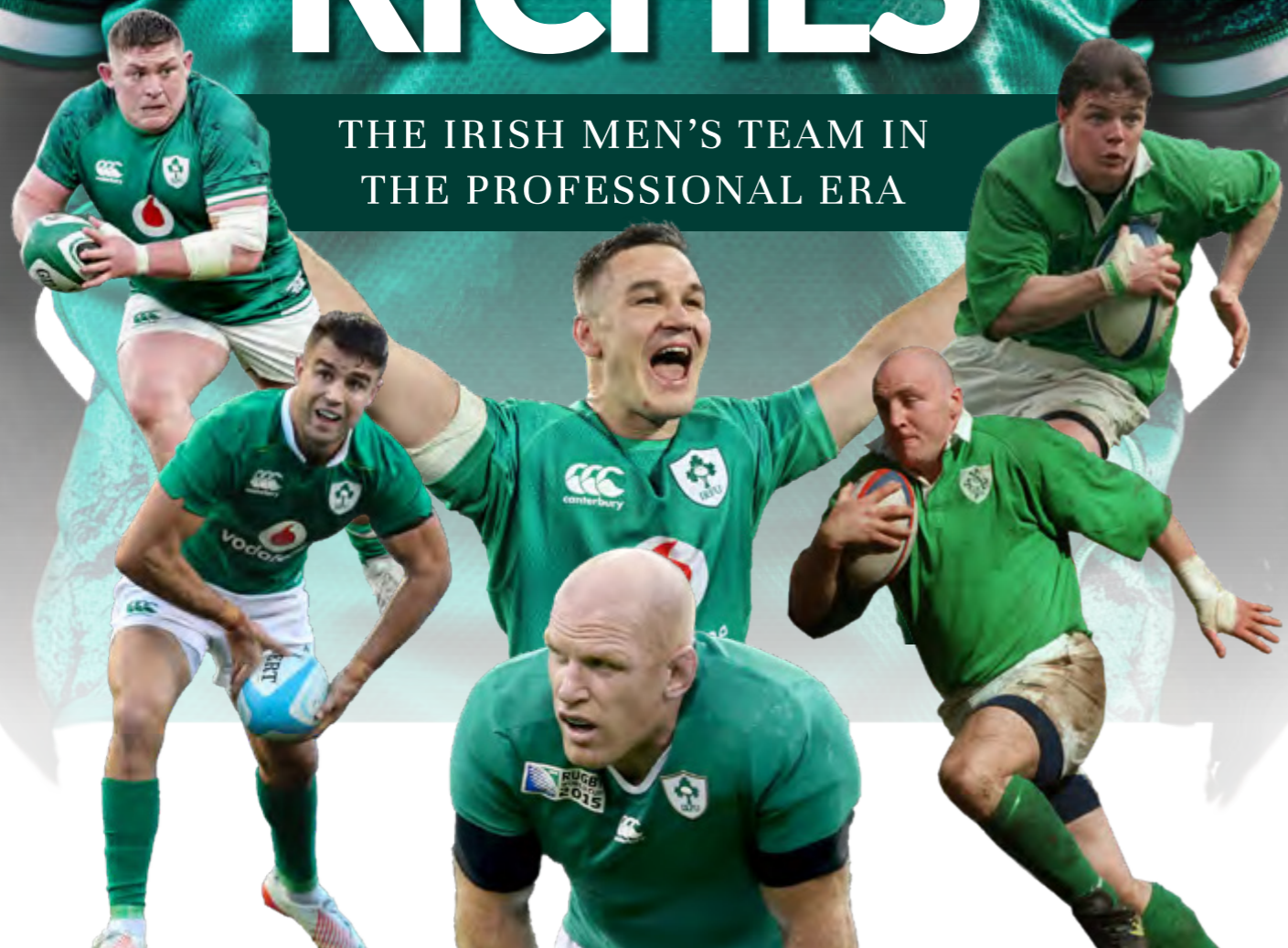




FROM RAGS — TO — RICHES

THE IRISH MEN'S TEAM IN
THE PROFESSIONAL ERA



FEARGAL O'ROURKE

WITH THANKS TO



TRITONLAKE



2023\24 SEASON REVIEW

PLAYED 15: WON 12 LOST 3

Failure and Success...

RWC WARM UPS

After a series win in New Zealand in Summer 2022, followed by a Grand Slam in 2023 on the way to a run of 10 successive wins and a World Rugby ranking of number one, it was difficult to dampen the levels of expectation for the Rugby World Cup in France. In this upcoming tenth edition, it was the first one that Irish supporters could genuinely say that their team was a contender. Up to 2016 Ireland had never beaten the All Blacks, so expectations had always been tempered. In 2019, we were clearly a team in decline. But in 2023 we were a force to be reckoned with on the global rugby stage.

The draw had not been kind with three of the top five ranked teams in the world in Pool B with the other two teams in the same quarter final bracket. Three of Ireland, France, Scotland, South Africa and New Zealand were not going to make the semi final.

The opening warm up game was against **Italy** in the Aviva Stadium on 5 August, which was a cool Saturday evening. Jonathan Sexton was missing for all of the warm up games due to a three match suspension for his conduct to the referee at the Investec Champions Cup final at the end of the previous season. But he was still part of the enlarged 42 man squad.



New caps Tom Stewart, Ciaran Frawley and Calvin Nash celebrate after the Italian game.

It was a good run out for some players outside the normal starting squad evidenced by the fact that no fewer than fourteen of the match day squad had not played in the Grand Slam decider against England the previous season.

As with the vast majority of warm up games, it was not memorable but Ireland racked up a comprehensive win. After Allan had scored an early penalty, Ireland responded with a try from Kilcoyne. A tap penalty from Herring seemed to have been stopped easily but on the next phase, the Munster prop barged over. Then, just before the half hour, Fischetti was sin-binned for taking Casey out after a quick penalty. Ireland kicked to the corner and Doris was the one who grounded from a dominant Maul. Then Varney was caught at the back of a ruck near his own line by Doris and from the resulting ruck Ireland drove over the ball and McCloskey emerged from the back of it to cross the line. Crowley converted all three tries and with a half time lead of 21-3, Ireland were comfortable.

Ten minutes into the second half, a slick passing movement out the Italian line saw Pani get past Stockdale a bit too easily to score in the right corner with Allan scoring a magnificent conversion. Just after the hour, Cian Healy scored from a pick and drive from all of a foot. But straight from the restart Italy won a penalty and set up a series of plays that saw the excellent Menoncello muscle his way past Earls and Stewart to bring it to 26-17. Unfortunately the Italian centre was injured in the closing minutes and, from his anguish, it was clear he knew this would take him out of the World Cup.

Ireland had the last word after a surging move down the left flank brought them into the Italian 22. In the shadow of the posts, Healy threw a loose pass that bobbled along the ground but man of the match Doris, playing with an unfamiliar 7 on his back, was quickest to react and go over. A final score of 33-17 with, most importantly, no serious injuries for the Irish.

Two weeks later **England** were visitors to the Aviva and the preparations were clearly going up a notch. On the Wednesday prior to the game, the squad was reduced by five with Blade, Coombes, Nash, Osborne and Treadwell being cut. But some tough decisions still lay ahead. As part of the build up for the game, the IRFU awarded

caps to 17 players who played internationally for Ireland from 1946 to 1989 but were not included in the list of Irish internationals as the matches were not awarded test status due to the customs and practices of the time. Included in the group was Frank O'Driscoll, father of Brian, for his two tests against Argentina in 1970 (leading to a future quiz question of "Which Irish international was capped before his father was?").

On the day, an early Ford penalty was quickly wiped out by an Irish try. A lovely short pass from van der Flier saw O'Mahoney break the English line just inside their half. He waited until Steward committed to the tackle before a short offload to Aki who ran it home. Ireland were 7-3 up inside 10 minutes but the next score didn't come until just before half time. A lovely cross kick by Hansen on the English 22 found Ringrose on the right wing in space but with a lot of work still to do. However, with a swerve and a twist, he managed his way past three would-be tacklers to score and give Ireland a 12-3 lead at the break.



Earls scores a try on his 100th appearance.

The match turned a little over ten minutes into the second half. England had just won a penalty on half way for Ireland holding on but the TMO intervened to show Billy Vunipola's shoulder making clear contact with Porter's head. A clear yellow card (then upgraded to red under the new protocol) gave Ireland a penalty and a foothold well into England's 22. From open play a few phases later, Ross Byrne threw a beautiful right to left pass cutting out two defenders to allow Lowe to walk over into the left corner.

Ten minutes later Byrne was again the provider, this time slinging a long left to right pass to Hansen who swerved inside Steward and took Marchant's challenge before scoring. England didn't give up and Sinclair scored after

a quick Care tap penalty, but the crowd was treated to one more special moment on the match. In his 100th cap, having come on for Lowe, Keith Earls produced a special moment. Prendergast made a turnover on the English 22 and van der Flier carried it on. Aki then threw a huge long pass to the waiting Earls on the left wing who, despite three converging English players, scored acrobatically in the corner to produce the biggest cheer of the day by some distance. An emotional moment for the popular Munsterman and his watching family.

Crowley's conversion crowned a 29-10 victory but, despite this, there were still evident signs of rustiness and room for improvement.

The final warm up game was the following Saturday in Bayonne against **Samoa**. On a rain drenched night, Ireland got off to a bright start. An early contestable kick by Murray saw Doris make ground with his physicality. A perfectly judged cross kick by Crowley to Hansen on the right wing saw the Connacht man draw the tackler before an infield pass to Jimmy O'Brien for his first Irish try. But from there on it was a hard slog with a real chance of an upset at many stages during the game. The first disaster was Cian Healy going down with a torn calf muscle that ruled the veteran prop out of playing in his fourth Rugby World Cup - a cruel blow and a real depletion of Ireland's backup resources.



Conor Murray scores Ireland's second try in the warm up game in Bayonne.

In the last five minutes of the half, with Ireland attacking the Samoan 22, a loose pass from McCloskey ricocheted off Paia'aua's forehead, hit the ground but bounced fortuitously for him to run the length of the pitch to score a try that former All Black and Samoan debutant Sopoaga converted to make it 7-7. There was still time for Samoa to take a lead into the break when their scrum demolished the Irish eight and Sopoaga kicked a penalty.

Early in the second half, with Samoa camped under the Irish posts, they won another penalty which Sopoaga kicked for a 7-13 lead. Within five minutes Ireland had

South Africa v Ireland

Match #753

Loftus Versfeld Stadium, Pretoria.
Saturday 6 July 2024, kick off 5pm (local time)
Castle Lager Incoming Series 2024 - 1st Test

South Africa (13) 27 Ireland (8) 20

Scoring sequence: 3 min Arendse try, Pollard con 7-0; 13 min Crowley pen 7-3; 18 min Pollard pen 10-3; 29 min Pollard pen 13-3; 35 min Osborne try 13-8; **(half-time 13-8)** 65 min Kolbe try, Pollard con 20-8; 75 min Murray try, Crowley con 20-15; 78 min penalty try 27-15; 79 min Baird try 27-20. **2T 1PT 2C 2PG to 3T 1C 1PG**

Player\Club\Caps

15. **Jamie Osborne** (Naas\Leinster) **1st Cap #1163 (1T-1st)**
14. Calvin Nash (Young Munster\Munster) 7
13. Robbie Henshaw (Buccaneers\Leinster) 73
12. Bundee Aki (Galwegians\Connacht) 57
11. James Lowe (Leinster) 32
10. Jack Crowley (Cork Constitution\Munster) 15 **(1PG 1C)**
9. Craig Casey (Shannon\Munster) 15
1. Andrew Porter (UCD\Leinster) 65
2. Dan Sheehan (Lansdowne\Leinster) 27
3. Tadhg Furlong (Clontarf\Leinster) 77
4. Joe McCarthy (Dublin University\Leinster) 11
5. Tadhg Beirne (Lansdowne\Munster) 51
6. Peter O'Mahony (Cork Constitution\Munster) 106 (Capt 15th time)
7. Josh van der Flier (UCD\Leinster) 63
8. Caelan Doris (St Mary's College\Leinster) 42

Replacements

16. Rónan Kelleher (Lansdowne\Leinster) 32 (for Sheehan half-time) **(YC 78 min)**
17. Cian Healy (Clontarf\Leinster) 130 (for Porter temp 54-63 and 74 min)
18. Finlay Bealham (Buccaneers\Connacht) 41 (for Furlong 63 min)
19. James Ryan (UCD\Leinster) 63 (for McCarthy 50 min)
20. Ryan Baird (Dublin University\Leinster) 21 (for O'Mahony 50 min) **(1T-2nd)**
21. Conor Murray (Garryowen\Munster) 117 (for Casey 64 min) **(1T-17th)**
22. Ciaran Frawley (UCD\Leinster) 5 (for Osborne 50 min)
- 23 Garry Ringrose (UCD\Leinster) 59 (for Henshaw half-time)

Starting XV on selection 627 caps.
Bench on selection 460 caps.



Jamie Osborne finishes off a wonderful Irish move to score on his debut.

- Ireland's 19th defeat against South Africa (9 wins, 1 draw) in 29 matches.
- Pre match handicap - Ireland 7 point underdogs.
- It breaks a run of 3 wins by Ireland against South Africa and is their first win over Ireland since the 3rd test in 2016 in Match #663.
- Jamie Osborne becomes the 30th try scoring debutant of the professional era and the first since Michael Lowry against Italy in Match #726 in 2022.
- With his 17th try, Conor Murray joins Brendan Mullen and Andrew Trimble as Ireland's joint 10th highest try scorer.
- Ireland stays at 2nd in the World Rankings while South Africa stays in 1st.



Highlights

South Africa v Ireland

Match #754

Hollywoodbets Kings Park, Durban.
Saturday 13 July 2024, kick off 5pm (local time)
Castle Lager Incoming Series 2024 - 2nd Test

South Africa (6) 24 Ireland (16) 25

Scoring sequence: 6 min Crowley pen 0-3; 14 min Murray try, Crowley con 0-10; 19 min Pollard pen 3-10; 35 min Pollard pen 6-10; 38 min Crowley pen 6-13; 42 min Crowley pen 6-16; **(half-time 6-16)** 45 min Pollard pen 9-16; 48 min Pollard pen 12-16; 53 min Pollard pen 15-16; 57 min Pollard pen 18-16; 59 min Crowley pen 18-19; 61 min Pollard pen 21-19; 65 min Pollard pen 24-19; 70 min Frawley drop goal 24-22; 81 min Frawley drop goal 24-25. **8PG to 1T 1C 4PG 2DG**

Player\Club\Caps

15. Jamie Osborne (Naas\Leinster) 2nd Cap
14. Calvin Nash (Young Munster\Munster) 8
13. Garry Ringrose (UCD\Leinster) 60
12. Robbie Henshaw (Buccaneers\Leinster) 74
11. James Lowe (Leinster) 33
10. Jack Crowley (Cork Constitution\Munster) 16 **(4PG 1C)**
9. Conor Murray (Garryowen\Munster) 118 **(1T-18th)**
1. Andrew Porter (UCD\Leinster) 66
2. Rónan Kelleher (Lansdowne\Leinster) 33
3. Tadhg Furlong (Clontarf\Leinster) 78
4. Joe McCarthy (Dublin University\Leinster) 12
5. James Ryan (UCD\Leinster) 64
6. Tadhg Beirne (Lansdowne\Munster) 52
7. Josh van der Flier (UCD\Leinster) 64
8. Caelan Doris (St Mary's College\Leinster) 43 (Capt 2nd time) **(YC 48 min)**

Replacements

16. Rob Herring (Ballynahinch\Ulster) 40 (for Kelleher 65 min)
17. Cian Healy (Clontarf\Leinster) 131 (for Porter 57 min)
18. Finlay Bealham (Buccaneers\Connacht) 42 (for Furlong 45 min)
19. Ryan Baird (Dublin University\Leinster) 22 (for Ryan 57 min)
20. Peter O'Mahony (Cork Constitution\Munster) 107 (for van der Flier 57 min)
21. Caolin Blade (Galwegians\Connacht) 3 (for Murray 59 min)
22. Ciaran Frawley (UCD\Leinster) 6 (for Crowley 59 min) **(2DG)**
- 23 Stuart McCloskey (Bangor\Ulster) 18 (for Nash 62 min)

Starting XV on selection 708 caps.
Bench on selection 361 caps.



Highlights



Joe McCarthy and RG Snyman.

- Ireland's 10th win against South Africa (19 defeats, 1 draw) in 30 matches.
- Pre match handicap - Ireland 8 point underdogs.
- Ireland's second test win against the Springboks in South Africa after Match #661 in the first test in 2016.
- It is the 11th time Ireland has beaten the reigning RWC Champions and the 3rd time it has been SA.
- Frawley's drop goals represent the 11th time Ireland has scored 2 drop goals in a match and the 9th time it has been done by one player. It is the first time since O'Gara against England in Match #535 in 2005.
- Jack Crowley ends the match on 101 points and becomes the 20th Irish player to score 100+ test points.
- Handrè Pollard's 24 points represents the 23rd occasion a player has scored 20+ points against Ireland in a test match. It is a new South African record for the fixture, passing Stefan Terblanche's 20 points in Match #459 in 1998. He joins G erald Merceron of France as the only players to score 20+ points against Ireland and finish on the losing side. (Match #479 in 2000). His 8 penalty goals against Ireland is matched only by Thierry Lacroix (8PG 1C) for France in Match #438 at Rugby World Cup 1995.
- Conor Murray and Eben Etzebeth move to a record 10 appearances each in the fixture.
- Ireland stays at 2nd in the World Rankings while South Africa stays in 1st.



Conor Murray scores a try despite a tackle from Pieter-Steph du Toit.



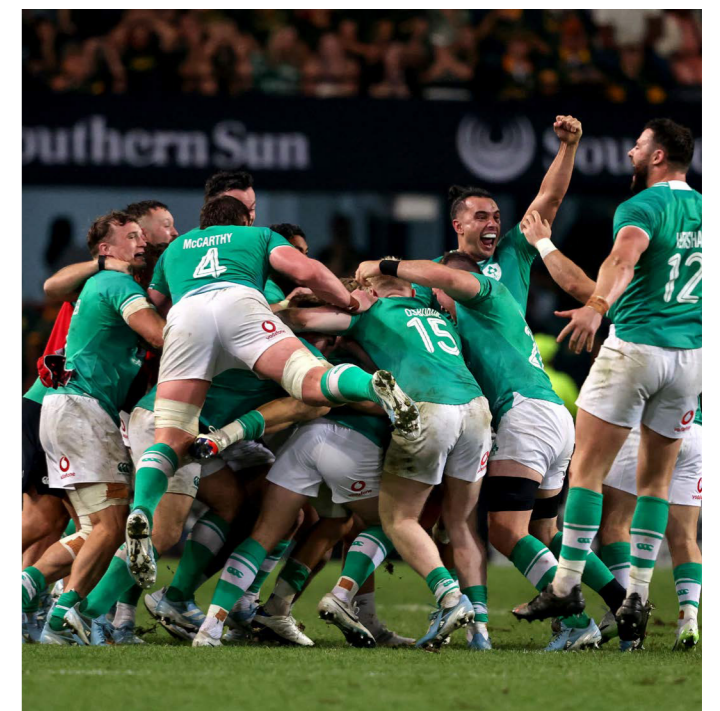
Ciaran Frawley's match winning drop goal.



Joe McCarthy on the burst.



Eben Etzebeth leaves the field due to an injury.



On 26 August 1995, in the Hotel Ambassador in Paris, the International Rugby Board drew the curtain on almost 125 years of organised amateur rugby and declared that the game was going professional. Faced with a growing and popular global game with commercial interests circling to hijack it, in truth the Board had little option.

Irish rugby was one of the bastions of amateurism off the pitch and, on the pitch, was nowhere near the top table. There had been great Irish players and administrators and, occasionally, great Irish teams but never on a regular basis.

However, after a rocky start to professionalism, Irish rugby has had a sustained golden era with a level of achievement never seen previously. Grand Slams, Triple Crowns and wins in New Zealand, South Africa, Australia and Argentina rank among the highlights.

This book is a record of the 29 seasons and 316 test matches that the Irish men's team has played since the game went professional (including links to online footage to over 250 of those matches via QR codes). With over 600 photos covering every test match in this period, it is the definitive record of the rise of Irish rugby to the top table of the game and will be a go to reference point for this era for years to come.

By Feargal O'Rourke



ISBN 978-1-0369-0085-4



9 781036 900854 >



ALL PROFITS FROM THE SALE OF THIS BOOK ARE GOING TO THE IRFU CHARITABLE TRUST, HELPING SERIOUSLY INJURED PLAYERS.