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Saturday 25 March 2006

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Fears for new €20m stadium

inside

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20 months for letter to travel 40 miles

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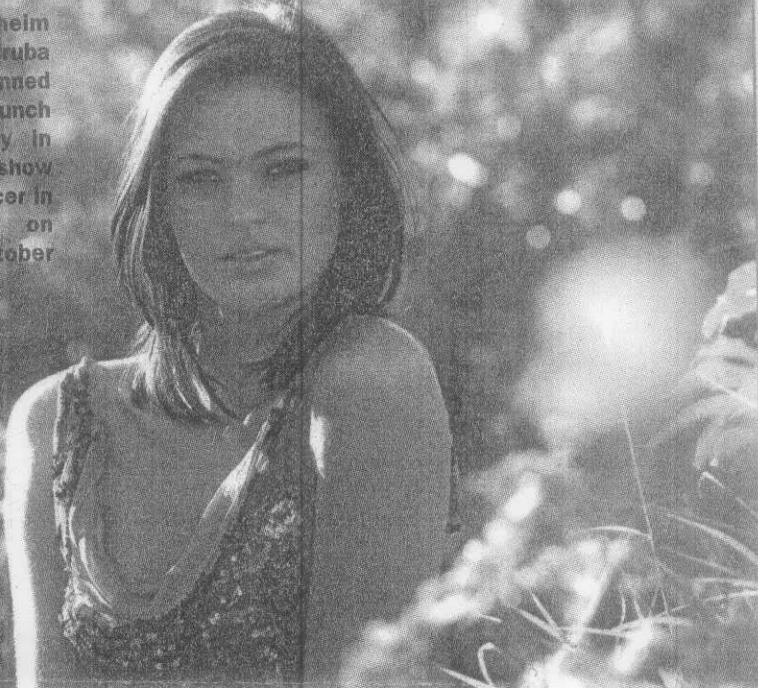
Fashion and rugby seen as main attractions.

PAGE 18

An Taoiseach - questions and answers

Daily news on the web @ www.limerickpost.ie

Sohalla Lindheim wearing an Arruba cocktail sequinned Dress at the launch of the "Pretty in Pink" fashion show for Breast cancer in Adare Manor on Thursday October 19.



By John O'Shaughnessy

FEARS are growing that the proposed euro 20m greyhound stadium on the Ennis Road, on a site to the rear of the Two Mile Inn Hotel, might have to be shelved, because of objections.

Gus Ryan, track manager at the Markets Field, warns that the planning objections which recently surfaced needed to be addressed immediately. And he has called on all public representatives in the region to lend their weight and ensure that obstacles are overcome.

"There is a very important meeting planned by Bord na gCon for next Monday involving Clare County Council. If problems continue to persist about the suitability of the site acquired last year, it is reasonable to assume that the Bord will be obliged to walk away and look for an alternative landbank.

"We cannot afford to wait any longer. The money is there to be drawn down and the danger is, that if there are any further delays it might be diverted to other stadia. Those involved in the industry, owners, trainers, sponsors and supporters, have shown remarkable patience down through the years and latest developments are not at all encouraging".

In the latest twist, the Irish Examiner exclusively reported last week that environmental concerns had been expressed for the otter population by An Taisce, who had made a submission to An Bord Pleanála.

Said Ryan: "This is ridiculous, the last time an otter was seen in that area of the Ennis Road was when a fella' produced one from his pocket. I'd be prepared to send out a search party looking for otters. The whole thing is laughable".

Continued on page 4.

NEWS

Fears for new €20m stadium

Continued from page 1.

HE REVEALED that objections to the state-of-the-art track were also submitted by the Two Mile Inn and the National Roads Authority, the latter having expressed concerns about the

flow of traffic likely to be generated by the new stadium.

Back to Ryan: "Since the track will be open for business only in the evenings, I don't foresee any traffic congestion on the Ennis Road".

It had been hoped to unveil the new stadium inside the next 12 months but at the current state of play, it could be that length of time before the first sod on the site is turned.

A spokesperson for the Limerick and

Clare Greyhound Owners and Breeders Association, said they were dismayed that the project was now almost certain to be delayed.

"There was a press conference held at the Castletroy Park Hotel earlier this year at which plans were presented, and all were excited that we were at last to get the facility that we deserved. We have been waiting 10 years to get out of the Markets Field and now this happens.

"It could take at least a further 10 months before any planning permission is granted, and another two years to build the stadium. I ask you, where are we going. Why is it that we always seem to have problems when it comes to doing anything positive for Limerick".

Meanwhile, Gus Ryan has appealed to all public representatives in the Mid West to row in behind them.

"This saga has been ongoing for far too long. Just when we had our hopes raised, this happens. The Markets Field is way past its sell-by date, the track promised would be a great acquisition to the region and would generate a lot of revenue. Our representatives in Dail Eireann and on the local authorities simply must get involved and apply the necessary pressure to ensure that our dream home is realised.

"Most other greyhound stadia throughout the country have been upgraded in recent years but we continue to be left behind".



The Markets Field has long passed its sell-by-date and there are now fears that the promised 20m euro development off the Ennis Road might not go ahead

More job losses

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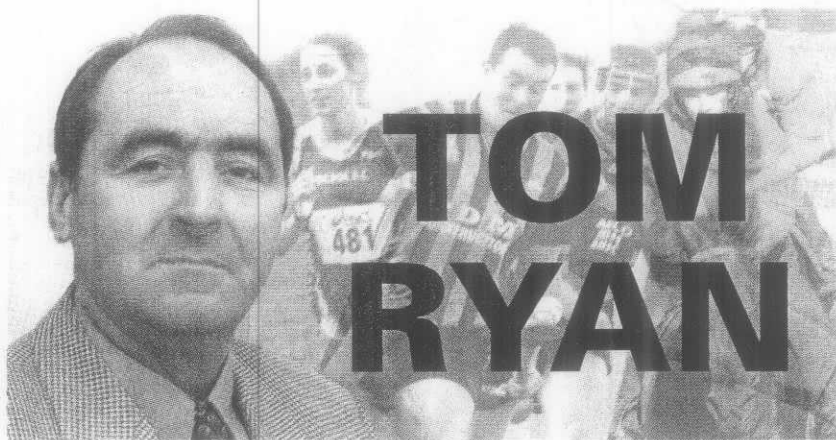
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TOM RYAN

What next for Limerick's new greyhound stadium?

"HERE I go once again with my suitcase in my hand and I'm running away down River Road, and I swear once again that I'm never coming home and I'm chasing my dreams down River Road".

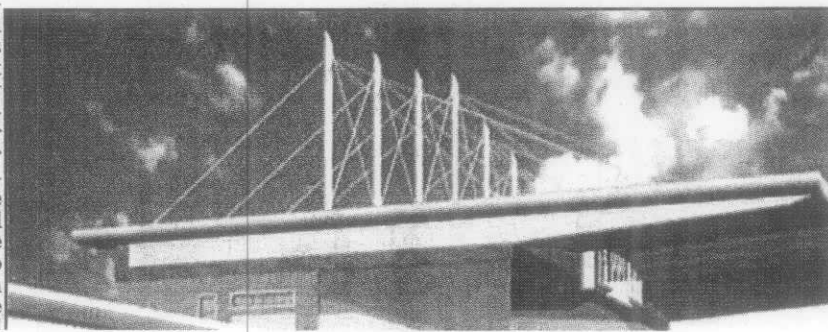
Chasing dreams! It now looks like that the plans for a new greyhound stadium at Meelick has run into "choppy waters", pardon the pun and to blame the otter and his habitat for our troubles adds injury to insult.

This column has highlighted the plight of greyhound owners, breeders and supporters in the mid-west region over the past 12 months. It was the first to draw the whole sorry saga that Bord na gCon now is with accuracy into the public domain. The writer has been subjected to adverse comments from many quarters, from the confines of 104 to the centre of democracy Dail Eireann when deputy John Cregan, TD, Fianna Fail member for Limerick West spoke in the chamber on behalf of the Minister for Sport, Art and Tourism, John O'Donoghue and waxed lyrical on his government's investment of exchequer funds into Bord na gCon's development on racing stadia all over Ireland.

From Curragheen Park in the South to Lifford in Donegal and from the city of the tribes in the West to Shelbourne and Harold's Cross in Dublin.

Limerick, the headquarters of Bord na gCon was completely forgotten about and our facility at the Markets Field now considered a hazard, with a Director recently describing it as "well passed its sell-by date" and requesting political support for a new development. There have been numerous statements, press briefings, official launchings in connection with Limerick's development and now there appears to be complete confusion reigning as regards the Ennis Road project. I will try in layman's language to explain how and why the local greyhound fraternity find themselves in this present situation.

Over the past 10 to 15 years, there have been huge government investments in stadia infrastructure throughout the length and breadth of the country. There was even serious investment of public funds into stadia that were not under the complete control of Bord na gCon. This investment was given by way of generous grants for major improvements at these locations and fair is fair, the writer has no problem with that and time will tell.



Irish delegation and Lloyd George, the Welsh fox. We knew that there wouldn't be total satisfaction with the decision and took it as a way forward. However, whether or not we misjudged the mood of the greyhound fraternity remained to be seen. Within weeks another self appointed group went to Dublin without any mandate with, according to themselves, five million punts in commitments for a public private partnership deal (PPP). This proposal was uniquely for a green field starting up in, you'll never guess where, but Greenpark!

Low and behold, the GOBA agreement that we shook hands on with Bord na gCon was cast aside without even the courtesy of a reason to us by the Board. I suppose the weight of the money (five million) and the importance of this new un-elected group, it was an easy decision for the Board to make. The Markets Field was again out of the equation and we were back to the swamplands of Greenpark for a new wonder stadia. They even had the directors appointed and we were ridiculed and forced to resign from the GOBA but "there is many a slip between cup and lip".

After more site plans, survey's, site examinations and engineering reports, the following accrued....The mystery man or woman with the five million in the back pocket disappeared like the fog on the river overlooking the site and the technical engineering report refused to allow any track development to take place. The site was declared unfit by the Board and the seven million of the Board's own funds were transferred to Galway and Lifford and to add insult to injury, the deeds to the famous Markets Field were used as collateral for development at Dublin tracks. We were then left with nothing only broken promises and then came the bombshell within the Board, drug testing, sensations and cover-up and the subsequent unfair dismissal of Mr. Aidan Tynan, CEO, followed some months later by the resignation of Mr. Pascal Taggart as Chairman. The next big event coming down the line was the calling of the Chairman before the Dail Public Accounts Committee and then the worrying involvement of Mr. John Purcell, the Controller and Auditor General to examine various contracts that had taken place over previous years. I cannot understand how these contracts hadn't been checked on. The unbelievable



Limerick, the 1956 Munster Joe Myles, Mick Murphy, McNamara, Tim O'Connor,

Limerick 1956

By JEROME O'CONNELL

THE Limerick minor football team that won the 1956 Munster minor football championship will be honoured at this Sunday's county senior football final.

Fifty years on, their achievement will be commemorated at the Gaelic Grounds on Sunday when they are introduced to the attendance at half time in the senior final.

Limerick County Board will host a special lunch for the surviving members of the team and mentors along with family members of those who have passed to their eternal reward.

All will be presented

1907 and

Forward

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Over the past 10 to 15 years, there have been huge government investments in stadia infrastructure throughout the length and breadth of the country. There was even serious investment of public funds into stadia that were not under the complete control of Bord na gCon. This investment was given by way of generous grants for major improvements at these locations and fair is fair, the writer has no problem with that and time will tell whether the investments will justify the end. A lot of these projects were politically driven by influential Ministers and TD's looking after their own constituencies and the old saying comes to mind "All is fair in love and war".

The problem in the Mid-West region, especially Limerick, was that there was never any interest by our Ministers or Dail Deputies in the greyhound industry or the benefits that can be accrued from same. Although Deputy John Cregan did show a lot of interest in his comments about me in the Dail Chamber. Come to think of it, I didn't receive any reply or comment from John to my article in response to his Dail statement but I am sure that he is busy on affairs of State and with an election blooming in the new year, greyhounds and their owners in Limerick West will be the furthest thing from his mind.

Limerick has been completely ignored as regards development and let's have a look at the pathetic efforts of Bord na gCon and the Board of Limerick Greyhound Track in attempting to put a new facility in place. I am sorry but I think art this juncture that I should provide my readers with a brief resume of the history of the project.

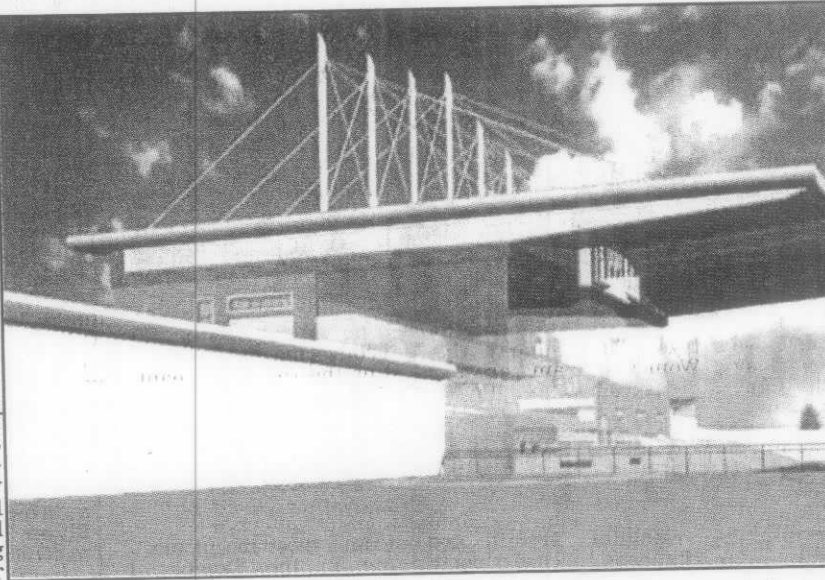
I have been involved with Limerick and Clare greyhound breeders for years and this well organised group, which is a member of a national body, have been lobbying all and sundry over the past 40 years for improvements and the new facility. The Markets Field is a very strategically situated stadium, well known and is recognised country wide as a centre for sporting activity. Hurling, soccer, rugby, athletics and greyhound racing have been played there for over a 100 years. The property was owned by Limerick Corporation, now called the Limerick City Council, and was managed under the auspices of the Market Trustees, who are a sub body of the City Council. Bord na gCon has been

posai was uniquely for a green field stadium - you'll never guess where, but Greenpark!

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The unbelievable saga of Bord na gCon, which had been brought under the stewardship of the Minister of Sport, Arts and Tourism, Mr. John O'Donoghue,



An artist's impression of Limerick's proposed new Greyhound Stadium in Coonagh

continued and if anything can be said about this public funded body, it is to say that they are durable. Because in the middle of all the drugs, boardroom and political battles, the men that run this organisation delved again into the property market, this time in Clare with another huge fanfare at the Castletroy Park Hotel, announced that another site was purchased for 1.1m Euro. This time the brave speculators, showed the colour of their money and for what looked like a bargain price, sure weren't they well used to getting bargains, hadn't they got the Market's Field for proverbial song 300,000 punts. These men should have been developers, their talent was lost working for a State owned company, but wait a minute, what were they after buying? Was it 17 acres or 11 acres or did I hear 9.2 or 8.7 or just six acres, even so, six acres, even so, six acres on the Ennis Road wasn't bad value at 1.1m. The only problem is that you could hardly build a greyhound stadium on six acres, again, the prophets of doom, including myself, urged caution as to the location. Oops, nothing against Clare, the suitability and access came into our deliberations for not the first time, we were again castigated in public and private, the work "knockers" came into the equation and jealousy was mentioned.

Where would you go in any development without a management team and again, directors were in position with prominent individuals appointed to the Board of the new stadium? We had a board now but we had no stadium. So back to my introduction verse, "Here we go once again..." There are now serious problems on many fronts with the planning proposals as already stated, size of avail-

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By JEROME O'CONNELL

THE Limerick minor football team that won the 1951 Munster minor football championship will be honoured at this Sunday's county senior football final.

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1907 : Foynes

By HARRY GREENSMYTH

THE Markets Field in Limerick was the venue in 1907 and 1914, when Foynes and Abbeyfeale inscribed their names on the county senior football roll of honour. The first time indeed to do. Foynes have advanced the record any further while Abbeyfeale has claimed the trophy on seven occasions. Abbeyfeale had to close on a few times prior to the initial win by Foynes.

It was on February 1908 when Foynes Sr O'Briens won the championship by defeating Commercial for honour. The team captain was John O'Connor. The team was composed by Tom Corbett, Mic O'Connor, Pat Shee, John Sheehan, Jim win, Jeweller, She Birdie Madden, Ma Fitzgerald, Ned L Enr Tom O'Brien, Ned Shan, Jack McCarthy, Costello, Tom Hug Jimmy Walsh, Jim