

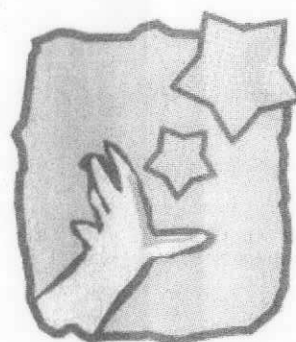
Munster and Ireland rugby star Jerry Flannery receives his Person of the Month award from Dermot Moloney, Southern Advertising, sponsors, watched by Aine Fitzgerald, Limerick Leader, sponsors, and Sean Lally, general manager, Clarion Hotel, sponsors (LL)

Jerry's cup flows over

By AINE FITZGERALD

SHANNON, Munster and Ireland rugby star Jerry Flannery has been named Limerick Person of the Month for the pivotal role he played in Munster winning the coveted Heineken Cup in May. "I'm very proud to get the award; it's brilliant. I was very lucky to get the chance to play on such a good rugby side this year and as a result these kind of opportunities come up," said Jerry. The 27-year-old hooker rose to national prominence this season on foot of some eye-catching displays for Munster in the Heineken Cup, culminating in a historic win at the Millennium Stadium in Cardiff on Saturday, May 20. "It was a brilliant feeling to win the Heineken Cup. Munster has been trying to get there for so long and it meant so much for people around—not just Limerick, not just Munster but all around Ireland and for Irish people living around the world. It was just something special to be involved in," he said. Educated at St Munchin's College and University College, Cork, Jerry began playing rugby at seven years of age. "My dad is big into rugby—he was

president of Presentation Rugby Club out in Rathard and used to take me out to all the games when I was younger," recalled Jerry, who made his Heineken Cup debut as a replacement against Stade Francais in Thomond Park in April 2004. A voracious trainer, the Limerick man scored two tries in Munster's recent Heineken Cup pool campaign and has been the source of many a fond memory for the people of Limerick. For the Heineken Cup final, 10,000 fans turned out in the city to watch the game on a 45 square metre screen in O'Connell Street. Television crews relayed images from Limerick onto a big screen in the Millennium Stadium to add to the atmosphere—a moment Jerry will never forget. "I remember Paul O'Connell tapping me and saying have a look up. I think Ronan O'Gara was taking a kick at the time and there was a stop in play—you could just hear the roar going around the crowd—it was just brilliant," said Jerry. Making his Ireland senior debut as a replacement against Romania last November, Jerry went on to crown his first start and Six Nations debut against Italy in February with his first try.



LIMERICK PERSON OF THE MONTH

As a publican's son from a Limerick bar—Flannery's—Jerry's exploits on the field have gained the pub plenty of headlines. "The pub is going great. It was just pure luck the way the opening fell. During the Six Nations, when I was away, we closed the place down and then when we opened it just happened to coincide with the semi-final against Leinster. I suppose Paul O'Connell's bit of advertising gave the place a good kick-

start too," he said. Meanwhile, Jerry still faces several months lay-off due to a shoulder injury he sustained during Ireland's June tour of New Zealand and Australia. At the moment, his recovery is "going good". "I am getting really good physio and I am being looked after well with the Munster medical staff so I am hopeful that I should be back playing by the end of Christmas. We have a couple of Celtic League matches with Munster around then so I am setting myself that target date," he said. And, understandably, speculation is rife over who will don the number two jersey for Munster, and, indeed, Ireland. "For me the main thing is just to get my fitness back. When I get back fully fit, then I'll see how I am going with the competition. Frankie Sheahan is there and I suppose that there are quite a few good hookers now around Ireland, with John Fogarty is coming through in Connacht, and Rory Best is doing well with Ulster. There is always good competition and that raises the bar," he said. The Limerick Person of the Month Award is jointly sponsored by the Clarion Hotel, the Limerick Leader and Southern Advertising.



The night sky The Aurora in Crecora

MANY have heard of The Northern Lights (Aurora Borealis) or The Southern Light (Aurora Australis) and know the term "aurora".

An aurora occurs about 100 to 250km above the surface of the earth and the different colours are caused by energetic particles arriving from the sun and ionising atoms in our atmosphere—the blue and red light is emitted from nitrogen molecules and similarly green light is emitted by atomic oxygen.

You need luck to see one at our latitude in the Mid-West because they are seen most frequently near the poles. Two of our club members, Conn Buckley and Dave Lillis, had the good fortune to see one on the cloudless night of November 23, 2003, in Crecora. The result is in the image below.

The sky was jet black, just like the bottom right hand corner of the image which shows the "belt" of Orion rising in the east. The display of shimmering colours is dynamic and can change over a period of just a few seconds. So, why can we not see them all the time at our latitude?

Here's why: the story started three days earlier. Charged particles constantly stream outwards from the sun—this is called the "Solar Wind". Near earth these particles in the solar wind are travelling at approximately

1,000,000mph and interact dramatically with earth's magnetic field called the magnetosphere (which dominates space for thousands of kilometres in every direction) and deflects most of them around our planet. Think of how water is deflected to either side of the bow of a huge ship.

However, on November 18, even though the sun was approaching the quietest period of its 11-year sunspot cycle, a large solar flare (eruption) was detected on the sun and a violent event called a coronal mass ejection sent a burst of protons and electrons towards earth. Some of these particles always leak through our magnetosphere and funnel downwards following earth's magnetic field lines towards the poles, and, if the eruption is strong enough, then the aurora is pushed southwards and can be seen in Ireland.

While an aurora is one of nature's best displays, the high energy particles that cause it can interfere with satellites, pose health problems for astronauts and even knock out power grids, as happened in the Quebec region of Canada in 1989.

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