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FANS IN FRANCE DID US PROUD

SOME of you may have caught my television documentary with Colin Murphy on BBC Northern Ireland about the then-upcoming Euro football finals.

The programme idea was simple enough — take two simpletons with absolutely no knowledge or interest in football and send them out on a quest to find out what all the fuss was about.

Much frivolity ensued, involving our meeting superfans and managing to get lost getting in to see Northern Ireland play at Windsor.

Most of you seem to have especially enjoyed my virtual nervous breakdown while being driven around the Arc de Triomphe by Murphy in a Citroen 2CV. I've been congratulated on more on one occasion on my acting ability regarding how terrified I looked.

Let me tell you, there's no way I'm anywhere near that good an actor. The terror you witnessed was completely real. With Colin actually beginning to enjoy the experience, I did consider at one stage punching him, jumping out and running for my life.

While I proved myself a wimp on the road, who could have predicted the heroics of both the Northern Ireland and Ireland teams on their trip through the competition?

But beyond the magnificent football performances, the behaviour of both sets of fans endeared themselves to not only France, but also the world.

This was no surprise to me, as my visits to fans from both teams for the television documentary had impressed me beyond measure. A nicer bunch of people you couldn't wish to meet.

So while Northern Ireland's amazing victory against Ukraine, combined with Robbie Brady's last-minute goal when the Republic defeated Italy will live long in the memory, the real heroes were both teams' fans.

Their good manners, civility and good nature without doubt did more to showcase our wee part of the world than millions spent on any advertising campaign.

Could it be beer goggles that caused Brexit?

What in the name of good God have you done?

And I'm not talking about the Twelfth (not yet, anyway). Or Theresa May or thingie Leadsom (but I will).

No, I mean Brexit. Now the dust has settled, we know this is going to go on for years. I wasn't in favour of an exit, and I'm proud to say the majority of those who voted here shared my view. I'm not going to claim that those of us who voted to remain are cleverer or better than those of you who voted to leave, there were genuine arguments on both sides.

Sadly, both political camps fighting the debate decided to ignore facts in favour of campaigns based on fear. And it was fear of unfettered immigration to the UK from the EU that seems to have tipped the balance in favour of withdrawal.

Once again, the promise of controlled immigration by the Brexit campaign was another lie that cannot be delivered.

If the UK want to continue to trade within the EU — and remember, it's not only our biggest market now, but always will be — then one of the basic tenets of such trade is free movement of workers.

It was soon obvious nobody in power ever really believed there would be a vote to leave, so nobody had any idea what to do when that became the reality.

Brexit is akin to those nights when, and we've all done it, buoyed by too much to drink, we see the partner of our dreams. Nature takes its course and having gone to bed with a thing of beauty, we waken to a beast snoring beside us. At that moment, there are only two possible courses of action: either we get up and make our new friend breakfast or Ninja-like, we sneak from the bedroom, dressing on the way to the car.

Nigel Farage proved himself a sneak in that as soon as a win was announced, he announced he was resigning from Ukip,



BYE BYE BRUSSELS ... new PM Theresa May

leaving the mess he'd just created for others to try and work out. Prime Minister Cameron who promised he'd stay on whatever the result announced his immediate departure. I mean, can we believe anything politicians say, ever again?

It looked like bumbling Boris Johnson would be a shoe-in for the Tory leadership and PM designate until the embodiment of a Dickensian villain, Michael Gove, made his move.

Gove announced that even after having worked with him for the whole of the Brexit campaign, he'd suddenly decided he couldn't support Boris and wanted the PM job himself. But the drama was far from over. The next obvious Tory candidate for PM, Theresa May, suddenly found herself in a face off with new girl on the block, Andrea Leadsom.

Andrea decided to come out swinging and a womb war was declared, with claims by Leadsom to a reporter that her being a mum meant she'd more invested in the future of the country compared to her barren opponent. Chauvinistic, misogynistic males around the country winced

at this example of post-feminism and the media went into meltdown.

It wasn't really a surprise that Leadsom then withdrew from the contest, leaving the keys of number 10 in the hands of May. This means the Tory Minister who voted to remain will be the one left working out the mechanics of how to leave.

Once again, the law of unintended consequences had played out.

One of the top complaints by many within the Brexit camp was they were sick of being governed by unelected Eurocrats. Well, now they have a new Prime Minister not even voted in by the members of her own party.

While Theresa May looks the biggest winner from the Brexit vote, that title may in fact belong to Scotland's SNP leader Nicola Sturgeon who is pushing for, and will inevitably get, another vote on Scottish Independence due to the result.

Juxtapose Northern Ireland's First Minister, Arlene Foster — fixated on calling NI 'our wee country' — with the statesman-like Nicola Sturgeon stridently fighting for Scottish Independence. If Sturgeon gets her way for another referendum, and the vote goes her way then the 'our wee country' Arlene often comments on will reside within a much diminished UK.

And, while at present Arlene can reject any call for a border poll, if Scotland votes to leave the UK a precedent will have been set that can never be undone, somewhat like Brexit itself.

Take this one simple reality — Unionists who would never have considered taking an Irish passport are now seeing the practical advantages in having one, with rumours that application forms are even running out in East Belfast. Remember only two weeks has passed since the vote for Brexit and the whole political horizon has changed forever. We can't even begin to imagine what more damage will ensue as the actual exit begins.



MEEHAN'S A CERT TO WIN AGAIN

I'M not a betting man and the fact that I already owe £15 to two friends after I bet them that the United Kingdom would never vote for a Brexit tells you why.

But I'm definitely having a punt on poor jockey Chris Meehan next time he rides in a race.

Chris had the misfortune of falling off his horse at a recent meeting in Italy, with his animal managing to kick him, breaking his nose and also cracking his jaw.

This was bad enough, but then the ambulance turned up — and that's when the problems really began.

Nobody, except Chris, noticed as the ambulance reversed over him, breaking his leg as he lay writhing in pain from his facial injuries.

No, don't laugh, it really isn't funny! Thankfully Chris, like most jockeys, is a man of iron and politely pointed out to his rescuers that they'd inadvertently parked on him.

But the story gets better, what do you think Chris's Dad works at?

He's only an ambulance-driving trainer with 30 years experience. I mean, could you make this up?

So, I wish Chris a very speedy recovery and promise that if he wins his next race, and I get a few pound, it will go straight to an ambulance charity.

I'd also suggest he might think of paying his Dad to travel with him in future, just in case.



Wasn't it glorious?

I SAID to a friend that, for the first time in years, this Twelfth didn't seem to have the usual sense of anxiety. Things almost seemed relaxed.

Alright, we still have our flashpoints, with Ardoyne being the worst. But even there, negotiations were almost reached until the very last minute. I heard it reported that real improvements had been made in that neither side was blaming the other for the breakdown in negotiations. But, if neither the Orange nor the Green were responsible then who was? Well, isn't it obvious? It has to be them immigrants — sure aren't they behind everything?

Then the row about tyres on bonfires kicked off again. A cynic would argue the fact that UDA-controlled areas conform to the 'no tyres' policy while UVF-controlled areas seem to be shipping in tyres direct from rubber plantations would have something to do with one side getting more community funding than the other. What people don't realise is that the ritual of burning tyres, which shroud loyalist areas in a cloud of noxious gasses for days, is traditional. Sure a few local asthmatics may have it rough but won't it enhance their 'PIP' claims, so everything works out in the end.

And two houses going up in flames beside a giant bonfire on the Shankill only proves again the stupidity of the planners, who insist on building houses so close to 11th night bonfires. Will they never learn? It's our tradition, so it is, so it is.