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HONEST ATHLETES FAILED BY THE IOC

THE decision of the International Olympics Committee to allow Russia to compete in Rio places it on the same level as Fifa.

With incontrovertible proof that doping was government-sanctioned across Russian sport, it's a complete disgrace that they have been allowed to compete.

One positive was the decision of the International Paralympics Committee to do the right thing and ban the Russian team.

Chairman of the IPC, Sir Philip Craven, said the ban was punishment for Russia running a doping operation that polluted sports — by prioritising “medals over morals”.

This decision throws into stark contrast the cowardice of the IOC acquiescence to Russian pressure.

And it will destroy what little credibility the organisation was attempting to retain.

In the end, it is individual clean athletes who will pay the ultimate price. They have to compete in the full knowledge that it's not a level playing field.

And as for any medals won at these Olympics by Russians — such as the gold for judo athlete Khasan Khalmurzaev, *above left* — well, they'll be as valued as the latest free toy at McDonald's.

I HAD a stark reminder last Sunday of just how prevalent the drug problem has become in Belfast.

I'd taken my two children into town to buy school shoes. Yes, it's that time already.

We stumbled across a group of teenage boys openly smoking either crack cocaine or heroin in an alleyway beside Corn Market.

While no expert in drug use, I know enough to know the difference between someone smoking cannabis and what I saw.

Rather than being angry or outraged, the thought I couldn't shift for the next few days was that these young men, not that long ago, had also probably held the hand of a parent as they were taken to get new school shoes.

As a doting da, I can but imagine the pain and suffering those unfortunate parents are experiencing now.

How the Celt in me was finally happy to do Feile

IF I were to describe myself as anything it would be a Celt.

Long before there was Catholic or Protestant, long before even Ireland or England were heard of, my people roamed this land.

My family's Irish name is O'Cahan, and our roots lie in and around the town of Dungiven in Co Derry.

On the way into that village lies an Augustinian Priory dating back to 1200AD, which was subsequently taken over by the O'Cahan clan as a stronghold in the 16th century.

And before you ask, no, I've no intention of reverting from O'Kane to O'Cahan, as seems to be the fashion of late.

I've enough trouble getting help desk personnel on the phone to recognise the former without making things even more complicated with a name change.

I'm telling you all this because the older I get, the more convinced I am that I carry the personality traits of the Celt, like Braveheart William Wallace.

As a ginger, I fit the boring stereotype of being quick to anger, impetuous and stubborn. I'm overly emotional and, while I can cry watching sentimental movies, within a heartbeat I can switch to beating some idiot over the head whose mobile has gone off beside me in the cinema.

But most of all, us Celts never forget a kindness and never forgive a slight.

The reason for this in-depth self-diagnosis is that I finally played the West Belfast Feile last Friday.

Nothing unusual in that except they've been asking me to play it for the last five years, and I've refused on all occasions.

Why? Well, for the 15 years previous I hadn't been approached to do so much as a first spot, much less close the show, as I did on Friday. After more than a decade of being ignored, the Celt in me



TRAITS... Mel Gibson in Braveheart

came to the fore and I resolved that if they ever did ask, I'd tell them where to stick their Feile.

And it came to pass, they asked every year and I said no.

I even began enjoying saying no — on one occasion telling my agent to inform them I'd prefer to lick the sweat off Jim Allister's genitals than play their poxy gig.

Then over the last couple of years, they got clever and instead of approaching my agent they used friends as intermediaries.

I held out the first year, but this time around I owed the man who approached me a favour, and you remember how us

Celts never forget a favour. This meant I had to agree to meet the Feile organisers.

And so I found myself sitting in Culturlann on the Falls Road, surrounded by three rather large men who impressed upon me how much they desired my appearance at their comedy night.

An agreement was soon made where I was assured my family would be released as soon as I came off stage. I'm joking. I'm joking.

In reality, after half an hour's chat it was clear the committee of Feile changes every few years so the people I'd been holding a grudge towards had long gone.

The new committee were genuine fans and that's why they'd persevered in asking for so long. Even I couldn't argue against this and so, on Friday night, I stood on the stage of a two-domed circus tent in Falls Park in West Belfast.

Was it an easy gig? Absolutely not, but I'm thrilled to have been given the opportunity to play it.

I'd already made it clear to the organising committee that I have never, and will never, change my act to suit an audience, and that this being the case, prominent members of Sinn Fein would be featuring in the show. They agreed, and so it was.

If I remember right, I had a go, in no particular order, at Gerry Kelly, Bobby Storey, Martin McGuinness and, most of all, at Gerry Adams.

And while I heard an intake of breath when I put up on screen Adams' now infamous 'I'm a Ballymurphy n****r' tweet, I still managed to get a rousing reception at the end of the night.

This demonstrates, in a small way, how far we've come as a society.

It definitely demonstrates that the people of West Belfast have long since done away with cultural or political shibboleths and are able to laugh at the idiocy not only of others, but their own politicians.



LOSS... Solinas and Fennell

THE ROOT PROBLEM OF STRIFE

HAVING been left standing at the altar of the Twaddell protest on the 12th of July, the decision of the Ballysillan Orange Lodge to remove its support for the event is akin to a spoilt child taking its ball and going home.

The forlorn figure of Ballysillan spokesman Gerald Solinas trying frantically to get anyone to answer his phone calls as he stood alone at police barricades summarised just how futile the protest has become.

Leaving aside the millions wasted on policing, the bigger question needing answered by the Loyal Orders is why, 19 years after the failure of the protest at Drumcree, did they expect to win at Ardoyne?

While most people realise an accommodation such as that achieved with the Apprentice Boys parade in Derry is both possible and preferable, there will always be elements on both sides that will stubbornly reject any compromise.

They will continue to waste the time and scarce resources of society to satisfy their own marginal and irrational egos.

On that point, am I the only one who's noticed the striking resemblance between leading Nationalist protester Dee Fennell and Orangeman Solinas?

Talk about Tweedle Dee and Tweedle Dumber.

The real root of the Ardoyne protest mightn't lie so much in politics as the neuroses of two men suffering early hair loss?

Maybe if we get the two boys hair transplants they'd let the rest of us get on with our lives?



PADDY No1 IN MY BOOK

WHILE I was heartbroken to see that north Belfast boxing hero Paddy Barnes exited the Olympics in his first bout, he need have no shame after giving everything he had over in Rio — as always.

Gracious in the defeat to Spain's Samuel Carmona Heredia, Paddy, *left*, admitted that getting down to light flyweight had been a real problem for him.

As Irish team captain, I have no doubt that he will now put his own defeat behind him and throw all his energy into supporting all of his fellow athletes in green.

The brilliant win by his friend Carl Frampton over Leo Santa Cruz to become a two-weight world champion will undoubtedly be all the encouragement Paddy will need to move over into the professional ranks.

When he does he can be assured of the same fanatical local support Frampton has enjoyed over his professional career.

I, for one, have promised to be sitting ring-side the next time Paddy pulls on a pair of gloves for a bout.