

NORTHERN IRELAND BEAT REPUBLIC IN ST. PATRICK'S WEEKEND TOURNAMENT SENIOR INTERNATIONAL 1

ROI JUNIOR MEN PUT UP PROMISING PERFORMANCE IN DEBUT APPEARANCE AGAINST NORTHERN IRELAND 2

WINNER OF "SPONSOR THE IRISH" RAFFLE ANNOUNCED AT RAFFLE 2



Big Block

THE BIG BLOCK NEWSLETTER IS BROUGHT TO YOU BY THE IRISH NATIONAL MENS VOLLEYBALL SQUADS PROGRAMME

Northern Ireland comeback twice to beat Republic 3-2 in Naas

As part of the St. Patrick's Weekend Tournament and in their 1st Senior International match under the helm of Laurent Cauet, the Republic of Ireland lost to Northern Ireland on Sunday March 14th in St. Mary's College Naas, despite an impressive start.

The Republic of Ireland went into the game with a few notable injuries, including Tommy Kilfeather, Chris Dunne and team captain Hugh Nohilly. Yet with or without these players, the match-14 was still always going to be made up of a blend of youth and talent, along with considerable experience.

In comparison, Northern Ireland entered the match with a large representation from the Ulster Elks team, who are currently on the verge of winning their 1st ever Premier-32 League title.



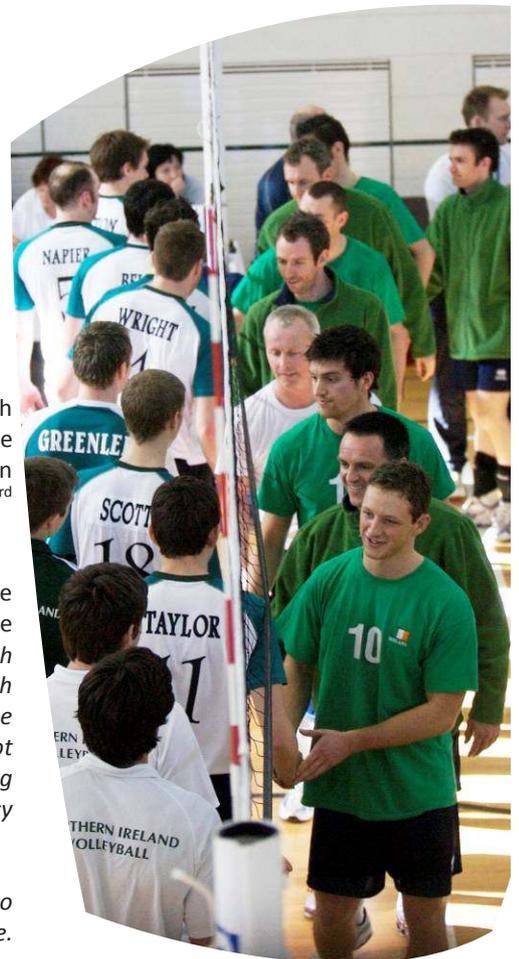
In the end, a well contested and absorbing 3-2 match was played out, with Northern Ireland coming from 0-1 and 1-2 down to take victory and deny the Republic of Ireland victory on their 1st International appearance on home soil in as many years, having started so impressively.

Both sides also played out a friendly match in the same afternoon, with the sides once again playing out a tight match, going 2-1 in favour of Northern Ireland (15-13 in the 3rd set).

Laurent Cauet spoke to the BigBlock at the end of the day and he was full of praise towards his players' efforts: *"The 1st match was a brilliant game of volleyball from both sides. We had our chance to take all in the 4th set while we were leading, but we forgot to run the middle properly, while our passing and use of wing began to lack in efficiency and success.*

The Northern Ireland players dug deeper to win while we stumbled under the pressure. In the 5th set, our heads started dropping when we realised they were getting the better of us, and that made it easier for the points to fly on the scoreboard for Northern Ireland.

Needless to say, I'm disappointed to have lost this game, because as a re-established National team, it was our first major official objective and I wanted to see the lads wining this game more than anything, after all the effort they have put in so far. We just seemed to lack that killer instinct on court, even when we were doing well.



Northern Ireland are still ahead of us at the moment but we're not far behind now, while we also have to consider that some players have been tried in new positions while others have limited big-game experience at the moment. At least we know we are still moving forward; we now need to expect more and be merciless when in the win-zone.

I would like to thank all the people who came to support us, the event organisers and all the volunteers here who helped make this day happen for us and for Irish volleyball."



ROI Juniors impress against Northern Ireland in debut match

The Republic of Ireland Junior men's team made its 1st public appearance in as many years as it lined out against their Northern Ireland counterparts on Saturday March 13th as part of the St. Patrick's Weekend Tournament.

Made up of 15 players from every corner of the country, the Republic of Ireland Junior men's team assembled together for the first time since the revival of the Irish men's volleyball programme in 2009.

Even if a few of the panellists have been training together in 2009 or have been invited to some of the Senior team's sessions, the group was mostly new and had only one significant training session together in Mountmellick in 2010.

And they made an immediate impact as they beat Northern Ireland in a friendly match 2-1 on Saturday morning. Later in the afternoon, they were to put up a repeat performance, although this time on the losing side of the scoreboard, 3-1 to the Northern Ireland lads.

A delighted Laurent Cauet spoke in admiration of the players afterwards: "It was a great day for these boys, because we didn't have much time to train

together. But we had a game plan based on determination and simplicity; we played 4-2 so we always had a setter in the front-court. We also served very well and players quickly understood their areas of responsibility in the back-court, so our team organization and game-plan was instantly efficient.

We knew Northern Ireland were out for revenge going into the International match after the friendly defeat to almost entirely different line-outs from us throughout, and we knew they would put their best 6 in from the start. We lost 3-1 but we didn't lose our fight as they got a hard time from us, especially in the 3rd set where it was anyone's game at 22-22.

What these young guys have done this afternoon is quiet amazing; they could have panicked due to the pressure of playing for the 1st time for their country and in front of a large crowd, but they showed they can fight for their country and it was thrilling for everyone to watch.

I was also pleased to see some of their

schools coaches watching on and I would like to highlight the great job done by them and their schools where volleyball is prominent and now thriving from our programme. I hope we can continue to move forward with this golden generation of Irish Volleyball players".



Elsewhere, the Republic of Ireland Senior and Junior women's teams were victorious in their International matches against Northern Ireland, 3-0 and 3-2 respectively.



Raffle and Sponsorship of Irish men's volleyball teams won by InterCake

The draw for the "Sponsor the Irish" raffle took place on Sunday March 21st in ALSAA Sports Bar where the winning ticket drawn was bought by **InterCake**, a local Irish company based in Kilcoole, Co. Wicklow. InterCake specialise in creating photo quality edible images for cakes or cookies.

News of this unique raffle spread worldwide, with people from as far as San Francisco and Sydney buying tickets online, along with a large contingent from France and Luxembourg also on hearing about the draw across Facebook from the squads' fan page. The raffle itself was a major success, with almost 1,000 entrants buying tickets for the draw, and almost €6,000 being fundraised towards the Irish men's volleyball squads, with just over 10% of that figure raised from online ticket sales, a significant return for a first attempt at online fundraising!

Thank you to EVERYONE who contributed towards our raffle and helped in spreading the word. For more information on InterCake and its services, please visit www.intercake.ie.



Irish National Men's Volleyball Squads

HEAD COACH: LAURENT CAUET | ADMINISTRATOR: DAVID HERLIHY

ASSISTANT COACH: JEFF KING | TREASURER: EAMON O'BRIEN

SENIORMEN@VOLLEYBALLIRELAND.COM



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