



■ Kildare fans Aoife Kelly from Sallins and Anna Coburn from Castlewarden (both five)

# Lilywhites seek new sponsor

■ KARL O'KANE reports

KILDARE chairman John McMahon is confident the county brand is strong enough to find a top class replacement for Tegral as jersey sponsor. Tegral announced yesterday that they would not be renewing their sponsorship deal after over 20 years of being emblazoned on the Lilywhites' jersey. The slate roofing specialists blamed the downturn in the construction industry as their reason for pulling the plug and said they made the decision with regret. Both sides were reluctant to reveal the extent of Tegral's financial input but it is believed to be well in excess of €1m over two decades.

# Cork lead nominees

■ KARL O'KANE reports

ALL-IRELAND champions Cork front the race for the ladies GAA All Stars with 12 nominations.

The 45 nominees for the 31st All Stars were announced yesterday with the winners to be named at a gala awards ceremony in the Citywest Hotel on November 10. League champions, Monaghan, have earned nine nominees, while



CHIEF: O'Rourke

defeated All-Ireland finalists, Kerry, receive seven nominations. Connacht champions, Galway, are next with three players listed, while Intermediate champions Armagh, Clare, Dublin and Mayo all have two nominees each. Laois, Kildare, Antrim and Leitrim all have one nominee. Ladies GAA CEO, Helen O'Rourke, said: "The nominations reflect the reach of our game with 13 counties represented on the list from all four provinces."

# Having recovered from his drink and drugs problem John is keen to make a difference

# BORN TO BE WILD



DARK TIMES: Leonard

# Leonard: The GAA saved me

JOHN Leonard first came to prominence in Dublin football in 1996. "Brian Talty had taken over as manager of St Sylvester's and we won the county championship that year," he recalled. "It was a great time. We had some fine players and Brian got the most out of us." In his earlier years, Leonard had been more attracted to soccer — dreaming of a move to his beloved Liverpool. "I went over to various trials in England when I was a teenager," he said. "One scout was really excited. He wanted to bring me to Oldham Athletic, and they were in the Premiership at the time. "The talk was that I'd then move on to Everton.

# Professional

"I'd only been playing in goals for four years, but the talk was of turning professional. I couldn't believe it. "But then the roof caved in. They discovered that I was two months too old to play for their Under-18s the following year. "That finished the deal. My world caved in after I got the phone call. "I started hitting the booze, the hash, the Es. "Only for the GAA, I would have been in big trouble back then." Leonard went on to feature for Dublin at underage level. "I got into the minor set-up and the Under-21s. I was on a really good Under-21 team with Jason Sherlock and Cianan Whelan," he said. "I went off travelling for a while in my mid-20s. "Then, when I got home, I started playing for Sylvester's and got a call from Paul Caffrey. I was on the Dublin panel for three years. Training six days a week to be a sub."



GROUNDING: John Leonard on a beach in South America and (right) in action against Galway in a challenge match in 2007; (below-right) with Stephen Cluxton

I smoked hash when I was a teenager. Got into ecstasy, cocaine. Even smoked opium in the Himalayas

# IT IS four years since John Leonard's mobile rang and he saw Pat Gilroy's number flash up on the screen.

Gilroy had just taken over as Dublin manager and the players he'd inherited from Paul Caffrey had been put through a series of fitness tests. "One of those was goalkeeper John Leonard, Stephen Cluxton's understudy. Leonard knew he was out of condition, and feared the worst. Gilroy cut straight to the chase. He told Leonard that he was the best shot-stopper around, but that



OLD AND NEW LIFE: John Leonard in his training top in the jungle in Colombia



Kieran CUNNINGHAM CHIEF SPORTS WRITER

kieran.cunningham@thestar.ie they weren't happy with his kick-outs or decision-making, so he was being let go. Leonard wished Gilroy all the best — and then crashed into the abyss. He'd always had addiction issues: "I smoked hash when I was a teenager. Got into ecstasy, cocaine. Even smoked opium in the Himalayas. I couldn't have two or

three drinks, it would be a three or four-day bender." And the shock at being cut loose by Dublin pushed him close to the edge. "That phone call...it did send me on a bit of a whirlwind session for a long time," recalled Leonard. "When someone tells you you're not good enough, it really destroys your ego. And destroys any idea you have of yourself. "It sent me into a downward spiral. When I'd gone on binges before, there had been an element of enjoyment. "But I was angry, paranoid, got a bit crazy — and a lot of the 'good' parts of drink or drugs were disappearing. I had a few breakdowns in Ireland. And when I got to Australia, I was in a weird mental state. "It was the lowest I've ever felt about myself. "Being involved with Dublin is such an amazing experience. "When that goes, it's like losing your first love. You put as much effort into being part of a team like that as into relationships. "When someone tells you you're not good enough, it takes away your desire to be part of life almost."

# How being dropped from Dublin panel almost sent former goalkeeper Leonard over the edge and back again



Being a sub goalkeeper is a lonely and frustrating existence, but being part of the Dublin set-up meant the world to Leonard. "Even though I wasn't getting into the Dublin team, it became my life. It was everything to me," he said. "When that went, there wasn't much left. "I looked at my job and I wasn't interested. I didn't have a girlfriend or whatever at the time, and I wasn't interested in anything except getting messed up. "There were a few incidents in the space of a couple of weeks in Australia. "A friend of mine ended up in hospital. He went for me, I threw something at him and he ended up slicing his hand. "A few days later, I woke up beside a dumpster in a lane in Sydney. No wallet, no phone. Didn't know how I'd got there. "When I attacked another friend... The penny dropped. I just couldn't keep doing this. "I had a look at AA, but it wasn't for me. You need to put your trust in a God, and I'm a fully committed atheist. "I struggled really hard at the beginning after quitting drink and drugs, but stuck at it day to day."

In many other counties, Leonard would have been first choice. But trying to displace Cluxton meant he was always up against it. "One thing I thought I might be able to do was put in more effort in than Clucko," he said. "Not a chance. He was always there earlier than everyone else, out working on the pitch on his own, and he'd be one of the last guys to leave. "I had to match him at least, so my commitment to training was as good as anyone in the squad. "When I was a kid, all I wanted to do was to play for Liverpool at do was to play for Liverpool at Anfield or Dublin at Croke Park. "I was 27, 28 when I got called up so, being older, I appreciated being involved. "But the frustration at the lack of opportunities was crushing. "It's really tough to keep motivating yourself, but that's what I had to do. "If you don't get on to the pitch, you don't have that same emotional connection with having achieved something. "You don't feel as if you've achieved the same because you haven't sweated the same. "You can train all you want, you can go to the gym all you want, you can have the right attitude — but if you're not performing on the pitch, there's not the same satisfaction when you win." When Dublin won last year's All-Ireland, Leonard watched from thousands of miles away. "I managed to get a stream from Setanta, in Sydney," he said. "When I started the Sober Paddy blog and one of the things I was determined to do was to be honest and accountable to myself. "I need a reason to go off the rails. If I have that reason, I'm gone. Now I can control it and life is a lot different."

When someone tells you you're not good enough, it takes away your desire to be part of life almost

# Oisín Cross at Armagh snub

■ KARL O'KANE reports

OISIN McConville has revealed the Crossmaglen players were hurt by their lack of representation on the Armagh side in this summer's championship. Only two players from the three-in-a-row chasing All-Ireland champions started against Tyrone and Roscommon — Jamie Clarke and Aaron Kernan — as Armagh crashed out in the first round of the qualifiers. And McConville has called on Armagh boss Paul Grimley to lure former county goalkeeper Paul Hearty out of retirement. Hearty starred for Crossmaglen as they won a 16th county title in 17 seasons at the weekend, defeating Pearse Og at the Athletic Grounds. McConville, the only man to be involved in all 16 wins, going back to the 1996 triumph, reckons up to eight Cross players should be in the Armagh squad. The 38-year-old Armagh All-Ireland winner said: "It's complete madness to me (the lack of Cross players in the Armagh team) when you consider the quality that the boys have shown all year. "There were a lot of players in our panel that were quite hurt by that. Whenever boys do come back and play for Cross it gives them that extra spur to try and prove a point again. "That's the only stage we have — out there in the club championship to say, 'right, I'm good enough to play for Armagh.' "I understand that it hurts that these boys don't get playing McKenna Cup or that much in the League — but that's the way the fixtures go." McConville believes Hearty could be tempted out of retirement. He continued: "I think it's time that somebody came and got him. "(There are) about eight or nine (players) who can, at the very least, challenge to be in that Armagh squad, but again it's all about opinions. That's my opinion."



VIEW: McConville

# Fergal to return

FERGAL O'Donnell is poised to return to inter-county management for 2013 — but not as Roscommon senior boss. Instead O'Donnell will take charge of the county's minors, having led them to All-Ireland glory in 2006 before enjoying three years as senior manager. O'Donnell stepped down from the position a year ago and Roscommon supporters were hoping he could be persuaded to return. It is understood that a change in his work role as a Garda was one of the factors which saw O'Donnell willing to make a return and he has been nominated for the vacant minor manager's job.

# O'Dwyer: I am here to stay!

■ KARL O'KANE reports

DUBLIN star Ryan O'Dwyer intends to spend the rest of his career with Kilmacud Crokes after landing his first ever county title at any grade. O'Dwyer, who grabbed a crucial first half goal in the win over Cuala, said the victory "meant more than anything" to him. O'Dwyer, who'll be part of the Crokes football squad for tomorrow's championship clash with St. Sylvester's said: "I'm going to be up here for the foreseeable future, hopefully forever. "Kilmacud is my club so winning a county with Kilmacud means more to me than anything." Harder O'Dwyer jettied out to New York after Dublin exited this year's championship — but was in for a rude awakening when he got back to the capital! He said: "It was harder than anything I did all year when I came back. It stood to us. "It was all guns blazing. The attitude is fantastic. "Before the St. Brigid's game Rob O'Loughlin hit me in training and I said, 'well, f\*\*k you anyway, you are not meant to be hitting me like that, we are on the same team!' "But we are lucky enough the lads are driving us on and we are bringing it into matches."



CLASS: O'Dwyer