

Carty shows Andy Farrell and Ireland exactly what their missing

Jack Carty has certainly given Andy Farrell plenty to ponder ahead of Ireland's Six Nations meeting with Italy next weekend. The out half was in imperious form on Saturday night against a stubborn Cardiff side, once again reminding everyone that his name certainly belongs in the Ireland conversation.

With Ireland's recent and well documented troubles at replacing Johnny Sexton, the big question on many people's lips is, why exactly is Carty not involved with the squad.

Carty, 28 has just 10 caps for Ireland and has been in international exile for almost 18 months now, his last appearance coming in the watershed defeat to Japan at the World Cup. While Carty certainly did not have his best game that day, the fact remains that Ireland were beaten on numerous fronts and ultimately the better team on the day in Japan won.

In Irish sport, accepting an opposing team was superior is often too bitter pill to swallow with Carty scapegoated by many for the defeat.

Ireland are set to face the Italians next weekend and it presents Farrell with an ideal opportunity to grow Ireland's depth at out half.

Sexton has been a wonderful servant for Ireland and arguably has been Ireland's best ever out half depending on what province you are from.

Sexton however will be 36 in July and the likelihood that he will be still playing at the level Ireland need when the next World Cup rolls around shrink as the days go by giving his history with injuries and concussion.

Ireland know exactly what Sexton can do and starting him against Italy would not benefit any party. Planning for life after Sexton must begin and it must begin now to avoid a repeat of the 2015 world cup.

The debate on who should take the reins won't be solved here but Carty's name must now surely move up the queue.

Billy Burns was introduced for Sexton against Wales and also played 40 minutes against the French. While no one needs reminding of Burns gaffe against the Welsh, he certainly did not set the world alight against the French either.

While it may seem harsh to judge someone over 50 minutes of rugby, the fact remains that John Cooney holds the kicking duties at Ulster ahead of Burns. Can Ireland really persist with an out half at international level who does not face the pressures of kicking week in week out for his own province.

Unlike Burns, Carty is certainly used to this type of pressure having nailed crucial kicks at key moments for Connacht in the Pro 14 and Champions Cup.

Ross Byrne is another currently ahead of Carty in the Irish pecking order. Last night however Ross was played at inside center for Leinster with his younger brother Harry played at 10.

While it is important not to read too much into this, it does seem that Leinster are unsure who exactly will be the one to take the club forward.

Joey Carberry has recently resumed training with Munster but expecting him to return to a green jersey anytime soon after a 13-month injury layoff is most certainly wishful thinking.

With all this in mind, it begs the question, what exactly must Carty do to be given a chance to take the reins for Ireland.

On Saturday night, Carty gave an assured performance with 12 points from the boot ensuring that Connacht remain on course for Champions Cup qualification.

Carty's latest tally means that he is now the second top scorer in the Pro 14, second only to Ulster's John Cooney. Carty has also amassed almost 5000 kick meters for Connacht, 1000 more than any other player in the competition, a remarkable statistic.

On Off the Ball this week, Brian O'Driscoll called for Carty to start against Italy.

"The reason I'm calling for him is he presents a little bit more from an attacking mindset," he said. "He goes to the line quite aggressively and is very capable of running with the ball himself."

Carty seems to offer the best of both worlds, both the direct running game of Burns but also the accurate and assured kicking of Byrne.

Carty seems to be one of the unluckiest men in Irish rugby and one must wonder if he donned a different color jersey would his chances for Ireland have been so limited.

While Ireland's game with Italy is now more important than ever following the opening two defeats, it's high time that Ireland looked to build for the future with Carty well placed to lead this.

Andy Farrell is under increasing pressure mind you so don't be one bit surprised to see Sexton emerge from the Stadio Olimpico tunnel with 10 on his back to face the Italians next weekend.