

OLYMPICS



CORK BROTHERS SECURE THEIR PLACE IN IRISH SPORTING FOLKLORE WITH STUNNING SHOW



OPENING WIN FOR EVANS

DUBLINER Scott Evans came from a set down to beat German Mark Zwiebler 2-1 in his opening Badminton match at the Olympics.

Evans (above), a veteran of Beijing 2008 and London 2012, was facing the man who eliminated him eight years earlier.

The German was quick out of the blocks, going 11-2 up in the first game. Evans dug in to get the score back to 19-8 but in the end went down 21-9 after a number of unforced errors.

The Dundrum man went on the attack after the change of ends but trailed 11-7 at the break.

Battled

The 28-year-old battled back in the second set to tie it up 12-12, eventually winning 21-17 to take it to a deciding set.

Zwiebler again started fast, taking a 3-0 advantage before Evans started using the court much better, winning 11 points in a row to turn the deciding set around.

He then made Irish Olympic history as he closed out the set 21-7, to register Ireland's first ever Badminton win at the games.

He'll now face Brazil's Ygor Coelho de Oliveira tomorrow, and will be fancied to earn the win that would send Evans into the last 16.

Murray gets into semis

ANDY Murray is two steps away from Olympic glory once more after another titanic clash in yesterday's quarter-finals.

The Wimbledon champion (inset) needed a deciding set tie-break to see off gritty American Steve Johnson and win 6-0 4-6 7-6.

That guaranteed him a shot at another Olympic medal in today's semi-finals.

Murray will play Japan's Kei Nishikori, who beat Frenchman Gael Monfils, in the last four.

And he will go in bolstered by the fact that he has won his last 10 Olympics matches, stretching back to his London 2012 triumph.

Murray said: "My last two matches were incredibly tough and I can't believe the semi-final will be any different. But the thought of playing for another Olympic gold is awesome."



EVERY dog has its day. But the O'Donovan brothers never had a day like this before.

They rode their silver dream machine to a podium finish and what stood out was their utter conviction in every stroke.

Afterwards, they talked of a tinge of disappointment at not getting gold. That's what makes these boys special. And they have won the hearts of the nation with their good humour and open nature.

Already, the t-shirt company Hairy Baby have produced t-shirts with the slogan 'Shtreak, spuds and pull like a dog'.

Their interviews have been frank, funny, honest.

They have been a breath of fresh air in the often-toxic atmosphere of the Olympics.

When the O'Donovans woke yesterday morning and opened the curtains, a smile must have crossed their faces.

Grey skies, driving rain, a chill in the air. Pure Skibbereen weather, boy.

The Lagoa Stadium in Rio has a stunning setting, but it was such a wintry day that the Christ the Redeemer Statue — which looms above the venue — was shrouded in fog.

Gary and Paul O'Donovan are slow starters, so we knew not to read anything into the first 500m. Stationed in lane one, the Irish pair were in fifth at that mark, with Norway leading.

But the dogs of war started to show their teeth and moved up the field.

Challenge

Near the halfway point, France had taken the lead from Norway, with the O'Donovans well placed to challenge.

Into the business end, and the Cork brothers drove on to second spot, just half a second behind the French.

This was it. Time to close the eyes and pull like a dog.

The Irish support in Lagoa got hysterical as the O'Donovans squeezed their boat in front.

But the French pair of Pierre Houin and Jeremie Azou dug deep and just got over the line ahead of them.

Rowing is regarded as the toughest sport of all from many studies. Rowers have been known to lose hearing and vision in races from the effort.

As the O'Donovans tried to extricate themselves from their boat, we saw just what had the final had taken out of them. They looked like old men. Wincing with the effort, crumpled, drained utterly.

We saw it too when RTE's Joe Stack conducted his on-camera interview.

At one stage, Gary had to move away to the side to retch. Rowers' legs sometimes go purple from the strain in the last 500m of races.

"You can become bogged down in the toughness and misery of it all so we try and enjoy it," said an elated Gary.

"It's very monotonous because when we are not training we are resting and that can get kind of boring because we are spending almost 24 hours a day with each other.

"When there are more people to talk we can start coming out a bit daft. But we don't dwell on that.

"We enjoy doing it and we are hoping we can portray the sport in a great

OAR BLIMMEY!



A DAY TO SAVOUR: The O'Donovans with their dad Teddy after the race



AFTER their medal ceremony, the O'Donovan brothers had a brainwave.

Back on the water with a tricolour hoisted on the boat.

A gentle row up and down waving to the Irish fans, who broke into that old familiar 'Ole, Ole' chorus.

For Paul, the younger of the two, this was just reward for having been cooped up with his older brother for months on end.

"Ah, it's good yeah. I suppose we're almost like the same person at this stage because we've spent so long together in this past year," he said.

"I suppose people think when we're giving interviews we're great craic but we're just excited that we're other people to talk to than ourselves.

"We're sitting at home there and we're only allowed rest up in bed most of the time.

"We can't even talk to each other because it's like talking to yourself. We can only talk about things that

'We used to bate the head off each other when we were smaller!'

■ Kieran CUNNINGHAM

stuff, that's the way it goes. "As we matured and started getting a bit more successful in rowing we realised if we bate the head off each other, I kind of need him to be in good form and good health and uninjured... so we realised we can't be doing that to each other. We don't do that anymore."

Podium

"It's a bit boring then at times. It was good craic there to stand up with him on the podium. He's a nice guy as well. Sometimes."

Gary maintains the brothers have always been close, but they've had a few ups and downs.

"Yeah, we used to bate the head off each other when we were smaller," he said. "We'd be at it, two young brothers growing up and

O'Donovans make history by winning silver in Rio

"Forever we have been in to rowing. Ah. Forever. Our dad used to take us in to watch the crews training and at the national championships we would watch the Skibbereen crews racing.

Amazed

"They would all be wrecked after one race and then they would go out for another race, another race. We used to be amazed.

"We are so lucky and honoured that we can be ambassadors for Ireland and rowing. We only got into a boat together two years ago. We did a national trial. Paul was very good in a single scull.

"We did a national trial to establish the top two guys in the country to try to form a double with the aim of qualifying. Paul finished first and I finished second in that trial. We came together.

"At the end of the race, I didn't know what position in the field we were. All thoughts go out the window. I was delighted. Silver! I jumped forward in the boat and gave Paul a big hug."



DELIGHT: Gary O'Donovan with Claire Lambe and Sinead Lynch yesterday

LYNCH AND LAMBE OUT OF MEDALS

■ Kieran CUNNINGHAM

THERE was heartache for Irish pair Sinead Lynch and Claire Lambe yesterday as they finished outside the medals despite a stunning performance.

Lynch and Lambe had qualified for the lightweight double sculls final with the third fastest time.

They bettered that time in the final by more than five seconds. That got them sixth spot in a very competitive decider.

No podium finish, but still a brilliant performance from the first Irishwomen to make an Olympic rowing final.

An impressive display saw the Dutch take gold, while Canada and China were second and third respectively.

Nice

"It would have been nice to get up there into the medals," said Lynch. "We're disappointed because we did think we could get up there. There was only a tiny bit in it but it was enough to keep us out of it."

Lynch was world champion in single sculls all of 15 years ago. That isn't an Olympic event, however, so she switched to the double.

Things didn't work out in trying to qualify for Beijing in 2008 and Lynch went down a different route.

A talented club runner, she is also strong on the bike and she chased qualification for London 2012 as part of the women's track pursuit team.

But a puncture in the qualifying event finished her dream.

It looked as if Lynch's sporting career was over but she was tempted back to rowing.

A mother of three who turns 40 in October, the woman from Letterkenny is something special.

"We've shown that Irish women can make Olympic finals," she said. "What I'm sad about now is that it's the end of a fantastic journey."

Games show Brazil in its best light

BRAZILIAN journalist CAMILA CURADO gives her unique insight into watching her home nation host the Rio Olympics from Dublin.

BEING a Brazilian in Dublin is special during the Olympic Games.

But there is so much happening here, soccer, horse racing, 'the Dubs', it is hard to know which way to look!

I arrived on the first day of Euro 2016 — what a day to arrive!

I worked at the 2014 World Cup in Brasilia, so I followed the games in the Mane Garrincha Stadium, and Colombia's fans surprised me a lot.

They were the most excited and loud fans of any country — until I saw the Irish fans that is! Now I have changed my mind.

Shane Long's on fire, right? And all the fans were too — for a whole month.

I watched the Rio 2016 opening ceremony in The Woolshed on Parnell Street astonished.

Culture

I was very proud of my country's culture. And afterwards I heard a lot of compliments coming from Irish people in the streets, which was wonderful.

Another reason to feel honoured — when the Brazilian judoka Rafaela Silva (pictured) won the gold medal.

Silva is from Cidade de Deus, one of the poorest and most violent favelas in Rio de Janeiro. About 20 per cent of Rio's residents live in favelas — her father earns a living running a makeshift moving company out of his Volkswagen van.

The community was made famous in the 2002 film of the same name. Silva was disqualified in London for an illegal move and had to deal with an lot of abuse in the last four years.

Now, she is a gold medalist on the judo mat and in life too and a great source of pride for Brazilians everywhere.

I cannot say the same about in our men's football team, who had a disappointing start.

They drew 0-0 with South Africa and Iraq in the first two games in the Olympics and we were afraid of being eliminated in the last game on Thursday. Surprisingly we beat Denmark 4-0, so maybe the tide's turned.

In times like this, when we are disappointed, I must say that we have a lot to learn with the Irish fans to keep up our energy, even when we are not playing well.

On the other hand, the Brazil team has to follow the example of the Ireland side about how to give their best in the field.

Our players can do more, they just seem to have lost their way.

But there is still time for 'Neymar's on fire'...

MURPHY IN THIRD PLACE

■ Kieran CUNNINGHAM

ANNALISE Murphy is still in a great position in the Laser Radial class after yesterday's sailing action.

Conditions were tricky, but she is in third place overall, heading into the business end of the competition.

Andrew Brewster and Saskia Tidey impressed in coming eighth in their opening race of the 49er FX class.

First

DUBLINER Scott Evans became the first Irishman to win a badminton match at the Olympics

when he took down Germany's Mark Zwiebler in 9-21, 21-17, 21-7.

And, in dressage, Judy Reynolds qualified for the freestyle stage after posting a 10th place finish in the Grand Prix special.



SMART: Mark English (left) during the men's 800m heats

ENGLISH HOLDS NERVE TO REACH SEMI-FINALS

MARK English ran a smart tactical race to book his spot in tonight's 800m semi-finals on the first day of track and field action in Rio.

The Letterkenny man was at the back of the field heading into the final lap.

But he held his nerve, and the UCD med student

■ Kieran CUNNINGHAM

kicked hard to come home in third behind Canada's Brandon McBride and Marcin Lewandowski of Poland.

English posted a time of 1:46.40, and was happy with his performance.

"I knew with 500m gone people would be worried about where I was, but you just have to worry about yourself and run to your own strength," he said.

"I felt good, the last 200 felt really good, you know when you're passing guys like Jeff Risely you're in good shape.

"I was in Uberlandia for our training camp, got the sun every day, would train at nine or 10 in the morning, trying to get used to that heat time.

Ranked

"I treated that heat as a final. I knew I'd have to, I was ranked fourth and it was

three to qualify, so I'm happy with that."

English feels this should be his second Olympics, and he was frustrated at not being sent to London 2012.

His preparation this year was damaged after he broke a bone in his foot, which prevented him training on the

track for nearly three months.

"I had a doubt I might not get back to 1:44, 1:45, but I know I'd get back running," he said. "It was a case of whether it was going to be quick enough to get to the semi-final."

"There were nerves. It was easy to not get nervous when

it wasn't a full stadium, but I kept telling myself this is the Olympics, because I wanted that adrenaline rush."

English has been handed a fiendishly tough semi-final draw, with Olympic champion David Rudisha (right) one of many class acts in there, but he will give his all.

"I need to recover as much as I can now, run my own race again tomorrow night and do what I've got to do to run 1:44. It usually takes that to make a final. I'll leave everything on the track."

Alex Wright made his Olympics debut, finishing 46th in the 20km walk.



POISED: Annalise Murphy