

REVEREND FATHERS, LADIES & GENTLEMEN.

WHAT I AM MOST PROUD OF IN MY LIFE IS BEING A MEMBER OF OLD BELVEDERE RUGBY FOOTBALL CLUB.

IT'S A CLUB THAT OVER THE YEARS HAS ALWAYS HAD MORE THAN ITS FAIR SHARE OF DREAMERS, YET MORE THAN ITS FAIR SHARE OF PEOPLE OF ACTION TOO.

IT'S A CLUB I JOINED IN AUG 1972 AS A 10 STONE 18 YEAR OLD TEENAGER-WITH RED HAIR!

IT'S A CLUB OF WHICH I HAVE BEEN A MEMBER FOR NEARLY HALF OF ITS EXISTENCE, A CLUB WITH WHICH I HAVE HAD A FAMILY ASSOCIATION FOR 81 YEARS-SINCE MY UNCLE AND GODFATHER, SEAMUS HENRY, JOINED THE CLUB IN AUGUST 1938.

TONIGHT, I THINK, IS ESSENTIALLY A CELEBRATION OF THE *PEOPLE* THAT HAVE BEEN INVOLVED IN THIS UNIQUE AND HISTORIC CLUB, SINCE IT WAS ORIGINALLY FOUNDED 100 YEARS AGO.

THIS INCLUDES EVERY OFFICER, FROM THE FIRST PRESIDENT, DR JOHN EDWARD McCULLAGH AND THE FIRST CAPTAIN, JAMES TALLON, TO THE CURRENT PRESIDENT, DAVID EDWARD McGRATH AND THE CURRENT CAPTAIN, STEVE CROSBIE, AND ALL THOSE WHO HAVE CAPTAINED ANY TEAM IN THE CLUB-AT ANY LEVEL;

IT INCLUDES EVERY MEMBER, VOLUNTEER & SUPPORTER THROUGHOUT THAT TIME, HOWEVER BIG OR SMALL A CONTRIBUTION THEY HAVE MADE-AND ALL THEIR FAMILIES AND LOVED ONES TOO;

IT INCLUDES EVERY *CURRENT* MEMBER OF THE CLUB, WHATEVER THEIR BACKGROUND, FROM THE FATHER OF THE CLUB, FORMER INTERNATIONAL MICK DARGAN, TO THE YOUNGEST-LITTLE CHARLIE BALL FROM THE MINI RUGBY U6s;

IT ESPECIALLY AND MOST PARTICULARLY INCLUDES THE HUNDREDS AND EVEN THOUSANDS OF MEN *AND* WOMEN, BOYS *AND* GIRLS, WHO HAVE LACED UP THEIR BOOTS, PULLED ON THE FAMOUS BLACK AND WHITE OB JERSEY AND REPRESENTED THE CLUB-ON THE FIELD OF PLAY.

UNFORTUNATELY, NEITHER MICK DARGAN, WHO IS 90, OR CHARLIE BALL WHO IS 5, ARE WITH US TONIGHT-BUT BETWEEN THEM THEY REPRESENT A CLUB STEEPED IN HISTORY, YET FOCUSED FIRMLY ON THE FUTURE TOO.

IN THE PHOTO OF THE FIRST EVER OB TEAM IN 1918/19, ON THE FRONT OF TONIGHT'S DINNER PROGRAMME IS A MAN CALLED WILLIAM FANAGAN. HE IS STANDING AT THE BACK.

WILLIAM IS THE GRANDFATHER OF 1968 SENIOR CUP WINNER, FORMER PRESIDENT, AND CURRENT TRUSTEE-ALAN FANAGAN.

WHAT AN EXTRAORDINARY 100 YEAR CONNECTION THAT IS.

AS AN ASIDE, THIS YEAR FANAGANS FUNERAL DIRECTORS CELEBRATE THEIR 200TH ANNIVERSARY. THANKS TO ALAN, THEY ARE ONE OF TONIGHT'S SPONSORS AND, FOR THOSE WHO DON'T KNOW, THEIR ADVERTISING BOARD IN ANGLESEA ROAD IS PERFECTLY POSITIONED-ON THE DEAD BALL LINE!

I MENTIONED THAT WHEN I JOINED THE CLUB I HAD RED HAIR.

FAST FORWARD TO ABOUT 18 MONTHS AGO, WHEN I HAD TO TAKE THE LUAS TO MY OFFICE ONE MORNING. THERE WAS STANDING ROOM ONLY AND I ENDED UP STANDING OPPOSITE A STUNNING YOUNG WOMAN.

INSTINCTIVELY I SMILED AT HER-AND, MUCH TO MY SURPRISE, SHE SMILED BACK.

I BLUSHED LIKE A TEENAGER AND DIDN'T KNOW WHERE TO LOOK.

A FEW MINUTES LATER WE HAD EYE CONTACT AGAIN. THIS TIME SHE SMILED AT ME AND, SECONDS LATER, SHE WAS ON HER FEET WHISPERING IN MY EAR.

IN A MOMENT I WILL NEVER FORGET, LADIES AND GENTLEMEN, BELIEVE IT OR NOT, SHE WAS OFFERING ME.....HER SEAT!!

THE STORY OF OLD BELVEDERE IS DEFINED BY ACHIEVEMENT, COMMITMENT, IMAGINATION AND CONSTANT EVOLUTION OVER TEN DECADES. IT'S BEEN AN EVENTFUL AND FASCINATING JOURNEY.

THE INITIAL FOUR YEAR PERIOD OF THE CLUB BETWEEN 1918/19 AND 1921/22 HAS BEEN REFERRED TO AS "THE FORGOTTEN YEARS".

IT WAS A PERIOD WHEN INTERNATIONAL RUGBY RESUMED AFTER THE FIRST WORLD WAR-AND THE FIRST SHOTS IN OUR WAR OF INDEPENDENCE WERE FIRED.

IT WAS A PERIOD WHEN THE CLUB DECIDED, AT THE END OF ITS FIRST SEASON, TO *“ENTER SENIOR RANKS AND TO OPEN TO SISTER JESUIT COLLEGES AND TO OUTSIDERS WHO MAY WISH TO JOIN US”*.

IT WAS A PERIOD WHEN OLD BELVEDERE PLAYED ITS FIRST SENIOR CUP MATCH, AGAINST WANDERERS, IN LANSDOWNE ROAD, ON ST PATRICKS DAY 1920-A GAME WE LOST 3/0.

IT WAS A PERIOD IN WHICH THE 18 YR OLD MEDICAL STUDENT KEVIN BARRY WAS EXECUTED, AN EVENT WHICH HAD A PROFOUND EFFECT ON THE CLUB.

IT WAS ALSO A PERIOD IN WHICH THE CLUB, IN A SHEER ACT OF DEFIANCE, RE-APPOINTED MICHAEL O'BRIEN AS CAPTAIN FOR A SECOND SEASON-EVEN THOUGH HE WAS INTERNED AT THE TIME.

IT WAS A PERIOD WHEN A TRY WAS WORTH 3 PTS AND YOU COULD BUY A PINT OF GUINNESS FOR 10 OLD PENCE!

1930s

1930 SAW THE RE-BIRTH OF OB AFTER 7 DORMANT YEARS, WHEN A MEETING OF FORMER BELVEDERE COLLEGE PUPILS UNANIMOUSLY DECIDED TO *“FORM A FOOTBALL CLUB FOR BELVEDERIANS TO COMPETE IN THE JUNIOR AND MINOR LEAGUES PROMOTED BY THE LEINSTER BRANCH OF THE IRFU”*.

ONE OF THE TRULY GREAT AND MOST INFLUENTIAL PEOPLE IN THE HISTORY OF THE CLUB, DR TCJ [BOB] O'CONNELL, WAS APPOINTED CAPTAIN.

IT WAS THE DECADE IN WHICH OB WON ITS FIRST TROPHY-THE METRO CUP IN 1936 , CAPTAINED BY DICK BELTON-BEATING A CLUB CALLED BLACKROCK. I THINK IT WAS IN THE FINAL IN LANSDOWNE ROAD.

THAT CUP WAS RETAINED THE FOLLOWING YEAR.

IN THE FOLLOWING SEASON, 1937/38, OB BECAME A SENIOR CLUB AGAIN-LED BY 6 TIME PRESIDENT JIMMY O'CONNOR AND CAPTAIN PADDY KEVANS,

THE MAN WHO SCORED THE FIRST TRY FOR THE CLUB WHEN IT WAS REFORMED IN 1930.

IT WAS A DECADE IN WHICH ANOTHER TRULY GREAT MAN OF OB, THE MASTERFUL AND MAJESTIC SCRUM HALF GEORGE MORGAN, THE CLUB'S FIRST INTERNATIONAL, WAS SELECTED TO TOUR SOUTH AFRICA WITH THE LIONS IN 1938- ALSO BECOMING THE CLUB'S FIRST LION .

UNIQUELY, GEORGE PLAYED IN 7 SUCCESSIVE SCHOOLS CUP CAMPAIGNS [4 JUNIOR AND 3 SENIOR] AND IN HIS PRIME IT WAS SAID THAT HE WAS "AS FAMOUS AS THE HILL OF HOWTH", AND HIS SON BILLY, WHO WAS SCRUM HALF ON THE '68 SENIOR CUP WINNING TEAM-IS HERE TONIGHT.

1940s

THE 1940s WERE "THE GLORY YEARS" OF OLD BELVEDERE.

IT WAS A DECADE WHEN THE CLUB WON 7 LEINSTER SENIOR CUPS IN A ROW, AN UNPRECEDENTED FEAT BY ANY CLUB IN ANY PROVINCE-BEFORE OR SINCE.

EVERY CUP GAME PLAYED BY THESE "INVINCIBLES" WAS PLAYED IN LANSDOWNE ROAD-THE OLDEST INTERNATIONAL RUGBY GROUND IN THE WORLD.

THE NAMES OF THE CAPTAINS "THE MAGNIFICENT 7", ARE ETCHED INTO THE HISTORY OF THE CLUB-GEORGE MORGAN, PADDY QUINN, JACK BELTON, SEAMUS HENRY, GERRY QUINN, PADDY O'SULLIVAN AND DES THORPE, AS ARE THE NAMES OF THE 6 LEGENDARY OLD BELVEDERIANS WHO WON ALL 7 MEDALS-BRENDAN QUINN, CHICK O'NEILL, DES THORPE, JACK BELTON, JOHN O'DWYER & NEIL McNELIS.

AFTER THE WAR, OB WAS THE FIRST IRISH CLUB TO PLAY A TOURING SIDE, BEATING RACING OF PARIS IN LANSDOWNE ROAD, AND AN OB SELECTED TEAM BEAT THE NEW ZEALAND SERVICES ALSO IN LANSDOWNE ROAD-THE FIRST EVER DEFEAT FOR A NEW ZEALAND REPRESENTATIVE SIDE IN IRELAND.

AS WELL AS THIS, NO LESS THAN 6 PLAYERS FROM OB [KEVIN, BRENDAN AND GERRY QUINN, KARL MULLEN, DES THORPE AND JACK BELTON] WERE SELECTED TO PLAY FOR IRELAND AGAINST ENGLAND.

IT WAS ALSO THE DECADE WHEN KARL MULLEN LED IRELAND TO ITS FIRST EVER GRAND SLAM IN 1948, ALONGSIDE FELLOW OLD BELVEDERIAN DES O'BRIEN, THE START OF A GOLDEN ERA IN IRISH RUGBY.

HAVING HAD FOUR PREVIOUS HOMES [BEECH HILL, VERNON AVENUE, BALLYMUN AND JONESES ROAD], THANKS MAINLY TO 6 TIME PRESIDENT JIMMY O'CONNOR AND 7 TIME PRESIDENT BOB O'CONNELL, IN 1944 THE CLUB PURCHASED A 75 YEAR LEASE TO A 10 ACRE SITE ON ANGLESEA ROAD [FOR £5950 PLUS FEES OF £297.10s] AND THE DECADE CONCLUDED WITH OB PLAYING ITS FIRST EVER GAME THERE, AGAINST UCD, ON FEB 20TH 1949, AND IT HAS BEEN OUR HOME EVER SINCE.

HOWEVER, THAT LEASE WAS UP THIS YEAR-BUT THANKS TO THE GENEROSITY OF OUR SPORTS LOVING PARTNER AND JOINT OWNER, THE INCREDIBLY SUPPORTIVE DERMOT DESMOND, WHO IS HERE WITH US TONIGHT, I BELIEVE WE CAN LOOK FORWARD TO IT BEING OUR HOME FORr ANOTHER 75 YRS-AT LEAST!

1950s

THE 1950s-WERE "THE HISTORIC DECADE" OF THE CLUB AND BEGAN WITH ANOTHER 2 SENIOR CUP WINS IN '51 & '52, CAPTAINED BY KEVIN QUINN & DONAL McALEESE.

SO, IN 13 SEASONS OB PLAYED IN 11 LEINSTER SENIOR CUP FINALS AND WON THE CUP 9 TIMES.

IN '5,1 KEVIN QUINN BECAME THE THIRD OF THE QUINN BROTHERS TO CAPTAIN OB TO A SENIOR CUP WIN AND THAT CUP WAS WON WITHOUT SINGLE POINT BEING CONCEDED-IN THE WHOLE CAMPAIGN.

MICK DARGAN WAS ON THAT TEAM.

THE 1950s ALSO INCLUDED PRESTIGIOUS FIXTURES AND WINS OVER GIANT CLUBS LIKE CARDIFF, WASPS, BRISTOL & LEICESTER.

YEARS LATER, FINBARR O'MAHONY, PRESIDENT IN 1978/79, RECALLED THOSE GLORIOUS DAYS OF THE 1940s AND 1950s WHEN HE WROTE;

"THE VELVET GRASS THEY TROD ON SEEMED ALL HALLOWED

***THE GODS, IT SEEMED, FOREVER BLESSED THEIR PLAY
THEIR THOUGHTS WERE NOT OF LEAN GREY YEARS TO FOLLOW,
THEY CHANGED A GREAT TOMORROW INTO A GREAT TODAY”.***

“THE LIONS STAND FOR EVERYTHING THAT IS GOOD IN RUGBY” AND NOT ONLY WAS KARL MULLEN SELECTED TO CAPTAIN THE LIONS TO NZ IN 1950 [THE LAST LIONS TO TRAVEL BY BOAT AND THE FIRST LIONS TO WEAR RED] BUT THE EVER INSPIRING TONY O’REILLY SCORED NO LESS THAN 38 TRIES ON HIS TWO LIONS TOURS TO SOUTH AFRICA IN ‘55 AND NEW ZEALAND IN ‘59-A RECORD THAT WILL LAST THE TEST OF TIME.

THOSE THREE LIONS TEAMS OF ‘50s, EACH CAPTAINED BY IRISHMEN, PLAYED GLORIOUS OPEN AND ATTACKING RUGBY THAT EARNED ADMIRATION RESPECT AND AFFECTION IN EQUAL MEASURE THROUGHOUT THE RUGBY PLAYING WORLD.

THANKS TO KARL AND TONY, OB WAS RIGHT AT THE HEART OF THIS MOST ROMANTIC PERIOD IN HISTORY OF INTERNATIONAL RUGBY-A TIME WHEN RUGBY WAS FUN AND AN ADVENTURE-AND WASN’T ALL ABOUT WINNING BUT HOW THE GAME WAS PLAYED.

ON DEC 23RD 1950 IN LANSDOWNE ROAD OB, WITH A SELECTED TEAM, BECAME THE ONLY CLUB TO EVER PLAY AGAINST THE LIONS.

WE CAME SECOND!

1960s

THE 1960s HAVE BEEN DESCRIBED AS “THE LEAN YEARS” BUT, UNDER THE PRESIDENCY OF DONAL O’HERLIHY, THE PRESENT CLUBHOUSE AS WE NOW KNOW IT, WHERE SO MANY OF US HAVE SPENT SO MUCH OF OUR LIVES, WAS BUILT AND OFFICIALLY OPENED IN FEB 1962 AND A NEW ERA DAWNED.

DES O’BRIEN, GRAND SLAM WINNER IN ‘48, A MAN WHO PLAYED HOCKEY TILL HE WAS 72, SQUASH TILL HE WAS 80, AND CROQUET TILL HE WAS 86, WAS NAMED MANAGER OF THE LIONS TO NZ IN ‘66 AND AFTER A GAP OF 16 YEARS THE LEINSTER SENIOR CUP WAS WON AGAIN IN 1968 FOR THE 10TH

TIME, UNDER THE CAPTAINCY OF NIALL McCARTHY, IN HIS THIRD YEAR AS CAPTAIN.

THE McCARTHY FAMILY ARE WELL REPRESENTED HERE TONIGHT AND NIALL McCARTHY JNR IS CURRENTLY CHAIRMAN OF MINI RUGBY.

SADLY, WITHIN HOURS OF THE FINAL WHISTLE IN THAT '68 FINAL, ONE OF THE GREATEST AND MOST COMMITTED OF ALL OLD BELVEDERIANs, PADDY QUINN, A PAST CUP WINNING CAPTAIN, A PAST PRESIDENT AND HONORARY SECRETARY FOR 15 YEARS, PASSED AWAY.

LEST WE FORGET, AND FOR THOSE WHO DON'T KNOW, THE GATES AT THE ANGLESEA ROAD ENTRANCE OF THE GROUND ARE DEDICATED TO THE MEMORY OF THIS IRREPLACABLE, PERFECT GENTLEMAN.

ONLY 5 TROPHIES WERE WON IN THIS DECADE-ONE BEING THE MINOR LEAGUE IN '66-CAPTAINED BY NONE OTHER THAN THE CHAIRMAN OF THE "BELVO 100" COMMITTEE, ALAN BRADLEY, WITHOUT WHOM NONE OF US WOULD BE HERE TONIGHT.

ALAN IS A FORMER PRESIDENT AND CURRENT TRUSTEE OF THE CLUB-AND IS THE EPITOME OF AN OLD BELVEDERIAN.

ALAN'S BROTHER BRUCE IS AN HONORARY VICE PRESIDENT OF THE CLUB AND THEIR LATE BROTHER DERMOT WAS HONORARY SECRETARY FOR A MERE 11 YRS!

IN 1962, THE OB SQUASH RACQUETS CLUB WAS FOUNDED-AND THEY ARE REPRESENTED HERE TONIGHT BY QUALITY, IF NOT QUANTITY.

1970s

THE 1970s WAS THE "DEFINING DECADE" OF THE CLUB.

IT WAS A DECADE THAT SAW TONY O'REILLY WIN HIS 29TH AND FINAL CAP FOR IRELAND-SEVEN YEARS AFTER HIS 28TH.

IT WAS ALSO A DECADE WHICH SAW THE BIRTH OF THE OB INTERNATIONAL 7s, ONE OF MANY UNQUALIFIED SUCCESS STORIES OF THE CLUB.

FOR THOSE TOO YOUNG TO KNOW, OR TOO OLD TO REMEMBER, THIS TOURNAMENT WAS PLAYED ON THE LAST SUNDAY OF APRIL FOR OVER 25 YEARS AND ATTRACTED CROWDS OF UP TO 15,000.

IT WAS THE DECADE IN WHICH THE FLOODLIGHTS WERE ALSO INSTALLED IN ANGLESEA ROAD, ONLY THE SECOND CLUB IN IRELAND TO DO SO.

BUT MOST SIGNIFICANTLY OF ALL, IT WAS THE DECADE IN WHICH THE CLUB, AFTER MUCH SOUL SEARCHING, EMOTION AND DEBATE, AT AN EGM ON APRIL 22ND 1976, AFTER 46 YEARS OF BEING A CLUB ONLY OPEN TO FORMER PUPILS OF BELVEDERE COLLEGE, *OVERWHELMINGLY* VOTED TO BECOME AN OPEN CLUB.

THIS WAS HELPED IN NO SMALL MEASURE BY THE OPEN MINDED HONORARY LIFE PRESIDENT BOB O'CONNELL, WHO SUPPORTED THE MOTION-HAVING *PASSIONATELY* OPPOSED IT JUST ONE YEAR EARLIER.

THIS WAS *THE* DEFINING DECISION OF THE CLUB AND ONE WHICH HAS SINCE SEEN IT BECOME THE INCLUSIVE, WELCOMING, FRIENDLY, COSMOPOLITIAN CLUB IT NOW IS.

IN 1972, AFTER 75 YEARS, THE VALUE TRY INCREASED FROM 3 TO 4 POINTS AND THE DECADE CONCLUDED WITH FORBO [DERMOT FORBES] BECOMING THE ONLY MAN TO CAPTAIN THE CLUB FOR FOUR SEASONS.

1980s

THE 1980s WERE THE "SUCCESSFUL DECADE", AS IN TERMS OF TROPHIES WON, IT WAS THE MOST SUCCESSFUL DECADE IN THE HISTORY OF THE CLUB, AT THAT TIME.

FOR MANY YEARS, JUNIOR RUGBY HAS BEEN THE HEART AND SOUL OF OB AND NO LESS THAN 17 OF THE 18 TROPHIES WON IN THIS DECADE WERE JUNIOR TROPHIES-12 CUPS AND 5 LEAGUE TITLES.

THIS INCLUDED WINNING 4 LEINSTER BRANCH TROPHIES IN ONE SEASON FOR THE FIRST TIME IN 1983, AND THE O'CONNOR CUP FOR THE FIRST TIME IN 1984. [THIS CUP HAD BEEN PRESENTED BY THE CLUB TO THE LEINSTER BRANCH IN HONOUR OF 6 TIME PRESIDENT JIMMY O'CONNOR].

THE McCORRY CUP WAS ALSO WON FOR THE FIRST TIME, IN 1982. THIS TEAM WAS COACHED BY GEORGE HOOK AND CAPTAINED BY MARK BARR AND INCLUDED MY MISCHIEVOUS EVER SMILING, LOVABLE LATE BROTHER, MICHAEL, AT SCRUM HALF AND IS WELL REPRESENTED HERE TONIGHT- INCLUDING GEORGE AND MARK.

IT WAS THE DECADE IN WHICH JIM WALSH & FRANK McGRATH BECAME THE FIRST NON PAST PUPILS OF BELVEDERE COLLEGE TO CAPTAIN THE CLUB, NOT AN INSIGNIFICANT MILESTONE.

IT WAS THE DECADE THAT SAW ANOTHER UNQUALIFIED SUCCESS STORY OF THE CLUB UNVEILED-THE FLOODLIGHT CUP-UNDER THE CHAIRMANSHIP OF FORMER PRESIDENT TOMMY JORDAN. TUESDAY NIGHTS HAVE NEVER BEEN QUITE THE SAME SINCE.

IN THIS DECADE, PADDY MADIGAN BECAME THE FIRST OLD BELVEDERIAN TO BE PRESIDENT OF THE IRFU IN 1987/88. THIS WAS A SINGULAR ACHIEVEMENT-AS PADDY WAS THE ONLY MAN I EVER MET WHO SPOKE IN BRAIL!

THE 1980s WAS THE DECADE WHEN, AFTER 30 YEARS, ANOTHER ONE OF THE UNQUALIFIED SUCCESS STORIES OF THE CLUB, THE SUNDAY NIGHT DANCES, BECAME THE SAT NIGHT DISCOS-BUT THE LOVE STORIES CONTINUED UNABATED!

IT WAS ALSO THE DECADE WHEN THE FIRST EVER RUGBY WORLD CUP TOOK PLACE-IN AUSTRALIA AND NEW ZEALAND IN 1987.

1990s

THE 1990s WAS THE "GROUND BREAKING DECADE" AND A DECADE WHICH ALSO SAW THE BIRTH OF THE ALL IRELAND LEAGUE.

IN THIS DECADE, THE CLUB WON 16 TROPHIES AND IN 1992/3 WITH DONAL SPRING, BROTHER OF DICK, SON OF DAN, AS COACH, AND MERVYN FEELY,

BROTHER OF MARK, AS CAPTAIN, THE FIRSTS WON A TREBLE-THE LEINSTER SENIOR LEAGUE, THE LEINSTER FLOODLIT CUP, AND THE ALL IRELAND FLOODLIT CUP, THE ONLY TIME THE CLUB HAS WON 3 SENIOR TROPHIES IN ONE SEASON.

THIS DECADE ALSO SAW ALL BLACKS BRUCE DEANS AND WORLD CUP WINNER STEVE McDOWELL PLAY FOR OB AND THE CLUB WON PROMOTION TO DIVISION 1 AIL FOR THE FIRST TIME IN 1995, UNDER CAPTAIN GARETH DINEEN.

THE 1990s ALSO SAW TWO OF THE MOST SIGNIFICANT DEVELOPMENTS IN HISTORY OF THE CLUB.

ONE WAS THE SETTING UP OF MINI RUGBY IN 1990, THANKS MAINLY TO THE VISION AND DRIVE OF THE LATE PAUL REDDY, ONE OF THE MOST VALUABLE MEMBERS IN THE HISTORY OF THE CLUB.

IT HAS NOW ONE OF BIGGEST MINI RUGBY SECTIONS IN THE COUNTRY, HAS STIMULATED A GENERATION OF PASSIONATE AND SKILLFUL RUGBY PLAYERS, NUMEROUS JUNIOR AND SENIOR CUP WINNERS IN A VARIETY OF SCHOOLS AND, SO FAR, 5 FULL INTERNATIONALS-IAN MADIGAN, NOEL REID, DAN LEAVY, LUKE McGRATH AND ROSS BYRNE.

THE OTHER SIGNIFICANT DEVELOPMENT WAS THE SETTING UP WOMEN'S RUGBY IN 1995/96. BOTH THESE GROUND BREAKING DEVELOPMENTS HAVE HAD A DYNAMIC IMPACT ON THE EVOLUTION OF THE CLUB.

CATH EVANS WAS THE CLUB'S FIRST CAPTAIN AND THE CLUB'S FIRST WOMEN'S INTERNATIONAL, AND, APPROPRIATELY, WOMEN'S RUGBY IN OB WAS SET UP IN THE SAME DECADE AS MARY ROBINSON AND MARY McALEESE WERE ELECTED THE FIRST FEMALE PRESIDENTS OF IRELAND.

WOMEN OF OLD BELVEDERE, I WOULD ENCOURAGE YOU, FROM TIME TO TIME, TO SPARE A THOUGHT FOR THE PIONEER OF WOMEN'S INVOLVEMENT IN RUGBY IN THE CLUB-MURIEL BUTLER.

IN THIS '90s DECADE, SHE WAS MADE AN HONORARY LIFE MEMBER FOR HER LONG AND DEDICATED SERVICE TO U19 AND JUNIOR RUGBY AND, OTHER THAN GRACE McCORMACK TONIGHT, IS THE ONLY OTHER WOMAN TO HAVE BEEN NAMED CLUB PERSON OF THE YEAR, BACK IN 1994.

MURIEL WAS ALSO THE FIRST WOMAN TO ATTEND AN OB ANNUAL DINNER- AND WAS AN AUNT OF OUR CURRENT PRESIDENT DAVID EDWARD McGRATH.

IN 1992, AFTER 20 YRS, THE VALUE OF A TRY INCREASED FROM 4 POINTS TO 5 POINTS AND JD O'BRIEN, WHO PLAYED FOR THE CLUB AT JUNIOR LEVEL FOR NO LESS THAN FIVE DECADES, BECAME THE ONLY OB TO SCORE A 3 POINT TRY A 4 POINT TRY AND A 5 POINT TRY!

IT WAS IN THIS DECADE THAT THE GAME OF RUGBY WENT PROFESSIONAL-IN AUG 1995.

2000s

IN THE NOUGHTIES, AFTER SEVEN SEASONS IN DIVISION 2, THE CLUB AGAIN WON PROMOTION TO DIVISION 1 OF THE AIL IN 2007 AND, AFTER A 39 YEAR GAP, WON THE LEINSTER SENIOR CUP AGAIN IN THAT SAME YEAR, UNDER THE CAPTAINCY OF SCOTT HUTTON-AND SCOTT AND EMMA HAVE FLOWN IN FROM DUBAI TO BE HERE TONIGHT.

IT WAS A DECADE IN WHICH THE CLUB WON A TOTAL OF 14 TROPHIES- INCLUDING A UNIQUE TREBLE OF MINOR LEAGUE, MINOR CUP AND ALL IRELAND CUP YEAR GAP BY THE THIRDS IN 2003, CAPTAINED BY JOHN KILFEATHER.

OFF THE FIELD, EOIN DEERING AND MARK FEELY, BROTHER OF MERVYN, BECAME THE FIRST NON BELVEDERE COLLEGE PAST PUPILS TO BE PRESIDENTS OF THE CLUB. SO FAR THE FIRST OF A FEW BUT HOPEFULLY, IN TIME, JUST THE FIRST OF MANY.

BARRY KEOGH, ANOTHER MEMBER OF THE 1968 CUP WINNING TEAM,WHO IS HERE TONIGHT, BECAME THE SECOND OLD BELVEDERIAN TO BE PRESIDENT OF THE IRFU IN 2004/05.A YEAR LATER, IN 2006, THE INDOMINABLE BRIAN WHELAN RAN THE OB ANNUAL DINNER FOR FINAL TIME-AFTER 41 CONSECUTIVE YEARS.

THE NOUGHTIES BEGAN WITH THE 5 NATIONS BECOMING THE 6 NATIONS AND FINISHED IN 2009 WITH LEINSTER WINNING THE HEINEKEN CUP FOR

**THE FIRST TIME AND IRELAND FINALLY WINNING ITS SECOND GRAND SLAM-
AFTER 61 LONG YEARS.**

**AS THE LATE GREAT MOSS KEANE SAID AT THE TIME “IT WAS A LONG TIME
BETWEEN DRINKS”!!!**

2010s

**AND FINALLY WE ARRIVE AT THIS CURRENT “DECADE OF LANDMARKS” WITH
THE CLUB WINNING A RECORD 20 TROPHIES.**

**IT ALL BEGAN WITH OB WINNING THE HOLY GRAIL OF THE AIL LEAGUE IN
2011-UNDER THE CAPTAINCY OF THAT EXCEPTIONAL YOUNG MAN ANDREW
DUNNE. OB “THE SLEEPING GIANT” WAS AWAKE AGAIN.**

**JOHN MAHONY WAS PRESIDENT-AND IT WAS THE YEAR HE DISCOVERED
THAT HE *WASN’T* IN WIFE LAURA’S WILDEST DREAMS!**

**A YEAR LATER, IN 2012, THE LEINSTER SENIOR CUP WAS WON AGAIN FOR
THE 12TH TIME-UNDER CAPTAIN RICHIE LEYDEN.**

**ONLY LANSDOWNNE, TRINITY & WANDERERS HAVE WON THE CUP MORE
OFTEN.**

**THIS IS THE DECADE IN WHICH THE WOMEN OF OB APPEARED IN NO LESS
THAN 5 CONSECUTIVE AIL FINALS-WINNING 3 IN A ROW IN 2014/5/6-UNDER
THE CAPTAINCY OF AOIFE RYAN, NORA STAPLETON AND NORA STAPLETON,
MAKING OB THE ONLY CLUB IN IRELAND TO HAVE WON THE AIL IN MEN’S
AND WOMEN’S RUGBY.**

**IT WAS IN THIS DECADE THAT IRELAND WON ITS FIRST EVER WOMEN’S
GRAND SLAM IN 2013-INSPIRED BY NORA STAPLETON, SOPHIE SPENCE, AILIS
EGAN, MAZ REILLY, JENNY MURPHY AND ALISON MILLAR, *AND* BEAT BLACK
FERNS OF NZ IN WC IN 2014 *AND* HOSTED THE WOMEN’S WORLD CUP IN
2017 WHEN 7 PLAYERS FROM OB PLAYED AGAINST FRANCE, *AND*,
UNBELIEVABLY’ HAVE NO LESS THAN 8 PLAYERS SELECTED FOR THE IRISH
TEAM, AGAINST SCOTLAND, IN THIS YEARS 6 NATIONS-SENE NAOUPU,
MEGAN WILLIAMS, CLAIRE McLOUGHLIN, ELLEN MURPHY, DEIRBHILE NIC A**

BHAIRD, ALISON MILLAR AND, NOT LEAST, KATHRYN DANE AND LINDA DJIOUGANG WHO ARE BOTH HERE TONIGHT.

LADIES AND GENTLEMEN, KARL MULLEN, THE MAN WHO CAPTAINED IRELAND TO ITS FIRST GRAND SLAM IN 1948, WAS AN OBSTETRICIAN. IT'S BEEN SAID OF KARL THAT IN HIS LIFE HE DELIVERED ENOUGH BABIES TO FILL LANSDOWNE ROAD. ONE OF THE BABIES HE DELIVERED WAS FIONA COUGHLAN-THE FIRST *WOMAN* TO CAPTAIN IRELAND TO A GRAND SLAM!

IN THIS "DECADE OF LANDMARKS", TWO YEARS AGO, THE J1s WON THE METRO LEAGUE FOR FIRST TIME EVER-AFTER 86 YEARS OF TRYING.

LAST YEAR, RORY & GARY KEOGH NOTCHED UP 1000 GAMES FOR OB BETWEEN THEM, OVER 54 CONSECUTIVE SEASONS, AND, FIVE WEEKS AGO, ON SUN APRIL 14TH THE J2s, CAPTAINED BY ROSS O'NEILL, WON THE MINOR LEAGUE AT WINDSWEPT SKERRIES.

IT WAS THE CLUB'S 100TH TROPHY.

A WEEK LATER, THE J3s WON THE WINTERS CUP FOR THE 3RD YEAR IN A ROW, ALL OF WHICH MEANS THAT OB, WITH 101 TROPHIES, IS THE MOST DECORATED CLUB IN LEINSTER.....OTHER THAN LANSDOWNE AND ST MARYS, OF COURSE, BOTH OLDER CLUBS THAN WE ARE!!!

IT WAS A DECADE WHICH SAW:

THE IRELAND MEN WIN A THIRD GRAND SLAM-INCLUDING JACK CONAN, DAN LEAVY AND LUKE McGRATH;

IRELAND FINALLY BEAT THE ALL BLACKS IN LANSDOWNE ROAD-AFTER 113 YEARS OF TRYING;

THE IRISH U20s WIN ITS SECOND EVER GRAND SLAM THIS YEAR-INCLUDING MARTIN MOLONY AND JOHN McKEE;

THE OB U13s WIN A LEAGUE AND CUP DOUBLE 2 WEEKS AGO, IN AN UNBEATEN SEASON, AND, MOST IMPORTANTLY OF ALL,

THE OB FIRSTS SURVIVE IN DIVISION 1B IN THE TIGHTEST LEAGUE IN THE 29 YEAR HISTORY OF THE AIL-COMFORTABLY!!!

SO, WHAT AN EVENTFUL AND FASCINATING JOURNEY IT HAS BEEN, ONE THAT HAS SEEN OVER 20 MEN AND OVER 30 WOMEN FROM OB WIN SENIOR INTERNATIONAL CAPS AND OVER 50 MEN & OVER 60 WOMEN WIN OTHER REPRESENTATIVE HONOURS.

THE GAME OF RUGBY HAS CHANGED DRAMATICALLY IN THE PAST TEN DECADES-BUT ITS SPIRIT, I BELIEVE, REMAINS.

LADIES AND GENTLEMEN, THANK YOU SO MUCH FOR LISTENING AND I HAVE REALLY GOOD NEWS FOR YOU.

I AM NOW INTO INJURY TIME AND I AM GOING TO FINISH BEFORE TIM O'BRIEN OR ANY OF THE OTHER OB REFEREES THAT ARE HERE TONIGHT BLOW THE FINAL WHISTLE ON ME!

PENULTIMATELY, SINCE THE 1940s, OB HAS HAD A GREAT TRADITION OF TOURING AND WAS WELL REPRESENTED AT THE EPIC WORLD CUP FINAL BETWEEN SOUTH AFRICA AND THE ALL BLACKS IN ELLIS PARK, IN JOHANNESBURG, IN 1995-THE INVICTUS FINAL.

NOT LONG AFTERWARDS, NELSON MANDELA, A FREEMAN OF THE CITY OF DUBLIN AND ONCE DESCRIBED AS "THE PRESIDENT OF HUMANITY" SAID THAT:

"SPORT HAS THE POWER TO CHANGE THE WORLD.

IT HAS THE POWER TO CHANGE PEOPLES LIVES MAKE THEM HEALTHIER AND HAPPIER; THE POWER TO INSPIRE AND THE POWER TO UNITE PEOPLE IN A WAY THAT LITTLE ELSE CAN".

FOR ME THIS IS *EXACTLY* WHAT RUGBY AND OLD BELVEDERE HAVE DONE FOR SO MANY OF US HERE TONIGHT AND FOR SO MANY OLD BELVEDERIANs IN THE PAST 100 YEARS.

TIM O'BRIEN NOW HAS HIS WHISTLE IN HIS MOUTH SO I WILL FINISH BY PROPOSING 3 TOASTS.

FIRSTLY, IN THIS WORLD CUP YEAR, WHEN 20 TEAMS WILL BE COMPETING FOR THE WEBB ELLIS TROPHY IN JAPAN IN A FEW MONTHS' TIME, I WOULD

LIKE TO PROPOSE a TOAST TO WILLIAM WEBB ELLIS HIMSELF WHO, *“WITH A FINE DISREGARD FOR THE RULES OF THE GAME AS PLAYED AT THE TIME PICKED UP THE BALL AND RAN WITH IT”*, IN RUGBY SCHOOL, 95 YEARS BEFORE OB WAS ORIGINALLY FOUNDED AND, BY DOING, SO CREATED THIS BEAUTIFUL, MAGICAL, MAGNIFICENT AND TRULY WONDERFUL GAME OF RUGBY THAT HAS ENRICHED ALL OUR LIVES AND GIVEN US ALL SUCH INCREDIBLE EXPERIENCES, SUCH UNFORGETTABLE MEMORIES AND, MOST IMPORTANTLY OF ALL, SUCH GREAT FRIENDS.

I WOULD ALSO LIKE TO PROPOSE A TOAST TO ABSENT FRIENDS, THOSE WHO, FOR ONE REASON OR ANOTHER, CANNOT BE HERE WITH US TONIGHT BUT EVEN MORE IMPORTANTLY, THOSE WHO ARE NO LONGER WITH US-FROM KEVIN BARRY IN 1920 TO PAUL REDDY EARLIER THIS SEASON, TO BRIAN MERRY AND PADDY WALSH, JUST LAST MONTH.

TO BE FORGOTTEN IS TO DIE TWICE AND TONIGHT IS A NIGHT TO REMEMBER AS MANY AS WE CAN.

FINALLY, AND MOST IMPORTANTLY OF ALL, IN PROPOSING A TOAST TO THE CLUB, I WOULD LIKE TO PROPOSE A TOAST TO THE FUTURE-BECAUSE THE FUTURE OF OLD BEVELDERE RUGBY FOOTALL CLUB IS IN THIS ROOM.

TONY O'REILLY ONCE SAID THAT *“RUGBY IS A GREAT TEMPLATE FOR LIFE AND THOSE INVOLVED IN IT SHOULD HAVE A COMMITMENT TO EXCELLENCE AND A COMMITMENT TO BEAUTY OF GAME”*.

AS A CLUB, I BELIEVE THE CHALLENGE FOR US ALL FOR THE FUTURE IS TO CONSTANTLY STRIVE TO HAVE *“A COMMITMENT TO EXCELLENCE AND A COMMITMENT TO THE BEAUTY OF THE GAME”* AND TO CONSTANTLY STRIVE TO PRESERVE, AND EVEN ENHANCE, EVERYTHING THAT IS WORTHWHILE IN THE GAME AND EVERYTHING THAT THE CLUB HAS STOOD FOR SINCE IT WAS ORIGINALLY FOUNDED 100 YEARS AGO.

**LADIES & GENTLEMEN, WE HAVE HAD GREAT DAYS, ON AND OFF THE FIELD,
BUT TO REMAIN AS WE ARE IS IMPOSSIBLE-WE HAVE TO IMPROVE,
CONSTANTLY, OR DIE.**

THE FUTURE STARTS TONIGHT.

THE MORE WE DREAM, TOGETHER-AS ONE, THE MORE WE WILL ACHIEVE.

TO OLD BELVEDERE-MAY OUR BEST DAYS BE AHEAD OF US.

THANK YOU VERY MUCH.