

What impeccable timing the FAI showed in their announcement of a new manager

Jenny Friel

ON THE TREATMENT OF THE WOMEN'S GAME



WITH the explosion of sports punditry in recent years, we've come to expect a lot from former athletes who comment not only on performances but on the politics of the disciplines they once excelled at.

It's no easy task, articulating intelligently the strengths and weaknesses of an individual or a team in an engaging manner, while also being willing to discuss the issues or the latest controversy the particular sport is caught up in.

Some make their name from being cantankerously outrageous in their assessments, although in these more nuanced times, this kind of pundit seems to be fading from mainstream media – a move not universally welcomed by viewers who enjoy a bit of entertaining argy-bargy following a closely fought game.

However, the more thoughtful approach to sports commentary has thrown up some interesting moments, perhaps revealing more than expected about how that world generally works.

On Wednesday night, before England beat the Netherlands in the Euros, the pre-game discussion on RTE television spent a lot of time on the announcement of a new manager for the Irish men's team. It took the FAI almost nine months to make the surprise appointment of Heimur Hallgrímsson, a qualified dentist from Iceland.

But the timing was questioned by former professional turned psychotherapist and pundit, Richie Sadlier. He pointed out how the women's team were due to play England on Friday night and set to hold their press conference the day before – the same day the new men's manager was now scheduled to be formally introduced to the media.

'We have talked for years about the need for the women's game to get coverage in the media,' said Sadlier. 'They [the FAI] have gone up against their own women's team for coverage.'



Motives: Richie Sadlier, left, and interim FAI chief David Courell



He also wondered if there was a darker motive at play for holding the press conferences on the same day – to possibly act as a distraction from another huge story involving the FAI, the revelations about alleged abuse of female players by senior coaches in the 1990s.

That subject would naturally be covered at the women's pre-game press conference.

'How much coverage do you think the female press conference is going to get if it is going to go absolutely head-to-head with the male one?' asked Sadlier. 'I am trying to be as generous as possible and be as open-minded as possible and try to imagine what is the reason the men's press conference would be put on tomorrow.'

'What's the rush? What upcoming fixture is there? What's the benefit?'

After Sadlier's intensely cynical line of questioning, the presenter swung round to his fellow pundit, Kevin Doyle, another former professional footballer. The difference couldn't have been more marked.

The FAI was probably just happy to get the appointment over the line, he suggested. There was no greater thought put into it than that – no agenda, just relief they finally had a manager.

Given the recent history of scandals unearthed about this organisation, including the controversies from when former CEO John Delaney was in

charge, Doyle's apparent naivete about how the FAI has operated seemed a little, well, misplaced.

But maybe he's right. Maybe the FAI was so giddy at its success in finally getting a new men's manager that it didn't cross anyone's mind to maybe hold off on the announcement until after, say, the weekend.

Certainly the FAI's interim CEO David Courell was making no apologies for potentially overshadowing the women's clash against ancient rivals England.

'Unfortunately, the calendar is jam-packed,' he said at the men's press conference on Thursday. 'There's never an ideal time for these announcements. The reality is we had secured our preferred candidate. We wanted to get going.'

He did, however, acknowledge that the announcement came in a week when the organisation has been dealing 'with very serious allegations relating to historical abuse of women in Irish football,' before claiming the FAI would have liked it to happen at a different time 'but due to a range of factors we had to proceed today.'

He ended with the classic: 'Despite today being an important day for Irish football, those courageous women remain at the forefront of our thoughts.'

But as Kevin Doyle noted in his unwittingly astute observation on Wednesday, it's unlikely the FAI gave the women's team, past or present, much thought at all.

THERE can be an astonishing degree of naivety in some quarters about Dubai, the type of place it really is and the deviance between the standards to which it professes to adhere and those it actually enforces.

Dubai has been in the news this week because of the detention of Tori Towey, a victim of appalling violence. Her injuries, the result of assault, have been displayed online and they are shocking. Immediately, you would hope and expect that the local authorities would move to find out who was responsible for inflicting the injuries and act accordingly.

Instead, the Roscommon woman, who was an Emirates airline cabin crew worker, was charged with attempted suicide and illegally consuming alcohol by authorities in the United Arab Emirate and was banned from leaving Dubai.

The idea that she would face charges when photographs showed she had been subjected to intense physical violence is almost unbelievable. Except it's not, because it is Dubai.

said: 'I have found this whole episode to be grotesque and medieval in what it says around how women are treated as objects, as possessions.'

Over many years, there have been plentiful examples in Dubai of people being detained in the most extraordinary circumstances. There has been a trend of charging those who would be considered victims in other countries. Victims who have reported rape have been arrested themselves for 'having' extra-marital sex. It's why there is an advocacy organisation called Detained In Dubai.

Before the Irish Government intervened successfully, Ms Towey faced possible imprisonment of months or years, or admission to a psychiatric facility. She is free now, but others have not been as fortunate.

Those who conduct a sexual relationship outside of heterosexual marriage run the risk of prosecution, imprisonment and/or a fine and deportation.

Detained In Dubai would argue that many crimes may go unreported as victims fear being charged themselves. People from countries such as India and the Philippines, many brought in to fill the lower-paid jobs, have been particularly vulnerable.

They are not the beneficiaries of high-profile representations by their home governments.

The Department of Foreign Affairs has long advised a 'high degree of caution' when travelling to the United Arab Emirates and has warned that Islamic laws

'Instead of hospital, she was taken to a police station'

And as Sinn Féin leader Mary Lou McDonald told the Dáil this week, after one 'particularly vicious beating', Ms Towey attempted suicide, and 'when Tori came to, she was surrounded by paramedics but instead of being taken to a hospital, she was taken to a police station'.

Despite the alleged brutal abuse, and despite seeking help from authorities in Dubai, she was sent home with her husband who then destroyed her passport, bringing any travel, and consequently work, to a halt, the Dáil was told this week.

McDonald nailed it when she

Biden must accept

AS I write this, Joe Biden remains both the US president and the Democratic Party's nominee for November's election. I hope that by the time you read this he has agreed to step down as the latter. He's hanging on grimly, but the Democratic Party must act to give it, and the United States, a better chance of avoiding a disastrous second Trump presidency.

The recent election debate was a disaster for Biden, but things got worse for him on Thursday evening when he introduced Ukraine's President Zelensky as Putin and later renamed Kamala Harris as Vice-President Trump at a televised Nato event.

Anyone can make a mistake like that. Indeed, Trump does it regularly, even recently during one of his stage performances getting wrong the name of the doctor who recently gave him a clean bill of health. Much of what Trump says is an incoherent babble as well as



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