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Champagne Football

*John Delaney and the betrayal of
Irish football: the inside story*

MARK TIGHE AND
PAUL ROWAN



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For Cara, Finn, Lyla and Rory Tighe
and
To the players, staff and supporters of Archibald Albion FC

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Prologue: The Name is Delaney, John Delaney

21 October 2017

Eamon Dunphy and his wife, the film and television producer Jane Gogan, sat in the back of a chauffeur-driven car. They were being taken to rural Kilkenny. It was a Saturday night. They wondered why they were bothering to make the trip.

Dunphy had accepted an invitation to attend John Delaney's fiftieth birthday party in the Mount Juliet golf club after being persuaded by one of his best friends, John Giles. The two had worked side by side for over twenty years as the wise old men of RTÉ television's football coverage, having played for Ireland together as young men: Giles one of the finest players of his generation, Dunphy a journeyman.

Over the years Giles had grown close to Delaney, the Chief Executive of the Football Association of Ireland. The two would travel around the country dispensing cheques to amateur football clubs from a fundraising foundation bearing Giles's name that was run through the FAI.

Although Dunphy had been publicly supportive of Delaney as the FAI's boss, he did not regard Delaney as a friend. He was travelling down to Kilkenny out of a sense of duty to Giles, but also with half a mind on the ten Manchester United season tickets that Delaney had access to and occasionally allowed Dunphy to use. The pundit would always pay Delaney for the tickets, which were for a Man United-mad friend. The payments went through Delaney's personal assistant in the FAI.

Dunphy recalls being taken for dinner by Delaney at a time when Giovanni Trapattoni was the Ireland manager and Dunphy was 'on his case'. The FAI CEO had 'tried it on with me', Dunphy says, asking the pundit to lay off on his criticism of the Irish team. Dunphy recalls that while he joked with Delaney that he could buy a short

amnesty from criticism with each supply of Man United tickets, he then made it clear that he would not hold back in criticizing the team when he felt it was justified.

The party at Mount Juliet was a lavish affair, according to a number of people who attended. Bursts of flames from a pyrotechnic display greeted guests clutching gifts as they entered the old manor house, smiling as a professional photographer captured their arrivals.

Delaney's fiancée, Emma English, a former model turned event planner, had organized a James Bond-themed party. English, a striking blonde, had been a firm favourite of newspaper photographers and their editors since she began publicly accompanying Delaney to matches and other work events in 2014.

After their first joint TV appearance, on *The Saturday Night Show*, presented by Brendan O'Connor, in 2014, English and Delaney had dined with fellow guest Jane Seymour, the actress who played Bond-girl Solitaire in *Live and Let Die*. That encounter, and Delaney's love for James Bond movies, had inspired the party theme. (A previous birthday party English had thrown for Delaney had had a teddy-bear theme, because, as she had told the nation on that TV chat show, Delaney was her 'teddy bear'.)

The centrepiece of the drinks reception was a huge ice sculpture of a Walther PPK pistol, Bond's weapon of choice. The ice sculpture was surrounded by the spy's favourite martini cocktail glasses. Nods to Delaney's football career came in the shape of several life-sized cardboard cut-outs of a footballer with Delaney's head superimposed, wearing a white Ireland jersey emblazoned with the number 50 and a captain's armband with the initials 'JD'.

A huge birthday cake had been styled to look like the Aviva Stadium, which the FAI had part-owned since it was built on the site of the old Lansdowne Road ground in 2010. Delaney had repeatedly claimed the stadium was his finest achievement, despite poor ticket sales and persistent media questions about whether the stadium debt was too great for the association to repay.

The baked version of the stadium came with working floodlights and a miniature crowd holding 'Happy birthday, John' banners. There was stadium advertising from Three, the Ireland team's main

sponsor. Among the guests on the night was Davy Keogh, the well-known Ireland supporter. A ‘Davy Keogh says hello’ flag – a fixture at nearly every Irish away game – was visible on the cake.

When the guests moved from the old manor house towards a large marquee, they were greeted by waiters in skeleton costumes with face masks and top hats like the villains from *Live and Let Die*. The Bond baddies served drinks to each table. Around the large marquee, banners depicted a silhouette of a tuxedoed Bond holding his pistol. A sign over the posters read ‘Happy birthday John Delaney’. The iconic Bond 007 logo, incorporating a pistol, had been modified to ‘John Delaney 0050’.

For the many football people in the crowd, the extravagance of the party – which was being run by Franc, a well-known wedding planner who had his own TV show – made them laugh in bemusement. Some assumed Delaney, with his €360,000 salary, must be picking up the tab. Others weren’t sure. Many of the guests had received their invites directly from an FAI official using an FAI email address, and FAI events staff had worked on organizing the party.

The invitees sat around nineteen tables that had tall white centre-pieces filled with large ostrich feathers. ‘If my wedding is half as big as this I’d be lucky,’ mused one FAI staff member working on the event.

Amongst the guests was Aleksander Čeferin, the President of UEFA, the European governing body for football. Delaney had just been elected to the UEFA Executive Committee in April. Having led the FAI since 2004, Delaney was now one of the most powerful men in European football. A number of other senior UEFA officials, including Noel Mooney, a former FAI executive, were also in attendance. The FAI had considered booking helicopters to fly the dignitaries to Kilkenny, but were deterred by high winds in the aftermath of Hurricane Ophelia.

The other guests included Martin O’Neill, the Ireland manager, and Alan Kelly, a former government minister and TD from Tipperary, where Delaney has strong family connections. Sports journalists John Duggan and Paul Collins, who worked for Newstalk and Today FM, were also present. Their radio stations were owned by Denis

O'Brien, the billionaire who had pumped some €12 million into the FAI over the past decade to help it pay the salaries of Trapattoni, O'Neill and O'Neill's assistant, Roy Keane.

Delaney, wearing an open-necked shirt and suit, and English, in a blue evening gown, entered the marquee together as the invited guests stood and rhythmically clapped to the sound of 'Put 'Em Under Pressure', the Ireland team's anthem from the 1990 World Cup. Delaney shook hands and backslapped guests to the chorus of 'Olé, Olé, Olé, Olé' on his way to his seat at the top of the room.

Brendan O'Carroll, the creator and star of *Mrs Brown's Boys*, delivered a mild roast of Delaney from the stage. O'Carroll, a party guest along with his wife, Jennifer Gibney, was performing for free. The MC on the night was Aidan Power, a TV presenter who specializes in sports. The paid musical act was the High Kings, a popular Irish folk band.

Dunphy remembers being bowled over by the overt affection that Delaney and English showed for each other.

'I thought she was an incredible-looking woman,' he says of English, a separated mother of four. 'You know, you see people in photographs, but seeing her up close, she was beautiful. She was tugging out of him like, "He's my man." I just couldn't get my head around it. Like, he isn't God's gift, at all. There is nothing suave about John Delaney. He's fucking gauche and awful.'

There are times you just have to suspend your disbelief, Dunphy says, and this was 'one coupling that I had to just suspend my disbelief about'.

While Delaney loves to sing but has little talent, English has a fine voice. She took to the stage with the High Kings for an acoustic version of 'Mercy', a song by the Welsh singer Duffy about a woman driven mad over her lust for a man. Delaney danced and clapped in front of the stage. He would later sing 'Daisy a Day', a 1970s song by Jud Strunk about a man's undying love for a woman.

A lengthy video, professionally shot and edited, included tributes to Delaney from people who could not travel for the occasion. The highlight was a message from Sir Alex Ferguson, the former Manchester United manager. When Delaney took to the stage, which was

dressed to look as though it was surrounded by ice, he read out a letter to himself, this one from Michael D. Higgins, the President of Ireland and a keen football fan. The letter noted that landmark birthdays 'are special moments in life' and the President passed on his 'best wishes'.

Delaney then made sure to thank 'my own staff' for their brilliant work at the party. To nervous laughter from the crowd, he joked that it wasn't a part of the normal jobs of 'his' FAI staff to organize birthday parties.

'They won't be doing it again for a while, trust me,' he laughed.

Amongst those looking on were senior directors of the FAI board and some of their wives. Tony Fitzgerald, the FAI President, and Michael Cody, its Honorary Secretary, both wearing green ties, took to the stage to make a presentation of a silver plate to their Chief Executive.

Delaney then paid a tearful tribute to Emma English. 'He started slobbering about their love,' says Dunphy. 'It was cringe city.'

Dunphy hadn't seen much of his good friend Giles, who spent much of the night up at a bar with Dr Alan Byrne, the Irish team doctor, having a sing-song. To make things worse, Dunphy had been seated at the same table as Michael Ring, the Fine Gael government minister for rural development, whom he strongly disliked. As Delaney dissolved into tears on stage while professing his love for his fiancée, Dunphy was getting kicks under the table from Jane Gogan. The couple decided to make their excuses and leave early.

They missed the High Kings belting out their final song, the Clancy Brothers' 'The Parting Glass'. As the guests drank their teas and coffees, Delaney and English slowly danced alone between tables, singing the lyrics to each other and kissing.

Despite the absence of Dunphy, a renowned party animal in his day, the celebrations went on until 5 a.m. back in the Mount Juliet manor house. A DJ accompanied by a saxophonist and a drummer kept the dance floor busy. The revelry was bolstered by the late arrival of several players from the Kilkenny senior hurling team.

On the following Monday morning Mario Rosenstock, Today FM's resident mimic, aired a well-informed skit about the party. The

FAI CEO was a big fan of Rosenstock's 'Gift Grub' segments on the *Ian Dempsey Breakfast Show* and loved when he was the subject, even if his leadership of the FAI inevitably came in for mockery.

On this particular morning, Dempsey interviewed Rosenstock's 'John Delaney', who explained that the birthday party was still going on despite a mistake made by the 'FAI catering committee' which meant the celebrations did not start in a brewery as initially planned. The FAI's inability to organize a piss-up in a brewery had been a running gag of Rosenstock's for years.

This skit also included 'Roy Keane' incredulously reading out a scripted tribute to Delaney that praised his 'generosity, razor-sharp intelligence, general competence and utter professionalism'.

At the end of the sketch, a laughing 'Delaney' was presented with the bill for the party. The clacking sound of the till printing out the final receipt seemed never-ending.

Rosenstock's gag about the bill that Delaney had racked up was more on the mark than anyone knew at the time. Mazars accountants would later establish that the FAI ended up spending over €80,000 on the party. This included €26,293 to Mount Juliet, €25,000 to Franc, €7,595 for the chauffeurs and €3,609 for the helicopters that never got off the ground.

When Delaney made a payment to the FAI to cover the cost of his own birthday party, it was for a nice round number: €50,000. The €30,000-plus difference was carried by the organization that ran the sport of football in Ireland – everything from the senior national team down to the amateur clubs, run by volunteers, that provide the game's lifeblood.

The association was already in a catastrophic financial position. Delaney had run it into the ground. But it would be a year and a half before he was exposed.

I. Sins of the Father

Joe Delaney, Honorary Treasurer of the Football Association of Ireland, was rarely without a twinkle in his eye. But on the evening of 8 March 1996, beset by damaging newspaper reports that had led him to offer his resignation, he arrived at the Westbury hotel, off Grafton Street, looking dishevelled, his eyes puffy and red. Sessions of the FAI Council were, for Joe Delaney, normally cheerful gatherings. This one was more like a court martial.

Joe Delaney did not arrive at the Westbury alone. By his side was his eldest son, John, a gangly figure with a long face and cowlick haircut. John Delaney was twenty-eight years old.

★

Two years earlier, in happier times, Joe Delaney had travelled to the 1994 World Cup in the United States. Who could forget the buzz and bonhomie around the lobby of the Orlando North Hilton in Florida? Memorable also was Joe Delaney's ticketing operation on the seventh floor of the hotel, in a room covered with match tickets and cash in multiple currencies worth tens of thousands of dollars.

Ireland had their training camp in Orlando, and played two games there – both of which they lost badly. Still, there was no stopping the legendary *craic*. Bishop Eamonn Casey, exiled to Ecuador after a sex scandal, slipped in and out of the hotel quietly to get his match tickets. The Dublin comedian Brendan O'Carroll was happy to entertain the fans. U2's Larry Mullen was amongst the throng as O'Carroll led the revellers in a bastardized version of the Smokie hit 'Alice', which included the chant 'Alice? Who the fuck is Alice?'

Eamon Dunphy arrived in Joe Delaney's room on a mission to help an acquaintance get four tickets.

'Joe was sitting on the bed,' Dunphy recalls. 'On the floor was the

biggest suitcase I'd ever seen anywhere. I looked in the suitcase and all that was in it was dollar bills and tickets.'

Dunphy expected Joe to tell him to 'fuck off' when he asked for four, but was told it was 'no problem'.

Delaney dipped into his suitcase. 'They're four good ones.'

'How much do I owe you?'

'Nothing, tell him I gave them to you.'

'That,' says Dunphy, 'was the Irish way.'

It wasn't the right way for Brendan Menton, son of the former FAI President Brendan Menton Snr and himself a former FAI Council member. Menton was in Florida on a sporting holiday, away from his job as chief economist at AIB and amongst some old friends, when he hopped in the hotel elevator and arrived at Joe Delaney's nerve centre to buy tickets for the last-sixteen game against Holland. Menton looked at the bundles of tickets and cash strewn around the floor. He asked Joe if he would like him to assist in acquiring a credit-card machine to make payment more efficient.

Delaney politely declined the offer and told him it was 'cash only'.

Menton shrugged, paid for his tickets and left. He didn't think much more of it.

Joe Delaney moved his ticket operation to the environs of Mulvaney's pub in Church Street, where the Orlando cops intervened to restore order as Ireland fans jostled for tickets. Delaney was asked by the *Orlando Sentinel* how many tickets the FAI would have for sale on match day. He replied: 'How long is a piece of string?'

★

Qualification for the 1996 European Championship was beyond an ageing Ireland team, and it was clear that the magic of Euro '88, Italia '90 and the win over Italy in the World Cup opener in '94 had gone. The Jack Charlton era had run its course. Young blood was clearly needed on the pitch and in the dugout.

The FAI was coming under scrutiny for the way it handled its affairs. While Ireland had qualified for three major tournaments in ten years and beaten some of the biggest nations in world football, the association had made a loss from the two World Cups. Its financial

records were kept in an old-fashioned ledger, and when the bookkeeper, Maureen Lynch, left in the summer of 1994, the system broke down altogether. A new computer system for the association was lying in the basement, yet to be installed.

Peter Buckley, an accountant who arrived in the finance department in January 1995 after being recommended to Joe Delaney, found the place in a mess. One of his first jobs was to go through cheque stubs and work out who had been paid for what. That was particularly difficult when there was nothing written on the cheque stubs.

In February 1996, Sean Connolly, who held the title of FAI General Secretary, resigned after five years in the job. The association released a terse statement with no explanation given. Connolly told RTÉ's *Prime Time* that he had taken a 'loan' of £6,000 from the FAI, and that he had repaid it, but that the loan had been used as a pretext to get rid of him.

Two days after the announcement of Connolly's departure, Veronica Guerin reported in the *Sunday Independent* that, at the 1994 World Cup, senior FAI personnel had given tickets to a London-based ticket tout to sell on, that the tout had ripped the FAI off on a vast scale and that an unidentified FAI official had later personally made up the FAI's shortfall. The tout reportedly operated under the name of George the Greek, but his real identity remained a mystery.

One of those who read the story was Brendan Menton, who couldn't resist a wry chuckle as he recalled his encounter with Joe Delaney in Orlando. The day after Guerin's story broke, Menton was waiting at Dublin airport to pick up a friend when he was approached by the burly figure of Des Casey, a wily former trade union official who was then Honorary Secretary of the FAI. Casey was probably the biggest of the FAI beasts, as he also sat on the Executive Committee of UEFA, the first Irishman to rise to such an elevated position. Casey, who was now acting General Secretary in the wake of Connolly's departure, had his own daytime job as an arbitrator. He needed to get somebody in to run things and reckoned that Menton was the man.

Having just left AIB, Menton decided to take the job on an interim basis, even though he knew one previous incumbent who said the job was like 'being crawled over by snakes'.

In the days before Menton started in his new job, the FAI held a press conference to address Connolly's resignation and the *Sunday Independent* story about the ticket fiasco. The association's President, Louis Kilcoyne, acknowledged that the FAI had dealt with a tout, but said it did so for the sole purpose of gaining extra tickets for Ireland fans. Casey said he had received assurances from Joe Delaney that all funds had been accounted for. He referred to minutes of a meeting of the FAI Finance Committee in November 1994, and a statement attributed to the association's chief accountant, Michael Morris: 'No monies were owed by any officers of the association. No serious amounts of money were outstanding that caused them any concern or worry.' Delaney, sitting at the top table, said nothing.

The FAI's version of events did not hold up for very long. Two days later, Joe Delaney issued a statement admitting that he had made a personal payment to the FAI of Stg£110,000 to cover the losses arising from the FAI's dealings with a ticket tout. Casey had been made to look like an idiot, at best; at worst, it looked like he was involved in some kind of cover-up.

In the next edition of the *Sunday Independent*, Veronica Guerin reported that Delaney had made two electronic payments to the association, in November and December 1994, to values of Stg£140,000 and Stg£70,000, for a total value of Stg£210,000 – nearly twice the £110,000 Delaney had admitted to covering.

Menton started work at the FAI the following day, Monday, 26 February 1996. As he wrote in his book *Beyond the Green Door: Six Years Inside the FAI*, his wife Linda drove him from their home in Meath, and he arrived at the FAI's headquarters in Merrion Square at 9 a.m. Menton rang on the brass doorbell for ten minutes, but there was no response. Finally, he gained admittance – he didn't know about the back entrance, or the fact that work didn't start till 9.30 a.m. – and the first person he met was Joe Delaney. The Honorary Treasurer showed Menton into his new office. Before Menton had a chance to adjust his chair, Delaney offered a convoluted explanation about the ticketing payments. 'Was Joe Delaney telling me that the money from the FAI's World Cup tickets went through a personal account rather than the FAI's account?' Menton wrote. 'He seemed to be.'

Meanwhile, the FAI's accountant, Michael Morris, left the association. On 1 March, Morris issued a statement: 'I object to the timing of my resignation, a date fixed by Joe Delaney, and the circumstances with which it coincided.' Morris also said that he had queried the World Cup ticket situation in 1994, but had been told by Delaney that there was no reason for concern. Morris wasn't prepared to be the fall guy. 'During my time in office I was also periodically instructed by officers to edit the lists of ticket debtors, prior to advising the Finance Committee/Senior Council, and this editing would have included officers' names. I was never happy about this,' Morris said.

As part of an Irish footballing dynasty, Menton had heard any number of FAI horror stories before, but even he was shocked by what was emerging. His first act as General Secretary was to commission Bastow Charleton to produce a report on the FAI's World Cup ticketing. The 8 March meeting of the FAI Council in the Westbury would demand answers, and heads, if the explanations weren't satisfactory.

Further damaging revelations continued to spill out. It emerged in the press that Louis Kilcoyne had been arrested during Italia '90 for trying to sell a batch of tickets outside the last-sixteen game between Brazil and Argentina in Turin. The FAI had purchased the tickets because there was a chance that Ireland could have played in Turin that day had the group stage of the tournament worked out differently. Opponents had been waiting in the long grass for Kilcoyne ever since his family had sold Shamrock Rovers' Milltown ground to property developers, and now they were starting to emerge.

The FAI's somewhat Byzantine management structure and Ruritanian job titles had their roots in amateur football's culture of volunteerism. The General Secretary, sometimes also known as the Chief Executive, was not really a chief executive, but more the head of day-to-day administration at Merrion Square. The real power was held by the so-called 'five officers', a kind of executive board. The officers were unpaid volunteers (though they enjoyed a generous expenses regime and free travel). At the time the ticketing scandal broke, three of the five – Delaney, the Honorary Treasurer; Casey, the Honorary Secretary; and League of Ireland chairman Michael

Hyland – were the most powerful figures in the association. Their positions could be held indefinitely, whereas the President and Vice-President had shorter terms and thus tended to accumulate less influence. The fifty-two-member Council was effectively Irish football's parliament, reflecting the traditional view of the association as an amateur body run by committed volunteers. The Council elected the officers, who headed up an Executive Committee that consisted of between twenty and twenty-three members, also chosen from the voluntary ranks.

'The FAI was like Afghanistan; it was run by feudal lords, with no central authority,' says Bill Attley, an FAI Council member at the time. 'If I was here for the rest of the day to tell you how the Council carried on you wouldn't believe it. Approving the minutes used to take nearly an hour. Then there would be a row about what was said – "I spoke about this and it is not in the minutes." "I didn't get tickets for the international." "There were people in the VIP lounge who shouldn't have been there." That type of stuff.'

Joe Delaney had been chairman of Waterford FC in the 1970s, and this led to his becoming a member of the FAI Council. At some point in the 1980s, the role of Assistant Honorary Treasurer had been created for him, so that he could handle match-ticket distribution – a perennially contentious area. When Charlie Walsh stepped down in 1994, Delaney finally got his promotion to Honorary Treasurer.

In the run-up to the 8 March Council meeting, Casey reminded people that he knew nothing of the ticket dealings at the two previous World Cups, and he called on Delaney and Kilcoyne to resign. When they didn't, he tendered his own resignation. Pat Quigley, the Vice-President, quickly followed suit, as did Hyland. Finally, Delaney offered his resignation. Amongst the five officers, only Kilcoyne, the President, clung to office as the meeting began.

As members of the Council milled around the Westbury's Kildare Suite, where the meeting was to take place, they were handed copies of Bastow Charleton's draft report. Most of the Council members leafed through the draft as they sat in their seats waiting for the meeting to start. The accountants' report found that at USA '94 the FAI had purchased tickets for knockout fixtures that Ireland might or

might not be involved in. Joe Delaney, it said, was responsible for this trove of tickets. Delaney told Bastow Charleton that after Ireland were knocked out, he handed over IR £296,000 worth of tickets to an unfamiliar agent without any security, other than a third-party cheque for \$30,000.

Invited to address the Council, Delaney read from a lengthy statement in which he condemned a 'smear campaign' which 'has at its roots the belief that, as the person in charge with the responsibility of satisfying the huge ticket demands of Irish fans, I enriched myself in the process'. He said that the FAI had purchased tickets to various World Cup knockout matches with the intention of 'trading' them in order 'to secure as many tickets for Irish fans as possible'. He explained the discrepancy between Veronica Guerin's report that he'd paid the FAI Stg £210,000 to cover a ticket shortfall, and his own admission of having paid Stg £110,000, by explaining that he had managed to collect a total of Stg £100,000 from the ticket tout, and had topped this up with Stg £110,000 of his own money. He apologized to his fellow officers for not telling them what had happened. 'I have paid the ultimate price,' he said, 'for a foolish decision made for the best of reasons in the euphoria of the World Cup.'

As Delaney walked out of the meeting and into the Westbury's lobby, the media were waiting. He ignored questions from Veronica Guerin, but agreed to do an interview with RTÉ's Gabriel Egan.

'He was very upset and he found it difficult to find the words,' Egan recalls. 'He didn't want to do the interview and I kind of persuaded him. He knew me over the years so he trusted me. He was shattered.'

John Delaney, at his father's side, also spoke to the reporter.

'He was upset as well, and he was annoyed about what had happened to his father, there is no question about that,' Egan says. 'He said he was going to carry on and he was going to be part of the new set-up.'

Tony O'Donoghue, another RTÉ reporter who spoke with John Delaney that night, felt the scene was 'kind of Shakespearean'. In the years that followed, O'Donoghue 'would often think so much of [John's] motivation was to restore the reputation of Joe'.

The Council meeting continued without Joe Delaney into the early hours of Saturday morning. Kilcoyne lost a vote of confidence, but delegates voted not to accept the resignations of the other three senior officers of the association. One of them, Pat Quigley, was not only reinstated but immediately made President now that Kilcoyne was out. Most delegates insist that Joe Delaney also lost a vote of no confidence, though Bernard O'Byrne, who was president of the Leinster Football Association at the time, has a different recollection: he says there was no vote on Delaney, and that had he stood his ground he might just have scraped back in. Hyland and Casey were also reinstated, after they addressed the Council.

'I told them I felt humiliated and injured and victimized because of the fact that I'd gone in front of the press and the fact that we told lies,' Casey says. He had seen the back of Joe, but the Delaneys weren't going away. 'He [John] wanted to get revenge for the father. He felt the father had been unfairly dealt with.'



Joe Delaney's downfall caused John Delaney's life to take an irrevocable turn. He accepted his father had made mistakes, but claimed that he had been targeted because he had ambitious reforms of the FAI in mind. Imbued with a sense of injustice over the way many in the 'football family' had turned on his father, John Delaney proceeded on his own rapid ascent through Irish football.

As a boy, John looked up to the former Manchester United and Ireland player Shay Brennan. The European Cup winner had fallen on hard times after finishing his playing career with Waterford United, where Joe was chairman. Brennan came to live with the Delaney family for a number of years. He introduced the Delaneys to the likes of Sir Matt Busby, Bobby Charlton and Nobby Stiles at Old Trafford, where Joe attended about fifteen games a year. Joe ran a bakery and Brennan drove one of the family bread vans, with young John as his assistant.

After attending school in Tipperary town, John enrolled in an accountancy course at Waterford Institute of Technology. He also carved out a reputation for himself on the soccer field for his rugged

approach playing for St Michaels in the Tipperary Southern League. He was also keen on Gaelic games, but soccer was his number one. His father was away a lot on football business, and John often tagged along. When Joe became the FAI's Head of Security – a job he held alongside his role as Assistant Honorary Treasurer – John was eventually seconded to work behind the scenes. Cruelly, one or two players gave him the name Yorkie, on the grounds that he was rich, thick and chunky, but it wasn't a particularly accurate description.

The younger Delaney's duties were hardly onerous. At the 1988 European Championship in West Germany, he provided an impromptu commentary of the Ireland–England game for Philip Green, the retired RTÉ commentator, who was too nervous to watch the closing stages of the match and had his head in his hands. Afterwards the FAI's young security man rubbed shoulders with the FA chairman and UEFA grandee Bert Millichip, and revelled in the shocked expression on his face as Ireland's 1–0 victory registered.

Later, John Delaney was involved in a number of business ventures around the country. There was a furniture shop in Athlone. There was a bakery in Tralee, Cameo Cakes, which his family had a stake in but which was in financial trouble. The business owed IR£100,000 in back taxes, and a health inspector had earmarked it for closure. Delaney warned off the health officials by asking if they wanted to be responsible for the loss of dozens of jobs. He then wrote ten post-dated cheques of £10,000 each to the Revenue sheriff. He got the business back on its feet and the cheques cleared. It had been a 'ballsy' move, he later boasted in an interview with the journalist Barry Egan.

By 1998, Irish football was in a state of flux. Participation levels had trebled after Jack Charlton's teams qualified for three tournaments between 1988 and 1994, but the feel-good factor failed to seep into the depressed League of Ireland. Wannabe Irish stars still had little alternative to the hit-and-miss approach of trying to break into the English league system.

A year after Joe's dramatic departure from the association, John was elected as Waterford United's representative on the FAI Council. This was an important step, even though the powers of the Council were under threat in the aftermath of the ticketing scandal. Menton

had commissioned a report from the consultant Ray Cass on the structures and administration of the FAI. This found the Council 'unwieldy' and complained that there was a 'lack of clarity as to the purpose, responsibility and accountability of the Honorary Officer positions, encouraging an inappropriate and potentially dangerous concentration of power'.

Cass advised that more power should be vested in the Executive Committee, or Board of Management, as he wanted to call it. This should consist of a maximum of twelve members who could sit on it for no more than four years. The FAI did create a Board of Management, but this was little more than a name change for the Executive Committee. It still had more than twenty members, there were no term limits, and the informal 'five officers' power centre remained very much intact.

Nevertheless, a place on the Board of Management was the natural ambition for any tyro trying to ascend the FAI's greasy pole, and Delaney very much fitted that description. The story of his ascent to the board was tinged with tragedy for Irish football.

Dr Tony O'Neill, commonly known as 'The Doc', was one of the FAI's most respected administrators. O'Neill had come to prominence as the driving force behind UCD's establishment of a League of Ireland team in 1979. He rose through the FAI voluntary ranks as far as Honorary Treasurer, while also doing the bucket-and-sponge work at matches when treating injured players. When Charlton had a problem in the early days, he turned to The Doc rather than the General Secretary at the time, Peadar 'Big Dinner' O'Driscoll, who was rarely in the office. O'Neill himself then became General Secretary in 1988, but couldn't handle being pulled this way and that by the honorary officers. Taking a step back from the FAI after Italia '90, he returned to UCD as Director of Sport.

UCD's model involved relying on promising young players, many of whom were given scholarships. That meant offloading established players when they had been at the club for five or more years. The Doc also acted as a mentor to a young solicitor and UCD law graduate making his first forays into football administration after an enthusiastic amateur career as a goalkeeper. Brendan Dillon, aged

thirty-three, was given responsibility in 1998 for handling UCD's transfers.

The Doc rang Dillon one day that summer and told him that Waterford United were interested in buying Robbie Griffin, a left-sided UCD midfielder originally from Waterford.

'Robbie had given us some great years, but we were happy enough to let him go,' Dillon recalls. 'Doc said, "If you got five grand for Robert it would be great." He was kind of struggling that year. So, he says, "John Delaney is going to give you a ring."'

Like Dillon himself, Delaney at thirty was regarded as a coming force in Irish football. He had impressed many with his straight talking and ability to grasp a brief. And there was plenty of sympathy in FAI ranks towards his father.

Waterford United had been struggling, but the club made national headlines when it reregistered as a public limited company with a plan to raise £1 million through a share issue after it was promoted back to the first division. John Delaney was one of three directors in the Waterford United PLC who together purchased 60,000 £1 shares. The club had ambitions to once more be a big player in the League of Ireland and a war chest was made available for signing new players.

Dillon knew Joe Delaney but had never spoken with John. He says he 'would have been guarded with anything to do with the Delaney name'.

Expecting Delaney to drive a hard bargain for the midfielder, Dillon opened with a bit of flattery: 'John, that's great money you raised in Waterford.' Maybe it worked, because the negotiation was easy.

'I put out an outrageous figure, it might have been twenty-five grand, thinking he wouldn't go anywhere near it,' Dillon recalls. 'I was expecting if we got £10,000 it would be absolutely fantastic.'

Delaney agreed to pay £18,000. 'It was so easy,' Dillon says. 'I was thinking, this guy's the emperor with no clothes.'

Dillon rang O'Neill afterwards and said, 'Fuck me, Doc. We just got £18,000 for Robert Griffin.' O'Neill was incredulous. Dillon wondered why John Delaney was getting such hype in football circles for his business acumen.

O'Neill continued to be an influence in Irish football as a member

of the FAI Council and Board of Management until his sudden death in October 1999, at the age of fifty-three. The *Irish Times* lamented the passing of ‘probably the most universally respected figure on a scene plagued by internal dogfighting and factionalism’.

After some typically arcane FAI trade-offs, Delaney was elected unopposed to replace O’Neill on the Board of Management.



John Delaney joined the FAI’s top table as the association was grappling with the biggest and most ambitious project it had ever undertaken: the building of a dedicated football stadium in west Dublin. This became widely known as the Eircom Park project after a big-name sponsor was quickly found.

The driving force behind the stadium was Bernard O’Byrne, who had succeeded Joe Delaney as Honorary Treasurer. O’Byrne then became General Secretary on a full-time basis later in 1996.

Like Menton, O’Byrne came from a financial background. He had been a treasury manager at Cement Roadstone Holdings, and he got the FAI General Secretary post even though as a volunteer he had been the association’s Head of Security – succeeding Joe Delaney – for the notorious 1995 Ireland–England friendly that was abandoned after twenty-seven minutes because of rioting by visiting fans.

O’Byrne was a combative figure. The Lansdowne Road riot had crystallized his desire for Irish football to find its own home away from the antiquated headquarters of the Irish Rugby Football Union (IRFU), where the FAI had been tenants since the early 1970s. O’Byrne settled on a site at Saggart for a 45,000-seater stadium. For the first time, the FAI would be masters of their own destiny and in control of their own revenue streams. The dream looked set to become a reality when the announcement was made in July 1999, with O’Byrne and manager Mick McCarthy photographed beside an impressive model of the new stadium at a glitzy launch in the Burlington hotel.

With sponsors pledging support and the FAI Board of Management unanimously supporting the project at first, all the momentum was with O’Byrne; but slowly his master plan started to unwind.

Having failed to get the job of General Secretary on a full-time basis, Menton had been appointed Honorary Treasurer. Charged with the association's purse strings, he had severe reservations about loosening them for Eircom Park. He complained that O'Byrne had only given him a day's notice for the Burlington launch, and that he was stonewalled when he asked for documents setting out estimated costs for the project.

When he finally got a chance to study the financial projections closely in December 1999 – he says they arrived in a huge bundle at his house on Christmas Eve – Menton became alarmed at the plethora of expensive consultants on board and the way the costs were racking up. The projections included a £300,000 bonus for O'Byrne should the stadium be completed.

Many of Menton's concerns were legitimate, but O'Byrne is convinced that his opposition was personal, arising from a lingering resentment about missing the General Secretary position. 'Brendan was very angry when he didn't get the job, very angry,' says O'Byrne. 'He was even more angry when it was me who got it. That wasn't a good start. Brendan had no inclination to work with me. I remember we went out to lunch, at my invitation, to try to work it through and see if we could move it forward, but that just convinced me that we weren't going to be able to. He was Treasurer and I was Chief Executive and the relationship was just crap.'

Had the opposition been restricted to Menton alone, O'Byrne probably would have won the day, but soon there were other forces working against him. Chief amongst them was the Taoiseach, Bertie Ahern, a sports nut who had once played football on the same Home Farm team as Menton. With the Irish economy booming, Ahern decided it was time to build a national stadium. Just as O'Byrne thought he was getting his project off the ground, the so-called Bertie Bowl project was announced, an 80,000-seater home for the big three sports – GAA, rugby and football – in Abbotstown in north-west Dublin. O'Byrne was deeply sceptical of the government's costings and Ahern's ability to deliver the project. While the FAI didn't dismiss the Bertie Bowl, there was no let-up in the preparations for Eircom Park. However, with planning applications for the

Saggart site dragging because of objections from the Air Corps and others – the stadium was to be near Ireland’s military airbase in Baldonnel – construction costs began to escalate sharply.

Another member of the Board of Management, John Byrne – ‘a stand up, card-carrying member of Fianna Fáil’ as he described himself – then came out in support of Ahern’s project. And Delaney, after joining the Board of Management in October 1999, wasted no time in placing himself firmly in the anti-Eircom Park camp. The fight over two stadiums that would never be built was about to get very dirty.

‘A regular thing that happened eight or nine times was that if a board meeting was starting at 2 p.m., at 1.30 p.m. a letter would come over from the Taoiseach’s office which would be handed in to the President, Pat Quigley,’ says O’Byrne. ‘He didn’t have the option not to consider it at the meeting, even though he had only just received it, because they [Byrne and Delaney] would know that the letter had been delivered and they would ask: “Has there been any correspondence from the Taoiseach?” This type of thing. On one occasion the envelope was actually opened at the meeting. There was all this kind of stuff. Some of it was offers, some of it threats to try to bring down Eircom Park. They were successful tactics in the end.’

O’Byrne became very suspicious about a VAT query from the Revenue Commissioners and unsettling questions from government departments about adherence to tendering rules. The anti-Eircom Park faction also threatened legal action to get information about the stadium that was being withheld from them. When the first criticisms of the Eircom Park project emerged, the public relations firm employed by the association, Gallagher and Kelly, briefed a number of journalists against some of those within the FAI who were opponents of the scheme. ‘We were just doing what had been done to us,’ O’Byrne says.

Still, O’Byrne found that you can’t fight City Hall.

‘I had a meeting one-on-one with Bertie in St Luke’s, his base in Drumcondra,’ he says. ‘I was explaining to him why this would be good for football, and in the middle of our conversation he said to me, “If we build Abbotstown, we are going to need a CEO, Bernard.” I

said, “Bertie, I wish you hadn’t said that,” and that was the end of it. We were never going to have another one-on-one discussion or whatever. It wasn’t a bribe, but it was kind of put in a way like, “Think about the bigger picture. Maybe the FAI is not the place to be for the rest of your career.”’

O’Byrne found his stadium project firmly blocked by his own association. ‘I remember one particular board meeting which was a turning point and John Delaney said, “Do you guys realize if this goes arse-over-tit people will come after your houses?” He was looking around at the members of the board and people’s faces were whitening. I could see I was losing four or five of them here straight away because none of them could cope with this type of thing. It wasn’t accurate. The FAI was a limited company but it didn’t endanger board members. The late Charlie Cahill [an FAI Executive member at the time] worked on the buses. A nice man, but he wasn’t made for that type of situation.’

Pat Quigley, a pharmaceuticals salesman in his day job, struggled as FAI President to impose even a semblance of unity on the Board of Management.

‘Everything had just imploded at that stage,’ O’Byrne says. ‘You had Pat giving speeches at the end of board meetings for ten or fifteen minutes about the confidentiality of board meetings, and then you would turn on the radio half an hour later in the car going home and there would be interviews with board members. They didn’t give a damn. They had momentum and they knew that no action would be taken against them. The whole thing had just fallen asunder.’

Who was giving the interviews?

‘It was mostly John Delaney.’

O’Byrne felt Menton had genuine reservations about the stadium, but he believed Delaney was motivated at least in part by a desire to avenge what had happened to his father back in March 1996.

Delaney found himself defending his motives in an article in December 2000 for the Irish edition of the *Sunday Times*, a newspaper that was broadly supportive of his fledgling steps in football administration. The Eircom Park project was in its death throes at that point, but Delaney was in no mood to go easy on O’Byrne. Delaney

focused on inflated stadium revenue predictions and the international sports management consultants IMG, whom O'Byrne had drafted in at enormous cost, before going on to defend his own behaviour in the conflict. He also made an impassioned call for financial transparency from the association. It was an elegant dismantling of his rival:

The disclosure that IMG have sold £10 million less in corporate box and premium seat sales than was previously claimed has vindicated those of us who took a stand against Eircom Park. On one major issue our determination to ask questions has been justified. I don't believe that we would have secured this vital information if we hadn't threatened legal action.

Bernard O'Byrne now has serious questions to answer. How long has he been aware of this information? Why wasn't it made available to us six months ago when promised? Why were we told we had sold thirty-three more boxes and 1,700 more premium seats than we actually had?

If we've been misled on one issue, where do we stand on all the others, particularly the stadium cost, the land deal and Deutsche Bank's commitment to underwrite the project?

Delaney then turned to his own motives:

It's also regrettable that, perhaps in order to pigeon-hole me, people have sought to drag my father, Joe, into the equation. Joe, you might recall, was FAI treasurer in 1996 and was one of those who resigned when a shortfall in ticket revenue was discovered. I fail to see how this has any relevance to Eircom Park.

I've no problem saying that I still feel my dad was harshly treated. Perhaps I'm biased but, even though he sinned, the FAI didn't lose a single penny and others, who committed far more serious crimes, escaped with more lenient penalties.

But to suggest that what happened to my father has coloured my stance on Eircom Park is a gross distortion. There are football people who were not kind to him in 1996 whom I get on well with now. Likewise, there are people who I was friendly with then whom I hardly speak to now. It's just not relevant to the current issue.

Delaney went on to decry O'Byrne's completion bonus of £300,000, complaining that 'too many people stand to gain financially if this stadium goes ahead'. At that stage Delaney did not know about O'Byrne's misuse of an FAI credit card to withdraw cash and make personal purchases. That emerged weeks later, in March 2001, just as the FAI board voted to go with the government stadium project rather than O'Byrne's. The Eircom Park dream was dead, but worse was to come for O'Byrne.

Brendan Menton and the new Head of Finance, Peter Buckley, raised the alarm over his FAI credit card, which involved about £20,000 worth of personal spending.

'Every penny spent by me,' O'Byrne said in a statement the day after the story appeared in the *Sunday Tribune*, 'was spent within an authorized system and settled in full by me over a four-year period. When some inadvertent misallocations were brought to my attention, they were rectified immediately.'

Nonetheless, O'Byrne was damaged. The following month he went into 'voluntary retirement' with a severance package of £250,000: only slightly less than the bonus he would have received had Eircom Park been completed.

O'Byrne went on to rebuild his career as Chief Executive of Basketball Ireland, but he would not be the last to learn that you crossed John Delaney at your peril.

2. ‘What have we done?’

With O’Byrne’s departure as General Secretary, Brendan Menton again applied for the job, and this time he got it. The contrast with O’Byrne’s bludgeoning style could hardly have been more marked.

Menton’s move meant the important post of Honorary Treasurer was now vacant again.

In his early thirties and about to start a family with his wife, Emer, a teacher, John Delaney insisted that he was too young to be Honorary Treasurer – but he seemed prepared to allow his arm to be twisted. Even FAI veterans now recognized that there was a need for fresh blood in the association. Some were wary of another Delaney rising to control the FAI’s purse strings so soon after Joe’s downfall, but many influential figures in the association saw John’s elevation as a way of doing right by his father after his humiliating departure.

John Byrne, the FAI’s Mr Fixit with the government, was seen as the man mentoring the promising young figure of Irish football administration. The pair became known as the Two Johns – John One (Byrne) was short and bald, John Two (Delaney) was lanky with a flop of dark brown hair.

A Galway United stalwart, Byrne had a warm and benign view of Delaney at the time. ‘John gravitated towards me,’ Byrne says. ‘We stayed out in the Montrose [Hotel], and if we were stuck we shared the same room, and he would come to Galway for weekends and we would go down to his for weekends. Our two wives were very close and they used to ring one another, giving out about us being away all the time.’

Delaney’s performance over Eircom Park had earned him Byrne’s respect, and the older man had been pushing him to deepen his involvement with the association even before the Treasurer post opened up. ‘If you are good enough you are old enough,’ Byrne told Delaney, a sentiment with which John O’Brien in the *Sunday Times*