

CLIENT

Letterkenny Rugby Football Club (LRFC) became the first club from the Republic to compete alongside Northern Ireland sides when it was affiliated to the IRFU's Ulster Branch in Belfast in 1973. The club fields two senior sides and four junior sides. All personnel are part time volunteers.

THE BRIEF

Having discovered that a Co. Donegal emigrant, Dave Gallaher, captained the NZ All Blacks in 1905 and became (as the Sunday Times would later suggest) "arguably the most significant Irish-born figure in the history of rugby", LRFC briefed First Medical Communications (FMC) to develop a plan that could leverage this connection to promote rugby, at that time was the fourth most significant team game in the region.

Preamble

While Letterkenny's link with Dave Gallaher offered potential, he was an unknown figure in Ireland and little could be undertaken without a formal acknowledgement of Gallaher and his Donegal heritage by the NZ Rugby Union (NZRU), thereby offering currency and gravity to the initiative. To facilitate this, the club agreed to change its crest to incorporate Dave Gallaher's name and birthdate alongside a silver fern to represent his link with New Zealand.

OBJECTIVES

- Build awareness of Gallaher within the local Donegal community
- Engender pride within the community for Gallaher's achievements
- Solicit formal acknowledgement of Co. Donegal and Letterkenny's significance to world rugby as the birthplace of one of the game's most influential figures from the NZRU
- Gain the NZRU's endorsement of the LRFC and its efforts to promote rugby
- Ensure that the local community is aware of that acknowledgement and supports it
- Ensure that important governing bodies, the Ulster Branch of the Irish Rugby Football Union and the Irish Rugby Football Union recognise the NZRU's acknowledgement and endorsement of LRFC
- Leverage news coverage for the club to reinforce its importance nationally and locally to generate interest in the club from potential statutory funding agencies, sponsors, potential players and the families of potential under-age players
- Leverage NZ media coverage to ensure travelling New Zealanders would consider visiting LRFC

PROGRAMME PLANING AND STRATEGY

While a letter or All Black memento from the NZRU would have provided the necessary acknowledgement to develop local media stories, the LRFC wished to build its profile nationally and gain greater parity in its dealings with potential funding bodies in Donegal, Belfast and Dublin. Accordingly, it was decided to aim to bring members of the All Blacks team to Donegal.

Approaching the NZRU (media relations)

Approaches were made through the LRFC to ensure that the initiative was rightly perceived to be rugby driven and not commercial.

LRFC had the difficult task of sounding small enough to need help yet professional enough to manage the visit. Although it was never requested by the NZRU, LRFC suggested that a visit to Donegal would generate extremely favourable publicity to coincide with the International Rugby Board's Dublin meeting to decide which country would host the 2011 Rugby World Cup tournament. The NZRU's bid centred on their track-record of supporting grass roots rugby globally.

The IRB met on November 17 - the All Blacks were due in Ireland for their match at Lansdowne Road on November 7-13. LRFC wanted to create a sense of momentum surrounding the commemoration so that the proposal delivered to the NZRU was, in essence, a live publicity vehicle.

FMC contacted NZ's most prominent Sunday paper, the *Sunday Star Times*, readership 700,000, or 17.5% of the national population. A resultant story about the LRFC's unlikely link with the All Blacks featured on the same two page spread that covered the first test between NZ and the visiting British and Irish Lions, June 26 2005.

Simultaneously, FMC liaised with George Hook and co-wrote an article with him for the June 19 2005 issue of Ireland's *Sunday Independent*, readership 875,000. Again, the substantial (800 word) story appeared alongside coverage of the Lions' NZ tour.

These articles were used to establish the initiative's bone fides when meeting with the NZRU in NZ, the IRFU and Ulster Branch in Ireland and with sponsors.

NZRU to visit Donegal

Soon after meeting with the LRFC/FMC representative in Wellington, the NZRU accepted an invitation to visit the region, stating they would send an official party (players *not* guaranteed).

Donegal's four regional papers (Donegal News, Donegal Democrat, Donegal People's Press and the Letterkenny People) gave the development prominent coverage. This provided the necessary momentum to ensure the co-operation of sponsors and Letterkenny's civic bodies, including the Chamber of Commerce, Town Council, Institute of Technology (who hosted the main reception) and the Gardai.

Media relations ensured a solid stream of coverage that built excitement and anticipation over a sustained period, keeping rugby in the town consciousness for a prolonged time. Picking up on the story, *Highland Radio* (which has the highest % listenership in Ireland) ran a series of interviews with club members exploring the significance of Gallaher and the All Blacks and their connection with the local rugby club.

NZRU agree to a Co Donegal mascot

LRFC/FMC asked the NZRU to take a mascot from the Donegal region onto Lansdowne Road for their November 13 test against Ireland. The All Blacks have no tradition of a mascot and had never previously adopted one except for World Cup fixtures, where the practice is compulsory. The concept was framed as an opportunity to develop the game in Co Donegal, with the mascot to be selected from a pool of school children whose entries into a competition expressed a growing appreciation of rugby. The NZRU bought into the need to promote rugby at schools level in the birthplace of Dave Gallaher and agreed to accept a mascot nominated by the LRFC.

The IRFU also agreed to a suggestion that the two mascots and Dave Gallaher's significance be explained in an article by a LRFC member in the Ireland-All Blacks match programme.

All Blacks coming to Donegal

On October 20, the NZRU and LRFC issued a joint international media release announcing that six All Black players and various NZRU dignitaries would visit Letterkenny to help the LRFC open their new ground and spread the rugby gospel.

A simultaneous release announced the Donegal mascot competition. The announcement was covered in the October 21 issues of *The Irish Times*, *The Irish Independent* and *The Irish Mirror* plus on the All Blacks' official website, in NZ's national stable of Fairfax papers and on various rugby websites around the world. NZ's Fairfax media group incorporates the following daily papers:

- The Daily News
- The Dominion Post
- The Press
- The Evening Post
- The Evening Standard
- The Waikato Times
- The Manawatu Standard
- Taranaki Daily News
- The Nelson Mail
- The Marlborough Express
- The Timaru Herald
- The Southland Times

Schools entering the mascot competition were invited to hold in-class workshops during which LRFC members came and explained how to play rugby, gave a brief description of Gallaher's achievements and highlighted the significance of the All Blacks' visit.

Ramelton Heritage Centre establishes exhibition

As the project gained momentum, the Ramelton Heritage Centre agreed to establish a permanent display in honour of Dave Gallaher and so FMC joined with the LRFC and local historians to research his life and create seven 180cm x 60cm illustrated storyboards. These were erected at the Ramelton Town Hall during the All Blacks' Ramelton reception and were also displayed at the Letterkenny Museum before moving to their permanent home at the Ramelton Heritage Centre.

Visit itinerary

Only a limited budget was available for logistics and certainly not enough existed to finance the €10,000 chartered flight from Dublin. Sponsors were approached to support the flight, using examples of media coverage already achieved to illustrate the depth of goodwill such a gesture would generate.

In Donegal, the team was scheduled to:

- Open and name LRFC's new rugby ground *Dave Gallaher Memorial Park*
- Attend an official town reception at the Letterkenny Institute of Technology
- Attend a training session with LRFC under-age teams at the same venue
- Unveil a plaque at the birthplace of Dave Gallaher in Ramelton
- Attend an official reception at the Ramelton Town Hall

Maintaining focus

While there were many potential images which could be captured throughout the day as representative of an historic visit, FMC needed to maintain focus on LRFC.

The LRFC ground was the most important PR location for the rugby club and so demanded a compelling image that would compete with the intuitively appealing sight of giant All Blacks stooped in the doorway of Gallaher's quaint and picturesque birthplace in Ramelton.

FMC proposed that a large granite rock be engraved for the occasion. The ground would be christened, as ships are, with an All Black breaking a bottle of champagne on the rock, which would endure as a permanent local signpost to a famous day and association.

PR plans for the ground were complicated when works fell behind due to poor weather. This meant that initial plans for the All Blacks to visit a site where the pitches had been laid out and seeded were scuttled. Not only were the pitches undistinguishable, but nor had a proper road been constructed or a car park established.

More than 100 journalists, including seven satellite vans representing Irish, UK and NZ TV would not have direct access to the location. Yet FMC wanted this to provide the signature image of the visit.

Nothing more grass roots than mud

FMC pitched the rudimentary location for the ground naming as a return to the grass roots by rugby superstars. Media alerts noted that there was nothing more grass roots than mud.

FMC arranged for local, national and international print and radio media to rendezvous at an external location and board buses to the ground. Two buses of media were driven to the ground ahead of the All Blacks' arrival. TV media parked their units at a nearby lot and were shuttled to and from the location in cars.

A 'smashing' press image

Complications at Dublin airport and a bomb scare in Derry threatened the All Blacks' itinerary and they arrived 45 minutes late to the LRFC grounds. Already at the site were the NZ Ambassador to Ireland and the UK, John Hunt; the Consul General of Ireland in NZ, Rodney Walshe; the President of the Irish Rugby Football Union, Andy Crawford; and the President of the NZRU, John Graham, who had travelled ahead of the All Black party.

When rugged All Blacks wing forward Jerry Collins smashed the bottle of champagne against the granite memorial bearing LRFC's crest, the high-impact image that FMC sought was crystallised. Despite the All Blacks spending little more than five minutes on the ground, it was the image of Collins christening the ground that dominated print coverage in Ireland, the UK and NZ and provided an image which will define the club forever.

MEASUREMENT

The overwhelming measure of success was the agreement by the NZ All Blacks to visit one of Ireland's smallest and least-resourced rugby clubs, LRFC. The monumental local and national coverage ensured the club's profile was catapulted to an international scale, while dialogues were opened up with important national and provincial administrators plus community and commercial organisations.

The club is selling small titles on their now famous pitch to raise €50,000 for new facilities. The number of junior teams had doubled and sponsorship is at an all time high.

Significantly, the IRFU will announce in coming weeks that Co Donegal is the second region (Tallaght was the first) in which it will make a significant investment in terms of coaches and funding in a bid to widen the game's appeal.

While collaborating with such rugby powers as the NZRU and Gallaher's home provincial union of Auckland, the LRFC was able to negotiate a rugby exchange scholarship. This will see the club annually swap a player with the Auckland Rugby Union in an ongoing tribute to the famous day when Letterkenny and NZ celebrated their shared heritage.

BUDGET

Due to confidentiality agreements with the LRFC, FMC is not able to divulge what fees were charged for this campaign. However, the agency agreed that the campaign would be undertaken on a not-for-profit basis.

FMC had minimal license to incur third party costs. Practically 100% of costs were to be met by sponsors. The publicity and goodwill generated were integral to attracting financial support.

The value of in-kind support, such as venue hire at the Letterkenny Institute of Technology, has not been calculated. The third party costs borne by our client for bringing the NZ All Blacks to Letterkenny were approximately €9,000.

This included a return flight to NZ to meet with the NZRU, a proportion of the cost of flying the NZRU party to Donegal and the commissioning of the commemorative naming boulder plus various gifts to exchange with the NZRU.

Third Party Budget Total - €9,000

ENDS

APPENDICES FOLLOWING: Appendix 1: Sample Media Materials; Appendix 2: Sample Media Coverage; Appendix 3: Sample Letters of Endorsement/Congratulations