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TALKINGSPORT

From begrudgers to betting: our favourite things online this week

The best sports journalism from around the web, featuring gambling addiction, hurling, Filipino football and Tim Tebow



The enigma that is Tim Tebow. Photograph: Charles Krupa/AP

Thanks for all your comments and suggestions on [our last blog](#).

1) Two years, one day at a time

Niall McNamee made his last bet two years ago. He was not in a good place: "I have no idea what horse I backed or where it ran but what I do know is that it lost. It had got to a stage that I was no longer able to leave a bookies unless all of my money was gone or the nice lady behind the counter was turning off the TV because they were closing. If I was 'lucky' enough to have left with some money in my pocket it didn't matter, I knew I would be back the next day to give it all back. That night, the following morning, my

entire day in work, my head would be consumed with thoughts of doubling, trebling, quadrupling my winnings from the day before. Whatever debts or troubles I had would be wiped out if I could just have that one big win to get me back on track."

He was convinced that gambling would be his saviour, but the more he bet, the more he lost. He sold his car for half its value to place another failed bet; he sneaked food out of his mother's kitchen as he couldn't afford to buy his own; he gambled away the majority of his wages for five years. And then he stopped. This is the the story of how he hit the bottom and then began to recover. It's worth a read.

2) Soccer and logic don't often mix

Yael Averbuch starts this **New York Times** article with a promise: "In 500 words, I'm about to logically explain why I do not subscribe to logic."

Aristotle, Plato and friends can rest easily, as she doesn't quite succeed in bringing down 2,500 or so years of western thought; but as she opens up about her life as a professional footballer in the women's game, it becomes clear that chasing a dream can lead to compromises: "I'm laying in the same bed in my parents' house in which I slept as a 9-year-old. I'm 27. No home of my own home; I have a job that is incredibly unstable; and I get paid to play a game. I am on a continual mission to find fulfillment from a journey with no destination. None of this is logical, yet all of this is right." Good luck to her.

3) Mount Leinster Rangers v Oulart-the-Ballagh

Skip to 16.10 and savour the joy of local radio. Mount Leinster Rangers have just become the first Carlow club to be crowned Leinster senior hurling champions, much to the delight of the commentator. "I told everybody, I told everybody", he exclaims. "They'll love this one – from Ballymurphy to Bangkok and from Rahara to Rhodesia."

The elation soon turns to score-settling as he shames the "begrudgers" for underestimating the Mount Leinster Rangers. Partiality has rarely sounded so good.

4) How books about sport got serious

Simon Kuper makes an interesting point in his column for the **Financial Times**: "American writers have always taken sports seriously. Ernest Hemingway, Damon Runyon, Ring Lardner, Norman Mailer and Jack Kerouac all worked as sports journalists."

America has a great tradition of paying serious writers handsome sums to produce quality journalism. Europe has always lagged behind in this regard – can you think of one British newspaper that would devote more than three pages to a single piece of longform sportswriting? – but Kuper believes that things are changing for the better.

The phrase "football book" stopped being considered an oxymoron in the early 1990s when Pete Davies' *All Played Out* (1990) and then Nick Hornby's *Fever Pitch* (1992) opened the eyes of publishers to the potential of sports books. Two decades later and there are now admirable football publications in Sweden (*Offside*), Norway (*Josimar*), Spain (*Panenka*) and the US (*Howler*).

With every match available to watch online, and with footballers now masters of the art of saying nothing, the days of match reports, interviews and previews could be ending. But the lure of longform writing seems to be growing.

5) Review of 2013 football



Everton's Marouane

Fellaini thanks God for his luck. Photograph: Peter Powell/EPA

ESPN have jumped the gun a little with this review of the year, but the quote of the month section picks out a few pearls. Apparently, when speaking back in January about his life in Liverpool, Marouane Fellaini said: "I was recognised too much and sometimes women would suddenly climb all over me."

6) The history of Filipino football

The Philippines football team played their first international match 100 years ago. They beat China 2-1 in Manila on 4 February 1913 in what was to prove a golden age for the young team. Their 15-2 thumping of Japan four years later is still their biggest victory.

Paulino Alcántara was the man of the match that day. When the young striker's family moved back to Spain, he signed for Barcelona. He went on to score a 357 goals for the club – a record Lionel Messi could break in the next few years. Alcántara also managed and played for Spain (scoring five goals in six games). Filipino football has quite a history, as **Terry Cornick** explains in this feature for **These Football Times**.

7) 15 classic traits of sports fans who grew up in the 1980s

If you see Paul McGrath as a Manchester United player, miss the glory days of snooker and think Michael Thomas's title-winning goal was more dramatic than Sergio Aguero's, this article by **Conor Neville** for **Balls.ie** is one for you.

8) Children of the ring

Muay Thai boxers learn their craft early. Across Thailand the 700-year-old sport is taught to seven-year-old boys and girls, who are expected to perform in the ring with no protective headgear. They use fists, elbows, knees and feet to fight each other, often in the hope of earning money for their families. **Jeremy Schaap** takes up the story in this **E:60** documentary.

9) The book of Tebow

For his latest adventure in longform for **Sports Illustrated**, **Thomas Lake** has tackled the story of Tim Tebow. It's 20,000 words long, but, if you have the time, it's worth every minute.

10) Straight down the middle

Rory McIlroy and Wayne Rooney take the lead in this new Nike advert, but Brazilian Ronaldo steals the show.

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