

**FOR MANY INJURED PLAYERS THE NAME OF RAY MORAN IS ASSOCIATED WITH RECOVERY AND HOPE. NOW IRELAND'S LEADING ORTHOPAEDIC SURGEON IS THE MAN BEHIND THE SPORTS SURGERY CLINIC, A HIGH TECH, STATE OF THE ART INTEGRATED CENTRE DESIGNED TO TAKE SPORTS INJURY TREATMENT IN IRELAND INTO THE 21ST CENTURY**

# THE CLINIC

**W**ITH the focus on healthcare and healthy lifestyles sharpening by the day, the general benefit of engaging in sports activities and regular exercise has never been clearer.

Continuing to play football, hurling, handball, soccer or simply five-a-side are all useful pursuits in the battle to avoid cardiovascular disease or obesity. The level or standard is pretty much irrelevant in this regard.

However, there is a down side to an active lifestyle, even for the recreational sports person and that is the heightened risk of injury. And a sports related injury often leaves the individual in a Catch 22 situation regarding their health. Do I commit to fixing the injury and stay fit or let it off and risk gaining weight or developing heart problems?

While committed, elite players are inherently mobile and likely to seek specialist care, what about the rest of us? Would you be too embarrassed to share a waiting room with Ronan O'Gara or Henry Shefflin after tearing a hamstring playing indoor football with your mates?

Not so long ago, the onset of a chronic sports injury often meant an end to one's sporting career, particularly if you were a club player with little or no access to specialist advice. Because of a lack of knowledge, expertise and resources there was little encouragement to get something sorted.

The treatment of sports injuries was confined to the general hospital environment. As far as we knew, only the professional stars across the water received specialist care. When the curse of the cruciate knee ligament injury first raised its head in the GAA it was either walk away or head over to England for an operation.

Thankfully the landscape has changed dramatically in Ireland and there have been huge advances in sports medicine, particularly over the past decade. The faculty of Sports and Exercise Medicine was founded in Ireland in 2002 while two years later the Irish Medical Council granted speciality recognition to sports medicine.

In the GAA, the provision of medical care, particularly the availability of qualified physiotherapists, has improved the lot of county and club players when it comes to injury treatment, management and rehabilitation.

However, the opening of the new Sports Surgery Clinic (SSC) in Santry, on Dublin's north side has signalled a new departure for sports medicine in Ireland, one that could have a profound effect on the welfare of all GAA players and sports practitioners of all codes.

This almost space-age facility, under the medical direction of Consultant Orthopaedic Surgeon Mr Ray Moran (brother of legendary soccer and GAA star Kevin), will elevate the treatment of sports injuries and sports medicine in this country to a level alongside the best available internationally.

The Clinic's goal is impressively ambitious, aiming to deliver "the highest standards of diagnosis, prehabilitation, treatment, rehabilitation, and full recovery care



for orthopaedic, sports injuries and joint replacement."

However, access is really the key to the SSC's ambition. Few five-star hotels would boast facilities of this quality but, according to Moran, all active Irish sports people – and that means you – will have access to this incredible facility.

"We are not just for elite players who form just a tiny part of the patient body. If anything we would be more for the club player and retired player," says Moran. "Look at the whole area of musculoskeletal problems. In one generation, the whole country has become a lot more active. At one end you have the elite, a very small end of the patient population that you're dealing with. The far more typical patient for us would be the player who is getting a bit older, maybe playing a bit of over-35s football."

"There are huge numbers involved in playing sport. The concept of the Clinic is to be able to deal with their injuries and then to a variable extent to be able to deal with their fitness or wellness."

Moran reveals that the inspiration for the Clinic's development was provided by a Gaelic football match in Dublin

and the all-too-familiar consequences of a player receiving a bad injury. "A few years ago I was dealing with a patient who had suffered a humoral fracture during an inter-county football challenge match. He had just spent 24 hours in A & E. I felt we could do better, I mean this patient was not sick and he shouldn't have been competing with the busy hospital environment."

"It struck me that the thing to do was to get all the specialities together, deal with the problem in an integrated unit."

The SSC provides a dedicated sports medicine facility unrivalled in Europe, bringing together Ireland's most experienced and highly trained orthopaedic surgeons, musculoskeletal radiologists, sports physicians and physiotherapists.

"The Clinic compares very well internationally," says Moran. "I can't think of an equivalent in the whole of the UK. The closest models are in Australia and would be more familiar in the States."

While the 'target' patient is most definitely the ordinary player, the pro rugby set-up in Ireland wasn't long accessing the SSC's facilities and the

Clinic has already had enquiries from professional soccer clubs in the UK. If these "enquiries" come to fruition it would reverse the historical trend which once saw Irish athletes travel across the water for crucial surgery.

While it is now wearily commonplace to decry the Celtic Tiger era, this daunting project is a measure of Irish ambition, skill, expertise and passion. If Irish success can be measured by not exporting our problems, then the SSC reflects this success.

Some Gaelic games commentators may pine for an era when managers didn't know what a hamstring was but Moran is more inclined to ensure that people embrace life and sport by ensuring that injuries do not restrict their participation. And it is not pie in the sky stuff, either. "There is nothing evidence based to suggest that giving up activity is beneficial," Moran explains encouragingly.

The 'wow' factor is unavoidable at the SSC; the spacious marbled consultancy suites, the gym, the pristine, palatial bedrooms with individual TV, internet, telephone and patient information access at the touch of a button, the unique 3T MRI scanner – the most

powerful of its kind in Ireland which enables more precise diagnoses.

However, the cutting edge end of the Clinic's work concerns patients who are referred on and who require specialist treatment. Moran is quick to emphasise the importance of the physios and medical personnel working on the ground with clubs and counties and that the Clinic is not seen to be "going after" the work carried out by these people.

"We will rely on the expertise of club doctors, physios – to a large extent it will be their decision whether a player accesses the services and facilities available here. It is important that we are seen as partners with these people rather than trying to circumvent or supersede the role that they play."

"A lot of team doctors and physios on the ground do fantastic jobs and they are in a position to recognise where further specialised treatment is required and that is really where we come in."

"We would have a close working relationship with a lot of counties. One thing about sports practitioners including GAA people is that they are all very mobile. They are a healthy bunch of people with problems they

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want sorted. If they've a sense that they can access a facility or expertise that's beneficial to them then that's what they'll do."

GAA players are at an advantage when it comes to accessing the SSC too, due to the comprehensive insurance programme in place (for information on the Players Injury Scheme 2008, log on to [www.gaa.ie](http://www.gaa.ie)).

While the Clinic operates an acute sports injury centre with all the integrated services on hand, what if you injure yourself playing junior hurling on a Sunday morning; can you walk straight into the Clinic in your gear?

"Yes, you can, there is an acute injury set-up in place but a lot of the access is done directly to the specialist. We operate a triage system and we're already dealing with clubs and counties who will know the specialist they wish to go to and their area of expertise."

"With regard to direct access for acute injuries, where someone breaks their arm for example, we are currently talking to VHI Swiftcare at the moment about a possible link-up. However, a lot of the work for lumps and bumps is still dealt with locally by GPs and physios; they are the ones in the driving seat."

On arrival at the Clinic, consultants will assess your injury by carrying out necessary X-Rays, scans and diagnose you straight away. Instant treatment

can then be arranged including the necessary surgery (there are four operating theatres on site) and rehab.

However, while all follow-up care is available on site, patients will be encouraged to commence treatment locally where appropriate. Moran explains: "It is important that our role here is defined, that we do our bit. If we have guidelines, protocols for post surgery management then it is important that this work is carried out in association with a team therapist."

Moran is also confident outcomes will improve thanks to the facilities and expertise on hand. "A good example is our Groin and Soft Tissue injury clinic run by physician Dr Eanna Falvey. As well as the proper, integrated medical management in that area for your hip problems, Gilmores groin, abductors etc, different specialists for surgical management can be accessed easily. They are all cogs in that wheel."

A relationship has already been formed between the SSC and the GAA and it is likely to develop over the coming years. Moran is keen that the SSC be able to play a role in developing protocols for the preventative measures in relation to the common soft tissue

injuries, protocols which will be close to evidence-based as possible.

Above all else, he sees the SSC as being of huge practical benefit not just to GAA players but to retired players, golfers plagued by an arthritic hip or knee who want to do their thing. Where prehab is required, Moran points out, patients will be worked hard and a 'tracksuit' mentality will be introduced to ensure that they recover from surgery quickly and with less complications.

Moran's infectious positive outlook is hardly surprising given his brother's 'Roy of the Rovers' reputation as a star of Gaelic football and soccer, and indeed the sheer length of his illustrious professional career. The SSC exudes that same outlook; this is a resource which will not only put Ireland on the map but will put thousands of Irish sports men and women back on track.

Playing sport is a good thing and for those that don't want to give it up, the outlook has just got a lot brighter.

**For more information on the Sports Surgery Clinic see website [www.sportsurgeryclinic.com](http://www.sportsurgeryclinic.com) or call (01) 5262000**

