

'Carpe diem'

- Jill Bell

'You've always another chance'

- Sean Boylan

JOE HIGGINS

Incorruptible Trotskyist with a sense of humour

JOE Higgins always has a twinkle in his eye. He will be puzzled to see his name favoured on this list. If he were naming sworn opponents of his ideology, mine might not be far from the top. But Joe has a gritty, incorruptible approach to politics unmatched by any TD in the last 30 years. His consistency is unique, verging on nobility.

After promising to donate half his TD's salary to his Socialist Party and its ideals, following his election in 1997, he did exactly that, confounding the political cynics. His interventions in the Dail during his 10-year term there were unbending in his Trotskyist approach, but peppered with a dark humour that endeared him to the media.

The loss of his seat in 2007 removed one of the most entertaining TDs in the Dail, but he was not waiting for long to resume his career. In 2009, he stole a seat in the European Parliament from Fianna Fail. It was an extraordinary reflection on Joe's widespread appeal that the socialist who has never compromised on his hardline views garnered votes from the manicured mansions of Ballsbridge and Donnybrook. He is widely expected to regain a Dail seat in Dublin West at the next election, and to lead at least one other member of his party into Leinster House. I hope he does. The hardline image surrounding this former priest and teacher from Kerry is often softened by the public appearances of his 92-year-old mother standing shoulder to shoulder with him late into the night over several election counts.



RONAN O'GARA

Enduring talent on the rugby pitch and quiet dignity off it

AFTER nearly single-handedly turning the tide against South Africa, Ronan O'Gara's return to the Irish team against Samoa was a dream come true. To be reinstated as first choice at fly half after 100 caps is a triumph for nostalgia and talent. Until the South African *tour de force*, O'Gara seemed destined to serve out his final days as an Irish international on the subs' bench, making sporadic late appearances in place of the younger Jonny Sexton. That would hardly have been a fitting end for one of Ireland's greatest ever players who had suffered his second-choice status with great dignity in recent matches. But in the South African game, after his late arrival on the pitch in place of Sexton, he nearly single-handedly turned the game in Ireland's favour. He justified his recall, lifting a depressed nation's morale at a time of national despair. O'Gara's rugby achievements may never be matched. He is the all-time highest scorer for Munster and Ireland, also beating all previous scoring records in the Heineken Cup.

O'Gara showed the same calm dignity off the field as he has done while embroiled in the heat of battle. Three years ago, he was subjected to some unpleasant media stories not just about his private life, but also about his gambling habit. He responded by admitting that he was human, he had always enjoyed the odd bet and owned the odd racehorse. Since the malicious rumours about his marriage, his wife Jessica and he have produced three children.

JOHN HERLIHY

Google chief is far too busy to be seen dining with the social partners

JOHN Herlihy would turn green at his appearance on the same roll of honour as Joe Higgins. Herlihy is an unlikely poster boy for entrepreneurial Irish business. He followed a conventional road to head up one of the most dynamic companies in Ireland.

After a BComm in UCD he became a chartered accountant with the stuffed shirts at KPMG. After that, John relocated to the US, taking the road of technology, working in Oracle, PeopleSoft and Adobe systems. He has seen Google in Dublin grow from 78 people to more than 1,500 – a bright light in the recession.

The Google chief takes no prisoners in his approach to profit. He is unapologetic, he wants no trade unions inside the doors of his Barrow Street headquarters, the head office of Google in Europe.

Google is possibly the most prestigious multinational embedded in the Irish economy. Herlihy, along with others like Intel's Jim O'Hara and Hewlett Packard's Martin Murphy, today represents those who give Ireland hope in our darkest days. They want to retain Ireland's 12.5 per cent corporate tax rate; they reward workers with share options and good conditions. Although Herlihy somewhat surprisingly accepted a seat on the board of the older style Greencore, he and his business model are the future. He is far too busy to be seen dining up in Dublin Castle with the social partners.



KATIE TAYLOR

World amateur boxing champ who may yet scale even greater heights, and who is also a soccer international

IHAVE a local bias in favour of Katie Taylor, as she lives just down the road from me in Bray. The pluck of Katie when winning the Women's World Amateur Boxing Championship – coming from behind – in Barbados in September was the climax so far of a career that could still scale greater heights. Katie's dedication to her training programme at the expense of the hedonistic temptations open to an attractive young woman of her age (24) have caught the mood of the people at a time of austerity. She has been trained by her father Peter since she started boxing at the age of 12. She has won gold medals galore, but will face her stiffest test in the 2012 London Olympics. She has now won three world amateur and five European amateur championships. She combines her enthusiasm for boxing with football, having played and scored for Ireland in 2007 in the UEFA qualifying round win over Hungary. The next year, she scored again, this time against Italy, but proved that she was human after all when she was sent off soon afterwards!



JOE DUFFY

Tribune of the people who has kept his idealism despite broadcasting success

JOE Duffy has never lost his idealism, despite the successful career he has carved out for himself in RTE. His recent championing of the cause of James Connolly for the title of "Ireland's Greatest" shows a loyalty to old ideals that many would regard as outdated. Not Joe. Duffy's life story so far is the tale of the boy from Ballyfermot blessed with a good education who came to be one of the most influential Irish citizens. Fired by ambition to improve the lot of others less lucky than himself, he walked through the gates of Trinity College in 1977 and caused the authorities there a few headaches after becoming president of the Students Union, and later USI president.

His student activism led him to a short spell in Mountjoy before heading for the more comfortable surroundings of RTE in Donnybrook. His career there has been an unparalleled success, moving from Gay Byrne's show to his own *Liveline* every weekday afternoon. Duffy takes the pulse of the people. He enrages the establishment by giving vent to the emotional tales of those who would otherwise be voiceless. Some of the more begrudging commentators deeply resent his high salary, merited because he attracts one of the highest audiences on Radio 1.

