

A great fighter, but a dubious champion

IN THE wider boxing world, Steve Collins's victory over Chris Eubank last Saturday didn't have anything like the impact it had here.

One of America's most respected boxing writers, the veteran Jack Fiske, told The Sunday Tribune yesterday: "The fight rated single columns here, four or five sentences. It wasn't much noticed alongside the Roy Jones fight the same night for what is generally accepted as the real super-middleweight title which was networked on Home Box Office television."

"The most important Irish fight here around St Patrick's Day was the McCullough fight. He's wonderful."

Collins, too, is a genuine world-class fighter, and the

Steve Collins' win last week was as big as many made out, writes Eamonn McCann

Millstreet victory opens up for him the possibility of riches and real fame. He's strong, whole-hearted and dependable, and has dodged nobody in nine years since leaving the amateur ranks. None of his three losses in 31 fights before Millstreet was discreditable. He took the great Mike Mc-

Callum to a narrow points verdict for the WBA middleweight crown; was on the wrong end of a debatable 1992 majority decision against the awkward and formidable Reggie Johnson for the same title; and then, by all accounts, was robbed against Sumbu Kalambay for the European championship.

He deserves all the glory he can grab hold of now. But even so, his World Boxing Organisation title is dubious. Not only is the WBO the least respected of four outfits claiming ludicrously to regulate world boxing. But the super-middleweight division Collins moved into with this fight is dominated by one of only two men — Pernell Whitaker at welterweight is the other — to be accepted everywhere as

number one at his weight. As the celebrations still swirled around the Millstreet arena early last Sunday morning, in his home town of Pencoala, Florida, Roy Jones was scoring a devastating first-round knockout against Antoine Byrd to retain his International Boxing Federation super-middleweight title. Tyson apart, Jones is the biggest star in world boxing right now. He took his championship last November with a comprehensive victory over James Toney, who had hitherto been estimated by good judges as the best pound-for-pound puncher in the world.

Collins's victory over Eubank enhanced his credentials as a possible challenger to Jones. But any notion that it already

puts him on a par with the man from Pensacola — much less makes him as credible as 'world champion' at the weight — is sheer delusion.

Strangely, what gave the Millstreet match much of its seeming significance, helping to fill the stadium and to attract a sizeable audience for Sky TV, was the derisive antics of Eubank. No fighter from these islands has so irritated the sporting public in recent years. Millions were tuned in to hope of seeing Collins putting a halt to his arrogant gallop.

But Eubank's monocoloured posturing and freeze-frame posing in the ring has also made it impossible to know how good he is — or was. His weren't the genuine eccentricities of the full-blown boxing odd-ball, but

the contrived gimmickry of TV light entertainment. He fought well on occasion but had already been dismissed by many serious fight fans as a fool.

So, while Collins's victory gives him a shot at the megabucks big-time, he's still not secure there.

Fiske — whose 'Fiske on Fights' column in Ring magazine has long been a monthly must for millions — said yesterday from his California home: "I've seen Collins fight. He was terrific against McCann, and the decision against him in the Johnston fight was debatable to say the least."

"But he didn't help his cause when he went back to Europe, for whatever reason. He was lost sight of here. Insofar as people were aware of his fight

with Eubank, they didn't pay much attention.

"People here go with what is hot. Jones is really hot right now. He's hot for McCullough. He's an active fighter, he fights for two minutes 59 seconds of every round, he's trained by Eddie Futch. If he learns not to get hit so often he'll be sensational. He's getting a lot of ink here. I love him. He's beat Mexican world-ranked Gomez in the seventh in Vegas two days before St Patrick's Day. That was televised here. It was a terrific performance."



Steve Collins

Bath time for Wood

Mark Jones

KEITH Wood's decision to sign for top English club Bath is evidence of a growing trend which will lead to a substantial number of Ireland internationals playing in the European League over the next few years.

If Wood opts to leave Garryowen, he will be joining Nick Popplewell, Jonathan Humphrey, Gary Halpin, who have all left Irish clubs to play in the UK, as well as Simon Geoghegan and Jim Staples, who have come through the English system.

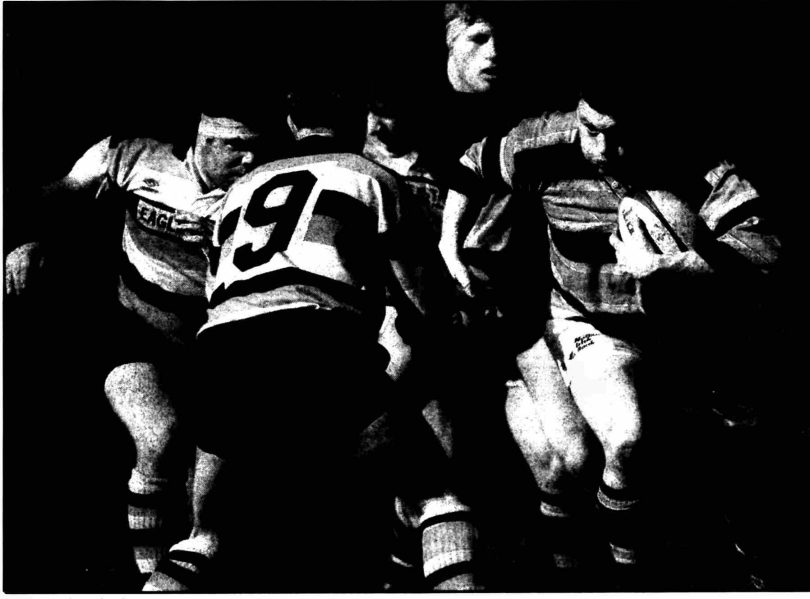
There is every reason to believe that one or two more established Irish internationals will add to the player drain before the season is out.

Wood, who is currently taking time out to rehabilitate a long term shoulder injury, was registered for Bath over two weeks ago, on 10 March. Because his forms were processed after the deadline for players transferring clubs, he will have to serve a 120 day quarantine period. Because that period does not include the period May to August, Wood will become eligible only in November.

The 23-year-old hooker was adamant that as yet, there was nothing certain about the move. "I have not made a firm decision to join the club, but I would be crazy if I didn't look at all options at this stage of my career."

It is believed that Bath's courtship of Wood began in earnest after Ireland's opening Five Nations game against England in January. His registration was then approved by a number of senior Bath officials, as well as coach Brian Ashton, chairman of selectors Richard Hill and captain Jon Hall.

Notwithstanding the club's failure to sign Nick Popplewell in 1993, one Bath source was very optimistic about bringing Wood to the west country. "We rarely fail to get our man and with Graham Dave looking to wind his career, hooker is one of the positions we need to strengthen."



Cathal Glides of Sunday's Well attempts to break through the Lansdowne defence

Tight struggle at bottom

SUNDAY'S WELL 12
LANDSDOWNE 12

Mark Jones
Musgrave Park

INTENSITY is never an adequate substitute for quality, but at least we had an Insurance Corporation League game that held the attention to the very end. Sunday's Well may still get themselves out of trouble, though this share of the points will prove to be much more beneficial to Lansdowne.

The visitors played like a team cruising in mid-table rather than one threatened with the drop and really, the Well should have had this match won long before Connor O'Shea was given the chance to

scrape a draw with his controversial last minute penalty.

Lansdowne, with three games left, will almost certainly avoid relegation now, and while Ken O'Connell and his team have to negotiate both Constitution and Blackrock, they should stay up.

Yesterday the Well were by some margin the more positive side in a nervy contest that was littered with penalties and handling errors, and yet they paid the price for not putting Lansdowne away much earlier. They were leading 12-9 with the final whistle only seconds away when Lansdowne's No.8 Charlie Quinn looked to have strayed offside at a ruck. However, referee Alan Watson, who will definitely not be

flavoured of his month at Musgrave Park, saw the situation differently. To widespread surprise, he penalised Tadhg O'Sullivan for holding the ball on the ground, and after three earlier misses in quick succession, O'Shea kept his composure to thump over the equalising kick from 40 metres.

If Sunday's Well had reason enough to feel aggrieved at Mr Watson's suspect judgment, they had no excuses for leaving the door open. They destroyed Lansdowne in the loose where O'Connell and Jim Curtis were excellent and they always seemed to have more options behind the scrum. But in truth, they never looked remotely like scoring the one try that would surely have settled the issue.

Paul O'Connor provided his usual share of line-out ball for Lansdowne, yet all too often

O'Connell and hooker Martin Wheehan had little difficulty in preventing the forward momentum the visitors needed. The consequence was that Gus Aberne and Johnny Woods were never able to dictate and the rest of the outside backs spent the afternoon drifting across the pitch.

The Well's 9-3 interval margin was scant reward for their dominance. Eric Croty found the range with a snap left-footed drop goal, Richie Daly landed two penalties and O'Shea replied for Lansdowne.

Three more penalties, two from O'Shea and one by Daly, kept the interest, but even this frustrating, shapeless contest was liable to shift either way, the home side were always favourites to take the points.

O'Shea then lost his rhythm to miss three kickable chances in a row and Lansdowne seemed almost resigned to defeat as Croty pinned them deep in their own 22, but there was still time for the full-back to land the kick which could effectively save the Dublin club's season.

As for Sunday's Well, if they are eventually relegated, they will look back on this match as the one that sent them down.

MANAGERIALS: G. O'Neil, C. Hayes, R. Day, S. McCarroll, B. Roche, E. Croty, B. O'Shaughnessy, J. Cummins, M. Whelan, G. Glavin, B. McCarthy, P. O'Connell, K. O'Connell (capt.), J. Curtis, T. O'Sullivan. **REPLACEMENTS:** C. O'Shea, J. Sexton, R. Corbett, B. Gannon, M. Healey, J. Woods, J. Aberne (capt.), W. O'Leary, M. McDermott, A. McKean, P. O'Connor, J. Collins, S. Rooney, A. Dwyer, C. O'Sullivan, P. O'Sullivan, D. Fawcett, P. Sexton, G. M. **REFEREE:** A. Watson (USR)

Dungannon make drop

ST MARY'S COLLIERIE 13

DUNGANNON 9

Dennis Walsh
Templeville Road

IN THE game's last breath Dungannon's Willie Dunne lunged over the St Mary's line, only a thicket of bodies preventing the ball from being touched down. In half an hour of nearly continuous possession it was the closest Dungannon came to rescuing the game and their Division One status.

There wasn't time for the five-metre scrum, but

Ballymena inch closer

Rugby Round Up
Dave Hannigan

UCD in the clear and they'll be watching today's game between Dolphin and Bective with interest.

The queue to take Bangor's place is as densely populated as ever. NIFC, who didn't play yesterday, are almost there. But the teams immediately behind them, Highfield, City of Derry and Clontarf, all had convincing wins yesterday, so all that can be said for certain is that the promoted duo will come from that quartet.

Highfield's 36-14 victory over Waterpark means the Water-

ford club slip out of contention while City of Derry's defeat of Ballina relegates the westerners. DLSF have definitely avoided that fate. 18-9 victors over Monkstown, they have clambered away from the relegation zone. UCC's meek capitulation to Clontarf keeps them still in trouble.

Nothing is certain yet at the top of Division Four. Bohemians' 13-12 win at Skerries puts them in first place, a point ahead of Sherries and Portlaoise. They are both on 15 points. Dublin University's 70-7 lashing of Collegians even gives them an outside chance, but we can expect the promoted pair to come from the first three.

Pegasus defeat Muckross for Irish Cup

IRISH CUP FINAL
Johnny Witherspoon

minutes of the game.

Claire McMahon was the greatest threat in the side of the Muckross defence and clearly showed that she is in top form and a candidate to get into Irish coach Terry Gregg's squad for the European Championships in the summer in Holland.

The first Pegasus goal came four minutes before the break on their third corner. Arlene Thompson's stop and roll gave Claire Samways the time to strike past Irish team keeper Sandra O'Gorman low to her pad side.

It was just reward for a first half during which the Ulster side showed more creativity than any other in the formidable Muckross attack.

Ireland draw with Portugal in Hong Kong

IRISH HONG KONG SEVENS

Tonga v Western Samoa, Fiji v Namibia, Ireland v Australia.

England made a more impressive start with a 26-7 victory over Papua New Guinea in their opening match. The Pacific Islanders, who have shown good form at Hong Kong in past tournaments, tested the new look England side, but in the end sheer class subdued their challenge.

England, making their first ever appearance at the two-day Asian event, took the initiative after Wasps threequarter Nick Greenstock raced in for the opening try. Ireland stand-off Austin Healey converted and added the extra points to a touchdown by Saracens flanker Richard Hill.

Skipper Derek Eves went over to stretch the lead before Greenstock raced in for his second try, converted by Healey. Papua New Guinea — where rugby league is the national sport — gained some consolation with a try by David Tiki, converted by Billy Papila.