



NO COMPETITION: The Olympic flame is extinguished during the closing ceremony of the Tokyo 2020 Olympic Games in Japan

When it comes to sport, I know my limitations

IS IT over yet? Can I turn on the television and find programme schedules restored to normal and the news in its regular slot?

There was no escaping the saturation coverage of the marathon that was the Olympic games – and all that sweaty Lycra, screaming in victory, sobbing in defeat and international jingoism.

I'm not denigrating the skill, strength and wholehearted dedication of the athletes in all disciplines, but the coverage of their efforts was exhaustive, exhausting and, most of all, repetitive – the first ten minutes of every news bulletin, exclusively 'highlights'.

I was never one for competition, my mantra being, 'if at first you don't succeed, pack it in and do something else'.

This I learned in the school of hard knocks. Two schools actually and a teacher training college.

I was a city child at a country primary school where my father was principal, in a village with three generations of cricketing excellence to uphold.

We didn't have formal Physical Education lessons. The juniors played rounders by way of apprenticeship; the bigger ones, cricket.

It was not unusual on a sunny afternoon for the older boys, (school leaving age then was 14) the sons and grandsons of cricketing aces, to approach me with the request, "G'won an' ask yer da tae let us out for a match."

Being an aficionado himself, he rarely refused. Once, a Department of Education inspector arrived to find the entire school in the playground and my father made him wait till a crucial 'over' was over.

I could just about be trusted to sit on the wall keeping score with a bit of blackboard chalk, or dispatched to retrieve the ball that a 'sixer' had deposited among the nettles in Master Mullan's field.

Why wasn't I playing with the girls,

Anita
ROBINSON



you might ask?

Their skills were awesome – 'three-ball-bouncy' against the school gable wall, (I could barely manage two,) and intricate skipping games involving two ropes. I was hopeless at it all.

'Big' school brought little respite. There was the purgatory of compulsory Physical Education, particularly netball.

How I loathed running, jumping, aiming, throwing, catching.

My hand/eye co-ordination was such that I couldn't hit a barn door with a bakeboard and was thus only a liability on a team.

Swimming lessons were a teeth-chattering, goose-fleshed nightmare.

The smell of chlorine made me sick – then having to sit all day in a chilly classroom with a clammy rope of wet hair down my back.

Once, a Department of Education inspector arrived to find the entire school in the playground and my father made him wait till a crucial 'over' was over

It was all to no avail, since I never took the last toe off the bottom of the pool.

Little did I suspect when I opted for the Early Years teaching course at college, that my term of trial had another three years to run.

As would-be tutors of mixed infants we were expected to hone the developmental skills necessary for a healthy, happy and stimulating childhood.

It involved a lot of beanbaggy, barefoot bear balancing and doing forward rolls, to the detriment of one's hairdo.

Imagine if you will, a dozen fully grown women with pretensions to sophistication, singing and acting out, "I'm a dingle-dangle scarecrow with a floppy-floppy hat."

I can shake my hands like this and shake my feet like that." – and outside the floor to ceiling windows of the gym, a trio of goggle-eyed painters, brushes suspended in disbelief at the sight.

Music played an intrinsic part in our training.

There was a lot of tambourine-bashing and triangle-tinkling, but playing an instrument to adult level was obligatory.

I hadn't touched a piano since 'O' levels. Choosing Chopin's simplest nocturne, I sacrificed my fingernails to stumps and closeted myself in a practice-room for two days existing solely on sausage rolls passed in by friends.

Now, when I hear it on Classic FM I'm still paralysed with retrospective fright.

Mercifully, any school I was ever employed in had a dedicated music teacher and I've never tickled the ivories since.

If I've accrued any wisdom in life, it's to recognise my own incompetencies.

Totally devoid of competitiveness, I don't get dirty, damaged or disappointed sitting on a sofa watching others succeed or fail...

ON THIS DAY

AUGUST 10 1971

Internment: 14 Killed

TWELVE people including a local priest were shot dead in Belfast yesterday in the bloodiest 16 hours in the city's streets since August 1969. The NI death toll was brought to 14 when a UDR man was gunned down at Clady, County Tyrone and a man was shot dead by the Army in Armagh. Fr Mullan (40) and a curate at St John's Church, Falls Road died on an errand of mercy. He was home at Springfield Park when he got a call to attend a wounded man at Moyard Park. He had administered the last rites to the man when he was hit by a burst of machine-gun fire. Another man who ran to his assistance is believed to have been killed by a second burst of automatic fire from the direction of Vere Foster School.

The wave of death and destruction in the city started early yesterday with the shooting of Private Malcolm Hadden (21) in Ardoyne. Before lunchtime 25 year old Ardoyne man, Patrick McArdorey was shot dead by a civilian sniper. At the same time a youth was shot dead by the Army [at a barricade]. He was named as Frank McGuinness (17) of Riverdale.

300 Lifted in Dawn Swoops

BUSINESS and professional men, tradesmen and labourers were all among the more than 300 taken from their beds in Army-RUC raids on their homes before dawn yesterday. Leaders of the People's Democracy were among those detained and include Michael Farrell, John McGuffin and John D Murphy. The raids at Upper Andersonstown started at 4.30 a.m. and there were numerous complaints of detainees being ill-treated and in some cases beaten up as they were dragged to Army vehicles.

Houses Set on Fire

AS VIOLENCE flared throughout Belfast and Protestant extremist guns came out, intimidation of Catholic families was reported and scores of houses were reported to have been burned down. One of the worst infernos was at Farrington Gardens in Ardoyne where several Catholic families to only minutes to get out before the torch was put to their homes. One man was refused to take permission to take his dog with him and the animal died in the blazing house. Army camps in the South are being prepared to accommodate as refugees the dependants of men interned in the North.

CONVINCED that only internment – successfully used, north and south, in the 1950s – would crush the IRA, Faulkner had won the conditional support of the British PM, Edward Heath, at Downing Street on August 5. However, Heath warned Faulkner that if internment was seen to 'alienate the minority', Direct Rule would swiftly follow.

EDITED BY ÉAMON PHOENIX
e.phoenix@irishnews.com