Media Portrayals of an Irish Olympian

RONNIE DELANY

Master of Sport Administration
Research Paper

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ABOUT THE AISTS

The AISTS (International Academy of Sports Science and Technology) was founded as a not-for-profit organisation in 2000 to support international sport organisations through education and applied research. The AISTS Founders - the International Olympic Committee (IOC), the EPFL, the University of Lausanne, the University of Geneva, IMD Business School, Ecole Hôtelière de Lausanne, the City of Lausanne and the Canton of Vaud - all recognise the importance of meeting the evolving knowledge needs of today’s sports industry.

Through education, the AISTS: prepares tomorrow’s international sports managers with the Master of Advanced Studies (MAS) in Sports Administration held each year in Lausanne; provides professional development opportunities to international sport organisations; and onsite training for major event organisers.

Through applied research, the AISTS conducts independent and commissioned projects to helping sport organisations and federations navigate an increasingly complex sport landscape. The AISTS focus lies in three key areas of expertise, namely: sport business and events; sport technology and innovation; and sport sustainability and legacy.
ABSTRACT

Ronald Michael Delany is a former Irish athlete who specialised in middle distance running. He won Gold in the 1500m race in the 1956 Melbourne Olympics. His victory is remembered as one of the greatest in Irish Olympic history and came at a time that was very important for the Irish nation.

The overall objective of the research was to undertake an analysis of the textual reporting of this unique event in the print media of the time, as portrayed by the Irish and British newspapers. The focus of the analysis relates to a comparison of the reporting of the build up to, during and post the Melbourne win to assess whether there were any biases or differences associated with the reporting dependent on the political bias of the source. To provide a more accurate political and historical frame of reference for the time and to elucidate the political climate surrounding Ireland as an independent sporting state of the world, official correspondence between the International Olympic Committee and Olympic Council of Ireland were consulted from the archives in the Olympic Study Centre, Lausanne, Switzerland.

The historical backdrop of the time, highlighted in the IOC correspondence, shows Ireland as being at a delicate juncture in its recent independence. We find that Ronnie Delany and his Olympic achievement were significant in contributing to the emergent sense of Irishness or national pride for an independent and unified Ireland.

ACADEMIC SUPERVISOR: Joseph MAGUIRE, Prof
EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

National identity is a kind of collective identity that is shared by a large group of people that identify with national symbols. This collective identity can develop based on common interests and experiences (Melucci, 1996). Sport and national identity are closely associated and sporting competition can facilitate the expression of ‘imagined communities’ (Anderson, 1983, p. 6). The Olympics, according to (Hogan, 2003, pp. 100–23), amplify tensions between globalism and localism and provides an ideal ground for articulating this national identity.

Ronald Michael Delany won Gold in the 1500m race in the 1956 Melbourne Olympics. His victory is remembered as one of the greatest in Irish Olympic history and came at a time that was very important for the Irish nation. The aim of the study was to understand the significance of the Delany’s participation and success for Ireland in the 1956 Olympics in Melbourne in the context of national sporting identity.

A variety of media reporting in the build up to, during and after the Melbourne games, was consulted. The study evaluated whether there were differences in the reporting associated with the political bias of the publication. To frame this politically and historically and to elucidate the climate surrounding Ireland as an independent state, official correspondence between the IOC and OCI were analysed and referenced.

The Olympic Games give an opportunity to display one’s country’s colours and symbols, as well as when winning Gold, the opportunity to play the countries
national anthem. In this research, the national flag and anthem were reported as important to Delany and the team. This reporting could help enable people to feel attachment to their nation of Ireland through construction of this ‘imagined community’ (Anderson, 1983).

The perceptions of Delany in the media portray him as a modest hero, embodying Irish public values of Catholicism and ideals of national unity and independence. It could be said that Delany’s win contributed to the sense of ‘nationness’ within Ireland, in a period where Ireland was establishing itself as an independent state with its own national identity. Together these attributes and the universal positive reporting lent themselves to Delany becoming a figure the entire country could rally behind, reinforcing their sense of independence and Irishness.

It was shown how British interference in how Ireland was named and perceived in the Olympic movement, was still a problem in 1956. The struggle for the government to send an Irish team to the Olympics in Melbourne was justified by the success of the team as ambassadors for the country and especially Delany’s Gold as the ultimate symbol of that success. Ronnie Delany and his Olympic achievement was significant in contributing to the emergent sense of Irishness and national pride for a newly independent Ireland.

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

- AAA - Amateur Athletic Association of England
- AISTS - International Academy of Sports Science and Technology
- AAU - Irish Amateur Athletic Union (also IAAU)
- CCAI - Cross County Association of Ireland
- FIFA - Fédération Internationale de Football Association
- FINA - Fédération Internationale de Natation
- GAA - Gaelic Athletic Association
- GB – Great Britain
- IAAA - Irish Amateur Athletic Association
- IAAF - International Association of Athletics Federation’s
- IAAU - Irish Amateur Athletic Union (also AAU)
- IF - International Federation
- IOC - International Olympic Committee
- NACA - The National Athletic and cycling Association (NACA)
- OCI – Olympic Council of Ireland
- UK – United Kingdom
1 INTRODUCTION

1.1 Sport as a vehicle for national identity

Identity is a socially and historically constructed concept. Key facets of identity play an important role in how we make sense of the world, such as age, race, ethnicity, gender and social class. Individuals do not just have one identity at a time, rather a group of them, of which national identity plays an important part. A nation is a socially constructed community, ‘imagined’ by the people who believe they are part of that group (Anderson, 1983, p. 6) and feelings of ‘nationness’, are widely shown through national culture (Schwarz, 1992, pp. 198–206). They are imagined because members of a nation will not know all of their fellow citizens, but will feel part of that group.

Sport and national identity are closely associated and sporting competition can facilitate the expression of these ‘imagined communities’ (Anderson, 1983, p. 6). Anderson suggested that members of nations are brought together by the ‘image of their communion’ and that nations can be re-imagined and transformed. Sport and representations of sport in the media, are platforms for imagining and re-imagining the nation (Farquharson, 2003). This is particularly important in how sport and the media could re-imagine or transform the new nation of Ireland in the post-World War II era.

Nationalism, national pride, and patriotism are often used as synonyms for national identity. National identity may be defined as the cohesive force that holds nation states together and national pride is the positive effect that the public feels towards their country, resulting from national identity (Smith, 1998, p. 1).
Nationalism and Sport are often intertwined. It has been argued for a long time that ‘representative sport acts as a public location for national identity’ (Polley, 1998, pp. 35-62). The Olympics are a good example of this where sport can give a platform for symbolic competition between nations.

The Olympics and the FIFA World Cup are the most widely watched and possibly the biggest TV media events in recent history (Tomlinson, 1996, pp. 583–602). The Olympics bring together nations from all over the globe to compete against one another on the world stage. The overall message from the Olympic movement is that it is ‘the taking part that counts’, sportsmanship is paramount and that sport is for all. The nation’s people express solidarity with players and teams that represent their country and this is closely linked with cultural nationalism (Bairner A., 2005, pp. 87–100.), this both internally unites people in a country and draws external boundaries against those outside. The Olympics, according to (Hogan, 2003, pp. 100–23), amplify tensions between globalism and localism and provides an ideal ground for articulating this national identity. Hogan also suggests that major sporting events, especially the Olympics, are key to the construction of a nation.

The media uses representations or words, images and characters to get across specific values or ideals, related to identity and culture in a society. The athletes representing their home nation become symbols and visual embodiment of their countries. The habitual usage of national symbols during events like the Olympics, such as flags and anthems, are good examples of integrating banal nationalism into daily life (Billig, 1995).
This study examines the textual and photographic portrayal of the Irish Olympian, Melbourne 1956 gold medal winner, Ronnie Delany, in the print media of both the Republic of Ireland and Great Britain. Theoretically, this analysis draws on collective identity theory, which focuses on the processes by which groups define themselves. National identity is a kind of collective identity that is shared by a large group of people that identify with national symbols. This collective identity can develop based on common interests and experiences (Melucci, 1996). Melucci also argued that collective identity is formed in an interactive process because it is constructed, negotiated and maintained through ongoing interactions linking people.

1.2 The 1956 Olympics in the historical context of Ireland

The Republic of Ireland and the United Kingdom have always had a complex range of identities within the domain of sport. The Gaelic Athletic Association, formed in 1884, aimed at establishing Gaelic games, began to forge a national identity separate to the U.K for Ireland. These games can be seen as the embodiment of Irish culture and what it means to be Irish. Sport is one of the social domains in Ireland, where at the time of the 1956 olympics, had a clear divide. Rugby and soccer were supported by the richer Protestant and largely pro-British population, while Gaelic games were the sports of choice for the Catholic population. Athletics could be enjoyed by both groups in the era, despite disputes over the governing of it in Ireland. Sports are also effective in defining and dividing moral or political communities and can become ‘vehicles of
identity, providing people with a sense of difference and a way of classifying themselves and others’ (MacClancy, 1996, p. 2).

Large sporting events such as the Olympics may strengthen nationalism and fuel positive patriotism. These large-scale events could also influence processes related to national identity construction. Sport was recognised in the post World War I world as an effective vehicle to promote national fervor and unity. In addition, it had been successfully employed by various political leaders of the early to mid-twentieth century as an “adjunct to foreign policy” in an attempt to show superiority (Buckel, 2008).

Ireland was still part of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Ireland until 1922. The Irish War of Independence ended with the signing of the Anglo-Irish Treaty (commonly refered to as ‘The Treaty’), which resulted in twenty six counties seceding from the United Kingdom. Michael Collins and W.T Cosgrave set about leading the establishment of the Irish Free State. At the same time a strong republican group led by Éamon de Valera opposed the treaty. This sparked a civil war between pro- and anti-treaty sides which ended in 1923. By the 1950’s Ireland was a new Republic and had gone through considerable change in its fight for independence from Great Britain. Ireland had become a Free State in 1922 and then in 1937 a new constitution re-established the state as Ireland (Eire, in Irish) (Constitution.ie).

Meanwhile this was also an important period for sport in Ireland. Concurrent with the Irish War of Independence the Olympic Council of Ireland (OCI) was founded in 1920. By 1922 most sports were affiliated to the OCI in an all-Ireland capacity, except for athletics and cycling. Prior to 1922, Ireland competed at the Olympics
as part of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Ireland. Athletes from Ireland competing before 1922 were counted as British in the Olympic statistics (Olympic Review pdf, 1973). The Republic of Ireland Act 1948, come into force on the 18th April 1949. This declared Ireland to be officially described as the Republic of Ireland after which it subsequently left the Commonwealth (Irish Statute Book, n.d.).

Economic depression, emigration and unemployment blighted the 1950s in Ireland. Emigration damaged the national psyche, especially in rural Ireland. In the post-war period, until 1961, net migration in Ireland totalled 105,000 (CSO.ie, n.d.). In 1956, when Ronnie Delany won gold for Ireland, the Republic was in its infancy and keen to show the world its legitimacy. For a country newly established, going through difficult economic times, this exposition on the world stage could be seen as an opportunity to showcase the country with its own unique identity and presence, separate to Great Britain. Since Ireland was a newly independent country, events like the Olympics were significant to it, in particular how it could contribute to the construction of its new national identity. Studying the portrayal of an Irish Olympic Champion in the media at this time could give insight into this process and the importance of sport for national identity. Furthermore, investigating the official correspondence between world and national sporting governing bodies reveals a prevailing foreign policy agenda between Britain and Ireland, in the context of Ireland trying to prove its legitimacy as a nation.

The political independence and established recognition of Ireland as an independent country were still very fragile constructs, open to political attack and were subject to buffeting from the maneuverings’ of both the Irish and British
governments not to mention from nationalist movements within Ireland. This viewpoint in the context of national identity was never more clearly illustrated than with the official naming of the country’s athletics entry on the world stage of the Olympics in 1956.

1.3 Naming the nation and use of ‘Eire’ and ‘Ireland’ at the Olympics

Prior to 1922, Ireland competed at the Olympics as part of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Ireland. Athletes from Ireland competing before 1922 were counted as British in the Olympic statistics (Olympic Review pdf, 1973). The OCI has always used the name ‘Ireland’, and has claimed to represent the entire island of Ireland, even though Northern Ireland remained part of the United Kingdom. In 1948 the Irish team competed as ‘Eire’ and in 1952 as the ‘Republic of Ireland’ (Olympic Review pdf, 1973). Melbourne, 1956, was the first Games using the preferred name ‘Ireland’ after an agreement was reached with Avery Brundage, president of the IOC (Olympic Archives, D-RM01-IRLAN/002, 1955-1959).

In a letter from Chancellor Otto Mayer to Lord Killanin (12th Dec, 1955) confirmation was given that Ireland would be used as the country’s official name: ‘I have received today from President Brundage the name of your country will be used in official Olympic publications as follows: IRELAND. As regards your letter of Dec 6th we took notice that Mr Lewis Luxton (Melbourne Organising Committee) has confirmed that the identification board which will proceed your team during the Opening and Closing Ceremony will mention the name ‘IRELAND’ only’ (Olympic Archives, CIO PT-KILLA-CORR, 1952-1968).
1.4 Split in governance of athletics in Ireland

There were problems within Irish athletics (IAAF) and who governs athletes in Ireland for a number of Olympic games. Ireland did not compete in the 1936 games as the OCI refused the organising committee’s invitation in protest against a change in the IAAF rules limiting national representations to political borders (Olympic Review pdf, 1973). In 1884, the Gaelic Athletic Association (GAA) was formed and a year later the Irish Amateur Athletic Association (IAAA) was formed. The National Athletic and cycling Association (NACA) was established in 1923 as a federation of clubs in Ireland merging the IAAA, the Cross County Association of Ireland (CCAI), and the Athletics Council of the GAA, with the objective of the GAA concentrating on Gaelic games from then on.

The NACA refused to recognise the partition of Ireland and the IAAF changed its constitution in 1930 which defined member organisations as being contiguous with political entities. The NACA rejected this and was then suspended from the IAAF in 1935. In 1937 a number of clubs left the NACA to set up the Irish Amateur Athletic Union (IAAU) and this new governing body became a member of the IAAF and the NACA’s suspension was made permanent (www.athleticsireland.ie/about/history/history-1900-1950/, 2016).

It appears that this split in the representation of athletics in Ireland at the time and the personal feelings of Lord Burghley resulted in the naming of ‘Eire’ for the track and field athletes in the official programme and on the scoreboards in Melbourne, were politically motivated.
1.5 IOC correspondence reveals the political debate associated with naming of the country

At the time Lord Burghley (Marquess of Exeter) was the President of the IAAF and was adamantly against the naming of Ireland as ‘Ireland’ and insisted that the country should be named ‘Eire’ for Olympic purposes. In his letter to Avery Brundage (President of the IOC) on 27th April, 1956, he wrote: ‘They have changed their name to Eire and the Republic of Ireland (under their 1949 Act), and now they have the audacity to call themselves ‘Ireland’! If they are allowed to enter as ‘Ireland’ as far as the IOC is concerned, they are not allowed to compete as with, to name two sports, athletics and swimming, no country called ‘Ireland’ is affiliated to the IAAF’ (Olympic Archives, D-RM01-IRLAN/002, 1955-1959). Lord Burghley continually raises this point in his correspondence that the Inernational Federation (IAAF) does not recognise ‘Ireland’ as an affiliated member and therefore cannot use ‘Ireland’ in the athletics programmes in Melbourne.

Many of Lord Burghley’s arguments against naming the country ‘Ireland’ was on the basis that the six counties were part of the UK and not Ireland, and using ‘Ireland’ made a claim over these six counties also. In his letter to Avery Brundage on the 7th September 1956 he wrote: ‘ever mounting political pressure. Eire has endeavoured to absorb Northern Ireland, who are equally determined to remain where they are. It is because of this political pressure, which is completely foreign to amateur sport and the Olympic movement, that not only the IOC but the large Federations have refused to allow this one more step of permitting Eire to call itself ‘Ireland’ in their organisations as if it were the whole of the country and controlled Northern Ireland. I understand the IOC will shortly be receiving a strong protest from the British Olympic Concil on its action, taken without
consultation with the other interested party, and I have already received one as President of the IAAF from the representative of Northern Ireland’ (Olympic Archives, D-RM01-IRLAN/002, 1955-1959). He was under considerable pressure from the British Government and Foreign Office about the naming of the country in the Olympic movement. In a letter from Lord Burghley to President Brundage on the 6th April, 1956, he wrote how he ‘had a flap from our Commonwealth Relations Department concerning Ireland, where apparently they have tried to put over a fast one stating in various press reports that the IOC recently made a rule ‘that all Irish teams competing in the future Olympic Games go under the official heading of ‘Ireland’’ (Olympic Archives, D-RM01-IRLAN/002, 1955-1959).

Lord Burghley used his position as President of the IAAF to try to block the naming of the country as ‘Ireland’. In a letter to Avery Brundage the 7th September 1956 he spoke of how the IAAF had made a decision at their Congress not to agree with the IOC about the name change of the country: ‘A decision has been taken by the IAAF at their last congress that they would not agree to this change in name, and as the Olympic Games are our World Championships as well as part of the Olympic programme, we obviously must have some say as to who competes. Obviously, it would be quite impossible, and I am sure it would be equally true of at least FINA, to break our Rules and allow runners to compete in the colours of a country which we do not recognise as existing and is not affiliated’. He also went on to claim that the change was due to political pressure from Ireland: ‘If the IOC insists on bowing to this political pressure and affiliating them as ‘Ireland’, then they can only compete in athletic events as Eire and their colours must be marked accordingly’.
On the 20th September 1956 Lord Burghley wrote to E.J. Holt from the Melbourne organising committee admitting that there was a ruling that the country should be named ‘Ireland’: ‘It is quite true that if Avery (Avery Brendage, President of the IOC) has decided that they are to be called ‘Ireland’, their entries will come in as such through their Olympic Committee to your Organising Committee’. He then made his argument for why ‘Ireland’ could not be used for athletics under IAAF rules: ‘drawing of the heats and the programme are the responsibility of the IAAF and quite clearly under our Rules we cannot allow anybody to appear in it or take part under the name of a country which does not exist as far as we are concerned. Clearly this is a point on which each International Federation must make up its mind for their individual sport, but under our Rules any athletes will appear on the programme as ‘Eire’’ (Olympic Archives, D-RM01-IRLAN/002, 1955-1959).

The official decision according to the minutes of the meeting of the Executive board of the IOC, in Lausanne, on October 3rd and 4th, 1956 was that ‘Ireland’ was to be used: ‘It is finally decided to maintain the status-quo (using IRELAND)’, but that ‘the Marquees of Exeter demands that his strong protest against this decision be entered in the minutes of the meeting’ (Olympic Archives, D-RM01-IRLAN/002, 1955-1959). Despite the official decision of President Avery Brundage and the IOC that ‘Ireland’ should be used, Lord Burghley used his power as IAAF President to have the name changed to ‘Eire’ for track and field athletes in the Melbourne Games.

In the official athletics programme dated 23rd Nov,1956, the scoreboard abbreviation is IRE. Ireland (Olympic Study Centre, 716(04), MA 15373/1+1). However, the next day 24th Nov, it was changed to EIR. Eire (Olympic Study
Centre, 716(04), MA 15373/2+1). It remained as ‘Eire’ in the programmes and also in the listing of finalists for the 1,500metres race ‘Delany, R.M Eire’ on the 29th November (716(04), MA 15373/6+1) (Appendix II – photo 5-9).

1.6 Ronnie Delany the man

Ronald Michael Delany (born 6 March 1935), better known as Ron or Ronnie Delany, specialised in middle distance running. He won the gold medal in 1500m race in the 1956 Melbourne Olympics. His victory is remembered as one of the greatest in Irish Olympic history and came at a time that was very important for Ireland. In 1954 Ronnie Delany had yet to run a mile and had never been outside of Ireland. Just two years later he was to become the seventh ever runner, and the youngest, to break the 4-minute mile barrier. On the 1st of June 1956 in Compton California, Delany ran a time of 3-minutes, 59 seconds (Delany, 2006). That same year he was crowned Olympic Champion in Melbourne.

Delany had moved from Ireland to America to study a BSc in Economics on an athletics scholarship to Villanova, Philadelphia. He was coached by Jumbo Elliott, who also coached four other Olympic medallists. There, Ronnie was famous and known as the ‘Villanova Rocket’ (Delany, 2006). Delany’s strongest event was the 800m. He was only convinced later to try the 1,500m event; this is the foremost middle distance track event in athletics. The US and Team GB dominated the podium positions for the event at the Olympics from the 1900’s to the mid 1920’s.
1.7 The athletics sporting landscape in the run up to the 1956 Olympics

In the sport of athletics, the four-minute mile means completing the mile run (1,609.344 metres) in less than four minutes. It was first achieved in 1954 by Britain’s Roger Bannister in 3:59.4 (Guinness World Records, 2016). Up until he did it in 1954, most people thought it was impossible to break the four-minute mark. The sub four-minute mile was thought to be unreachable and physiologically impossible. Bannister will be remembered as the man who ran the ‘miracle mile’ in breaking what was thought was impossible.

Just 46 days after Bannister broke the record, Australia’s John Landy surpassed his time (3:57.9). At this time Delany was a promising young athlete, competing in Irish schoolboy events. Just two years later he would be competing against the best in the world and breaking the four-minute barrier himself. In May 1956, Delany went with the Villanova track team to compete in the Compton Invitational meet at the US national Collegiate Championships. Here Delany would start the race alongside the world record holder for 1,500-metre, Gunner Nielsen (Denmark). He raced to win, but in doing so also broke the four-minute barrier, with a time of 3:59.01. This made Delany the 7th four-minute miler, and the youngest to achieve this distinction. He joined Roger Bannister, John Landy, Laszlo Tabori, Chris Chataway, Brian Hewson and Jim Bailey in the most exclusive club in the world (Ultimate Triumph: The Olympic 1,500, 1968).
1.8 Debate over the justification of sending Irish Athletes to Melbourne

Before the Olympics started there was a lot of uncertainty about who would be sent as Team Ireland and how the team would be funded. Billy Morton (Hon., Secretary of Clontarf Harriers) on justifying the sending of Ronnie Delany and Eamon Kinsella was quoted as saying ‘People are sighing over Delany – don’t I know it. He didn’t look good at Landsdowne road this summer – but he is good. I never lost confidence in him. He’ll do his stuff in Melbourne’ and of the fortune of the team ‘Of course I can’t say they will be going to Melbourne until the result of the appeal for funds is known’ (Oct 20 1956 Irish Pictorial (Irish Times) p18).

In the press coverage Delany was not the favourite in the build up to the Olympics in Melbourne and the press had written him off due to his defeats in Ireland earlier that year. The Australian, John Landy, was seen as a serious contender but was also carrying a recent injury. Along with Landy the press tipped other four-minute milers; Bailey, Hewson, Tabori Nielson and the current 1,500-metre world-record holder Rozsavolgyi (Hungary), for placings (Delany, 2006). For the Australian home crowd, Landy, who read the Olympic Oath in Melbourne Olympic opening ceremony, was the favourite in the 1,500m, but Landy’s best event was the 5000m.

With just two months until the Melbourne Olympic Games, Delany did not yet know if he was competing for Ireland. This was due to issues over funding of the Irish Olympic team and the process of how the OCI selected its athletes. As discussed earlier there were problems within Irish athletics and who governs athletes in Ireland for a number of Olympic games. When it was announced, he
learned of his naming in the Ireland squad through reading a newspaper article. He only received official communication from the Council on the day before he left to travel to Australia (Sports Illustrated, 1968).

1.9 Melbourne Olympic Games 1956

Delany qualified easily for the final, having completed his heat in third place, behind Merv Lincoln (Australia) and Ken Wood (GB), with Tabori (Hungary) in fourth. From the other heats Landy, Neilson, Hewson, Ian Boyd, Klaus Richtzenhain, Neville Scott, Murray Halberg and Stanislav Jungwirth, had qualified for the final. The world-record holder (Rozsavolgyi) and the defending Olympic champion (Joseph Barthel) were eliminated (Sports Illustrated, 1968).

Delany won gold a few days later in Melbourne, 10 feet clear of the rest of the field. Coming from behind with about 150 yards to the finish, Delany gave his all to pull away from the pack. He was followed by Richtzenhain in second and Landy in third.

1.10 Specific aims of this study

The aim of this study is to understand the significance of the Delany’s participation and success for Ireland in the 1956 Olympics in Melbourne in the context of

- National cohesion - His ability to rally people from differing sides of the political landscape in a unifying sense of national pride
• National political identity - His embodiment of Irishness as a reflection of the values and admirable attributes of the time in political and humanitarian terms.

• National independence - The significance of his success as an athlete competing under the title ‘Ireland’, representing 32 counties rather than as the 26 county ‘Eire’.

• National religious identity - The significance of his actions with a religious characteristic in the context of representing Ireland and what that meant as a statement of separation from Britain.

To address these aims a variety of media reporting in the build up to, during and after the games will be consulted. In doing so differences in the reporting associated with the political bias of the publication will be evaluated. In an effort to frame the historical political climate at the time back reference back to correspondence between the OCI, IOC and the IAAF will be undertaken.
2 RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

2.1 Content Analysis

Sport is now widely communicated through a variety of media, to an ever-growing number and range of consumers. Content analysis can develop an understanding of some aspects of how sports are presented. Content analysis can examine text, which is written, audio or visual. During this content analysis printed and digital newspapers were consulted, as well as correspondence from various sporting bodies in Ireland, Great Britain and Switzerland, to illucidate the data collected.

2.2 Sample

The content analysis examined mainly Irish national press and some British press coverage of the Melbourne Games 1956 (1st November – 31st December 1956) from online archives, in the build up to, during and after the Olympics. The Irish Times, The Times, The Irish Independent, The Sunday Independent, The Irish Press (1931-1995), The Olympic archives, Sports Illustrated, and Dáil Éireann archives were selected as the sample set for the study.

The Irish Times newspaper represents a conservative, pro-union focus, with mainly a middle-class or protestant readership (O'Brien, 2008). The Times newspaper reportage most likely represented the British conservative viewpoint of Ronnie Delany during the games. For most of its history, the Irish Independent (also called the Independent, including The Sunday Independent) was seen as a
nationalist, Catholic, anti-communist newspaper (McGarry, Vol. 33, No. 129 (May 2002)).

The *Irish Press* (1931-1995) was controlled by Éamon de Valera and his family, and as a consequence, it supported Fianna Fáil ideologies, expressing the "national outlook" in keeping with the sentiments of his party supporters – that would mean pro 32-county Ireland. The paper was aimed particularly at teachers and schools, with strong coverage of GAA games and the Irish language (O’Brien, De Valera, Fianna Fáil and the Irish Press: The Truth in the News?, 2001). *Sports Illustrated* and the Olympic Archives were selected for further coverage; these latter sources would be regarded as without bias. All papers had a large circulation at the time in their respective countries.

### 2.3 Procedure

Articles with mentions or photos of Ronnie Delany in the data sample above, were collected and analysed. A coding sheet, designed to code for all variables in the research was used to collect and collate information. Coding is the organisation of the collected data into a constellation of words or statements that relate to the same central meaning (Baxter, 1991, pp. 239-254). Codes are used to assign meaning to descriptive information that’s has been gathered during the research. According to Coffey and Atkinson (1996, p. 32) ‘codes are tools to think with’. Creating these categories is a core feature of qualitative content analysis.

Once the data was coded, emerging themes where then looked at. A theme can be considered to be a thread of an underlying meaning through, condensed
meaning units, codes or categories, on an interpretative level (J.H. Granehiem, 2003, p. 107). A code or category may fit into more than one theme.

Categorical variables included:

Pre event and during:
- Number of Articles
- Number of photographs
- Mention of Delany as a favourite to win
- Use of Ireland or Eire in the article
- Mention of Nationality as Irish
- Mention of Nationality as British

Post event:
- Number of Articles
- Number of photographs
- Positive description of Delany
- Use of negative or neutral words
- Mention of Nationality as Irish
- Mention of Nationality as British
- Use of ‘Ireland’ or ‘Eire’ in the article

2.4 Reliability/ Limitations:

As a method, content analysis is specifically intended for the study of messages, and is central to mass communication research. Intercoder reliability, more specifically termed intercoder agreement, is a measure of the extent to which independent researchers make the same coding decisions in the evaluation of
messages. There are few standard and accessible guidelines or software available, with regards to the appropriate procedures to use, to assess and report intercoder reliability. This may lead to a lack of consistency in how content analysis is assessed and reported in studies. In qualitative research the concepts of credibility, dependability and transferability have been used to describe various aspects of trustworthiness (Guba, 1981, pp. 75-91).
3 RESULTS

The five national newspapers examined in this study, from the 1st of November 1956 (Pre-Games) until the 31st December 1956 (post Games) published a total of 89 articles concerning Ronnie Delany, including during the competition and after his win in the Olympic final. The frequency and percentage of articles are represented in Table 1 (Appendix 1).

*The Irish Times* and *The Times* represented a centre-right broadsheet in Ireland and in Great Britain, respectively. *The Irish Independent* and *The Sunday Independent* represented a slightly more left opinion but were still viewed in Ireland as nationalist papers. The *Irish Press* was viewed as a very pro 32-county Ireland nationalist paper. Thirty-eight percent of articles mentioning Ronnie Delany were published by the ‘nationalist’ *Irish Independent* (and *Sunday Independent*) paper and twenty-nine percent of articles were published in the *Irish Press*. Thirty-three percent of the articles were published by the more ‘conservative’ *Irish Times*. These figures suggest an even and almost equal spread of coverage of Ronnie Delany following his gold medal win in Melbourne, in Irish national press regardless of their political or religious leanings.

Positive or negative mentions of Delany were counted as distinct sentences rather than number of positive or negative words. The *Irish Independent* and *Sunday Independent* had the most positive mentions of the papers with 32.5% and 19.7% respectively. The only negative mentions of Delany centred around his pre-Olympic results on the track and were only mentioned in *The Times* and *Sunday Independent* (Table 2. Appendix 1).
The *Irish Press* had the most mentions of the issue of the use of ‘Eire’ or ‘Ireland’ for the track and field athletes at the games. The use of ‘Eire’ would imply that athletes were representing 26 counties and ‘Ireland’ would refer to a 32 county Ireland. The *Irish Press* being an anti-treaty paper and of a pro 32 county Ireland sentiment, picked up on this misrepresentation of Ireland as ‘Eire’ and explored it more than the other national papers. ‘Eire’ was used in the Olympic programme and on the score boards at the games for the track and field athletes, while ‘Ireland’ was used for the other athletes. This former representation of ‘Eire’ would have been due to the complicated situation in Irish athletics at the time, involving interference from British athletics representatives. This aspect of the representation of athletes was discussed in the *Irish Press* on three occasions and once in the *Sunday Independent*. Other newspapers did not report on the issue.

The archives of Dáil Éireann and Seanad Éireann debates were also searched for mentions of Delany’s win, but did not yield any results. There was only one mention of the Olympic athletes who had just competed at the games; it focused on the fact that Ireland had sent its first female athlete to an Olympic games (http://oireachtasdebates.oireachtas.ie/Debates, 1956).

There were very few photos of Delany after his win, and almost all equally distributed among all the Irish national newspapers (Table 2. Appendix 1). There was no photo of Delany in *The Times* newspaper coverage of the event. This would be expected at the time, as photojournalism was taking off but not as established as today. The photos documenting the win in the Irish papers were not of Delany while in Melbourne or of him winning the race. The photos were taken on his homecoming and at the celebration dinners in Dublin. Photos from international newspaper clippings in the Olympic archives have photos of his crossing the finish line, after the win in an act of prayer and on the podium. None
of these photos made the Irish media. This could be due to rights and ownership of the photos taken in Melbourne by non-Irish journalists (Appendix II – Photos 1-3).
4 DISCUSSION

This research examines the extent of coverage of Ronnie Delany around his Gold medal win in the Melbourne Olympics, 1956, in Irish and British national newspapers. In addition, the research assesses how Delany was perceived by different media before, during and after the win. These results are all framed in the political climate of the time as illustrated in the official correspondence of the Irish NOC and the IOC. After looking at the data, the types and frequency of the content was then broken down into the following themes, to discuss the representation of Delany in each press source in more detail.

4.1 Justification of sending the team despite funding problems

Given the afore mentioned trepidation in sending athletic representation for Ireland (see 5.10), the press coverage post Olympic Games, from all sections was positive; the consensus being that the win by Delany more than justified the sending of representation.

The *Irish Times* reported about the grants for the Irish athletes and that Villanova University would assist Delany in ‘his passage to Melbourne if he were chosen’ and that his expenses were likely to be less as he was travelling from the U.S and joining the rest of the team on route (Irish Times, Oct 6, p 4).

After the games Lord Killanin said that there was a ‘struggle to send an Irish team to Melbourne’ but that the team were an ‘outstanding success, due to the efforts
of sportsmen such as Ronnie Delany and thanks to the generous support of the Irish people and Government’. He also went on to say how ‘Irish national prestige had been boosted by the performance of the Irish representatives’ (Irish Independent, Dec 20, p9).

The Irish Press noted that Delany’s win had justified the sending of the whole team (Dec 3, p 9) ‘Now that Delany has established by his superb victory that the forecast of a few who regarded him as an Olympic prospect were well founded, the reality of sending our tiny representation to Melbourne is fully justified’. The Irish Press also noted the success of such a small team achieving a huge amount of success with the medals claimed. Oliver Weldon reported ‘The achievements of Ireland’s tiny Olympic team - of which Ronnie Delany’s win in the 1,500 metres was the crowning glory – have been truly magnificent’. He also mentioned the success compared to other nations who sent larger teams, with less return on investment ‘Our twelve entrants have secured five medals, and so may be said to have been 41 per cent successful…..Britain with 200 men and women in the Games had a mere 7 per cent’ (The Irish Press, Dec 3, p 9).

The short notice the team was given before the Olympics was also recognised: ‘Everyone recognised the short notice the team members had to get ready and the degree of uncertainty as to whether they could go or not due to lack of funds (Irish Press, Dec 12, p 7). Chief-supt. P. Carroll, secretary of the Olympic Council, was quoted ‘I think our team, for a small body of athletes, has achieved something unique in sport; it has set a headline to many bigger countries’.

Although it was difficult to send a team due to these funding issues, it was very much a point of national pride to have a team present and compete under the
name ‘Ireland’. Sending a team despite the expense on the Government was perceived across all papers as justified because of their success on the world stage, especially Delany’s gold medal. The Olympics are a critical national and international event and can provide an important platform for nations to present themselves. Governments invest in subsidising their athletes so they can represent their country to the best of their ability. The results at this Olympic games are portrayed in the Irish media as having made that investment by the Irish Government worthwhile.

4.2 Delany as an underdog

It was consistent throughout all papers that Delany was never favourite to win the Olympic final. In fact, he was never mentioned as a favourite in the build up to the final and often received no mention in the pre-games build up at all. From the Olympic Archive search The Sun newspaper (GB) printed on the 23rd of November stated: ‘The 1500 metres will probably be the closest race of the games’ and ‘Britain’s second representative Brian Hewson will be the fastest half-miler present and his tactical skill and power of acceleration will be most valuable. Istavn Rozsavolgyl has the best claim, having set a new record for the 1500metres less than two months ago’.

There was no mention of Delany in the article despite the naming of eight athletes in the line-up. Also found in the Olympic Archives The Age, an Australian newspaper based in Melbourne, wrote about Landy on the 21st Nov ‘He has become such a public hero that thought of him being defeated is not entertained by many’, ‘Split seconds separate six or eight in the 1500 metres, with fellow
Australians Baily and Lincoln just as likely to succeed over Landy as Rozsavoelgyi (Hungary) or Wood (England)’.  

After the race most admitted that they had not foreseen the win. The Irish Times on December 3rd wrote ‘Although he had run well in his heat, contenting himself with qualifying, few of the experts expected him to win’, ‘He confounded them all by running probably the best race of his life to best Germany’s Klaus Richtzenhain and John Landy effortlessly, while establishing, new Olympic record figures for the distance’.  

The Irish Independent also remarked: ‘Four months before, with a bitter taste of two defeats by Brian Hewson on Irish tracks in his mouth, Ronnie had left an Ireland that was wagering little money on his chances at Melbourne’ (Dec 22nd, 1956, p22). Despite Hewson’s wins over Delany, The Times had not picked Hewson as favourite either and reported that ‘at least a dozen athletes must be in the reckoning’. On October 1st an article in The Times stated that Rozsavolgyi (Hungary) ‘definitely looms already as the Olympic favourite’. Again, on the 7th November (p14) it read that Rozsavolgyi ‘certainly looks the part of a champion, but it is K. Wood (GB), the holder of the A.A.A. (Amateur Athletic Association of England) mile, who seems the most difficult to beat’. On November 30th The Times wrote of how Wood looked full of strength and ‘though one would not like to predict the winner in such an unpredictable event and with such formidable opposition he must be considered as dangerous as ever’. In none of the articles about the 1,500 metre race did they name Delany as a possible medal hopeful in the race.
One writer to have picked Delany as winner was Arthur P. McWeeney, writing in the *Sunday Independent* (Dec 9th, p18), said ‘The ‘*Sunday Independent*’ could take a bow for the publicity given to Delany over 1956. ‘He proved our predictions to be right. Many Irish athletic enthusiasts were inclined to write off Delany as a ‘has been’ after his two defeats by englishman Brian Hewson last summer. But Ronnie set out to prove what Olympic champions are made of. No doubt, his critics were more than delighted to be proved wrong’. He also wrote on the 3rd of Dec (*Sunday Independent*, p15), ‘its extraordinary how many of my colleagues are now saying that they had a quiet fancy all the time for the Irishman’, ‘The cold statistical fact is that of the seven leading experts before the race only one before the race tipped Delany to win. That was Ted Smidts, sports Editor of the Associated Press’.

Landy was quoted in *The Irish Press* (03.12.1956, page 8 by Oliver Weldon) as saying ‘Ronnie is the world’s greatest. He is extremely fast. He has stamina and a wonderful mental approach. I was not surprised at his win. I picked him’. Also from the Olympic archives cuttings an article stated; ‘He certainly was not regarded as a very likely winner, but rose to the occasion magnificently and thoroughly deserved his victory’ (paper and author unknown). Even *The Irish Times* reported ‘Delany’s victory in the 1,500 metres, against the world’s best runners over the distance, was as convincing as it was un-expected’ (Dec 3, p 2).
4.3 Sporting ambassadors do Ireland proud. Political unification behind the Irish athletes.

A strong theme among all the publications was how the whole team, regardless of result, brought great pride to the country and how they represented Ireland as great ambassadors for the country. Ireland as a relatively new independent country was keen to establish itself worldwide.

The Taoiseach, Mr Costello, offered his personal congratulations to the team, ‘the mere fact that Ireland was able to put forward such a wonderful team of varied character was a great credit to the country’, and how Ireland was ‘very proud of those who had kept the reputation of the country high’ (Irish Independent, Dec 31, p 8).

In the Irish Press, Lord Killanin was reported to have said about the team ‘The ambassadors they sent to Australia, led by Ronnie Delany, were a tremendous asset to the country and were appreciated not only by their Australian friends but by all other countries’ (Irish Press, Dec 20, p 9). The Irish Independent also quoted Lord Killanin (Dec 20, p9) ‘Ronnie Delany had made Ireland renowned throughout the world by his wonderful accomplishments. Ronnie has been hailed in newspapers all over the globe as one of the world’s greatest sportsmen. We hope the success of the Irish team will be an inspiration to Irish youth and Irish athletes’. He also commented on the ongoing difficulties between Ireland and Britain by suggesting that ‘we hope also that it may inspire people in Britain and Ireland to solve the difficulties which exist in field and track which make the running of an Irish Olympic team so very difficult’. Lord Killanin is referring to the spilt in governance of athletics in Ireland and the ongoing struggle between the OCI and
the International Association of Athletics Federation’s (IAAF) to have the track and field athletes recognised as representing ‘Ireland’.

Councillor Robert Briscoe was quoted as saying, in the *Irish Times*, ‘it was his privilege to be in office at a time when a Dublin citizen had brought such credit, not only to Dublin, but to Ireland, Delany had made Ireland renowned throughout the world by his accomplishment, and he deserved the congratulations of all citizens’ (Dec 20, p7).

The *Irish Press* also wrote that ‘All Irish sportsmen will salute Ronnie Delany for an outstanding personal achievement, which puts Ireland back on the map, so to speak, so far as Olympic Games athletics. Ireland can well be proud of those who bear back one Gold, one Silver, and three Bronze medals. The honour they have done their country is a greater prize’ (Dec 3, p9).

A search of the database of Dáil Éireann, showed no mention of Delany’s gold medal win, but it was highlighted how Ireland had sent a female athlete to the Olympics for the first time and, importantly, how the athlete was a married woman. In the Seanad Éireann debate on the 11th December 1956, it was argued by Dr Sheehy Skeffington that an amendment to the rules around the Civil Service Commissioners examination be made to allow married women sit the civil service exam stating ‘there was one married woman who represented us at the Olympic Games. I feel that if our married women are good enough to represent us in the field of international competitive sports we might recognise that the time has come when they can compete in Civil Service examinations, however grueling such tests may be’. Using an Irish Olympic female athlete as an example to the Seanad that there should be amendments to Bills to come in line with a more modern Ireland, shows the importance of the athletes as ambassadors.
These comments show how important it was for the Ireland and its leaders that Irish athletes performing and representing the country, reflected well on the new independent nation. In the Smith and Jarkko study, 1998, ‘National Pride’, Ireland ranked first in National Pride data in Specific Achievements, but were ranked 9th in General National Pride. Also in this study sport was the most frequently cited source of national pride, with 77% indicating it made them proud of their country. A country’s National Pride was ranked across ten domains for Specific Achievements, Ireland ranked number one in four domains; Sport, Arts and Literature, History and Fair and Equal Treatment (Smith, 1998, p. 8). This study also suggested that the top four countries (including Ireland) with the highest average level of national pride across their two scales, was due to the fact they were all former colonies having established their independent nationhood within the last two centuries.

4.4 Split in governance of athletics in Ireland

Delany when questioned about the split in athletics had ‘no comment’ to make about the split in Irish athletics and when asked if he had seen the N.C.A. cyclists in Melbourne he turned away, reported the Irish Independent (Dec 20, p 12) and the Irish Press (Dec 20, p 9). No mention of the split in athletics was recorded in the research in the Irish Times during the period examined.

Mayor of Limerick, Ald. G. E Russell, who attended a convention of the NACA in Limerick said ‘It was the desire of everybody he felt, that there should be one single organisation representing the 32 counties and they read from time to time with the deepest regret of the split in Irish athletics over the number of years’. The
Mayor also said he wished to make his position very clear. He was wholeheartedly in support of a unified sports association, but he would be at Shannon Airport to welcome Ronnie Delany, ‘an Irishman who had brought credit to the country’ (Irish Independent, Dec 18, p 13). The Mayor was also reported to have said that they wanted a national united body imbued with ‘the native traditions in athletics and culture’ and it was always a ‘matter of pride when an Irishman distinguished himself against athletes from all parts of the world’. Fr Slattery (President) said that the ‘so-called’ Olympic council was ‘not representative enough of the sports bodies of the country and it was not elected from all sporting bodies’, Fr Slattery also stated ‘If an AAU member of the team was successful at Melbourne it would have been the British flag that would have been hoisted, and that is one reason why we are not so enthusiastic about having anything to do with AAU, which in 1934 from formed against the wishes of the majority of this country’ (Irish Independent, Dec 18, p 13). Here refers back to the split in governing bodies of Irish athletics in the 26 counties and in Northern Ireland. There were issues of citizenship of athletes from Northern Ireland. Along with correspondence about naming of ‘Ireland’, there were also many letters requesting confirmation that Irish citizens born in Northern Ireland had the right to compete for Team Ireland (Olympic Archives, D-RM01-IRLAN/002, 1955-1959).

Also in the same article, he was quoted as saying ‘the union is fighting England’s battle for the partition of Ireland and placing obstacles in the way of this country from getting international recognition’ and ‘he felt that it was a pity that Ronnie Delany who brought such honour to the country, was unable to represent the entire country’. Mr. D. Brien (Tipperary) said that ‘with the exception of the boxers the people who competed did not represent the country’ and the NACA made ‘no apologies to anybody for the stand they had taken in demanding a 32 county
Ireland’. This highlights the naming issues spoken about earlier, with ‘Eire’ designating 26 county Ireland and how this was assigned to Ronnie Delany in the official programme and bulletin after his win.

4.5 Athletes embraced their political role

The athletes representing Ireland in Melbourne were also aware of the issues with the country’s name while competing. The Irish Times reported that Ronnie Delaney said that the team went to Melbourne, with ‘Ireland’ written across their blazers, and with the idea of upholding the traditions of their country (Dec 31, p7).

In the Olympic archives a newspaper clipping reported that the Irish team in Melbourne flew an Irish flag twice the size of a normal flag at the Olympic Village. ‘You can count on the Irish to do things in a big way’. For a few short hours a green, white and orange flag of Ireland twice the normal size flew in front of the Chef de Mission’s quarters at the Olympic Village but it was eventually removed by officials who asked that a smaller flag replace it. Where the flag came from was reported as ‘a mystery’ (Olympic Archives - ID iRIMS 206627, 206636, 14378, 201257, Retrieved 08/04/2016) (Appendix II – photo 4). This could be interpreted as the athlete’s showing pride in their country as Team ‘Ireland’ and showing it through the use of the Irish flag. There can be huge political battles over flags and symbols used by a nation, as discussed by Hargreaves (J., 2000 p58); they can be used as part of a power struggle between the competing nations.
4.6 Delany the unifier and symbol of a 32 county ‘Ireland’

An article in the *Irish Independent*, by Arthur P. McWeeney said that Mr. Avery Brundage had the last word on the subject of the countries’ status. As Delany stood on the winner’s rostrum to receive his gold medal, Mr. Brundage, President of the International Olympic Council, shook his hand and said: ‘I want to make it clear that I am presenting this medal to a gentleman from Ireland’ (Dec 3, p 15). The political impact of this statement given the contest of the run up to the Melbourne Olympics, cannot be over stated.

In the *Sunday Independent* an article on the question of whether the team competed as ‘Ireland’ or ‘Eire’, Lord Killanin said that they ‘competed as a 32-county Ireland’ (Dec 30, p 4). The article also made reference to Ronnie Delany’s comment that they went to Melbourne with ‘Ireland’ written across their blazers and ‘with the idea of upholding the traditions of their country’ (*Sunday Independent*, Dec 30, p 4).

*The Times* also acknowledged Delany’s win as ‘a win for Ireland without a doubt’ (Dec 03). The *Irish Times* did not report on the fact that ‘Eire’ was placed against the names of the track and field athletes in the official athletics programme and on the score boards. The *Irish Press* reported on this issue stating ‘Meanwhile Irish supporters in Melbourne resent the designation ‘Eire’ placed against the names of track and field athletes Maeve Kyle, Eamonn Kinsella and Ronnie Delany in the official programme. The remainder of the team, the boxers, our wrestler and yachtsman, have been correctly designated as coming from ‘Ireland’” (Dec 04, p
Press office officials at the main stadium reportedly did not know why the ‘Eire’ tag was in the programme (Irish Press, Dec 04, p 10).

The Irish Press wrote how John Caldwell was excited about Delany’s win and how important it was to Irish athletes that the Irish flag was used. ‘He ‘hacked’ home and gave us the thrill of the games. It was great to see the flag raised and hear the National Anthem played’ (Dec 12, p9, Tom O’Ryan). Delany was quoted in the Irish Independent (Dec 20, p12) as saying ‘My greatest thrill was when I heard our National Anthem played when I won the 1,500 metres’.

On his return to Ireland a local school band turned out to welcome him and played ‘A nation once again’ on tin whistles (Irish Independent, Dec 31, p8). The song choice is significant as it is a nationalist song that expresses hopes that Ireland may yet be freed, and be no longer a British “province” but a nation of its own. This choice of song and tribute was reported by the Irish Press but not by the other papers.

The split in the athletics associations caused some people to feel Delany’s win represented the 26 county Republic and not all of Ireland. The president National Athletic and Cycling association, Rev Slattery, said ‘he felt it was a pity that Ronnie Delany, who brought such honour to the country, was unable to represent the entire country’ (Irish Independent, Dec 17, p 9). He also declared that the OCI did not fully represent the sports organisations in the country as it ‘was not sufficiently representative of the sports bodies in the country, and was not elected from all the sporting bodies’. Also, that the OCI was acting outside its jurisdiction in confining its selection to the twenty-six Counties and that ‘the NACA was not even asked if it had any athlete capable of competing at Melbourne’.
In respect of a 32 country representation of athletes, we are also told how Ronnie Delany agreed with the prospect of the athletics association representing the 32-counties in the future. In the *Irish Independent* (Dec 20, p 9), Mayor of Limerick Ald. Russell said that ‘no Irish triumph in living memory had caused so much happiness and joy as did Ronnie’s victory in Melbourne’ and ‘he hoped the time was near when Ireland would be represented in International sporting events by one united 32-county body’, it was reported that Ronnie Delany, in his place beside the Mayoral chair, ‘applauded vigorously’ (*Irish Independent* Dec 20, p 9).

### 4.7 Continued efforts of the British government to undermine the legitimacy of the Irish team

The *Irish Press* wrote a piece on the front page ‘Team Represented Ireland’ (Dec 3), on how the International Olympic Council accepted the team as representing Ireland. However, the Marquees of Exeter (Lord Burghley) insisted that in athletic events the country should be described as ‘Eire’, intending of course, to have the Irish word used as meaning the Twenty-Six Counties. He claimed authority to do this as chairman of the International Amateur Athletic Union.

Chief Supt. P.J. Carroll, secretary of the Olympic Council said last night that the statement by the Marquees of Exeter was a matter which would have to come back to the IOC. ‘The Council has ruled already that this country for Olympic purposes is ‘Ireland’”. This was followed up by the *Irish Press* on the 5th December (Page 1) with the Taoiseach’s message to the team referring to ‘All-Ireland’; ‘All Ireland followed their progress with the keenest interest. Delany’s win aroused
great enthusiasm and the gallant display of our boxers and other competitors were a source of pride to Ireland’.

They also wrote how Lord Killanin had ‘protested immediately against the designation of our track and field athletes as being from ‘Eire’ in the official Olympic programme’. The International Olympic Council, president Mr. Avery Brundage, when queried about the matter, gave the promise that ‘‘Ireland’ it is and will be in the future so far as the IOC is concerned’’ (Irish Press, Dec 5th Page 1). A letter from Lord Killanin to Otto Mayer dated 27th Dec, asked for confirmation of his protest to the use of ‘Eire’: ‘I should be very grateful if you could send me the draft minute which refers to my intervention when I discovered that the IAAF were using the word Eire in contravention to the IOC ruling that we were Ireland as it is rather important’. The reply from Otto Mayer confirmed a different issue and sent minutes from the wrong meeting to that asked by Lord Killanin; in the minutes of the meeting of the Executive board of the IOC, in Lausanne, on October 3 and 4, 1956 that ‘Ireland’ was to be used: ‘It is finally decided to maintain the status-quo (using IRELAND)’, but that ‘the Marquess of Exeter demands that his strong protest against this decision be entered in the minutes of the meeting’ (Olympic Archives, D-RM01-IRLAN/002, 1955-1959). Despite the official decision of President Avery Brundage and the IOC that ‘Ireland’ should be used, Lord Burghley used his power as IAAF President to have the name changed to ‘Eire’ for track and field athletes in the Melbourne Games.

Praise in the British papers, although there was not many mentions or space devoted to Delany’s win, did acknowledge the feat in winning gold, ‘Victories like that of R. Delany in the 1,500 metres and C. W. Brasher in the steeplechase make a glance at the stop-watch unnecessary. We know that we have seen a true
champion’ (*The Times*, Dec 20, p25). There was no mention of the issues of naming of the country as ‘Ireland’ or ‘Eire’ in the *The Times* newspaper. However, there is correspondence from Otto Mayer (Chancellor of the IOC) to Cecil Bear editor of the World Sports magazine, London, 28th April, 1957, asking to rectify their reporting of Ireland in their magazine: ‘The official report of the British Olympic Association published used the name ‘Eire’ rather than ‘Ireland’. May we inform you that ‘IRELAND’ is the correct name recognized by the IOC. Therefore, it would be appreciated if you would kindly use above mentioned name where Olympic affairs are concerned’ (Olympic archives, Correspondence of Avery Brundage, 1957).

### 4.8 Delany specifically embodied the sense of Ireland’s national pride, independence and values of the time: Ireland’s Olympic Hero

Despite not being put forward as a favourite to win, after the gold medal achievement, his win was well documented and celebrated across all newspapers. It was well recognised that his win was not only a fantastic achievement but that he won easily by such a large margin, gained him even more praise: ‘What a happy moment we Irishmen had here today as Ronnie Delany breasted the tape. There was not only the breast-swelling emotion of seeing that green jersey in front, there was proud astonishment, too. Seldom, if ever, in Olympic history can this event have been won more decisively’ (*Sunday Independent*, Dec 2, p 18, A. McWeeney).
The Irish Times devoted an article ‘No praise too high for new champion’ after Delany’s win, saying; ‘As one who thought it would have been a superb feat for him to finish in the first six, I must, necessarily, lack adjectives to describe his actual achievement’ (by Fionnbar Callanan). ‘To beat by the unequivocal margin of almost six yards the world’s greatest field of ‘metric milers’ will rank as one of the best performances of the whole games’ (Irish Times, Dec 3, p 2).

All papers were unified in their praise for Delany and his victory for Ireland: ‘Our highest applause is naturally reserved for Ronnie Delany, whose victory has earned the praise of the World’s press and admits him automatically to the ranks of the supreme athletes’ (The Irish Times, Dec 3, p 7). ‘The wonder runner has brought fame to Ireland’ (Irish Independent, Dec 22, p 12).

Delany also received congratulations and accolades from international stars such as Roger Bannister’s tribute ‘I never saw a more beautifully judged race’, in an Irish Independent article by Arthur P. McWeeney (Dec 03, p15), also calling Delany the ‘Hero of the day’.

The Irish Press elevated Delany’s ability in winning to above that of mortals, in the article ‘Ronnie Delany World Beater’, it stated; ‘Nature imitates Art; a truth that Oscar Wilde might have observed. If he were alive today and had been at Melbourne, he might have seen it proved; for the skill and striving of a dedicated few have made a feat, which once seemed far beyond capacity of mortal man, now seem commonplace’ (Dec 5, p10).

The Irish Press also wrote about Delany achieving immortality ‘By beating 11 of the world’s greatest runners in a record Olympic time for the distance, Ronnie
Delany, of Crusaders has joined the immortals of sport’ (Dec 3, p 8, Oliver Weldon). It also appreciated the difficulty of the event and what an achievement it was to win gold. ‘The wonder of that victory, against the highest class competition ever known in the event, has sparked the imagination as no athletic feat by an Irishman has ever done; it is truly an Olympian achievement’.

The Irish Press also hailed Delany as a world class athlete and elevated the position of the 1,500 metre event, ‘These are men who have given the mile of which the 1,500 metres is close kin, a glamour that is unsurpassed by any other event’. Quoting Landy, ‘Ronnie is the world’s greatest’, ‘He is extremely fast. He has stamina and a wonderful mental approach. I was not surprised at his win. I picked him’ (Dec 3, p 8, Oliver Weldon).

Solidifying national image, The Irish Independent spoke of Delany as a star, world class athlete and twice mentioned him as an Olympic hero ‘Crowds surged around Ireland’s Olympic star, world beating Ronnie Delany’ (Dec 20, p 9). The Irish Independent also ran the headline ‘Home is the Hero’, on December 22nd, p22. The article wrote how ‘Ireland was waiting to crown him the king of metric milers’.

Again, it is significant to point out that the praise of Delany’s ‘Heroic’ performance was universal, across all media, irrespective of their political bias. Such a consensus, it could be argued, could have a strong unifying effect. Presenting a figure, uniquely Irish, that everyone could rally behind.
4.9 Delany as a symbol of Catholic Ireland

In 1956 Ireland was still a very religious and majority Catholic country. The Catholic Church at the time played a major institutional role. Eamon de Valera had signed into law, article 44’s which gave a ‘special position’ to the Roman Catholic Church, in the constitution, 1937. Irish Catholicism was an equal and opposite reaction to English Protestantism (Inglis, 2004, pp. 18-19).

*The Irish Independent* and the *Sunday Independent* urged the government to institute an Order of Merit, and suggested it be called an ‘Order of St. Patrick, by which citizens who brought honour and glory to Ireland could be honoured’ (Dec 9, p 5).

When reporting on his win the *Irish Independent* described Delany as having his ‘head bowed in a few moments of thankful prayer’ for one of the greatest Irish Victories in the history of sport (Dec 7, p 17). *The Irish Times* reported that at Delany’s home-coming he said he was overwhelmed by the welcome accorded him adding that he found it ‘most touching’. He expressed that in the future, he hoped he would be able to bring further honour ‘to Dublin and to Catholic Ireland’ (Dec 20, p 7).

The *Irish Independent* also described him as a ‘Shining example to the youth of Catholic Ireland’ (Dec 31, p 8) and ‘in him’, said Rev J.F Roe, ‘we have the perfect sportsman who not only recognises the wonderful powers that are his but at the same time acknowledges from whom he received them’ and this was also quoted in the *Irish Press* (Dec 31, p2).
The Sunday Independent wrote ‘They (Major General W RE Murphy DSO, MC President of Honour, International ABA) were all proud of his victory and appreciated his act of thanksgiving in the moment of his triumph and his gesture praising his great rival and coach John Landy’ (Dec 30, p4). In a scroll awarded to Delany by his former school union, it described him ‘as a shining example to the youth of Catholic Ireland’ (Irish Press, Dec 31, p2). There were no religious mentions in The Times newspaper.

From the media reporting of Delany as an example for ‘Catholic Ireland’, can be seen how being Catholic was very much part of the nation’s cultural heritage and how this may have been used to distance the new nation from Great Britain. Delany displaying religious and specifically Catholic belief after the win (Appendix II – Photo, Delany act of prayer), was a unifying point for all of the Irish national papers to report on, even if they represented different political views. Large international sporting events give the opportunity to the media to exploit historical references and national characters in their reporting. By adapting their reporting of the event and framing their perspective it allows the media to contour a ‘common national boundary’ (Maguire, 2004, p. 851).

4.10 Humble champion

Delany was frequently praised for his modest behaviour and how he conducted himself after the win. The Irish Times wrote, ‘To beat the world in anything is an occasion of justifiable pride. Ireland’s one gold medallist has come home in a blaze of glory; but it has not changed him from the pleasant, modest boy that he was when he left Sandymount’ (Dec 22, p8).
The *Irish Press* also mentioned his modest nature ‘It was typical of this modest young man that when he had won his victory, the man he first sought out to praise and thank was John Landy’ (Dec 05, p 10), and also described his actions post win ‘It was typical of him, that after his victory he should have been away almost immediately to watch Fred Teidt, who was due to box in the Olympic final that night’ (Dec 3, p 9).

### 4.11 Summary

These perceptions of Delany in the media portray him as a modest hero. ‘Hero’ from the Greek word *heroes*, meaning a person distinguished for exceptional courage, fortitude, enterprise, superior quality or deeds. Heroes serve a number of social functions; as role models embodying public values and ideals, as unifying social forces which ‘transport an audience vicariously out of everyday roles into a new reality’ (Klapp, 1964, p. 24). Vitally, Delany was also portrayed as embodying Irish public values of Catholicism and ideals of national unity and independence. Together these attributes and the universal positive reporting lent themselves to Delany becoming a figure the entire country could rally behind, reinforcing their sense of independence and Irishness.
5 CONCLUSION

Sport, can fulfil many functions, it may help to define established boundaries of moral and political communities, it may assist in the creation of new social identities, and it may give physical expression to certain social values and to act as a way of reflecting on those values (MacClancy, 1996, p. 4). Several findings stand out when looking at the results of the research.

Firstly, there was a unified celebration across the Irish National media regardless of the political or religious leaning of the paper. Delany winning Gold in Melbourne was reported with favour regardless of whether the media were pro- or anti-treaty. It could be said that Delany’s win contributed to the sense of ‘nationness’ within Ireland, in a period where Ireland was establishing itself as an independent state with its own national identity.

Second, it was shown how British interference in how Ireland was named and perceived in the Olympic movement, was still a problem in 1956. Sports may be used as a resource by which the powerful can attempt to dominate others. This interference, through Lord Burghley and the IAAF, was strong enough to change the designation of Irish track and field athletes, including Delany’s, to ‘Eire’, despite official rulings from the IOC regarding the naming of the country. The volume of correspondence between the OCI and the IOC about the naming of Ireland in the Olympics shows how important the issue was for the nation of Ireland and how it was perceived by other countries. We have also seen how where there is conflict between nations, the domain of sport becomes increasly politicised (Buckel, 2008). The continued attempts of the governing bodies
sympathetic to the British government’s viewpoint to sow discord in Irish attempts at unity, are evidenced in the struggle outlined above against allowing athletes to compete under the name ‘Ireland’. The governance of athletics in Ireland being the example seen in this research. Sport can divide as much as it has the possibility to unite. Further research should be done regarding the IAAF ruling against the use the ‘Ireland’, instead of ‘Eire’ from 1957 onwards. More extensive analysis of British and Australian papers to ascertain if there were mentions of the use of ‘Eire’ for track and field athletes in the reporting of Delany’s win would be an interesting avenue through which the findings presented herein could be more exhaustively explored.

Third, the Olympic Games have become a politicised arena where nations can vie with one another through sport, while maintaining the Olympic ideal that it is the ‘participation that counts’. In 1936 Hitler tried to exploit the Berlin Olympic Games as a way to demonstrate his Aryan supremacy theory. The superpower countries could be seen to be competing for the top position on the medal table to showcase their countries might. The Olympic Games give an opportunity to display one’s country’s colours and symbols, as well as when winning Gold, the opportunity to play the countries national anthem. In this research the national flag and anthem were reported as important to Delany and the team. This reporting could help enable people to feel attachment to their nation of Ireland through construction of this ‘imagined community’ (Anderson, 1983). Sport, in this context, could be viewed as a means by which Ireland socialised the population into the newly established system of values. Sport, here, had a large importance for Ireland and the building of a national identity of the country, separate to that of Great Britain. This ability of sport to assist in the creation of a sense of identity occurs at the level of the nation-state which can be particularly
important for newly independent states eager to transcend traditional affiliations (MacClancy, 1996, p. 6).

Similarly, Delany, as an Olympic hero for Ireland, embodied the Catholic ideals of the country at the time. After the race he made the sign of the cross before dropping to his knees in a prayer like way. Also in interviews for papers he frequently was quoted using the phrase ‘Catholic Ireland’ as a way to describe the country. In this way Delany solidified Ireland’s separation from Britain by laying down a religious demarcation line. He galvanized the sense of an independent 32 county Catholic country known as Ireland.

In summary, it has been shown that sport is important in configuring nationalism and that newspaper reporting can promote a form of nationalism or ‘sporting nationalism’ (Cho, 2009, p. 360). This sporting nationalism can contribute to encouraging national unity and belonging, which were vital components of Ireland as a fledgling independent state. The games would be a small event if it were not for the media reporting and broadcasting the event to millions of supporters worldwide. The daily newspapers, especially at the time of Delany’s win, played a big role in shaping opinions and values of the people reading them. The media reported on the performances of all of ‘Team Ireland’ and congratulated them but coverage focused on Ronnie Delany’s gold medal win. Linking the success of Ireland’s world-class athlete to the success of the nation. This collective identity of the Irish nation could be developed, based on the common experience of Delany’s win for Ireland and experience around the Olympics for the Irish people. In this context the struggle for the government to send an Irish team to the Olympics in Melbourne was justified by the success of the team as ambassadors for the country and especially Delany’s Gold as the ultimate symbol of that success.
6 REFERENCES


7 APPENDICES

7.1 Appendix I – Results tables 1 and 2.

<table>
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<tr>
<th>Newspaper</th>
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<th>Articles (% among Irish Papers)</th>
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<td>-</td>
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<td>13</td>
<td>14.6%</td>
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Table 1: Frequency and distribution of articles in newspapers studied.
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<th>Negative/neutral mentions</th>
<th>Referral to issue of ‘Eire’</th>
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<td>3</td>
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<td>0</td>
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<tr>
<td>The Sunday Independent (IRL)</td>
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<td>23 (19.7)</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
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</table>

Table 2: Frequency and distribution of photographs and mentions.
7.2 Appendix II – Photos

Photo 1: Ronnie Delany post win, act of prayer (Olympic Archives).
Photo 2; Ronnie Delany winning the 1,500 metre race, Melbourne, 1956 (Olympic Archives).

Photo 3: Ronnie Delany on the Podium, Melbourne, 1956 (Olympic Archives).
Photo 4: Photo of the large Irish flag in the Olympic village (Olympic Archives).
Photo 5: Summary of Delany’s win and use of Eire, (Olympic Archives).

Photos 6, 7, 8 & 9 – Athletics programmes from Melbourne, date above with scoreboard designation below.