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MARGARET NELSON

I WORK HARD I PLAY HARD

LIFE MAGAZINE



IN THE ICE A PAIR OF BOOTS PROTRUDED THEY WERE GERARD'S

MAEVE SHEEHAN. THIS SECTION, PAGE 20



First-class for Cullen, misery for Olympians

Sports Minister pads around first-class in his pyjamas as Olympians travel in cramped seats

JODY CORCORAN, ALISON O'RIORDAN and JEROME REILLY

IRELAND'S greatest athlete, Eamonn Coghlan, has given a damning assessment of the medal prospects of the country's Olympians as anger erupted yesterday over the treatment of our elite sports men and women in Beijing.

In an interview with the *Sunday Independent*, Mr Coghlan suggested that our track and field athletes had no chance of winning medals at the Olympics, saying the best they could hope for was to get through to the first-round heats.

Mr Coghlan's comments will re-open controversy in relation to the development of Ireland's high-performance athletes.

In four years since the Athens Olympics, €30m has been spent preparing teams for Beijing — but success on the world stage is still elusive.

The first signs of unhappiness among our Olympians emerged yesterday when it was revealed that they were forced to travel economy class on the 14-hour trip to Beijing — while Sports Minister Martin Cullen travelled first-class. "My flight here to Beijing was pretty uncomfortable,"



CONTROVERSY: Left, Minister for Sport Martin Cullen. Right, former world champion runner Eamonn Coghlan. See Page 5



Olympic coverage: Sport, Pages 1, 6, 7 & 16

complained canoeist Eoin Rheinisch. "The plane was packed and I had one of the worst seats possible — stuck in the middle. It was impossible to sleep, as the people in front kept reclining their seats fully. "Normally I can sleep well on a flight — but not this one. It meant I arrived in Beijing at 8.30am and then had to stay awake until about 9pm that night. If you fall asleep in the middle of the day, it's a disaster for jet lag."

Meanwhile, Mr Cullen — in a separate airplane — was spotted wandering around in his pyjamas, clearly enjoying

all the comforts available on his long-haul flight. An eyewitness told the *Sunday Independent* how Mr Cullen walked — in his pyjamas — from first-class back to business class to check on his children, who also travelled to Beijing, though not at the State's expense.

The family of Irish boxer, Kenneth Egan, who made a winning start yesterday, also complained bitterly about the treatment of our Olympians and their families, as opposed to politicians, their families and civil servants.

Mr Egan's father, Paul,

along with his brother and supporters, had to go on a frantic hunt just hours before the fight. They finally had to buy tickets on the black market. "We had to go and buy tickets — on the black market, they cost us a fortune. Not just me, but all the gang here. We had to buy tickets for everybody," he said.

A spokeswoman for the Sports Minister confirmed Mr Cullen also watched the Egan fight at the Workers' Gymnasium, accompanied by his son and daughter.

The official Irish Government party to Beijing includes the Minister, his press advisor, his private secretary and another senior official. The Minister will be at the Games until August 17, though that may change, depending on Ireland's medal chances.

However, Eamonn Coghlan told the *Sunday Independent* that while he wished the track and field athletes well, he was not optimistic about their chances of winning medals — drawing a clear distinction between premiership and division one athletes.

He said: "The Irish athletes are superstars at division one

Continued on Page 5 & 'No medals for the Irish,' predicts Eamonn Coghlan.

EDDIE'S NEW INSPIRATION



EDDIE HATES SECOND PLACE, BUT LOVES HIS SECOND WIFE: Veteran Irish show jumper Eddie Macken hated coming second in Friday's Aga Khan Cup. But having his new bride, blonde beauty Kathi Ballentine, cheering him on was a constant source of encouragement throughout the competition. Photo: David Conachy. Full Story, Page 5

Oil price fall won't reduce energy bills

MAEVE SHEEHAN

THE falling price of oil will not be passed on to Irish householders, who are facing huge increases in their energy bills.

Although the price of oil is down 20 per cent on last month, to \$114 a barrel, consumers won't reap the benefits in their bi-monthly gas and electricity bills.

The ESB and Bord Gais said this weekend that price increases of 17.5 per cent and 20 per cent respectively will go ahead, regardless of cheaper oil prices.

The bi-monthly electricity bills increased by an average of €30 on August 1; while gas will jump 20 per cent from September 1, increasing the yearly gas bill by about €150.

The spiralling cost of oil has been blamed for the enormous electricity and gas increases, which were

amongst the main contributory factors to inflation. The price of crude oil peaked at \$147 in July, but by Friday had fallen back to \$114 a barrel.

'Ireland's slump is golden opportunity for success — and the economy's recovery starts now,' writes Daniel McConnell, Page 2

An ESB spokesman said that if oil prices remain stable in the next few months, savings will be reflected in future pricing.

Oil and gas prices are due for review by the Commission for Energy Regulation (CER) in October, but there are no

Continued on Page 2

JOHN O'KEEFFE

Cleaners give us the brush-off

WHERE have all our cleaners gone? From Brazil to Latvia, from Lithuania to Poland, they came to us in their thousands. Broad-shouldered women born of communism and dictatorships seeking a better life armed with only a dustpan, brush and mop.

They came to conquer a new world, to seek out an untidy civilisation, to boldly go where no house coat from Riga had gone before. They came, they cleaned — now they've gone missing.

Was it something we said, or do these non-Irish cleaners whom we loved so much know something about the economy that we

don't? Up and down the country, women folk are reporting their cleaners to the local gardai as missing persons. Last week, I called into a friend to find her busily hoovering her front room in preparation for the arrival of her Brazilian cleaner. It was a pathetic sight. Not the fact that she was cleaning the house up for the cleaner; that is, after all, a national condition.

What was far more tragic was that this Brazilian cleaner had not been there for eight weeks without a by your leave. Not so much as a thank-you that my friend had allowed her to inspect the house which she had, in fact, cleaned every week. Like so many of her

comrades from eastern Europe and the Americas, her cleaner had fled the jurisdiction. The question is why? Perhaps they have had enough of the doom and gloom and have seen the writing on the wall. Maybe, just maybe, they know that as we flail in this economic turmoil, we may soon be no longer in a position to pay them. As their men folk head back to Warsaw and Rio, they dutifully follow to a better life of double-digit economic growth, zero unemployment and a health service that actually works.

Or maybe they sense that the Irish economy has now bottomed. With the consumer-price index looking good, and inflation

and oil prices down, this can all mean only one thing: Mammy can drop the second job and be at home more. The only problem is that Mammy will now have to do something she hasn't had to do in a long time — the cleaning. Relax ladies; remember you've been doing it all along anyway for the weekly Polish cleaner's inspection.

From the men of Ireland, all we can say to the eastern European and South American cleaners is thanks for the memories. It has been a rollercoaster clean over the past 10 years and we're going to miss you.

Now if you will excuse me, I have some dusting to be getting on with.

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