

## Lure of the Classroom Proves Irresistible

Contributed by Knowledgeable Noel  
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"Mister, mister," the young boy began, eyes dancing in his head, "my father says Nancy is the brains of your operation, so he does. Is that true, sir?"

Oh how we laughed, Nancy and myself. Our annual trip to the schools of the parish for the 's Noel What Knows, You Know question and answer sessions always stimulates the fun side of our well-rounded personalities.

"Does he now," I replied, between poorly-suppressed bouts of laughter, "isn't he a terror entirely, hah? Between the pair of you, you'll only be giving Nancy ideas."

The class loosened up. Children get uptight in the weeks before the First Holy Communion. Sensing this boy's endearing audacity was having the effect of distracting their busy little minds, I decided to prolong the engagement still further.

With the renowned glint in my eye, I added: "Now, young Dalaigh, when you go home this evening, you'll have a question for your father too, from your new friend Noel..."

I let it sit there for a moment, children watching wide-mouthed and gape-eyed, transfixed by it all...

"Ask him if ever regrets turning over possession in the final minutes of the '99 county final, and if he had it all over again would he have stuck to the team's game-plan to let the ball do the work, instead of doing his own thing as always, and ask him then if he remembers the depth of compassion shown to him by the manager {a conspiratorial wink here by me} of the Ballybore team, as he sat crying in the dressing room for a full two hours after the game?"

Well, you can only begin to imagine the excitement. They whooped, they hollered, and they buck-lepped. The teacher, with patches on his elbows, was stuck for words.

"Noel," he eventually said, "You certainly made an impact. I'm not sure I would have the self-confidence to do it that way, but I must bow to your greater experience."

With that, he made as if to bow, though Nancy was later adamant his sudden movement actually constituted him having a strong weakness. He certainly seemed pale.

As I reflected Tuesday night on another magnificent day, I felt bad about it, because the last thing I would ever want is to undermine the incumbent teacher by having a child go through his school years wishing he could have Noel as his teacher.

Dealing with children comes easy to me. I was the first player-manager of the Scoil Iosa agus Naofa school team. We won our second ever divisional title, and might have done the two-in-a-row in Sixth Class were it not for the historic outbreak of ingrown toenails in Ballybore.

's hard to win a divisional championship at the best of times, let alone when half your team is playing with weeping eyes and burning feet.

"But Noel," Nancy often says, "getting them out at all was one of the greatest successes you ever had as a manager. And you only lost by four points, despite the Croke Park contagion ruling on not tackling your opponents."

"Walking single file nine miles to the pitch, 200 yards apart at all times, is no way to prepare for a final."

Days like last Tuesday remind me why I never gave up the teaching to pursue the broadcasting and writing full-time. Teaching was in my blood.

Micheal O'Muircheartaigh has me plagued to join me as co-commentator. RTE have even vowed to relax the rule which says that a co-commentator can only come 'in' once during each half.

There's a standing invite in the Irish Examiner, of course. It goes without saying, which possibly explains why it

hasn't been said in a while.

Apart from ghost-writing Michael Moynihan's column, I stick to the occasional contributions, the famous Noel & Nancy match commentaries on the local radio, the two of us coming in on separate mobiles, and, of course, my role as chairman of the McNamee Awards panel.

\* I still get phone calls from past-pupils. It might have been no more than an encouraging pat on the back during a kickaround in the schoolyard, or a two-hour talk on the breaking ball in the evenings, but they never forget me for it.

"John Evans will never forget you, that's for sure," John Evans said on the phone to me the other evening. He was always a rogue, John. "John Evans was always a rogue, everyone knows that, even John Evans," he laughed, the rogue, John Evans.

And it's for moments like that — or the confused look on young Dalaigh going home with his question to his father — that I still yearn for the classroom. I have no doubt my It's Noel What Knows, You Know tours of the local schools will continue for many years yet.

\* I leave the room whenever my own candidature is discussed, which explains why I have won McNamees in all the main categories: Best personal reminiscence in a county final programme, Best sideline interview in a NFL match, and Most Authoritative Public Address Announcer.

Noel knows Noel. Noel knows everyone knows Noel knows Noel. Email him at [knowledgeablenoel@examiner.ie](mailto:knowledgeablenoel@examiner.ie); visit [www.knowledgeablenoel.com](http://www.knowledgeablenoel.com); or get to know him on Twitter (KnowledgeNoel.)