

# Nothing Expeditious As Noel Leads Ballybore On Road To Glory

Contributed by Knowledgeable Noel  
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I have long felt a close affinity with Shackleton. "The pair of you are soul brothers," Nancy often says.

We share uncannily similar ideas on how to marshal the men in our care, though I would tend to be more personable with them, and the suggestion of a certain standoffishness in Shackleton's personality did him little credit.

Both of us constructed all of our triumphs on the same principles of optimism, egalitarianism, humour, ingenuity, intelligence, and selflessness: and, most importantly of all, an unshakeable belief in the virtue of devolving key decisions to the "troops" so that they gain a sense of proprietorship, and thus enter into the mission with a gusto that could never be achieved through the old, redundant model of top-down leadership.

In short, Shackleton understood, as I do, that once you let men think they are in charge, they'll do anything you tell them.

I was ruminating on all of this in the front room Tuesday night, consigning the occasional sentence to the notepad where I am assembling my memoirs, when there came from the kitchen a loud, shrieking noise and a low, dull thud. At first, I feared my darling Nancy had fallen from the step-ladder — I had warned her about her tendency to over-reach into the tight corners — and when there was no further sound for a full two minutes, I feared the worst.

I rushed to investigate. To my great relief, she was picking herself up off the ground, albeit gingerly. She had, indeed, gone too far with the rolling pin, but the sink had broken her fall and, apart from an almost imperceptible limp, and a bruising on the right side of her lower stomach hinting at minor internal bleeding, she was as healthy as a pawn broker's bank balance.

"Nancy, you gave me a fright," I said, "I don't know what I would have done if I came in here and found you in a heap on the floor, blood everywhere and maybe you out cold. How would I have coped with that?"

She hates to see me distressed in any way, and moved to calm me lest my blood pressure re-emerge. "Noel, Noel," she hushed me, "relax yourself now. You have been spared that trauma. Your wife is fine. Sit down and I will fix you a cup of tea."

Anyway, I digress. Back in the front room, with the aforementioned cup of tea by my side, I reflected on the power of good example, another favourite of Shackleton's, and mine, too, of course.

"Lads," I say in every team-talk, "I would never ask you to do anything I didn't do myself. But this is not about me. This is not about the eleven-in-a-row, or my four inaugurations into the Ballybore Hall of Fame, or the 19 years playing for the county, or any of that old nonsense."

Each time, they stare at me with the blank faces of men on the front line.

"The old days are gone now," I continue. "Let you not be burdened by the hand of history. When you go out there today, I don't want you saying to yourself 'I better do this for Noel, and all he did for this club'."

"Instead, I want every last man out there saying to himself 'I am going to play this game this way because Noel says it is the right thing to do, and everyone knows Noel knows, with all he won in the game.'"

"This will give allow you to transmute the base metal of this club's noble tradition into a 22-carat gold performance, a few long-range scores, maybe keep your man scoreless, particularly if you're playing in the full-forward line."

I am certain this is the same methodology Shackleton employed to keep his men eating out of his hand, metaphorically speaking, and perhaps literally too, because Shackleton, notwithstanding his unrivalled skill as an expedition leader, did cut it a bit fine on the food stocks.

On my watch, no Ballybore player ever lacks for an orange quarter at half-time.

Inevitably Shackleton, too, noticed how certain members of the group react in quite bizarre fashion to the onerous responsibility placed on their shoulders.

I have no doubt Shackleton, too, had to contend with the sight and sound of his entire crew rolling about down below in great paroxysms of laughter, only minutes before they were to set off on a, say, 50-mile hike across Elephant Island.

And I am equally certain Shackleton would have dealt with this potentially debilitating development in much the same manner I did last Sunday, as I concluded my inspirational 35-minute pep talk before our first championship match: by storming out the door in a flurry of angry words, thus obliging them to work out the finer details of the expedition themselves, and promoting the sense of proprietorship I mentioned earlier.

As always, it had the desired effect..

They performed with that empowering lack of inhibition that comes from playing in the grip of overwhelming fear. Later, as Nancy and I mulled over the game while on our favourite 44-mile circuit on the bike, we agreed it was Ballybore's finest performance\* of the modern era, otherwise known as this year.

"Shackleton would be proud," Nancy observed, and we going up-and-over into the breeze up what locals call "The Mountain Noel Reduced To a Molehill", "though I'm not sure he'd have thought of the inspired switches you made."

\* We lost by two points. But it's the process of performance I always focus on, never results. Noel paddles his own canoe. And never gives up, no matter how steep the hill. Email him at [knowledgeablenoel@examiner.ie](mailto:knowledgeablenoel@examiner.ie); visit [www.knowledgeablenoel.com](http://www.knowledgeablenoel.com); or join the expedition on Twitter ([KnowledgeNoel](https://twitter.com/KnowledgeNoel).)