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Richard K. Fox, the National Police Gazette and Ireland's Sporting Memory

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ABSTRACT

Born in Belfast in 1846, Richard K. Fox emigrated to the United States in 1874 and, from there, eventually began a sporting empire which shaped American sport during the late nineteenth-century. Beginning work with the National Police Gazette in 1876, Fox turned the magazine into one of the most influential, and widely read, magazines in the United States. Focusing on boxing, wrestling, strength sports and a host of other activities, the National Police Gazette was renowned for both its breadth of coverage and its unparalleled access among athletes. Few works have situated Fox's many editorials and sponsorships within the context of his emigrant status. Building on such works, this article provides the first in-depth examination of Richard K. Fox and his importance for Irish athletes (specifically pugilists), and Irish identity, within the United States. At a time of increasing Irish emigration to the United States, especially in the latter half of the nineteenth-century, Fox proved pivotal in the promotion and management of Irish athletes while simultaneously becoming a symbol of successful Irish integration in the United States.

KEYWORDS Ireland; National Police Gazette; sport; immigrants; popular culture

There are few citizens of the United States who are as welcome abroad as Mr. Richard K. Fox, the proprietor of the Police Gazette ...¹

The National Police Gazette, 3 August 1895.

In 1893, Richard Kyle Fox, the editor of the *National Police Gazette*, undertook a short tour of Ireland and Great Britain. Done during the height of his influence, Fox's tour mixed business with pleasure in equal measure. The tour, one of many taken to Ireland during these years, Fox met with British and Irish athletes, undertook a series of sailing expeditions and visited family members. Fox had built his fortune in the United States but he was not an American citizen. He was born in Ireland, specifically Belfast, a point he took special pride in. His newspaper, the *Police Gazette* was one of the United States' most prominent sporting periodicals during

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the nineteenth-century. In fact, it had revolutionised American sport and helped push it towards greater levels of organisation and promotion. It helped to organise prize fights in boxing, promote unknown athletes, sponsor matches and proved pivotal in the early years of women's sport.² Some of the *Gazette's* greatest innovations, such as the popularisation of championship belts in boxing, remain to this very day. The sporting importance of the *Gazette*, was not a mistake, but rather a deliberate effort made by Fox and his writers to shape American sport. When Fox joined the newspaper in 1876 it was known more as a cheap pulp paper which delighted in scandalous and, at times, seditious stories. Within two decades it was an authority in the sporting world, which many credited to Fox's vision and deliberate pivoting towards sport. Fox's legacy and impact in American sports has long been detailed by historians of American history. He has been depicted as a chief evangelist in a certain kind of rugged American masculinity, as a man who shaped print standards in the United States and a man who revolutionised prize fighting.³ What has received less attention in all of this research is his Irish heritage and importance for Irish athletes. This article will focus on his promotion of Irish pugilists.

During the course of the nineteenth century, Irish sportsmen, and occasionally women, were regular participants in American sports. From boxing to pedestrianism, there was rarely a feature of American sport which did not include athletes born in Ireland or of Irish heritage. This explains why Patrick Redmond's excellent, and all-encompassing, history of Irish-American sport was titled *The Irish and the Making of American Sport*.⁴ Redmond's research, which marked the most extensive study of Irish athletes in America, stressed the importance of Irish athletes and spectators in advancing the growth of competitive sport in the United States. Fox, for obvious reasons, was part of this story, but often in passing reference. The importance Redmond placed on Irish athletes in this regard has been reiterated by other historians.⁵ Building on such works, this article provides the first in-depth examination of Richard K. Fox and his importance for Irish athletes, and Irish identity, within the United States. At a time of increasing Irish emigration to the United States, especially in the latter half of the nineteenth-century, Fox proved pivotal in the promotion and management of Irish athletes while simultaneously becoming a symbol of successful Irish integration in the United States.

Studying Fox in this way, this article is divided into three distinct but interrelated sections dealing with Irish immigration, Fox, and Irish athletes. First, attention is given to the waves of Irish emigration to the United States

during the nineteenth century, a movement Fox himself was part of. This is done to stress the vibrancy, and volume, of Irish emigration to America while also contextualising Fox's life and times in the United States. Following this, the article discusses Fox's promotion of Irish athletes, beginning first with a general overview before studying two famous pugilists supported by Fox, the Irish born pugilist John Morrissey and the American-Irish prize-fighter John L. Sullivan. While the Irish-American Sullivan's story has been well covered by Adam Pollack, this article directs attention specifically to his Irish-American identity.⁶ Finally, the article explores Fox's importance in Ireland. In doing so, Fox's importance as both a promoter, and symbol, of Irish immigration in the United States becomes clear.

The Irish Diaspora and Richard K. Fox

From 1801 to 1921, it is estimated that roughly eight million men, women and children left Ireland for foreign soil. Their destination varied depending on the period but such movement generally centred on North America, Great Britain and Australasia.⁷ While the scope and depth of this emigration is beyond the remit of the present article, it is nevertheless important to stress the differing waves of Irish emigration during this period to North America. The first major influx of Irish emigrants to the United States came in the early eighteenth-century when Ulster Presbyterians began travelling to Boston and New England. Between 1700 and 1775, roughly 200,000 Ulster Presbyterians made this journey in a trip motivated primarily by the desire to escape religious discrimination.⁸ Religion would continue to remain important, and certainly become a means of comfort to many who travelled from Ireland to the United States, but it began to take a secondary position to economic concerns in the coming decades. Kerby Miller's work in this regard is particularly illustrative. Surveying the motives of Irish emigration across the course of the nineteenth-century, Miller cited the varying economic, social and religious reasons for emigration.⁹ Chief motives, especially among younger generations, related to the economic opportunities offered in the United States.

This was undoubtedly true for many individuals, from numerous countries, who emigrated to the United States during the course of the nineteenth-century. Two points, however, mark the Irish experience of emigration to America as particularly unique. The first was, of course, the 'Great Famine' of the mid-nineteenth century whose effect on

agriculture and commerce in Ireland acted as one of the greatest factors pushing men and women away from Ireland. Emigration to the United States was occurring prior to the 1840s but it was in the period during and immediately after the Famine that an intensification of Irish emigration arose.¹⁰ Such emigration was, much to the chagrin of later cultural nationalists, deemed by many to have deprived Ireland of young and intelligent men and women.¹¹ This, much like the trips undertaken by the Ulster Presbyterians in the previous century, was a trip born from necessity. The second factor which marked the Irish case as relatively unique was the permanency of emigration for so many. Gerard Moran's work found that unlike many other emigrant populations in the United States during the nineteenth-century, Irish immigrants tended to stay in the United States permanently and sent money back to Irish relatives.¹² Where other populations travelled to the United States, worked, saved money, and then returned to their home countries, many Irishmen and women preferred instead to remain within the United States.

What is significant about the post-Famine period was that the practice of moving to North America had become normalised for many within Ireland. This is not to discount the difficulty involved in emigrating but rather to recognise that with so many Irishmen and women in the United States, the idea and logistics of moving to the United States become somewhat easier to imagine for those who undertook the journey from the 1860s onwards.¹³ Included in this wave of emigration is the protagonist of the present article, Richard K. Fox. Born in Belfast in 1846, Fox grew up in the immediate aftermath of the Great Famine. Although there is some debate about the severity of the Famine in the north of Ireland when compared to the rest of the country, few have disputed the impact it wrought on the region.¹⁴ Fox was born to Scotch-Irish parents, whom he later claimed imbued him with an 'American enterprise and energy'.¹⁵ His first employment came in his late teens with the *Banner of Ulster*, a periodical produced by the Presbyterian Church in Ireland.¹⁶ Staying with the *Banner* for four years, Fox eventually moved to the *Belfast News Letter*.

At that time the *News Letter* was one of the country's premier periodicals. It was perhaps not the 'richest and most powerful newspaper in Ireland', as Fox later claimed, but it was influential and provided good training to a then novice journalist.¹⁷ Staying with the *News Letter* for nearly a decade, where he eventually rose to be the second in command of the counting room service, Fox eventually emigrated to the United

States in 1874. Settled in New York, Fox gained employment first with the *Commercial Bulletin* and then, soon after, with the *Police Gazette*.¹⁸ It was at this point that Fox began to gain much greater autonomy in the direction of his career. Founded in 1845 by Enoch E. Camp and George Wilkes, the *Police Gazette* focused initially on crime and criminals. This was not an academic interest but rather it was written for mass consumption and entertainment. Under the control of Camp and Wilkes for two decades, the periodical became a popular, although at times reviled, part of American popular culture. This continued to be the case under the *Gazette's* next owner, George W. Matsell who bought the periodical in 1866.¹⁹

It was Matsell who hired Richard K. Fox in the 1870s and Matsell from whom Fox gained a greater appreciation of the skills needed to run a successful periodical. Fox later recorded his early time with the *Gazette* in almost poetic terms

To see the slender, almost boyish proprietor of this wonderful business moving modestly and good humouredly through its mazes . . . is to make one convinced that after all even Monte Cristo was a possible character, with the difference, however, that Monte Cristo had his fortune made for him, while Richard K. Fox forced fortune to smile on him by his own genius, good judgment and indomitable energy of will . . .²⁰

How and why Fox's fortunes increased, although perhaps not as heroically as he later claimed, stemmed from a much broader cultural interest in gender and scandal. The mid to late nineteenth-century was, as John Kasson argued, a time of considerable gender anxiety.²¹ While it is correct to assert that every period seems to undergo its own unique gender crisis, the late nineteenth century has nevertheless been highlighted as a movement of remarkable instability.²² New technologies which facilitated the growth of pulp newspapers, magazines and photographs led to a growing fascination with the physical body and all that it represented.

It was a growing 'cult of masculinity' and appreciation of sport which many have credited with Fox's successes on becoming editor of the *Gazette* in 1877.²³ The United States, much like Great Britain, underwent a sporting revolution during the course of the nineteenth-century wherein sport increased not only in popularity but also in openness of availability. Fox himself was pivotal in this evolution. The *Gazette* played a key role in organising sporting contests in a range of disciplines, it reported on sporting celebrities and records. In many ways, the *Gazette* proved vital in building the relationship between sport and the media in

American sport. This was a time when sport was becoming increasingly democratised, by which it is meant more and more men, and in time women, began engaging in sporting practices.²⁴ Among many men, sport became a means of establishing and re-asserting a masculinity steeped in ideas of strength, hardship and struggle. There was, as Gail Bederman, previously explained, a growing celebration of the strong man in American culture.²⁵ This arguably culminated in the early years of the 1900s when President Theodore Roosevelt used sport as a means of displaying his vibrant and rugged individualism. Turning to the *Gazette*, Fox's decision to devote more and more attention to sport in the late 1870s coincided almost perfectly with this movement.

Whereas previously the *Gazette* was known for its reporting on crime and scandal, it became one of the country's most popular sporting outlets. It reported on sporting events, but also organised, scheduled, and promoted them. One of the peculiar aspects of the *Gazette* during the late nineteenth-century was how influential the periodical became in organising events, creating tournaments and crowning winners. While Ryan Murtha and Thomas Hunt's contribution to this issue highlights the influence of Fox in sports like pedestrianism, prize fighting or boxing will be the focus of the present article.²⁶ Boxing became the most obvious outlet for Fox as it was here where the *Gazette* organised prize fights between elite athletes, gave championship belts to victors, and printed exclusive interviews with athletes. Other sporting newspapers in the United States existed, but it was the *Gazette* which many turned to when looking for the latest sporting news and gossip.²⁷ This factor explains why Fox and the *Gazette* was so significant for Irish athletes, and those of Irish heritage, as it was undoubtedly the largest sporting platform in the United States and one which was always open to immigrant athletes across a range of different sports.

Sport was an important draw for the *Gazette* but it was not the only area the periodical targeted. Equally important was a continued, albeit lessened, emphasis on crime. The move from urban to rural commerce in large parts of the United States was often accompanied by overpopulated slums, poor hygiene, low wages, and often restricted economic opportunities.²⁸ Fear that crime was increasing was found in many parts of the United States. Certainly, Fox's city, New York, was home to ever present concern about crime and criminality, especially among newly arrived immigrants.²⁹ That Fox's periodical came to focus on outlandish acts of crime and gory forms of murder explains, in part, its appeal. Taken together, the combination of sport and

scandal ensured the *Gazette* enjoyed a wide readership in the United States which was often in the hundreds of thousands.³⁰ It was this combination of 'men, women and their bodies' which many created with underpinning the *Gazette's* success.³¹ Summing up the periodical's importance, Guy Reel explained it thusly

For many years, the *Gazette* was the most important of the tabloid publications and it was thus in a position to most obviously personalize, dramatize, and sensationalize issues of the greatest importance to its readers ...³²

Pausing then, momentarily, it is worth reflecting on Fox's biography and the success of his periodical a number of themes emerge. First it is worth noting that Fox himself was incredibly proud of his self-written 'rags to riches' story which began in post-Famine Belfast and ended with fame and luxury in New York. His was very much the celebrated story of the 'American dream' wherein immigrants came to the United States with little to show for themselves but through a combination of hard work and determination enriched themselves.³³ However, naïve this promise may have been for some groups in the United States at this time, Kristin Hoganson's research spoke to the allure of this idea for many.³⁴ Certainly, there is little evidence to believe that Fox himself did not ascribe to this idea. In dealing with athletes, as is discussed in the next section, the *Gazette* delighted in similar 'rags to riches' stories, especially when it came to Irish athletes who travelled from rural, often poorer, parts of Ireland. Second, it is clear that the *Gazette* was a platform, however lurid it may have been at times, which held a great deal of importance in American and even European sport. In organising prize fights for American pugilists, for example, Fox and the *Gazette* often recruited athletes from mainland Europe, a point which gave the *Gazette* an, at times, global reach. Taken together, such factors bode well for recent Irish emigres, or those of Irish heritage, as it ensured both a supporter and promoter in the guise of Fox's *Gazette*.

A Platform for Irish Athletes

Over the course of Fox's tenure with the *Gazette*, the periodical covered everything from boxing to women's weightlifting. When discussing Fox's influence for Irish sportsmen, it is wise therefore to limit discussions to a single sport. Given the importance boxing played in both sustaining the *Gazette's* readership, as well as attracting more readers, it is useful to focus

solely on pugilism as it was here where Fox's interest continually returned. Where Murtha and Hunt's article from this special issue focuses on the Irish pedestrianism Daniel O'Leary and his appearances in the *Gazette*, the present article instead discusses two pugilists greatly favoured by Fox, John Morrissey and John L. Sullivan. Of the two, Sullivan was the more successful and the more familiar to Fox. He was, at one point in his career in the late 1800s, the most feared pugilist in the world. Morrissey, on the other hand, was an individual more famous for his later time as an American Congressman than his time fighting. Both, however, held links to Ireland which Fox exploited in speaking of their legacies and their fights. John Morrissey was born in Templemore, County Tipperary in 1831 and died in New York in 1878. Despite fighting prior to Fox's time with the *Gazette*, Morrissey was routinely featured in *Gazette* reports on Irish fights, especially when it came to the second athlete discussed, John L. Sullivan. Sullivan, unlike Morrissey, was born in the United States to Irish parents. One of the most influential boxers of his generation Sullivan was depicted, both in the United States and abroad, as an Irish-American champion, and as one who simultaneously represented his native and adoptive land.

Turning first to Morrissey, whom the *Gazette* took a real interest in, his biographer and *Gazette* sports editor, William Edgar Harding, provided many of the themes which the periodical delighted in. He began boxing in the late 1840s, often operating in the nexus between the criminal and commercial classes and, finally, he displayed the sort of rugged manliness that the *Gazette* routinely promoted.³⁵ Even his boxing nickname, 'Old Smoke', was steeped in mysticism. This, incidentally, was part of the periodical's doing. In 1880, Richard K. Fox's publishing company printed a small biography on Morrissey entitled *John Morrissey: his life, battles and wrangles, from his birth in Ireland until he died a state senator*. In it, readers were told of Morrissey's rags to riches story whose twists and turns were similar, at times, to Fox's own heroic biography.³⁶ As retold in his biography, Morrissey's nickname supposedly stemmed from a brawl fight in a saloon over a woman, Kate Ridgely, in the late 1840s. During the course of the fight, Morrissey fell into a burning coal stove whose coals lit his coat on fire before spreading to his flesh. Still in pain, Morrissey continued fighting, ultimately beating his opponent Tom McCann.³⁷

The majority of Morrissey's career in mid-nineteenth century America was conducted on largely similar lines. He was a pugilist whose fame came before the time of glamorous prize-fights. Illustrative of this was a

prize fight against a Californian boxer in 1852, George Thompson. Now participating in organised fights, rather than those which stemmed from love interests, Morrissey was still an underdeveloped boxer at this point. Fighting for the 'Championship of America', a grandiose title devised by the fight's promoters, Morrissey brought with him a large crowd of supporters who ultimately turned the tide of the fight in his favour. According to later reports, Thompson ceded the bout when it became clear that pro-Morrissey spectators posed a threat to his life. Morrissey claimed the prize money amounting to roughly \$2,000 and the title of 'Champion of America'. Later reporting in the *Police Gazette*, W.E. Harding used this incidence as an example of the kind of impassioned support and borderline criminality attached to Irish sportsmen. Where other periodicals may have decried such elements, the *Gazette* celebrated them.³⁸

The most memorable fight of Morrissey's career was not his fight against Thompson but rather against a fellow Irishman, 'Yankee Sullivan'. Born in Cork in 1811, James 'Yankee' Sullivan emigrated to the United States in the early 1840s. A proficient bare-knuckle boxer, who had previously served a penal sentence in Australia, Yankee Sullivan's reputation as a proficient boxer was unquestioned among many of his contemporaries.³⁹ In 1841, just prior to his move to the United States, Sullivan defeated English middle-weight champion Hammer Lane after nineteen rounds. When he travelled to the United States, therefore, he did so with a champion moniker. Over the course of the 1840s, Sullivan's reputation grew, as did his infamy. An attempt to host a prize bout with American Tom Hyer in 1851 nearly descended into a small-scale riot, which some have described as a clandestine battle between immigrants and anti-immigrants.⁴⁰ Part of the violent following attached to Sullivan came from his association with Tammany Hall, a violent and corrupt faction associated with the Democratic party in New York. At the eventual Sullivan and Hyer bout, Hyer defeated Sullivan after fifteen rounds, a victory he celebrated by tearing an Irish flag in half to the cheers of his anti-immigrant following.⁴¹

Soon after the bout Hyer retired and Sullivan, somewhat contentiously, claimed the title of heavyweight champion. It was this title which Sullivan brought into his bout with Morrissey in 1853. This fight, held in Boston Corner, Massachusetts was a defining moment in both men's careers. Its notoriety stemmed primarily from its violence. At one point in the fight, members of the audience were said to have feared for Morrissey's life

owing to the beating inflicted on him by Sullivan. Despite protestations to end the bout, the referee allowed the fight to continue, thereby granting Morrissey the opportunity to win the match. It was this fight, and Morrissey's subsequent bout with American boxer and known criminal William Poole, which routinely appeared in later issues of the *Police Gazette*.⁴² In the first instance, the periodical often used Morrissey and, to a lesser extent, Sullivan, as prototype Irish boxers from which later athletes could be compared.⁴³ For example, when, in 1881, a Tipperary born boxer and wrestler James Quigley moved to the United States, the *Gazette* compared him instantaneously to his fellow Irishman John Morrissey.⁴⁴

Such comparisons, which appeared at several points in the periodical during the 1880s, served as a reference point for older fans of the sport and also as a means of advertising a new fighter.⁴⁵ This tactic, played on the *Gazette's* continued effort to preserve the history of boxing. Given the interplay of criminality and sport found in the careers of Morrissey and Sullivan, it was perhaps unsurprising that the *Gazette* featured several retellings of the men's most famous bouts. In 1880, the *Gazette* produced a series of articles on the 'battles ... wrangles ... and heroes' of American prize fighting from 1812 to the present day.⁴⁶ Included in these articles was the Sullivan/Morrissey fight previously discussed. In it, readers were told of the 'great battle' between the two, their 'scientific work' in the ring and the 'gangs' in the corners who yelled obscenities and openly held revolvers.⁴⁷ Despite its sordid elements, the fight was celebrated as a triumph in American prize fighting, one which entertained all and served to further the sport's popularity. This also proved to be the case with latter articles detailing Morrissey's fight with William Poole.⁴⁸ By the mid-1880s, the *Gazette* began inviting readers' letters on the subject of older fighters, with Morrissey proving to be a point of interest for several contributors.⁴⁹ Here, a space was opened up to praise prize-fighters for their skill while simultaneously forgiving, or even celebrating, many of their connections to organised crime. This allowed the *Gazette* to publish historical pieces on great fighters and, in time, grant readers of the periodical to do the same. In such readings and retellings, the Irish born prize-fighter gained an almost mythical status. Individuals like Yankee Sullivan or John Morrissey were presented as tough, skilled, and entertaining fighters. More importantly, they were eventually celebrated in the *Gazette* as men who had successfully integrated into American society.⁵⁰ When John Morrissey died in 1878, the *Gazette's* obituary wrote that Morrissey, who later went on to become a state senator, had begun with nothing

and rose to the top of American society.⁵¹ When the periodical dedicated several pages to Morrissey in a subsequent issue, his life was presented as an example for later immigrants to follow.

Covering the history of boxing, and Irish fighters in the United States, was part of the *Gazette's* often-noted attempts to position itself as the authority, and organiser, of the sport. These efforts celebrated Irish prize fighters at a moment when Irish immigration to the United States was still contentious. Michael Allen Gordon's work in this regard has explained the stigma attached to Irish immigrants, often depicted as unhygienic, uneducated and violent.⁵² Conversely, it was such qualities which the *Gazette* celebrated in historical retellings which they linked to later prosperity. In the case of Morrissey, he was a man who managed to parley his success as a feared boxer into one of the nation's highest political office. *Gazette* reports of Morrissey's life often drew a trajectory between his humble beginnings and his later successes, connected through boxing and his links to immigrant communities.⁵³ Here, the Irish immigrant was not an object of scorn, but rather one of admiration. Hence, when later fighters were compared to Morrissey, or indeed Sullivan, it was an indication that they, too, could integrate into American society and experience great riches. This was not an explicit celebration of Irishness but rather a promotion of prize-fighters from every background. That Irish prize fighters tended to dominate during this period, and were celebrated for doing so, created a pathway for others to follow.⁵⁴

One such individual was John L. Sullivan, an American-Irish boxer who fought in the 1880s and early 1890s. Born in Boston to Irish parents, Sullivan was, as Michael Isenberg explained, one of the nineteenth-century's most successful, and popular boxers.⁵⁵ Sullivan's career as a heavy-weight boxer coincided perfectly with Fox's tenure at the *Gazette*. It is unsurprising therefore that the two men worked closely together to advance both their respective interests.⁵⁶ The apparatus structured around Morrissey's stories – that which celebrated his toughness, rags to riches story and uncouth nature, came to be applied to Sullivan with great success. This was part of the 'democracy of sport' which David Welky believed the *Gazette* encouraged by speaking to the ordinary man and woman.⁵⁷ During his career, Sullivan forged a reputation as a skilled and feared fighter. He became recognised as the first official heavyweight boxing champion, and as a man who proved eager to meet challenges from all comers.⁵⁸

Alongside Fox, Sullivan was also a man who helped propel the status of boxing within the United States. In the late nineteenth-century, Fox and Sullivan worked together, with Fox often acting as Sullivan's agent and chief supporter.⁵⁹ Sullivan, in turn, provided the *Gazette* with exclusive interviews and insights. Together, the two men helped to grow the *Gazette*'s circulation to over 150,000 regular readers. In the lead up to prize fights, this figure was known to jump to over 400,000 individual purchases.⁶⁰ As the 1880s progressed, the *Gazette* expanded its coverage of boxing, with Sullivan a chief object of interest. This explains why Isenberg later claimed that through the *Gazette* Sullivan came to become one of America's first major sporting heroes.⁶¹ More importantly, he was a 'super sports hero' who was also Irish. Continuing the trend which began with Morrissey and Yankee Sullivan in the mid-nineteenth century, more and more Irish, or American-Irish, athletes entered the sport of prize fighting. Here, Fox played a leading role in promoting the fights, but also playing up the athlete's ethnic backgrounds.

At a time when Irish boxers held a substantial gravitas, Fox used an individual's Irish heritage as a sort of calling card, or code word, for their athletic prowess. On the eve of a Sullivan-Patrick Ryan fight in 1882, Fox offered \$1,000 as Sullivan's stake in a fight which would pit him against another Irish immigrant.⁶² Born in Tipperary in 1851, and nicknamed the 'Trojan Giant', Ryan entered the fight as heavyweight champion, a title he lost after a hard fought battle with Sullivan. The overall purse for the fight was the most lucrative yet in American boxing, totalling \$3,500 of which Fox contributed a substantial amount.⁶³ In the build-up to the bout the *Gazette* spoke of the fine 'Irish stock' of both fighters, of their comparisons with older fighters such as Morrissey and of the litany of great fighters who came from Ireland.⁶⁴ In reporting on Ryan, the *Gazette* featured Irish harps and Irish flags, a tactic mimicked for Sullivan.⁶⁵ Despite Sullivan's American birth, the fight, one of the most iconic in nineteenth-century American sport, was presented as an all-Irish affair.⁶⁶ Such fights, it must be said, helped captivate the boxing fans of America. The Sullivan-Ryan fight alone attracted over 2,000 spectators.⁶⁷

These tactics were repeated in later years when Sullivan fought other fighters. In all, a generally positive image of Irish fighters, and Irish people, was presented. At the height of Sullivan's fame in 1884, the *Gazette* described him as a man of good Irish stock, with a 'wonderful' disposition and intelligent demeanour.⁶⁸ Like Morrissey before him, he was presented

as a 'rags to riches' story and an example for other fighters to follow. When new fighters emerged in the wake of Sullivan's retirement in the early 1890s, they were compared favourably to him thanks, primarily, to their shared heritage.⁶⁹ Here Irishness was a moniker for toughness, athleticism but also upward mobility. Fox embodied many of these traits while simultaneously using these codes when describing the next big fighter.

Fox in Ireland

As is clear, Richard K. Fox and the *National Police Gazette* became a platform for promoting Irish-American athletes. This was not an altruistic drive, far from it, but one which proved profitable for athlete and entrepreneur alike. If the *Gazette* could be successful in driving the public's interest in a fighter, the result was often an increase in circulation figures. Likewise, if Fox could act as a fighter's manager or backer, as was the case with John L. Sullivan, it added a prestige to the periodical and its editor. Thus far, this article has focused primarily on Fox's interactions with Irish or American-Irish athletes operating within the United States. In exploring Fox's relationship to the Irish diaspora, it is equally important, however, to examine the writings and speeches attached to Fox's many trips to Ireland and Great Britain during the 1880s and 1890s. Despite operating America's most successful sporting periodical, while simultaneously acting as an organiser for many prize fights and athletic contests, Fox travelled to Ireland and England on several occasions through a mixture of recreational and professional trips.

In describing these trips, both in the United States and in Ireland, Fox, and the accompanying journalists, reiterated his own Irish heritage. As David A. Gerber explained, successful emigrants during the nineteenth-century often became cultural ambassadors for their home countries.⁷⁰ In the case of Fox, he was received in Ireland as an immigrant who had overcome considerable challenges on his road to success. Likewise, in the United States, he became something of a spokesman on the natural beauty of his home country. Initially many of Fox's trips to Ireland in the late 1880s and early 1890s stemmed specifically from his desire to sign Irish and English fighters to lucrative contracts.⁷¹ At times this resulted in a brief stay in Queenstown on route to Great Britain but far more often it meant several weeks touring Ireland.⁷² On the conclusion of such trips Fox often returned to the United States with both a signed contract and a

short passage about the uniqueness of the Irish countryside and people. That Fox returned to Ireland to bring others to the United States mimicked, in part, the same passage undertaken by countless other Irishmen and women during the nineteenth-century wherein those already established in the United States travelled back to Ireland to bring others back to known prosperity.⁷³

In the case of Fox, he had more to gain economically than many of these people but the fact remained that a clear pathway for Irish fighters to the United States was made possible by these trips. Such trips stirred excitement in local newspapers about Fox's return to Ireland and the possibilities open to the diaspora in America. In Fox's own retellings to the *Gazette*, he was always 'well received by the sporting men of Great Britain and Ireland', many of whom were desperate to work alongside a man known for making stars out of his athletes.⁷⁴ The ruthless commercialism of these trips, wherein Fox used his Irishness as a means of scouting some of the century's most skilled sporting talent, were tempered by admissions of his love of Ireland, its fine landscapes and affable citizens. Speaking with the *Gazette* in 1892, Fox expressed his thanks at being 'well received by the sporting men of Great Britain and Ireland', following a six-month stint in the country.⁷⁵ He spoke of his admiration for all he encountered, and his belief that some of the finest sporting talent in the world could be found in Ireland. This was, above all else, a means of promoting the Irish fighters supported by Fox, but it nevertheless helped create a positive image of Ireland.

Fox's admiration was reciprocated in domestic Irish newspapers. In 1894 it was announced that Fox was going to buy or build a steam ship capable of making quick transatlantic crossings. This led to speculation that Fox would attempt to break a world record in travelling from New York to Ireland by boat.⁷⁶ These rumours came to nothing, and although it is true Fox owned a yacht, there is little evidence of such a venture. Nevertheless, Fox did travel to Ireland again in 1895, where he spent time in both Dublin and Belfast. Articles in the *Belfast News Letter*, the periodical which previously employed Fox, spoke proudly of the return of one of the world's most successful sporting entrepreneurs to his native land. These articles were later reprinted in the *Police Gazette* lest any readers forget Fox's Irish roots. The *Belfast News Letter* even went so far as to claim that

No one knows Belfast better than the genial R.K. so that this pronouncement is all the more acceptable. Mr. Fox proposes spending a few more days in the city.⁷⁷

Lindsay Janssen's previous work on Irish emigration explained the anxiety often attached to homecomings. Many individuals, for very valid reasons depending on their length of stay, felt anxiety about returning to Ireland from foreign soil. Underpinning a great deal of such anxiety was the belief that one's hometown would have changed irrevocably since emigration or that one would no longer be accepted in their hometown.⁷⁸ That Fox, a man who sporadically visited Belfast, and hadn't lived there for several decades, was spoken of in such terms suggested efforts to quash any potential unease with his immigrant status.

Sport, one of Dublin's most influential sporting newspapers in the late nineteenth-century proved even more enthused by Fox's trip. Opening with the statement that 'some men were born great and others have achieved greatness', the unnamed journalist praised Fox for the 'energy and determination of his character', by then known to everyone within the country.⁷⁹ Interesting, *Sport* diverged from the *Belfast News Letter* when it came to explaining the purpose of Fox's journeys to Ireland. Whereas the *Belfast News Letter* tended to focus more so on the business elements of Fox's trips, *Sport* instead described them as a fillip to his health

His occasional trips in Europe or journeys about our country are taken rather for the purpose of recuperation from the exhaustion ...⁸⁰

It is interesting to pause, momentarily, on this point. Here, it was claimed that Fox could insulate himself from the pressures of modern business by returning to his native land. Despite his immigration, and ingratiation, into American society, it was claimed that only by returning to Ireland could Fox truly restore an inner peace. This was not so much a lament against emigration, as was commonplace during the late nineteenth-century, but rather a suggestion that an immigrant was always welcomed back to Ireland, that one's home ties never truly left, and that true peace could always be found by returning. To further this point, the newspaper finished by reminding readers, once more, of Fox's Irish heritage by means of a short biography of his time in Ireland.

Fox's trips to Ireland continued into the early years of the twentieth century and his reports back began to devolve more and more into marketing pieces or travel writing. In 1905, the *Police Gazette* featured a piece on the 'Emerald Isle' which claimed that

Many aspects of the present-day life of Ireland are as characteristic and picturesque as any survivals of earlier ages ...⁸¹

Continuing in this vein, the article continued by noting the ‘tiny, thatched cottages, white washed and frequently tinted pink, blue or yellow’. Once more mention was made of Fox’s Irish heritage, his pride in Ireland, and the natural beauty of the country and its people. Despite his time in the United States, Fox made strong, and repeated efforts, to assert his Irish identity. This explains why, on his death in 1922, several Irish newspapers, most notably the *Belfast News Letter*, commented on the passing of an Irishman who made his fortune in the United States.⁸² Such sentiments were not confined to the year of his passing. A sporadic, but enduring feature of the next several decades were repeated articles in Northern Irish and Irish newspapers on the legacy of Fox in an Irish context. One such example came in 1965 when the *Irish Press* feature ‘Window on the Past’ spoke of the Belfast native who did so much for American sport, as well as Irish athletes.⁸³

In this regard, Fox’s many trips to Ireland, regardless of whether or not they were done for business or pleasure, kept Fox relevant within the British and Irish context. Where his dealings with Irish, or American-Irish athletes, meant it was unlikely that he would be unknown in Ireland, his repeated trips to the ‘Emerald Isle’, and positive depictions of these trips, ensured a positive reaction from his homeland. As an individual, and as an entrepreneur, Fox profited greatly from these trips. They may have restored his energies, as some testimonies claimed, but they helped build a legacy from a country he left many years ago. Much like his Irish fighters, Fox’s absence from Ireland was never too keenly felt.

Conclusion

He was, like many others, attempting to figure out what it meant to be an American as a new, modern century approached. Even more, he was driven to success and wealth from his memories of his hard work as a schoolboy in Ireland. When he arrived in New York he was a charter subscriber to the American dream ...

Guy Reel, 2006.⁸⁴

Reflecting on Fox’s successes, and impact, in American sport, historian Guy Reel found a very real overlap between Fox’s experiences in Ireland and his later successes. Where Reel highlighted the personal links between Fox’s childhood and his later success, it is equally important to discuss the interplay between Fox’s professional and personal relationship with Ireland. As a sporting entrepreneur, Fox became perhaps the most vocal supporter, and promoter, of Irish or American-Irish athletes. At

a time when Irish immigrants to the United States were often, although not always, an object of scorn, Fox's *Police Gazette* wrote fondly, and with a great deal of admiration, for Irishmen. Even those like John Morrissey, individuals with sordid and criminal pasts, were praised for their ability to transcend their pasts and re-invent themselves. Fox himself embodied much of these traits. He enjoyed, as Guy Reel argued, a great deal of the 'American Dream', the idea that through hard work and industry, an immigrant could enjoy riches in the United States.⁸⁵ Whether or not this was the case, Fox and the *Police Gazette* clearly advanced this idea. More than that they applied it to the athletes under their care.

Fox's Irish heritage was a point regularly discussed in the *Gazette*. It likely helped in securing new and exciting talent but there was a sense also that Fox strove to retain his links across the Atlantic. From the late 1880s, Fox routinely travelled to Great Britain and Ireland for work and pleasure. Often fondly recorded in the *Police Gazette*, Fox made clear that he was proud of, and at times revelled in, his Irish heritage. This was not an opinion spoken into the void. Irish newspapers, throughout the country, reciprocated his kind words with equal praise. In Ireland, Fox was depicted as a successful immigrant, an example to others, and someone whom the country could take pride in. That this was the case both during and after his lifetime showcases the strength of this cultural bond. In other realms of immigration studies, a great deal of focus has been directed towards émigré agents and exemplars. Put another way, historians have continually highlighted the allure of immigrant success stories for those seeking to make their fortune in foreign lands.⁸⁶ Fox was among the most high-profile examples exempted from the political or literary sphere. His was a fortune created, sustained and solidified through sport. Rather than a meaningless pastime, sport became an important cultural ground. In all of this, Fox remained an ardent promoter, and symbol, of successful Irish immigration. In this sport was a business, a pastime, but also a vessel for greater integration.

Notes

1. "Mr. Richard K. Fox" (*The National Police Gazette*).
2. Reel, *National Police Gazette*, 1–20.
3. Ibid.
4. Redmond, *The Irish and the Making of American Sport*.
5. Martin, *The Irish Whales*.
6. Pollack, *John L. Sullivan*.

7. Fitzpatrick, "Irish Emigration in the Later Nineteenth Century"; and Jackson, "Women in 19th Century Irish Emigration."
8. Griffin, *The People with No Name*.
9. Miller, *Emigrants and Exiles*, 1–33.
10. Johnson, "The Distribution of Irish Emigration in the Decade before the Great Famine," 78–87.
11. Miller, Boling, and Doyle. "Emigrants and Exiles," 97–125.
12. Moran, *Sending out Ireland's Poor*, 22–60.
13. Fitzpatrick, "Irish Emigration in the Later Nineteenth Century."
14. Parkhill, "Emigration & The Great Famine."
15. See note 1 above.
16. Ibid.
17. Ibid.
18. Ibid.
19. Reel, *National Police Gazette*, 1–12.
20. See note 1 above.
21. Kasson, *Houdini, Tarzan, and the Perfect Man*, 22–45.
22. Rader, "The Quest for Subcommunities and the Rise of American Sport."
23. Reel, *National Police Gazette*, 22–34.
24. See note 22 above.
25. Bederman, *Manliness and Civilisation*, 44–70.
26. See also, Welky, "Culture, Media and Sport."
27. Ibid.
28. Reel, "This Wicked World."
29. Gilfoyle, *A Pickpocket's Tale*.
30. See note 23 above.
31. Ibid, 12.
32. Ibid.
33. Hoganson, "Cosmopolitan Domesticity," 55–83.
34. Ibid.
35. See note 23 above.
36. Harding, *John Morrissey*.
37. Ibid., 12–20.
38. Harding, "The American Prize Ring."
39. Redmon, *The Irish and the Making of American Sport*, 115–120.
40. Ibid.
41. Ibid., 165.
42. Anon., "The Prize Ring."
43. Ibid.
44. "James Quigley."
45. See note 38 above.'
46. Ibid.
47. Ibid.
48. See note 42 above.
49. "The Allen."
50. "Hon. John Morrissey, State Senator."

51. Ibid.
52. Gordon. *The Orange Riots*.
53. See note 50 above.
54. See note 4 above.
55. Isenberg, *John L. Sullivan*, 1–5.
56. Ibid., 90–114.
57. Welky, “Culture, Media and Sport.”
58. Isenberg, *John L. Sullivan*, 90–114.
59. Ibid.
60. Reel, *National Police Gazette*, 114.
61. See note 55 above.
62. “Sullivan Wins!”
63. Ibid.
64. Ibid.
65. Reel, *National Police Gazette*, 120–130.
66. Ibid.
67. Ibid.
68. “John L. Sullivan: The Boston Boy.”
69. “Plimmer Won – Eight Rounds.”
70. Gerber, *Authors of Their Lives*, 12–45.
71. “Arrival of Mr. Richard K. Fox in London.”
72. “The Sailing of the Campania.”
73. Kenny, *The American Irish*, 50–88.
74. “Thinks Corbett will Whip Mitchell.”
75. Ibid.
76. “A Fast Steam Launch.”
77. See note 1 above.
78. Janssen, “Diasporic Identifications.”
79. “Mr. Richard K. Fox.”
80. Ibid.
81. “The Emerald Isle.”
82. “Death of Mr. Richard K. Fox.”
83. “Window on the Past.”
84. Reel, *National Police Gazette*, 22.
85. See note 33 above.
86. Gerber, *Authors of Their Lives*.

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