

KATIE TAYLOR AT THE READY KEITH DUGGAN IN DALLAS

Sports
Thursday



Orbán will block something to exact leverage elsewhere. The approach has seen him become the guy at the party who most others present wished had left hours ago
Jack Power Page 7



A CASTLE HOME IN DUBLIN WITH A LIBRARY OF DREAMS

Residential
Property

A stunned silence follows McGregor's court testimony



Miriam Lord

at the High Court in Dublin

MMA fighter gives opening evidence in civil action accusing him and a companion of sexual assault

How do multimillionaire global sports stars enjoy themselves on a night out?

Court 24 was packed with onlookers, predominantly men, curious to find out.

Yesterday at the High Court in Dublin, one of them, known the world over as 'The Notorious', outlined in graphic detail how he might fill his time when he is "resting".

When Conor McGregor finished his stint in the witness box, people rose to their feet in a sort of stunned silence. There was a lot to take in.

In a case which has made headlines around the world, the mixed martial arts fighter had just given his opening evidence in a civil action taken against him by 35-year-old Nikita Hand, who has accused him and his companion on the night of sexually assaulting her in a Dublin hotel in December 2018.

At one point in his testimony, he described how it was a "very frightening experience" for him to find himself accused of such an offence.

"Because my life is on the line."

And at one point in his testimony, as he exactly recalled their "all happy" and "athletic" and "enthusiastic" sexual encounter, Hand stood up and rushed from the room.

McGregor's much-anticipated appearance in the witness box happened later than expected.

"I was under the weather last night," he explained to the judge when he took the stand after the lunchtime break.

"A stomach complaint." While waiting to be called, the MMA fighter seemed impatient to get started, rocking back and forth in his back-row seat. He wore a dark navy suit, a white shirt and a dark tie. When his turn came, he took a slug of water from a plastic bottle and walked forward confidently to the witness box.

He took the oath: Bible in one hand, left arm tight by his side, fist clenched beneath a very large watch. He speaks in a low voice which is a mix of staccato and drawl.

Senior counsel Remy Farrell took him through his evidence. How he came to meet Nikita Hand on a very long night at Christmas which stretched across a number of venues in Dublin until a group of four ended up in the penthouse suite of the Beacon Hotel in the middle of the next day.

Smiling

As he settled into his testimony, the fighter relaxed. Smiling as he talked of some of the sex acts he performed with the complainant. She was a "nice girl".

He knew her "from around" and said they "moved in the same circles". She was a colourist in a hair salon in Goatstown and was at its Christmas party on the night.

She sent him a message on Instagram.

"It was just a friendly picture. It was slightly provocative." She asked him to come out to their party, to come out and pick them up.

For much of the night, he drove around in the car with his friend James Lawrence. It's a big car. "I like driving around in the car... just driving around, listening to music." The car had blacked-out windows and interior covers on the glass.

It sounded like a wild one. In a city-centre nightclub, "lots of friends" joined McGregor and he bought drinks for everyone. It became a "ridiculously late night" and "there was a bit of cocaine produced, yeah".



■ Mixed martial arts fighter Conor McGregor leaving the High Court yesterday afternoon.
PHOTOGRAPH: COLLINS COURTS

He referred to Hand and her colleague Danielle Kealey for much of his evidence as the "two ladies". When he picked them up, he drove them to meet his friend James as he would be "perfect" to balance things out. "See, I had two girls, two boisterous ladies full of energy."

And the mood, he repeated many times, was fun and playful, happy and "good-hearted". He didn't know how she came to sustain such serious

bruising or how her tampon had been wedged so far up her vagina after they had sex it had to be removed by a doctor.

"It wasn't there when I was there."

He became irritated after it was put to him that he had pressed Hand's arm's so tightly to her body during intercourse, her watch had scratched her breast. He denied telling her that now she knows how it feels to have to "tap out" when pinned to the

ground during a fight, thus conceding defeat.

"How anyone could believe that me, as private person, would say [something] to highlight my shortcoming, it's not in my nature... it's a lie. One of many lies."

There is more to come today.

➔ McGregor tells court woman who alleges he raped her 'full of lies': page 4

Party battle lines sharpen on rent freeze

Opposition calls for three-year moratorium rejected by Fianna Fáil and Fine Gael

Taoiseach set to abolish means test for Carer's Allowance in election manifesto

PAT LEAHY and
EMMET MALONE

The battle lines on housing between Opposition parties and the outgoing Government sharpened last night with calls for a three-year rent freeze rejected by Fianna Fáil and Fine Gael.

In the wake of yesterday's report on prices in the sector from Daft.ie, which showed rents had increased by twice the rate of inflation during the year to the end of September and now average €2,476 in Dublin and €1,955 across the rest of the country, the Social Democrats and Sinn Féin yesterday pledged a three-year freeze, while Labour said it would freeze rents indefinitely. The Social Democrats published a 10-point plan that included a promise to end "no-fault" evictions and ban vulture funds from buying up existing homes.

Speaking at a campaign event, Sinn Féin's Louise O'Reilly said tens of thousands of people were having to work harder and longer "just to afford somewhere to live. This is completely

unsustainable. We believe that the right to affordable accommodation is a basic entitlement for workers".

The Social Democrats' Rory Hearne said the party was setting out "a radical reset of housing policy to give renters protection, real security of tenure and rents that are affordable".

Private landlords

The Irish Property Owners' Association, which represents private landlords, said it is committed to "an evidence-based approach in policymaking" and that this "includes supporting a regulatory stay to ascertain the impact of current Rent Pressure Zones (RPZs) and indefinite tenancy legislations". It said, "Landlords are leaving in their droves due to current Government inaction on rent controls and RPZs. The July 2024 Department of Housing Private Rental Sector Review states that 42 per cent of landlords left in the 26 months up to December 2023."

Fine Gael and Fianna Fáil hit back at the opposition

proposals, rejecting the three-year freeze idea, insisting it would lead to a reduced supply of rental properties.

"We don't believe that an outright ban on increases will have any impact other than to dissuade more investment in the sector, therefore reducing the numbers of properties to rent," Fianna Fáil said.

Fine Gael said that it had already "introduced a range of measures to help renters and also small-scale landlords".

The Green Party said that it would extend the duration of the RPZ legislation and would also enlarge its scope to include other areas if necessary. Meanwhile, Taoiseach Simon Harris said last night that he will commit to abolishing the means test for the Carer's Allowance, a key demand of advocates for carers. It is anticipated that Mr Harris will also announce the introduction of a new Family Carer Payment of €325 per week if Fine Gael is returned to government after the election.

The Fine Gael manifesto is expected to promise an immediate doubling of the weekly income limits, so that a couple can earn €2,500 per week and still qualify for the full Carer's Allowance payment, and to continue increasing the limit each year, with the means test completely phased out over the lifetime of the government.

➔ General Election 2024 coverage: pages 2 & 3

American (60s) killed in Laois five-star hotel

CONOR LALLY

An American man in his 60s had arrived in Ireland to assist his son, amid concerns due to the way the younger man was acting, hours before he was fatally assaulted in the leisure complex of the luxury five-star resort Ballyfin Demesne in Co Laois.

The victim's son, who is in his 30s and is also from the US, is a

suspect for the fatal assault, and remained in Garda custody last night.

The crime scene inside the country house hotel, located on the 600-acre demesne, was sealed off throughout yesterday, and underwent an examination by Garda forensic experts following the assault on Tuesday night. The victim, who had travelled from New York, was found injured and

unresponsive just before 8pm.

The Garda investigation team is expected to liaise with the Director of Public Prosecutions today regarding possible criminal charges in the case.

The man being questioned was described as having "vulnerabilities". He had been travelling in Europe and was in Ireland on his own for a period. He had this week undergone medical treatment while in

Ireland amid concerns for his welfare due to the way he was acting.

It is understood the victim had travelled from the US in a bid to help the younger man through his difficulties. He checked into Ballyfin on Tuesday, where both men were guests.

Although the suspect was taken into custody on Tuesday evening, he has since required

medical treatment. The maximum period of 24 hours that he can be questioned for was suspended while he was being treated. His detention period was also expected to be suspended into this morning to allow the suspect to rest.

A Garda family liaison officer has been assigned to the victim's family, some of whom were expected to travel to Ireland.

Weather

Today will be mostly cloudy with a few spots of light rain and drizzle. Highs of 12-14 degrees amid variable breezes.

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Sports Thursday

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STARTS TOMORROW

IRELAND'S PREMIER ART FAIR WILL FEATURE HUNDREDS OF IRISH AND INTERNATIONAL ARTISTS AND GALLERIES.

- Featuring pieces from Banksy, Damien Hirst, Julian Opie, Patrick Rubinstein, Andy Warhol, Patrick O'Reilly, Ian Pollock, Eamonn Ceannt and many more.
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- See artsource.ie for more details.