

## The Chequered F1ag



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### Season off to a strong start in Monte Carlo

THE Monte Carlo rally traditionally marks the starting point of the motorsport year. This year the "Monte" celebrated its centenary year and it has returned to its rightful position as the crown jewel of rallying.

With organisers consistently angered by the restraints imposed on World Rally Championship events it was only a matter of time before the Automobile Club de Monaco reached breaking point with the sport's governing body, the FIA. That point was reached in 2008 when the FIA decided that they would use rallies on a rotation basis. Amazingly the most famous rally of all was to host the WRC only every second year.

The ACM were aghast at such a thought and in 2009 they gambled on a championship that was seen by many in the sport as insignificant, the Intercontinental Rally Challenge.

The IRC, backed by Eurosport, was seen as small potatoes in the global framework of rallying but the organisers of the championship gave the ACM a free reign to bring back night stages, classic Alpine mountain passes and other elements of rallying that made the Monte Carlo Rally a legend.

With such freedom the ACM quickly realised that they could find a way to bring back the Monte of old. Whereas the WRC neutered certain elements of the rallying by enforcing strict time frames for stages and only allowing central servicing, the IRC gave organisers the freedom to remould the Monte to its former glory.

This year's edition saw French champion, Bryan Bouffier, take the first win of his IRC career after making the right strategic decisions on the second day of the rally.

The opening day saw Juho Hanninen dominate on dry tarmac in his Skoda Fabia. The Finnish star was immense for the first half of the rally before snow hit stage seven. Hanninen, and most of the field, choose the wrong tyres while Bouffier choose wisely, taking studded snow tyres. While his rivals floundered for grip the Frenchman dominated and opened a commanding lead that he never relinquished.

The Rally ended with the organisers lauded for another superb rally. The Monte was the first of a 13 rally calendar that will see the likes of the Tour de Corse and Rallye Sanremo continue on their path of returning to former glory.

### All star cast heads to Florida

With the rallying season now firmly under way dominoes fall into place in the rest of the motorsport calendar with the first sports car classic taking place this weekend.

The 24 Hours at Daytona is a traditional season opener for many drivers from all over the world. Daytona is the opening round of the Grand American Road Racing Championship and while many endurance races feature runaway winner Daytona has always found a way to keep the action close.

This was most certainly the case on 2009 when the margin between first and second was less than one second. This race went down as one of the greatest sports car races of all time and this year's edition should offer red hot competition and lots of action.

This year will see ex-Formula 1 drivers such as Juan Pablo Montoya, Justin Wilson, Mark Blundell and Martin Brundle, the BBC F1 commentator, will all take the start alongside a string of Indy Car and NASCAR drivers. Daytona becomes a magnet for top line racers in January and this year's race will be a superb spectacle with out of practice racers forced to thread their way through a field mixed with "gentleman drivers."

### Daytona is the centre of sports car racing's attention but Le Mans is still the focus

In other sports car news Audi announced that their Intercontinental Le Mans Cup charge will be led by Tom Kristensen and Allan McNish. The pair, both past Le Mans 24 Hours race winners, are sure to be strong contenders for the title in what should be a riveting year for sports car racing.

The IMLC features some of the most prestigious endurance races in the world. The Sebring 12 Hours will open the year before Spa plays host to the first European race. Double points will be awarded for Le Mans before Imola, Silverstone, Road Atlanta and a Chinese race bring the season to a close.

Audi bounced back from the disappointment of 2009 to win at Le Mans last year. The upcoming year will see Audi, and arch rival Peugeot, bring an all new contenders to races throughout the year. Audi have already started to test the new closed top coupe R18 while Peugeot has tested their new machine behind closed doors. The French squad have decided against competing in the IMLC this year and will only race in selected events.

As a result the new year in sports car racing is filled with a "wait and see" mentality. Sebring has traditionally been viewed as a great test for Le Mans and allows teams to get an understanding of where they are relative to the opposition. With Peugeot not racing in the early March event it is likely that endurance racing fans will have little on track comparison of the favourites before Le Mans.

In recent years it has been easy to predict who will have the fastest cars and dominate in sports cars, this season though is very different. There will be question marks over all the favourites before Le Mans due to the lack of on track comparisons to show who their strengths.

Daytona may open the sports car year but the middle weekend of June, and Le Mans, is already the focus of attention for the biggest teams in the sport.

## BASKETBALL North East Basketball League

# Understrength Ravens fall to second defeat in succession

**Killenaleck Titans 77**  
**Dundalk Ravens 58**

DUNDALK Ravens suffered their second loss in as many games when they fell to defeat against Killenaleck Titans - meaning their poor start to the second half of the season continues.

The team traveled to Killenaleck to face the Titans - who the Ravens beat at home by 40 points with only seven players. The team were missing the experience and leadership of Fu Faapito. Also absent were Andrius Burba, David Maguire, AJ O'Neil and Mateusz Karpinski.

The Ravens were not helped by arriving at the wrong gym only to find out that the game was in Mullahoran which was another ten miles away. Eventually the team made it in the nick of time, only forced to start with a technical foul for being late.

The game started without the Ravens getting much of a warm up which was an advantage to the Titans who went on a scoring spree at the start hitting five first quarter three pointers which led to a 24-8 first quarter lead.

The Ravens were under sized compared to the bigger and more aggressive Titans. The Titans continued to get second chance scores off offensive rebounds.

The Ravens finally found their feet in the second quarter with good scores coming from Aaron Lawless and Darren McGovern. Although, the Ravens only managed to close the gap by two points in this quarter.

The good man to man defense was the main contributing factor here to help the Ravens settle. Good rebounding by Liam Woods and Mindi Savicius set up some good scores for the Ravens to go into the break trailing 37-23.

The second half began with some belief for Ravens after good scores fell for Lawless and Liam Woods. Unfortunately, the Titans continued their hot shooting from the three

## AUTOCROSS :: Dunleer man picks up autocross award



Shane Marron from Dunleer winner of Class 2 in the Co Cavan Motor Club, Mervyn Wedlock Plant Hire Autocross Championship 2010 receiving his award from Championship sponsor Mervyn Wedlock at the presentation dinner in the Hotel Kilmore Cavan. Picture: Alex Coleman.

point line to keep their lead intact which made it difficult for the Ravens to get the lead down to single figures. At the beginning of the fourth quarter the Ravens trailed by 13 points.

The Ravens needed to find some sort of offensive spark early in the quarter to compete for the win and this happened with a three from McGovern and great individual scores from Lawless got the lead down to ten points but some good scores from the Titans and some suspect calls from the referees

allowed the Titans to cruise to victory which was fully deserved from the start.

This loss leaves the Ravens sweating on results from the weekend to see if they remain in the top four for the end of year playoffs.

**□ The Ravens next game is at home to Carrick on Shannon Cougars on Saturday at 6.30pm in Muirhevnamor Sports Centre. Support is welcome and appreciated.**

**DUNDALK RAVENS:** Darren McGovern (13), Aaron Lawless (31), John Loughlin, John Rafferty, Mindi Savicius (10), Liam Woods (4), Tadas Nerbusitas.

## GREYHOUND RACING Dundalk Stadium

### Bray's back in business with a Friday night double

By Joe Carroll

OLLIE Bray marked his return to Dowdallshill after a short break with a double, his two home bred winners coming from the Top Honcho-Three Star Girl litter.

The Derby-winning Navan trainer had Royal Reason going for him in the opening sprint, and this 80-pounder was out to improve on the form he'd shown in his three pre-Christmas races. He was led out by Cruppney Rebel, but soon got into his stride, and by the time they reached the bend he was in front.

Chased by Gatillo Show into the home straight, Royal Reason went on to win by almost four lengths, clocking 22.12 on a heavy track.

Litter-comrade, Royal Skater, had no wins from her previous ten races, but soon put that record to right. Running over the 525 and wearing the white sheet, she didn't take long before overhauling Criminal Mind, and after that was on her own.

The 5/4 favourite made it home with just over seven lengths to spare in 29.71.

While the weather remains severe, making the preparation of greyhounds difficult, travelling conditions are much better than they were before Christmas. Several runners on this card were taken on lengths journeys, and while just a few were successful, their availability has made racing manager, Michael Dempsey's task in framing cards that bit easier.

There were a few new innovations with the race card, the inclusion of the current standings in the leading owner and trainer tables and the list of runners for the following night's meeting among them. The response from racegoers was positive.

On a lean weekend for local kennels, Eoin's Billy was the only winner from around these parts, winning a sprint on Saturday night. Gerry Irwin's Castleblayney runner ran from the inside and quickly had the fast-starting Parnell Jo in his sights.

The Razldazl Billy dog took up the running at the opening corner and from there went on to score by just over twolengths in 21.96.

## SWIMMING :: Brian qualifies for Irish Schools Championship



Congratulations to Brian O'Sullivan, Transition Year student at Dundalk Grammar School, for qualifying in the Irish Schools Swimming Championship which will take place on Friday 28 and Saturday 29 January in Leisureland, Galway.

The greyhound fraternity's attention switches to the field next week, with the National Coursing meeting taking place on Monday, Tuesday and Wednesday. Newry owner/trainer, Brendan Matthews, has a very strong hand in each of the major competitions, with runners of his heading the betting in both Derby and Oaks.

Dundalk-born, Barney Joe Grimes, now living in Co Kildare is part of a syndicate that has a fancied runner in the Oaks, and her performance will create lots of interest among the big

contingent heading southwards from around these parts.

Taka Dawn is reported to have been very impressive in her Trial Stake win at the Galway & Oranmore meeting, and some betting lists have her as low as 12/1 to win out.

There are good reports about the Dundalk Derby TS winner, Chancy Soprano, who is on 25/1. Unfortunately, the Corn Cuchullain winner, Prevalence, won't be able to take his place in the Champion Stakes due to injury.