

The Chequered F1ag



A Formula One blog by Stephen English
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World class rallying returns to these shores in 2012

THURSDAY'S announcement that international rallying will once again return to Ireland was met with delight by fans throughout the island.

The Circuit of Ireland is one of the world's oldest rallies and the venerable event will be conferred with international championship status for the first time in the announcement that it has been added to the burgeoning Intercontinental Rally Championship.

The IRC was won two years ago by Kris Meeke after the Northern Irishman claimed four victories for Peugeot. Since taking the crown Meeke has moved to Mini in the World Rally Championship and despite a difficult season, retirements in his first four rallies, he finished on a high by narrowly avoiding a podium in Rally GB and finishing fourth.

The success of Meeke has done much to improve the fortunes of Irish rallying but with young stars such as Craig Breen also competing in the WRC and IRC the potential bonus of having an international rally in Ireland are sure to be seen in the coming years.

Breen recently won the FIA Rallying Academy Cup and the 21 year old would be a huge addition to the starting ramp for the Circuit of Ireland. If Breen does compete next April he is sure to start the rally as one of the favourites due to his local knowledge as well as his undoubted ability.

With the Circuit of Ireland still a counting round of the Irish Tarmac Championship it will be interesting to see which drivers eschew their normal machinery, 2L turbo charged World Rally Cars, for a tilt at racing in the IRC and its simpler Super 2000 regulations. The likes of Breen are sure to race for the overall victory but most regular drivers are sure to race their Irish Championship cars.

Route to be announced in coming weeks

While the route will not be announced until sometime closer to December there has already been much speculation that their inaugural IRC showing will be based in Belfast and run exclusively on roads in Northern Ireland.

If this does turn out to be the case it is a move sure to be met with disappointment by fans who would surely have hoped that the cross border nature of recent Circuit's and the Rally Ireland is maintained. With challenging roads on both sides of the border this is a great opportunity for rally organisers to showcase all that is good about the country and with the IRC organised by Eurosport it would also offer invaluable tourism opportunities by visiting areas throughout the island.

While historically the Circuit of Ireland was an event that moved throughout the country with stages in the Mourne and Wicklow Mountains, the Ring of Kerry as well challenging the drivers with stages in Donegal and everywhere in between recent changes to the event have seen it forced to adapt to the demands stringent of road closures and with funds increasingly hard to come by the rally lost its previous lustre.

Recent years have however seen it grow successfully and with increased financial support from sponsors the Circuit of Ireland regained its position as a premier event of the Easter sporting schedule. One can only hope that by becoming a fully fledged international rally that it can return to the flavour and style of its traditional format over the coming years.

While the IRC does not impose the same stringent requirements that the WRC has forced on events in recent years it is likely that we will see a compact event where organisers will look to produce an event that meets with approval from fans, teams and media alike. If over the coming years Ireland can become a rally of note on the IRC it would surely be possible for the organisers to call upon its unique heritage as a reason for increasing the size of the rally and incorporate the traditional layout of large portions of the country.

As the third oldest rally in the world, behind only the Monte Carlo Rally and the San Remo Rally, the Circuit of Ireland has the potential to become a long standing fixture on the IRC calendar and return the event to the status it held in its heyday.

Speaking after the announcement Bobby Willis, the rally director, said:

"When we took over the running of the rally in 2010 we stated that we wanted to re-awaken the sleeping giant that is the Circuit of Ireland and today's announcement is the realisation of that vision.

"Be under no illusions this country can look forward to hosting a truly world class sporting event in 2012, a rally that will captivate the fans and the general public alike as we bring the Rally to the people."

Webber ends season on a high

The Formula 1 season drew to a close as well last weekend with Mark Webber taking victory in the Brazilian Grand Prix. The Australian has struggled this year to match the pace of his world championship winning teammate, Sebastian Vettel, but it will have buoyed his spirits for next season to have finally won again.

Webber's struggles have been linked to his early season failure to adapt to the Pirelli tyres and the Australian knows that he has underperformed throughout the campaign but he is also sure to use this as a springboard to the winter as he attempts to bounce back from his poor showing and rediscover the form that made him a title contender in 2010.

While Webber has not enjoyed much good fortune throughout the campaign a gearbox glitch for Vettel in Brazil all but gifted the victory to Webber. The champion once again took pole position after a stunning qualifying effort and having opened a healthy cushion in the opening laps once again looked set to take a comfortable victory.

His gearbox woes put paid to that but even with an ailing car the German was able to finish second ahead of Jensen Button's McLaren.

The Englishman confirmed himself as Vettel's nearest challenger in the championship after a superb season that saw him convincingly outpace Lewis Hamilton throughout the season's races after a very consistent and blemish free season-the polar opposite of his teammate's struggles throughout 2011.

With the 19 race season now completed the focus shifts to 2012 where consistency in the regulations should allow McLaren and Ferrari to close the gap to Red Bull but with the Milton Keynes based team having consistently produced the fastest car on the grid for the last three years the challenge facing their rivals is still immense.

RUGBY All-Ireland Junior Cup Second Round

Coleraine dump Dundalk out of All-Ireland series

Coleraine	29
Dundalk	15

WITH a break in the Leinster League Dundalk took on Coleraine in the All Ireland Junior Cup competition in Rugby Avenue, Coleraine.

The rain and gale force winds coupled with soft conditions underfoot dictated the game plan for both teams. Free flowing running rugby was out and close control of the ball the name of the game. Dundalk were missing four of their first choice players and gave some of the up and coming talent an opportunity to make an impression.

Unfortunately the conditions were to dictate the pace and nature of the game for extended periods and the majority of play took place within a few metres of the pack.

The home side registered the first points when their out half, Andrews, used local knowledge to kick a penalty despite the strong crosswind.

Shortly afterwards Dundalk were penalised severely for some slack defence when Andrews was able to cut through heavy traffic to cross the try line. The wind pushed his conversion wide to leave the scores at 8-0 for the home side after the first quarter. Andrews was able to make

amends for his previous wayward kick on 25 minutes when he landed a second successful penalty and Dundalk trailed by 11-0.

The tide of the match started to turn at this point and Dundalk put greater pressure on their hosts. The Coleraine scrum in particular felt the heat and Dundalk pilfered a ball from the Coleraine Number 8 and set their blindside winger, Errol Boyle, on his way.

Boyle marked his debut on the team with a fine score, beating two defenders to touch down in the corner.

The conversion proved too difficult from that range, but Dundalk were gifted another opportunity shortly afterwards from closer in and Donal Clare slotted home the penalty.

With Dundalk in the ascendancy they now pressed their advantage, unfortunately over-exuberance in the dying minutes of the first half led to a penalty and yellow card for Greg Whately.

The disappointment was doubly penalised when Coleraine took advantage of a momentary lack of concentration to run the penalty and their winger went over for an unconverted try in the corner.

The half ended at 16-8 for Coleraine.

Dundalk started the first ten minutes of the second half with 14 men and were able to

Dundalk's U13s try to win a lineout at the weekend



hold Coleraine scoreless for the period. When they were returned to the full complement, Dundalk dialled up the pressure and pushed Coleraine back towards their own line, gaining a lineout on the 15m mark.

A good take allowed the resulting maul to drive over the try line for Grey to score. A fine conversion from Clare brought the scores to 16-15.

Dundalk continued to pile pressure on the home side, determined to close down any space.

Their eagerness sometimes put them on the wrong side of the offside line, a fact that the referee was quick to spot and Coleraine's out half was able to take advantage with two successful penalties.

With time running out and trailing by only seven points

Dundalk threw everything they had into attack. Coleraine showed why they were in this competition however with solid defence and tight control of the ball in possession.

Eventually something had to give and unfortunately for Dundalk it was their first up defence.

Coleraine's hooker evaded his marker and stepped the cover tackles to score from within his own half.

The game ended with the conversion to leave the result at Coleraine 29-15 Dundalk.

DUNDALK: R Williams, D McGuinness, R McArdle, S Murphy, E Boyle, E Fa'atau, J Williams, K Dorian, J Gray, P Keely, D Fearan, D Sloane, P Meegan, M Roundtree, G Whately. Subs: D McCabe, N Brown, C Brady, D Clare.

Boyne come out on top

Boyne.....	27
Dundalk Thirds.....	3

DUNDALK Thirds suffered an away loss to league leaders Boyne on Sunday as they went down, 27-3..

Dundalk started strongly but poor discipline allowed Boyne to pin the visitors back in their own territory.

Boyne were fielding a well schooled and quick back line who made the most of the chances that came their way. Their coach's influence was evident in the first half when they twice scored out wide following first phase ball.

Boyne's forwards played an increasingly active role in the match as it wore on and Dundalk struggled to make their line out work throughout the game.

With their lineout denied to them as a source of possession, Dundalk were forced to keep the ball in hand regardless of their position on the field. Gains in territory were only made after numerous phases of play and opportunities to score were few and far between.

The nearest Dundalk came to crossing the whitewash came after a scrum when No 8, David McGee broke only to be denied by the Boyne back row forwards.

Gerard Smyth kicked Dundalk's only points of the game from a penalty in the Boyne 22 in the second half.

The risks inherent in trying to hold on to the ball continuously for extended periods of time were illustrated late in the game when Boyne turned over the ball in their own 22 and ran the length of the pitch to score. The game ended with the scores at 27-3 for the home side. Dundalk host Ardee in Mill Road on Saturday.

DUNDALK: John Kerr, Brian Igoe, Jonny McDonnell, Carl Cunningham, Chris O'Hanlon, Shane Quigley, Thomas Thornton, David McGee, Simon Byrne, Aiden Reilly, Gerard Smyth, Mike Doyle, Stephen Clare, Brian Tansy, Eamon Roe: Stephen Smyth, David Murphy, Richie McDonnell, Niall Kerly, Cathal Myles, Shane Mathews, Chris McGeady.

Win for Under-15s

Dundalk.....	27
Enderrery.....	26

DUNDALK'S Under-15s travelled to Ederrery on Saturday, picking up a win. Dundalk played some great rugby throughout the game leading 22-5.

Ederrery began to play in the second half and found themselves leading 26-22. A try in the last minute by man of the match T McElroy stole the victory of Ederrery and now sees Dundalk lie third in the table.

Tries came from by H Tiernan, T Gardner, T McElroy
DUNDALK: K Quinn, B McElroy, A Cathal, A Carr, H Tiernan, A Quinn, O Duff, S McGivern, S Arrowsmyth, T Gardner, M McLoughlan, E Quigley, K McArdle, T McElroy, D Quigley

FANTASY FOOTBALL MANAGER

THIS WEEK'S RESULTS

1	Rogie United FC	Emmet Rogan	43	585
2	Mills of Louth FC	James Sweeney	58	556
3	D'Unbelievables	Eamonn Kelly	52	555
4	The Grunties	Brendan O Callaghan	54	549
5	El Pistoleros	Tony Malone	44	538
6	MUFC 19TIMES!!!	Barry Cumiskey	47	534
7	Da JnRs	Paul Sweeney	45	532
8	Timeforce Fc	Conor Twomey	52	532
9	Chalkys Team	Trevor White	44	532
10	The Mac Attack	Eamonn Mc Aleer	39	527

Emmet Rogan still leads the way by 29 points. Following in second place by James Sweeney who scored 58 points this week, the best total in the top 10. James had Adebayor, Kompany and Vermaelen who all scored him big points this week and also has Vorm in goal who scored him 6 points. Only 4 teams in the Premier League had a clean sheet and surprisingly Man United and Arsenal both conceded even though they were both at home.

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SOC CER Dundalk FC - League of Ireland 2012

Johnston happy with 2012 league format

By Gavin McLaughlin

THE structure for the 2012 Airtricity League season was agreed by the National League Executive Committee at the Annual Clubs' Convention last Thursday night.

The Premier Division returns to a 12-team league for the first time since 2008, and will commence on Friday 2 March. It will be the first time that Dundalk have competed in a 12-team division since 2004. The league will be played in a three round format, with a total of 33 fixtures.

The bottom-placed club will automatically be relegated to the First Division, while the 11th-placed club will take part in a two-leg Promotion/Relegation Play-off.

In the First Division, the winners will be automatically promoted to the top flight. The second-placed club will play the third-placed club in a play-off, with the winners of that playing the 11th-placed club from the Premier Division in the two-leg Promotion/Relegation Play-off, for the final place in the 2013 top tier.

The mid-season break will coincide with the Republic of Ireland's Euro 2012 campaign next summer. The league season will end on the weekend ending Sunday 28 October.

Clubs rejected proposals for a split to come into effect midway through the season. Under that system, clubs would face each other home and away before splitting into a top six and bottom six where they would meet each team in that section twice again.

Concerns

Dundalk were one of the clubs that voiced their concerns about the split and in the end a decision was taken for each team to play each other three times.

This will mean that clubs will face an

uneven number of home and away games but according to Dundalk FC General Manager Paul Johnston, it is the fairest outcome for each club.

"We knew there would have to be some change with the 12 team league", he said. "We couldn't play 44 league games so the three round format is probably best for all the clubs."

"Obviously the venue of the third game will make a difference to clubs' budgets and financial projections. I think all the clubs would be hoping to have the likes of Shamrock Rovers and teams with a big travelling support at home twice but we'll just have to wait and see what the outcome is."

"We have to plan for both scenarios", he added. "Our understanding is that in the third round of games all clubs should have an almost equal number of home and away games. There has been a precedent set in countries like Scotland so I'm sure FAI will be looking at that to see what way the third round of games is structured."

No date has been given as to when the fixtures for 2012 will be released but Johnston was hoping they would be published before Christmas, in doing so helping with season ticket sales.

Managerial vacancy

Meanwhile the club will hold interviews this week in a bid to fill the vacant position at Oriel Park.

Over 30 applications have been received with former Sporting Fingal boss Liam Buckley emerging as the favourite to land the job vacated by Ian Foster.

Buckley was in Oriel Park last week and was present at a number of Dundalk games towards the end of the season. However Johnston said that no formal talks had taken

place with the 51-year-old.

"Liam was in Oriel Park last week to look at the Youth Development Centre but there was no discussions with him about the managers position. We have not held talks with anybody regarding the job. A committee has been set up and we will hold interviews this week with a view to announcing the new manager in the next two weeks."

Johnston hinted that the successful applicant would come from League of Ireland circles.

"There are five or six key areas we are looking for the new manager to have and one of those is to have familiarity with the League of Ireland, not just over one season but over the past few years. We want somebody who knows the players in the league and who knows what players have gone abroad and are willing to come back."

"The panel that has been set up has a good range of people on it with plenty of footballing knowledge and we are confident we will get the right man for the job."

Former Celtic and Aston Villa striker Tommy Johnson and former Tottenham Hotspur and England goalkeeper Ian Walker are also believed to have their names in the hat. Former Aberdeen boss Mark McGhee was also rumoured to have applied for the job but that has been dismissed as speculation.

Johnston also said that the club were in discussions with Marc Griffin over a new contract but refused to comment on whether Colin Hawkins had a clause in his contract meaning he would have to be offered the same terms as last season.

"We are still talking to Marc with a view to keeping him here. He produced the good for us last season and he has been at the club since he was 16 or 17 years of age so we want to keep him".

SOC CER DkIT

Connolly enjoying DkIT manager's role

By Gavin McLaughlin

DUNDALK FC head of Youth Development Martin Connolly has certainly been a busy man of late.

As well as overseeing the club's Under-19 side, who are currently riding high in the FAI Under-19 League, Connolly has also taken over the manager's position of DkIT's football teams, guiding the first-team and second-teams to the quarter-finals of the College and Universities Football League.

Connolly took up the position in September and he says he is enjoying the role.

"There was a vacancy for a coach in DkIT. Dundalk FC have a good relationship with the college so we got talking about it, the approach was made and I was delighted to accept their position."

"We have a first-team, a second-team and we are trying to get a ladies team together. The problem we have with the ladies team is that a number of the players who were there have gone. There is quite a high turnover of players so we have to start from scratch."

"Both teams have performed quite well. The teams are regionalised. The first team are in Division One Group B and won five of their six matches and have a home quarter-final because we've managed to top the group."

Interestingly, DkIT's only defeat came against Blanchardstown IT, managed by a certain Colin Hawkins.

The second team also topped their group, beating Blanchardstown 'B' to qualify alongside Drogheda Institute of Further Education. They too will have a home draw in the last eight. The draw for both competitions will take place on Thursday December 8.

The only downside of has been DkIT's exit from the Umbro Cup - the main cup competition associated with colleges football. Connolly though, had no complaints about the result.

"DIT are the holders of the competition", said Connolly. "They would be a Premier College side while we are a First Division college side. They beat us 3-1 with their last goal coming in injury time so I think that added a bit of gloss to the scoreline."

"Their best players were Roberto Lopez, who played with Bohemians, Craig Hyland, the Irish Colleges goalkeeper so they are quite a good side. They run a scholarship scheme as well so they've plenty to pick from."

Connolly said his role as Head of Youth Development at Oriel Park was beneficial to the DkIT job but surprisingly there is only one player with current Dundalk connections in the college set-up

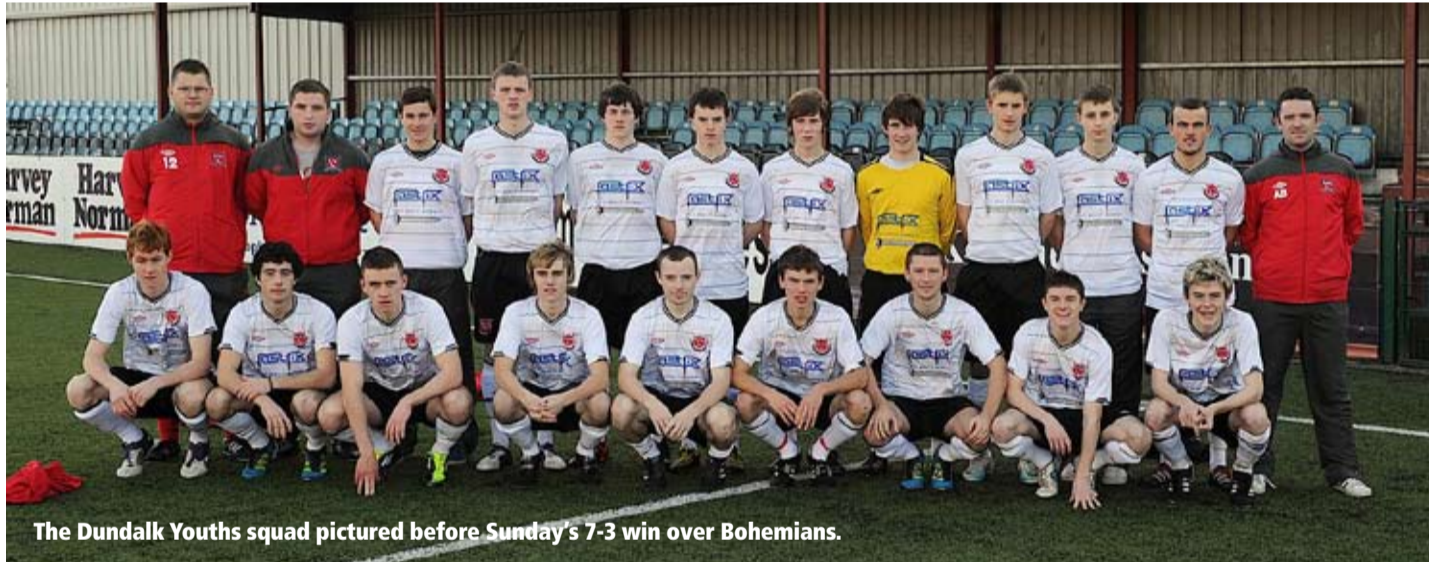
"The only one that's connected with the set-up is Daniel Hand who plays with the Under-19s. All the rest of the players are from outside the area or are too old to play with Youths or Under-19s, the likes of Paul Martin, Kevin McArdle and Cathal Bellew who now plays with Woodview Celtic."

"I'm enjoying it. The quality is not too bad", he added. "The problems with students is that they are not too readily available. Teams can vary week by week as students don't want to miss lectures for training so you need to have a good squad."

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SOC CER DDSL Under-18 Super League



The Dundalk Youths squad pictured before Sunday's 7-3 win over Bohemians.

Brilliant Bob hits four more

Dundalk Youths 7
Bohemians Youths 3

ANOTHER four goals from Bob McKenna, two from Stephen Kilcoyne and an unbelievable free-kick from Aidan Sheehy saw Dundalk Youths hammer league leaders Bohemians 7-3 in the DDSL U18 Super League, in a wonderfully-entertaining match at Oriel Park on Sunday morning.

After a competitive opening to the game, five goals were scored in an 11-minute spell, with the young Lilywhites leading 3-2 at the break, Kilcoyne with his first and McKenna with two.

Sheehy extended that lead after half-time before McKenna sealed his hat-trick. Bohs quickly pulled one back, only for McKenna and Kilcoyne to add further gloss to the scoreline, the Skerries native making it 18 goals in 11 outings.

Even opening

In an even opening, both sides had chances. The first fell to Dundalk on six minutes when the ball came invitingly to Kilcoyne on the left of the area but he blazed over.

Before the quarter-hour mark, in-form striker McKenna did well to create a shooting opportunity but he dragged his shot wide.

Bohs continued to be a threat and they went close from a free-kick which found a man in space at the back post, but he hooked his effort off target.

Goal frenzy

What was to follow was 11 minutes of madness as five goals were scored. Dundalk broke the deadlock on 20 minutes when a neat through-ball from Daniel Hand found Kilcoyne on the left of the box and this time he made no mistake as he finished superbly to the far bottom corner.

However, they were pegged level within 90 seconds when a Bohs player found space at the back post and shot home.

On 24 minutes, the hosts were back in front, as McKenna latched onto the ball on the left of the area and fired clinically to the far bottom corner.

Seconds later, it could have been 3-1 as Michael Gray's superb cross was headed over by McKenna from close range.

However, Bohs were level within minutes as a wonderful 25-yard free-kick beat Connolly.

Sheehy shot

Dundalk were back in front for a third time just past the half-hour mark. A corner was blocked on the line by the Bohs defence but it fell to McKenna who, from two-yards, could not miss.

Both teams had chances before the break, the best of them falling to Kilcoyne whose chip landed on the roof of the net. Hand then showed a classy touch but his low cross was blocked away, before, from the next attack, McKenna headed towards the top corner but the Bohs No1 collected.

On 52 minutes, the young Lilywhites made it 4-2, as Sheehy's magnificent free-kick flew into the top corner from 30-yards.

Shortly after, Sheehy fired a free-kick from a similar distance narrowly over, before captain Conor McDonald stung the palms of the visiting 'keeper as he pushed the ball over.

Four more

On 66 minutes, Dundalk looked to have put the game to bed when McDonald supplied McKenna and, despite a poor first touch, he raced through on goal and slotted under the 'keeper.

Just seconds later, though, Bohs reduced

the deficit to two when a cross from the right to the back post was headed in.

On 73 minutes, Dundalk were denied a penalty when Kilcoyne was dragged back inside the box, the left-winger getting his shot away but it was blocked.

The home side should have killed the game off on 78 when they broke well following a Bohs corner but, after Gray played in Hand, the tall striker was denied well in a one-on-one.

Dundalk did, however, seal it moments later when McKenna chipped in for his fourth, before Kilcoyne grabbed his second with a cool finish to complete a memorable win.

DUNDALK YOUTHS: Johnny Connolly, Ryan Duffy (Jude Carroll 50), Aidan Sheehy, Jack Clancy, Brian Bird, Michael Gray (Rian Hand 90), Conor McDonald, Kurt Murphy (Seanie Crosbie 56), Stephen Kilcoyne, Bob McKenna (John McKeown 83), Daniel Hand (Rowan Quinn 85).

U19s beaten

DESPITE goals from Cian Byrne and Peter Thomas, Dundalk U19s fell to a 3-2 defeat by Monaghan United at Gortakeegan on Saturday afternoon, having trailed 3-0

Gavin's

Last week's winning pick netted us €352.69, bringing our tally to €435.28 in aid of the Birches Alzheimer Centre. Our €25 BoyleSports treble for this week is:

Swansea (23/10)

Arsenal (8/15)

Everton-Stoke draw (5/2)

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Barclays Premiership - December 3-5

Home	Team	Draw	Team	Away
3/1	Newcastle	12/5	Chelsea	10/11
23/20	Blackburn	23/10	Swansea	23/10
1/6	Man City	6/1	Norwich	16/1
5/4	QPR	11/5	West Brom	11/5
1/3	Tottenham	19/5	Bolton	9/1
5/1	Wigan	3/1	Arsenal	8/15
9/2	Aston Villa	13/5	Man Utd	4/6
7/10	Everton	5/2	Stoke City	17/4
11/8	Wolves	11/5	Sunderland	21/10
23/10	Fulham	11/5	Liverpool	6/5