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# Driving Ireland past the Chequered Flag: Jordan Grand Prix, Formula One and National Identity

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Eoin Kirk

## Launch

Sport has changed. The nineteenth century rationale of amateurism, fair play and recreational participation has given way in the age of mass media and late capitalism to the staging of sport as commercial entertainment (Wenner, 1998; Whitson, 1998). While televised sport may work to create connections between people who have not yet met and are not likely to do so, it too, has slowly transformed these very relationships between sporting individuals and teams and the communities they supposedly represent (Whitson, 1998; Rowe et. al, 1998). Can the needs of national and international television, global commercial forces, transnational fans and audiences and narrow-focused sporting organisations all be accommodated by televised sport and still promote a sense of unified national identity? These larger issues of globalisation, postmodernism and national sporting identity are examined by exploring the world of the rolling, global circus of Formula One motor racing. Specifically, this article investigates Irish national sporting identity through an examination of Jordan Grand Prix and its commercial image, its representation in RTÉ's grand prix coverage of the team at the Belgian, Australian and Austrian races of 1998 and 1999, and the identification of Irish Jordan fans with the team.

The choice of Jordan Grand Prix for this study on the tenability of Irish national sporting identity in a mediated sports world, stems from the author's own fandom. As a devoted follower from the team's foundation in 1990, I never questioned the Irish identity of Jordan Grand Prix despite being aware of its multi-national alliance of drivers, engine suppliers, sponsors, tyre manufacturers and pit crew. My faithful fandom continued until August 30, 1998 when unexpectedly, Damon Hill's Jordan powered past the chequered flag first in the Belgian Grand Prix at Spa Francorchamps. This work arises out of the sense of disillusionment, anger and betrayal felt while watching RTÉ's coverage of the celebrations. The commentary team emphasised the triumphant nature of the Irish victory but the visuals were different. There were no Irish tricolours on display at the pit wall. There were no Irish symbols to be seen in the crowds. Eddie Jordan did not mention Ireland in his interviews. The Irish flag was not hoisted over the podium. *Amhrán na bhFiann* was not played as the constructors' national anthem. The post-race press conferences and press releases were an 'Ireland free zone'. It seemed clear to me, suddenly, Ireland had one story while a global viewing public had a totally different one.

## Eirton Murpherrari's identity

'The makers and purveyors of world class sport products seek to re-shape identities beyond the national stage.'

(Whitson, 1998: 72)

A consideration of Irish national sporting identity and Jordan Grand Prix must begin with the team itself. It licenses merchandise, produces press releases, supplies technical information and fact-files, controls the official fan club, Club Jordan,

approves marketing strategies and sponsors as well as running a motor racing team. All these forms of discourse produce meanings and reveal identification insights.

A primary characteristic of national identity, according to Schlesinger (1991a), is a sense of place. Jordan Grand Prix's headquarters are located in Northamptonshire, England, close to Silverstone, the current site of the British Grand Prix. A staff of 176 people work in a state of the art, highly technical facility complete with a wind tunnel and a track simulator. On the first day of September 1998, five flags hung over the workshop and factory floor. They were from left to right the flags of Japan, Germany, the United Kingdom, the Republic of Ireland and the European Union representing respectively the nationalities of the Japanese engine supplier Honda, the German driver, Ralf Schumacher, the predominantly British-based staff in the United Kingdom, the founder and majority shareholder Irishman, Eddie Jordan, and the European 'no trade barriers' community where the team and its sponsors operate. Flags, anthem, uniforms, and pageantry are significant in nation building, as Woodward (1997) contends, yet the equal weighting of flags in the official Club Jordan photograph with pictures of the staff wearing Benson and Hedges yellow indicates that no particular national identity is conferred on the team. The notions of flags of convenience and flexible allegiances spring to mind. There have been no O'Connell Street open-top bus cavalcades for the team after victories to question this no sense of place identity through a 'homecoming'. Instead, trophies have been brought back to the factory, the industrial, commercial and technical heart of Jordan Grand Prix. The territorial base, whether because of facilities, geographical convenience and competitive necessity or by choice, is beside a motor racing track in Great Britain. Ireland has no enhanced territorial claim over Jordan Grand Prix.

The next key factor that sustains and creates national identity is language which, according to Schlesinger (1991a), promotes difference and makes a country opaque to outsiders. Language marks boundaries in spoken words or communal images by invoking the first person 'we', the second person 'you' and invariably the third person 'them' (Raunsbjerg and Sand, 1998: 165). Therefore, it is necessary to scrutinise Jordan Grand Prix discourse in terms of the words, images and logos produced by the team, if we are to find distinctive marks of Irish identity. The original Jordan Grand Prix logo and letterhead in the early nineties was a diagonal Jordan signature in green lettering, crowned by two wheels containing the world and a shamrock which was linked underneath by two vertical lines to the words 'Grand Prix' in regular font apart from the final 'x' which trailed off like tyre marks. The combination of the equality of the globe and Ireland's national folk symbol, the authenticity of 'Eddie's' handwriting and the flowing confident movement of the design had obvious connotations for Irish fans. The encoded message appeared to be that this was an unmistakably Irish motor sport team competing with total self-belief on the world stage. These notions were underpinned by the licensed merchandise of the time where the primacy of the shamrock and green was maintained. Indeed, one Jordan Grand Prix lapel pin I bought had a two toned green shamrock with the Jordan signature in gold across it. Such merchandise is now unavailable.

Benson and Hedges' sponsorship in 1996 seems to have changed team priorities with regards to the logo. Initially there was the change of the colour of the signature and writing to yellow which was backgrounded by a two toned chequered green. This can still be found on some team uniforms in the pits and on letterheads. Then a snake supplanted the shamrock as the dominant symbol of the team. Ironically, the St. Patrick stories so rooted in Irish consciousness involve the banishing of snakes and the explanation of the Christian trinity by introducing the shamrock. Subsequently, Jordan's viper was superseded by a bright yellow and black buzzing hornet which is rarely glimpsed in Irish habitats. The merchandise logo has also evolved to include the instantly recognisable Benson and Hedges script on a two toned yellow background with a blue tinted, green Jordan signature underneath. The sting in the tail of the

hornet would appear to be the ancillary role ascribed to conventional Irish language images in the promotion of Jordan Grand Prix.

For Schlesinger (1991a, 1991b, 1993), the next criteria for national identity are a roll of trustworthy heroes and a shared collective memory, amnesia or history. It must be understood that such collectivities extend through time and space and consequently, that which is considered typically national or ethnic is usually a highly selective account. Notwithstanding this, Rowe et al. (1998) believe that such shared moments allow identification with the lives, dreams, and aspirations of millions whom we shall never know and with a territory which we shall never walk on or see in its entirety. Eddie Jordan frequently appeals to a sense of shared history in asserting his Irish credentials. In the aftermath of the Belgian Grand Prix anthem issue, he has emphasised his Christian Brother education in Synge Street where he learnt every syllable of *Amhrán na bhFiann*. This evocation is significant as he connects with Irish people who passed through the Church dominated educational system during the middle part of the twentieth century while also associating himself with the RTÉ appointed voice of Ireland, Gay Byrne, through Synge Street. Similarly, Jordan Grand Prix produced profiles regularly feature references to Mondello Park, karting, bank clerking and Eddie being a less than successful driver. The dismissal of failure in these 'rags to riches, Mondello heartland to Monte Carlo heart thumping' stories represent a new form of Irish identity. They strike a chord for a younger generation wishing to ignore politics, the Catholic Church, emigration and social exclusion. It is a capitalist identity which is humanised as Eddie Jordan emphasises his 'Irish myth of the West' personality traits. Achievement is attainable for all who 'dream the dream and enjoy the craic'. Modifying the American version, the hiberno dream evoked by Eddie Jordan and possibly through Jordan Grand Prix is that a forward-looking, stylish expression of individuality leads to a community success for the individual. Irish identity thrives on this individuality-collectivity paradox as illustrated by the status of Jack Charlton as soccer hero but Eddie Jordan wants more. He requires affirmation and re-integration into the community in true Proppian fashion as exemplified by his request to the government in 1998 to be contracted to promote Ireland world-wide and his organisation of a charity golf classic in the K Club. Such actions allied to the on-track successes of Jordan Grand Prix may allow him to be included in the recognisable pantheon of Irish sporting heroes. However, Jordan Grand Prix, the multi-national Formula One motor racing company may not have the same identity needs.

Schlesinger's (1991a) final defining characteristic of national identity is the integration of cultural signifiers into the political and economic domains. Governments may try to use the ritualism of sport to invoke feelings of history and unbroken tradition and confirm or create a national way of life in an essentially safe form of expression (Blain et al, 1993). However, they also warn how discourses of national identity are quite conservative, slow to evolve and lag a distance behind the rapid, energetic pace of change which characterises modern society. Therefore, it is quite surprising how quickly and enthusiastically the Irish government became involved in the sponsorship of Jordan Grand Prix. For £650,000 the display of Ireland/Discover Ireland emblems on the team cars, transportation equipment, and overalls up to 1995, gave a fresh impetus to Irish sporting identity. The shamrock and the word Ireland zoomed around the glamorous locations of the globe in the most technically advanced, sporting world championship into the living rooms of billions of television viewers. The myth of the West was banished and replaced by an image of Ireland as an entrepreneurial, capitalist, modern location for business. For Irish people identifying with Jordan Grand Prix, it could be a break from the past with regard to sporting loyalties. Here was a sport endorsed at the highest echelon of power that did not have the class and cultural connotations of gaelic football, hurling, rugby or soccer. It was loud, brash, aspirational and most importantly ahistorical in an Irish context. The free-spirited, 'rock n' roll', happy-go-lucky Irish projections of the team was heightened by the reverse discourse of the other sombre, unsmiling bosses such as Frank Williams

and Ron Dennis. For the much-clichéd youngest population in Europe, Jordan Grand Prix, as supported by official Ireland, allowed the space for the creation of new social identities with changing codes. Indeed for all three interested parties, government, people and Jordan, this symbiosis allowed a fresh area of culture where a diasporic identity could be formed. For the government, the Jordan Grand Prix sponsorship deal was a safe vehicle for what essentially could have been an anti-national state identity standing as it does outside the regular codes of nation citizenship. It allowed Eddie Jordan to access and open for himself and other economic emigrants, the possibility and desirability of the journey home in the same way as Mary Robinson's candle in the window invited the diaspora back. Those citizens in Ireland seeking points of identification with the nation could re-imagine their sense of belonging and reject the 'comely maidens at the cross-roads' mentality. Under the Jordan Grand Prix sponsorship, Ireland and Irishness became like Jonathan Swift's Laputa, a flying island capable of landing in many places historically, geographically and culturally. It allowed the paradox of 'a very ancient people and a very up to date one' to become a reality in the sporting arena (MacClancy, 1996: 10).

But all this has changed as the symbiotic relationships encountered difficulties. The government could not increase its investment in Jordan Grand Prix as space on the cars became more expensive when the team enjoyed more success. Bord Fáilte questioned the value of the promotion in terms of tourism impact. Eddie Jordan was upset by the snub and sought sponsorship within the Irish commercial sector. No money was forthcoming and Jordan Grand Prix effectively moved away from a formal Irish identity. The massive deal with Benson and Hedges confirmed the break with official Ireland. Despite Esat Digifone's sponsorship in 1998, the political and economic input from Ireland into Jordan Grand Prix's £40 million annual budget is minuscule. Jim McDaid, Minister for Sport, has been embroiled in controversy since he re-established political links with the promotional benefits of Formula One by appointing Eddie Jordan, in his personal capacity, as a sporting ambassador. The pressure group, Action on Smoking and Health, have criticised the decision because of the links with Benson and Hedges but the Minister is adamant that Eddie Jordan's appearances wearing Bord Fáilte and Ryder Cup logos will be successful because 'he is so proud of his Irishness' (Dept. of Tourism, 1999). But the link with Jordan Grand Prix remains severed politically primarily because the team moved financially out of Ireland Inc.'s league. Eddie Jordan's individual Irish identity may remain but the collective national identity of Jordan Grand Prix has altered irrevocably.

### **Eirton's chassis**

'In planet Reebok... there are no boundaries.'

(Whitson, 1998: 69)

Jordan Grand Prix's difficulties are obvious. Wishing to maintain sponsorship necessitates being amongst the front runners and this requires massive funding. This money is not available solely on the basis of an Irish identity, as a potential audience of five million North and South and sixty million, if estimates of the diaspora are included, does not have sufficient marketable earning capacity. Sponsors look at the figures of a twenty billion audience per race estimate and fund organisations that can appeal to the greatest proportion of it. Naturally, communal traditions and loyalties are supplanted by commodified identities that ignore historical and geographical added values. Corporate images and consumer choice discourse become dominant as exemplified by the buzzing hornet replacing the shamrock as the primary emblem of Jordan Grand Prix. Jhallay (1989) maintains that sporting teams that compete in such a highly mediated and global marketplace as Formula One, with 202 countries broadcasting coverage in 1996, are owned by companies of widely diverse characteristics and priorities. Esat Digifone's investment in Jordan Grand Prix was

made on the basis that 'both epitomise dynamic Irish companies taking on (and beating) the big boys in an exciting high tech business' as well as wanting 'to sponsor the Irish team as opposed to the sport itself' but others have different priorities (Esat, 1999). Benson and Hedges, Warner Pincus, Beta, Armour All, Cadtek, G de Z Capital, Bridgestone, Mastercard International, NatWest, Pearl Assurance, Playstation, Hewlett Packard, Rockport and a multitude of other Jordan Grand Prix sponsors in 1998 did not have such narrow focused, national interests. Jordan Grand Prix are under pressure to promote unrooted flexible identities that have commercial benefits for the greatest number of sponsors. It is share prices not shared national memories that are the focus of globalised, commodified sport.

The independent, outsider, full of fun image of Jordan Grand Prix widened the fan-base considerably and official membership 'outqualified' Benneton, a world-championship winning team by three to one in 1997 with fans predominantly residing in Great Britain (Nicholson and Hamilton, 1999). Consumers from large population centres became the target market for the team and the products of their sponsors. The hiberno-chic of the original Jordan image was not necessarily as useful in the Pacific-Rim's developing markets or on a pan-European base. The postmodern movement to a cultural convergence with no roots or fixed identity, suits all the interested parties in Jordan Grand Prix's global enterprise. A little bit of Irish identity can be beneficial but total alignment to one defining identity is dangerous in a commercial sense. With television rights and digital television subscriptions the principle form of funding in the future, Jordan Grand Prix can not afford to be encumbered by geographical boundaries. In a postmodern economy of signs, an unambiguous Irish national sporting identity for Jordan Grand Prix would be a liability. With the global beginning to control the local, Jordan Grand Prix must remain as independent, open and broad a cultural product as possible if it is to attract sellers, buyers and sponsors and survive in the financially-dominated sport of Formula One. Consequently, Irish national sporting identity becomes just another choice like Marlboro or Benson and Hedges, Tic Tac or Mastercard, red or yellow, in the cultural shopping centre of globalisation and commodification.

Yet, there are arguments which suggest that the global can, in fact, re-enforce the local (Walley, 1995). Hybridisation, whereby meanings of external origin are reconstituted, syncretised and blended with existing cultural traditions to produce vibrant identification, could offer hope for Irish national identity (Featherstone, 1995). This notion of 'glocalism', creating multiple blends of belonging which can sustain senses of the local, is illustrated perfectly by the coverage of the NBA on the Irish language channel TG4. Likewise under the yellow umbrella of Benson and Hedges Jordan Grand Prix, Irish fans can play with the German identification of Frenzzen, the Britishness of Hill and Eddie Jordan's Irishness and all the permutations and combinations of such identities. But the conveyor belt of drivers, sponsors and engine deals which suits the contemporary desire for transient identities must call all multi-local identities into question when the organising structure is corporate rather than societal. Local identities can be protected when the framing agent has a unifying location whether in time or space. For example, despite its commercialisation and the merchandised, multi-national construction of Manchester United, Peter Schmeichel still ended up talking like a native Mancunian because the club has a solid, rooted base in the city of Manchester.

The multi-local argument cannot be sustained in Formula One, however. The sport constantly moves as if propelled by profit margins. It rejects fixation in terms of venues, drivers, teams, tyres, engines and sponsors. Formula One does not want national identities for its teams and the FIA (Federation Internationale de l'Automobile) does not officially ascribe them. An Irish team is not needed by Formula One. It requires a competitive, narrative structure that will attract large Irish interest and audiences for its multi-national sponsors. Jordan Grand Prix fills that void presently as its owner is undoubtedly Irish-focused in terms of national identity. But attaching the

label Irish to Jordan Grand Prix is pointless when identity formation is a convenient, commercial, expedient process. Eddie Jordan admits as much when he said that Jordan Grand Prix is 'as Irish as a glass of Guinness' (Nicholson and Hamilton, 1999: 214). Deconstructed in Derridean fashion, Guinness may be considered Irish but meaning slippage occurs on closer scrutiny. Possibly the 'black stuff' is Irish in terms of origins and marketing appeal but its current production, shareholdings, profit-making and consumption transact on a multi-national, globalised basis. The comparison with Jordan Grand Prix is apt. Both companies originally used traditional Irish symbols as their identifying trademarks. The harp and the shamrock have been transcended by the colours black and yellow. Green is not an option.

Since Jordan Grand Prix cannot drive Irish identity past the chequered flag maybe the media's and in particular televised sport's tendency to operate restricted and conservative discourse when dealing with international sporting teams may be just the assistance required (Blain et al. 1993). Over to the Radio Telefís Éireann Grand Prix team trackside.

## Installation lap

'A text is always uttered from an utterance position.'

(Raunsbjerg and Sand, 1998: 164)

Having reached the era of the electronic turnstile, an initial utterance position from which RTÉ's coverage operates is the total control and manner with which the FIA has employed the most refined technological structures to bring strikingly differentiated versions of Formula One to international screens. National broadcasters such as RTÉ and ITV buy the rights from the FIA, providing grand prix racing with massive terrestrial audiences which satisfy sponsors who invest approximately £600 million into Formula One annually, while host broadcasters such as TVE and RAI provide clean video-audio feeds (Steiner, 1999). The national broadcaster must then choose how it wishes to transmit the race using the visuals and ambient sound of another organisation. This appears to replicate the notion of Baudrillard's simulacra concept where the world is made up of copies of which there is no original simulation or representation (Real, 1998). There is little sense of the single, authored, focused artistic experience as there is a scramble for a unity of meaning with pictures, countries and commentaries colliding. Each national broadcaster must try to gauge their own and their nations' needs to create and maintain audience interest and marketing opportunities. RTÉ, operating on constrained budgets, relies totally on the host broadcaster during live coverage and must commentate over these tightly organised, FIA commissioned visuals. RTÉ has no role in the choice of the structuring television codes and filters such as lighting, editing and camera placement. The only visual differentiations in Irish grand prix coverage are the scene-sets and pre-race interviews which are pre-recorded.

Given that only 36 per cent of RTÉ's income is from the licence fee, another context from which RTÉ's Formula One coverage must operate is having to recreate events in order to target audiences which will in turn attract advertisers and sponsors and secure additional revenue (Kinkema and Harris, 1998). With only a minimum of commercial breaks during race coverage and with RTÉ charging the same rates for grand prix as for other live sporting events attracting bigger audiences, there is an onus on the coverage to deliver the 'correct' diverse demographic audience to advertisers. Therefore, RTÉ need in their coverage to nationalise a global sport within a strong, mainstream point of entry. Jordan Grand Prix are obviously central to this. But it is perhaps RTÉ's reliance on Eircell's sponsorship of the television coverage that creates the greatest commercial pressures on the production team. Eircell were quick to identify the potential of Formula One sponsorship when launching their mobile phone penetration campaign. Not being in a financial position at the time to actually

invest in the perceived Irishness of Jordan Grand Prix, the marketing gurus chose to identify themselves as a dynamic, practical, knowing and lively company by sponsoring Irish coverage of the 'Irish' team. The fail-safe guarantee was that they were not inextricably linked to the fortunes of the Jordan team. Yet, if a non-Jordan driver got a podium finish, the edit to an Eircell graphic created its own discourse. Their use of highly imaginative, nation-neutral, purple bookends at commercial breaks drew on the familiarities of Formula One racing such as rapid pit stops and champagne ceremonies and keyed into the pace and unpredictability of the sport which of course suits mobile phone usage. But the implication left is that RTÉ has to deliver an Irish element to make the 'Eir' part of Eircell evident to the audience. With Esat Digifone becoming the official supplier of communication services to Jordan Grand Prix in 1998, the pressure increased on RTÉ to strengthen Irish ties in the coverage, if Eircell are to consolidate its position in the Irish mobile phone market. This commercial backdrop may have significant influence for the encoding of Jordan Grand Prix's Irishness.

RTE Sport's coverage of and relationship with Jordan Grand Prix lies within the realisation that many economic and cultural benefits will accrue from focusing on the Irish national identity of the team, a feature not covered by the rival ITV coverage. However, other groups, companies and individuals also profit from such a national designation. Eircell, Esat Digifone, Formula One merchandise outlets, the Irish government's promotion of the Celtic Tiger, the tourism industry all prosper by RTÉ promoting Jordan Grand Prix as an Irish team. A whole economy and cycle of interdependency thus depends on RTÉ ensuring Ireland drives past the chequered flag.

Compared to ITV, RTÉ's coverage appears to suggest that if Irish sports' fans wish to follow grand prix racing they should support the 'Irish' team on the Irish channel. ITV tends to reflect the relative achievements and grid positions of the different teams while RTÉ over-represents Jordan Grand Prix. For example, during the coverage of the 1998 Australian Grand Prix, Jordan Grand Prix received almost twice as much coverage on RTÉ as Ferrari even though their qualifying performances were just over half as good. They received over two and a half times more coverage on RTÉ than on ITV despite the presence of British driver Damon Hill in the Jordan team. No other teams were ascribed nationalities by RTÉ or ITV. Eddie Irvine's shamrock on his green and orange helmet seems to ensure that coverage of Ferrari is quite constant but also poses the question about how more imbalanced would RTÉ mentions of Jordan Grand Prix and Ferrari be without the presence of the Bangor born, Dalkey resident. RTÉ's grand prix coverage through volume assigns Jordan Grand Prix as the main viewership entry point into the narrative of grand prix racing and for RTÉ, as national broadcaster, Jordan Grand Prix are the primary source of interest. It is to an analysis of this identity concentration and how RTÉ build their narrative around Jordan Grand Prix that I now turn.

## Formation lap

'...the viewers are issued with a set of instructions or maxims as to how communication should be read, heard and seen.'

(Hargreaves, 1994: 157)

Preambles and conclusions in soap opera style are essential in nationalising an international event and retaining the less committed soft viewer in Formula One, particularly as there is no recognisable Irish sporting tradition to draw upon (Barrett, 1995). Arising from Blain et al.'s (1993) model of textual analysis, this section examines the combination of stylistic presentation, expert usage and narrative primacy in the prequels and sequels to RTÉ's live race coverage at the Australian Grand Prix on Sunday, March 7, 1999.

The pre-recorded prequel opens with a view of Peter Collins dressed in a stylish, casual manner positioned at the entrance gate to Albert Park. Conveniently a fan attired



in an Irish rugby jersey ambles through the frame. The preferred meaning could be that the smooth media professionalism of the Irish production team will provide an avenue of access for Irish fans to the complex world of grand prix. Collins welcomes Irish viewers to Melbourne and introduces edited highlights of the qualifying session. Significantly, the IT rich quality of Formula One and its identity potential is stressed by including invitations to send e-mails. The inference seems to be that the viewers can not only choose identification positions but can also interact and influence the commentary. A video postcard of the attractions of a modern, lively Melbourne detailing the popularity and history of the Albert Park race follows. This is intermixed with interviews from grand prix fans including on two occasions a group of Irish supporters wearing Jordan merchandise and carrying an Irish flag, evoking a sense of the Irish diaspora.

The first expert motor racing interview takes place in an affluent, modern, commercial centre with Eddie Jordan discussing the possibilities and imponderables, in true soap opera style, for the race and the season. The setting and characterisation infer that the audience can be inside trendy grand prix racing if it identifies with RTÉ's coverage of Jordan Grand Prix. A chain of interview snippets follows including John Watson, former world champion from Northern Ireland, Declan Quigley, motorsports correspondent of the *Irish Independent* and RTÉ's pit lane reporter and David Kennedy, a former Formula One race driver. The positioning of Declan Quigley is particularly interesting in that he is shown beside the symbol of a bridge wearing the green racing overalls of the Jordan Grand Prix team of 1993. Expectations of bias towards Jordan in his links between the pit lane action and the commentary box is evident from this image alone. It was unsurprising later, therefore, for Quigley, after a brief mention of McLaren mayhem, to refer almost exclusively to the activity in the Jordan pits prior to the red lights going out. In addition, after Eddie Irvine's win, two live interviews are conducted by Quigley and Collins from the pit lane. Both focus on the victory of Irvine through Jordan Grand Prix eyes as Ian Philips, the commercial director and Eddie Jordan are asked for comments on the race. As with the pre-race segments, the framing device is Jordan Grand Prix whether it is Kennedy's view with relation to the Celtic rivalry between themselves and Stewart or Watson describing how they matched Ferrari for reliability in pre-season testing. Cutting from Eddie Jordan's opinions of his drivers to the authorised experts appears to sanction preferred interpretations of the narrative.

Multiple plots and characters are presented but only one narrative is foregrounded. No other team owner or driver was interviewed within the diegetic structure. The principal entrance point emphasised in qualifying, is carried into the pre-race programming and is hammered home by Collins over the first live pictures which showed Irish tricolours in the crowd by asserting: 'Among the very large crowd, a large Irish contingent here to support Eddie Jordan's team of course', and almost as an afterthought, 'and Eddie Irvine at Ferrari.'

This narrative order outlined by Collins above was shown throughout the preliminaries and post-race analysis. For RTÉ, Jordan Grand Prix represent the primary narrative entry point and source of Irish national sporting identity in Formula One. The implication is that this should be the case also for the audience. But during actual racing, meaning becomes more fluid as incidents dictate the commentary while the visuals compete with Collins and Kennedy since they are provided by the host broadcaster. The signification for Irish national sporting identity of clashing commentary and visuals are my final area of textual analysis.

## The race

'When players in one way or another are the extended or vicarious agents of a national audience... the commentator's role will essentially be to mediate a transcendental we'

(Raunsbjerg and Sand, 1998: 169)

According to Wenner (1998) the commentary of televised sport may be quite at odds with the visual presentation because each imposes a different structure and ideological viewpoint on the coverage. In general, mediated sport pictures concentrate on specific stars that cast actions in terms of individual rather than team effort. Meanwhile, commentary tends to emphasise factors which are essentially superfluous to accounts of action such as the conveyance of sympathy and antipathy that endeavour to heighten the spectators' involvement and interest (Rowe et al., 1998; Wenner 1998 and Raunbjerg and Sand, 1998). I examined 30 minutes of RTÉ's live race transmission which is comprised of the final 25 minutes of race action and the first five minutes of celebrations from the Belgian Grand Prix in Spa Francorchamps which took place on Sunday, August 30, 1998. Owing to the Jordan Grand Prix triumph it allowed detailed analysis of the collision of the global priorities of Jordan, Benson and Hedges and the FIA with the national necessities of RTÉ.

As there was no change in race order during the selected sequence of images, the Belgian director inserted 16 shots from the pit lane and four slow motion action replays during the 25 minutes. 95 per cent of this non 'who will win?' race action was commented upon directly by Collins or Kennedy. Whether it was Johnny Herbert sulking in the pits, the Jordan pit crew looking anxiously at monitors, the Williams of Heinz Harald Frentzen sliding in the rain or Eddie Jordan being teased by Ron Dennis, the RTÉ team's flow of intense, hyperbolic national identification was interrupted and dictated to by the narrative concerns of the Belgian television director. They countered the global tenaciously with comments such as 'Jordan one and two, Ireland first and second' over regular images but the power of the cutaway made it difficult to construct notions of national sporting identity. In contrast, it was noticeable that during post-race euphoric images of the Jordan team, breaks to five inserts of fans waving Union Jacks or Benson and Hedges flags were ignored by RTÉ's commentators. They appeared to enter into a pre-planned mode of address that summed up their needs and the perceived needs of the audience and virtually ignored the presented visuals. Similarly, cuts to other parts of the race action did not have a defining power over commentary. Enduring shots of Jean Alesi and Jarno Trulli were largely ignored as Collins and Kennedy continued their speculations and considerations which were based on chats with Alain Prost in a bar the night before. Equally, images of disconsolate Ferrari fans on a litter strewn, half empty hillside viewing area as Sauber cars zoomed past was voiced over with 'We're not there yet'. Three or four different stories were available on screen but were ignored in favour of the evocation of the national. Thus, while the camera follows the race, the RTÉ commentary team follows their race for 'their audience' except for compelling, slow motions and humanised soap opera style inserts.

Raunbjerg and Sand (1998) contend that on-screen graphics are more authoritative than what is uttered by commentators. Information that used to be the preserve of the all seeing, all knowing commentator now originates with the producer. The graphics do not illustrate the commentator's words according to their theory but orient his or her commentary. This global dictation to local concerns could be quite significant for expressions of national identity. In Formula One as the most frequently used graphics of time gaps and race order do not specify constructors but drivers only, RTÉ then has to counteract this individuality narrative in favour of its chosen collective through regular team namings. However, it appears that their predominant tactic is to totally ignore the super-imposed sponsored information. Of the fifty three on-screen graphics displayed during the final twenty five minutes of race action, only twenty three per cent of them were alluded to by the RTÉ team. Rather than referring to the number of laps remaining visual, Collins tells us that the cars have no windscreen wipers, relates the history of Jordan Grand Prix in one minute and implored 'Damon' to drive conservatively by using the colloquialism 'keep it between the ditches'. The emotive familiarity of the local commentator's address challenges the indifference and starkness of the global facts and figures.

RTE's intersecting visuals and commentary relate multiple narratives. The pictures, the ambient sounds, the graphics and the commentaries all told conflicting, contrasting stories. Unified meanings depended on the viewer ignoring other facets of production. Commentators Peter Collins and David Kennedy tried heroically to ensure Jordan Grand Prix's national identity as they used comments such as 'A momentous day for Irish sport', 'the chequered flag falls for the Jordan Team', and 'it is very much an Irish win, we must remember that'. But the images and sounds of buzzing hornets, German flags, ITV interviewing Eddie Jordan first, Union Jacks, individualised graphics, yellow merchandise, freeze frames backdrops of Damon Hill and congratulating sponsors undermine their efforts. The only coherence of expression was global during the usage of slow motion and pit reaction shots, which could not be ignored by RTÉ. These close-up, intense, emotional visuals demanded fullest attention irrespective of identification while the inanimate, soulless profit-seeking machinery of globalisation as represented by the cars racing were deemed appropriate to be superseded by the local needs of RTÉ. Given this construction, Irish national sporting identity will depend on the race remaining an independent text. If global pictures continue to create more global narratives for global audiences, there will be little room amongst the 'over the moon' and 'sick as a parrot' pit lane shots to create national identification. If the 'who will win?' question becomes subservient to the 'how are people feeling?' story, RTÉ, with their limited production resources, will have to concede defeat in their attempts to drive Ireland coherently past the chequered flag.

In the coverage analysed above, there are no real winners, but more importantly there are no real losers. Certainly the global and the national undermine each other's unified meanings but paradoxically both global and national interests are served by such fragmentation. Benson and Hedges, Serengeti and Jordan Grand Prix's myriad of other transnational sponsors are satisfied by the widespread visual attention in a world-wide market. Eircell, RTÉ's advertisers and RTÉ's public service proponents are content with the nationally angled commentaries. Divide and conquer appears to be the motto of glocalism. The global equates with the visual while the national depends on the aural when applied to Formula One, Jordan Grand Prix and RTÉ. But critically, has meaning been so sub-divided that it has become powerless before reaching targets? Indeed no matter how polysemic globally or nationally encoded meanings become, the greatest variables remain in their reception. After Jordan Grand Prix's ambivalence towards Irish national sporting identity and RTÉ's over-enthusiasm for conferring it on the team, it will be the audience and specifically for this study, Jordan Grand Prix fans who determine ultimately whether Irish national sporting identity passes the chequered flag.

## The in lap

'There are as many fans and fan movements as there are meanings to contest and negotiate'.

(Harris, 1998: 4)

For this research two venues in Dublin were selected for a participant observation study and a series of focus groups were conducted with Irish fans of Formula One. Vicar Street and The Flowing Tide are two popular venues where fans congregate for live relays of races during the season.

The over-riding sense I got from participant observation at both venues was how organised and commercialised the fandom appeared. This was created initially by a most evident motivation at the locations to maximise profits through bar takings and in Vicar Street's case by charging £12.50 for a sandwich and admission to a screening. This meant that the social, public outing so important to fanship was largely contextualised by promotion and marketing activity. The commercial needs of 98FM, Hewlett Packard, Fosters, Benson and Hedges and other companies became more

important than identification. For example, the deep knowledge and expertise of fandom was validated but in a competitive 'pick the winner rather than follow your team' manner. The emphasis on the best in terms of success and style over the fans' personal sympathies creates homogeneity of allegiance. A possible implication of the podium prediction contests for trips to Monza is that fans try to pick the winners without personal involvement or identification. Their loyalties become fragmented as the 'best' is re-emphasised by themselves. Commercialised fandom does not seem to breed diversity despite the democratic and personal choice arguments in favour of postmodernism. At the venues, the prospect of winning an Olympus camera or a Benson and Hedges tee-shirt appeared as important as cheering on your favourite driver or team. A form of low intensity 'diet-fandom' was more prevalent with lots of shouting, interest and discussion but very little commitment on display. The one step removal from direct involvement lightens the fandom emotions. Additionally there is no inheritance of grand prix fandom unlike football where you copy or originate loyalties based on prior allegiances of fathers, mothers, brothers, sisters, friends or cousins. Who asks eight year olds what Formula One team they follow?

Instead, the grand prix fan selects from a list of eleven teams and twenty two drivers that are all multi-national, multi-commercial and globalised. Grand prix fandom becomes a deliberate decision and is as likely to be based on the colour scheme of the team as on nationality. As it is a considered identification, it does not have the 'natural' intense, frenzied negative connotations of fandom. If you do not like what you see, you switch channel and you do not have to wreck a stadium, throw missiles or cry. But because of the missing downsides of fanship, the grand prix fan may miss out on the deep play needed for identification. The representation of self by a team or driver becomes temporary and floats by without full engagement. The low number of fans who engaged in public shows of devotion illustrated this. Few Jordan Grand Prix fans wore colours and even if they did they were commodified yellow with sponsors names emblazoned all over them. Essentially there is no need since identity produced by consumerism and validated through third person media is worn lightly. Support seemed limited to big cheers in the darkness in true Lacanian style. The momentary escapism is nullified by the return to the daylight. The identity is so fragile that it depends wholly on symbolic affirmation and the tension felt before the playing of the national anthem after the Jordan victory at the French Grand Prix emphasised this. The grand prix series becomes a cultural product to be consumed with 'flexi-identities' the most common choice. A reciprocal transfer of allegiances between Ferrari and Jordan fans at the two different races re-iterates this point. On-track Ferrari tifosi just leave their seats and go home once 'their' cars have crashed or stopped. But Irish identities mediated through television were moveable and disposable and seemed to depend on 'which is the best performing most Irish car on the track'. Allegiances could be switched, without recriminations, for convenience. Identity appears to be as changeable as the tee-shirt you wear or the prize you might win. It would seem that these fans of the postmodern age build up a portfolio of light identities for access at different moments. Fandom does not have to be earned in the traditional manner by years of suffering losses and accumulating encyclopaedic knowledge. Postmodern fandom can be instantly acquired by buying a hat, switching on the television, acquiring a few key phrases such as understeer and reverse lock or paying £12.50. The witnessed smiles and tears of relief which greeted *Amhrán na bhFiann* in the Flowing Tide were, I believe, more a form of self-affirmation of having made a successful identity selection than unconfined joy. There was little time for partying in the streets as the new opportunities for identity were already on the screen with the superbiking exploits of Carl Fogarty. But how do the fans view themselves and their transient, temporary identities? It is to their views and comments I now turn.

## Spraying the fans

The fandom of Jordan Grand Prix supporters I interviewed seemed to be based on the largely intangible postmodern qualities of style, pace, prestige and transience in order to derive pleasures. The ability to move, be adaptable and become linked to a reality seemingly divorced from their own, emerged as the salient constructs of their fandom. The process of the race and its identities becomes far more pleasurable for these fans than the product of the result. The mystique and pace of the high tech equipment, detachment, financial pressures and fetishistic sophistication seems to heighten the fans' interest. Regular allusions to the numbers of pit stops, the commercial costs of managing the Jordan team and to the images of people and machinery controlled the flow of interaction. The fans appear to feel empowered by the realisation that the teams, packages, tracks, conditions, drivers and sponsors are ever-changing and temporary and delight in the transient, minor victories. There is little evidence of great outpourings of joy and pride as it does not matter who wins because there is another race in a fortnight and another championship next year with new engines, new colours, new sponsors and new venues. The delight shown by the fans in speculating about the future of Jordan Grand Prix emphasises the transitory nature of this fandom. Similarly, the dislocation of fandom due to its global nature becomes a virtue of loyalty because it is not local and it is not knowable. The voyeuristic, barely active involvement and participation with the sport is paradoxically its attraction. Fandom of Jordan Grand Prix allows a celebration of the detached, disengaged, fleeting moment.

Building on the perception created during observation, it would appear that the focus group members too had 'flexi-identities' and conditional identities. The former allows fans to have multiple emotional entry points into the text while the latter, in the best retail tradition, allows consumers of Formula One to reshelve one identity if a more involving identity becomes available, however temporary. Thus, fans described their Jordan devotion as being a response to Williams' boring dominance but could be coupled with strong interests in the mid-field battles while the removal of the Irish tricolour from the factory in Silverstone would precipitate the demise of some Jordan allegiances. In a similar vein, my own fragile, loose identity with the team was threatened seriously by the non-playing of the Irish national anthem in Belgium in 1998. The suggestion is that the quantity of identities becomes more important than the quality of identity since being stuck with an unempowering and valorising identity does not remain an option. The identity opportunities are vast within the Formula One structures and if the Jordan Grand Prix cars crash at the first corner, the fan must be able to adapt to the new conditions of viewership by adopting a fresh identity without reproach. This process is facilitated through having multiple reference points initially and not applying limits to the distances and speeds at which individual identities can travel. When the Irish grand prix fan cries 'Go Eddie', the ambiguity is convenient.

The opinions on the represented 'Irishness' of Jordan Grand Prix were as divergent as the life histories of the members. Given the cultural climate and differing educational, social, locational and familial backgrounds of focus group members, it is not surprising that no over-arching, totally coherent notion of nationhood emerged from the discussions about Jordan Grand Prix's Irish identification. Instead, each fan in turn emphasised separate facets of identity and reconstituted them to serve his or her own cultural demands. It appeared that the fans extracted their own meanings from the global texts and used them to fulfil their own needs in their own ways. This creates through Jordan Grand Prix a form of privatised, aspirational Irishness that refashions Irish national identity through time and place. It can move to the past or project to the future. It can accommodate both the bound geography of the state or look beyond the shores to the diaspora. It can breathe life into traditional, modern or alternative identifications that encourage social prestige and self-esteem on an individual basis. Self inventive, selective Irishness occurs with Jordan Grand Prix because the rapidity and mixture of national signifiers and symbols does not permit

According to Wenner (1998) the commentary of televised sport may be quite at odds with the visual presentation because each imposes a different structure and ideological viewpoint on the coverage. In general, mediated sport pictures concentrate on specific stars that cast actions in terms of individual rather than team effort. Meanwhile, commentary tends to emphasise factors which are essentially superfluous to accounts of action such as the conveyance of sympathy and antipathy that endeavour to heighten the spectators' involvement and interest (Rowe et al., 1998; Wenner 1998 and Raunsbjerg and Sand, 1998). I examined 30 minutes of RTÉ's live race transmission which is comprised of the final 25 minutes of race action and the first five minutes of celebrations from the Belgian Grand Prix in Spa Francorchamps which took place on Sunday, August 30, 1998. Owing to the Jordan Grand Prix triumph it allowed detailed analysis of the collision of the global priorities of Jordan, Benson and Hedges and the FIA with the national necessities of RTÉ.

As there was no change in race order during the selected sequence of images, the Belgian director inserted 16 shots from the pit lane and four slow motion action replays during the 25 minutes. 95 per cent of this non 'who will win?' race action was commented upon directly by Collins or Kennedy. Whether it was Johnny Herbert sulking in the pits, the Jordan pit crew looking anxiously at monitors, the Williams of Heinz Harald Frentzen sliding in the rain or Eddie Jordan being teased by Ron Dennis; the RTÉ team's flow of intense, hyperbolic national identification was interrupted and dictated to by the narrative concerns of the Belgian television director. They countered the global tenaciously with comments such as 'Jordan one and two, Ireland first and second' over regular images but the power of the cutaway made it difficult to construct notions of national sporting identity. In contrast, it was noticeable that during post-race euphoric images of the Jordan team, breaks to five inserts of fans waving Union Jacks or Benson and Hedges flags were ignored by RTÉ's commentators. They appeared to enter into a pre-planned mode of address that summed up their needs and the perceived needs of the audience and virtually ignored the presented visuals. Similarly, cuts to other parts of the race action did not have a defining power over commentary. Enduring shots of Jean Alesi and Jarno Trulli were largely ignored as Collins and Kennedy continued their speculations and considerations which were based on chats with Alain Prost in a bar the night before. Equally, images of disconsolate Ferrari fans on a litter strewn, half empty hillside viewing area as Sauber cars zoomed past was voiced over with 'We're not there yet'. Three or four different stories were available on screen but were ignored in favour of the evocation of the national. Thus, while the camera follows the race, the RTÉ commentary team follows their race for 'their audience' except for compelling, slow motions and humanised soap opera style inserts.

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The over-riding sense I got from participant observation at both venues was how organised and commercialised the fandom appeared. This was created initially by a most evident motivation at the locations to maximise profits through bar takings and in Vicar Street's case by charging £12.50 for a sandwich and admission to a screening. This meant that the social, public outing so important to fanship was largely contextualised by promotion and marketing activity. The commercial needs of 98FM, Hewlett Packard, Fosters, Benson and Hedges and other companies became more

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Instead, the grand prix fan selects from a list of eleven teams and twenty two drivers that are all multi-national, multi-commercial and globalised. Grand prix fandom becomes a deliberate decision and is as likely to be based on the colour scheme of the team as on nationality. As it is a considered identification, it does not have the 'natural' intense, frenzied negative connotations of fandom. If you do not like what you see, you switch channel and you do not have to wreck a stadium, throw missiles or cry. But because of the missing downsides of fanship, the grand prix fan may miss out on the deep play needed for identification. The representation of self by a team or driver becomes temporary and floats by without full engagement. The low number of fans who engaged in public shows of devotion illustrated this. Few Jordan Grand Prix fans wore colours and even if they did they were commodified yellow with sponsors names emblazoned all over them. Essentially there is no need since identity produced by consumerism and validated through third person media is worn lightly. Support seemed limited to big cheers in the darkness in true Lacanian style. The momentary escapism is nullified by the return to the daylight. The identity is so fragile that it depends wholly on symbolic affirmation and the tension felt before the playing of the national anthem after the Jordan victory at the French Grand Prix emphasised this. The grand prix series becomes a cultural product to be consumed with 'flexi-identities' the most common choice. A reciprocal transfer of allegiances between Ferrari and Jordan fans at the two different races re-iterates this point. On-track Ferrari tifosi just leave their seats and go home once 'their' cars have crashed or stopped. But Irish identities mediated through television were moveable and disposable and seemed to depend on 'which is the best performing most Irish car on the track'. Allegiances could be switched, without recriminations, for convenience. Identity appears to be as changeable as the tee-shirt you wear or the prize you might win. It would seem that these fans of the postmodern age build up a portfolio of light identities for access at different moments. Fandom does not have to be earned in the traditional manner by years of suffering losses and accumulating encyclopaedic knowledge. Postmodern fandom can be instantly acquired by buying a hat, switching on the television, acquiring a few key phrases such as understeer and reverse lock or paying £12.50. The witnessed smiles and tears of relief which greeted *Amhrán na bhFiann* in the Flowing Tide were, I believe, more a form of self-affirmation of having made a successful identity selection than unconfined joy. There was little time for partying in the streets as the new opportunities for identity were already on the screen with the superbiking exploits of Carl Fogarty. But how do the fans view themselves and their transient, temporary identities? It is to their views and comments I now turn.



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The opinions on the represented 'Irishness' of Jordan Grand Prix were as divergent as the life histories of the members. Given the cultural climate and differing educational, social, locational and familial backgrounds of focus group members, it is not surprising that no over-arching, totally coherent notion of nationhood emerged from the discussions about Jordan Grand Prix's Irish identification. Instead, each fan in turn emphasised separate facets of identity and reconstituted them to serve his or her own cultural demands. It appeared that the fans extracted their own meanings from the global texts and used them to fulfil their own needs in their own ways. This creates through Jordan Grand Prix a form of privatised, aspirational Irishness that refashions Irish national identity through time and place. It can move to the past or project to the future. It can accommodate both the bound geography of the state or look beyond the shores to the diaspora. It can breathe life into traditional, modern or alternative identifications that encourage social prestige and self-esteem on an individual basis. Self inventive, selective Irishness occurs with Jordan Grand Prix because the rapidity and mixture of national signifiers and symbols does not permit

nor encourage enduring, shared national affirmation. Instead, with community associations and meanings having been abraded and transformed by market place logic, Jordan Grand Prix fans create their own Irish identities through reconstruction of the encountered texts.

It was noticeable that very little distinction was made by the participants between Eddie Jordan and the Jordan Grand Prix team. Fans could tap into senses of collectivity so central historically to the Irish social fabric while simultaneously enjoying the singular specificity so important in consumer culture through the personality of Eddie Jordan. Jordan Grand Prix offers multiple identification possibilities inherent in the variety of symbols, drivers, logos and television coverage. Eddie Jordan himself, is just one more entry point amongst thousands. The open-endedness of the team as a text allied to Eddie Jordan's distinctly Irish moments of recognition such as dancing jigs and singing *Olé Olé Olé*, makes the identifications of the fans no lose situations for them. Despite RTÉ's coverage, they do not have to embrace an all encompassing, narrow hegemonic vision of Irishness with Jordan Grand Prix. While one focus group member suggested that it suited Eddie Jordan to be proud to be Irish, I would contend that it also suits the fans. Under the umbrella of Jordan Grand Prix, they can test, dismiss and acquire competing and contrasting Irish national identities that vary in form and in intensity, for themselves and for their country.

Significantly with regard to RTÉ, it appeared that for focus group members, their pre-disposed, inside-the-camp, Jordan oriented, commentaries were rejected for the vitality of Murray Walker and the detailed analysis of Martin Brundle on ITV. In the manner of the postmodern cliché, the style of ITV's commentary is more meaningful than the substance of RTÉ's. A comment that 'it's more a visual thing than listening to the commentary' also raises serious issues for RTÉ's attempts to claw national identification from the globalised images. With viewers giving added weight to the visuals, RTÉ's ability to specialise its coverage is severely diminished and it is quite possible that these fans did not notice RTÉ's efforts to control national meanings because they are already using the global images to create their own. The joyful anticipation of being able to extend this meaning making process using digital tv technology through choosing suitable replays, graphics, angles and in-car shots may diminish RTÉ's role even further. With the dearth of home produced visuals already costing RTÉ viewers, the future for grand prix on the station may be grim if they are not cogniscent of the real identity needs of their potential audiences. Self-empowerment through asserting control of the narrative with detailed knowledge and differentiating oneself from other sports fans were crucial meaning processes for these fans and seemed as vital as any Irish identifications. Fans may accept Jordan Grand Prix's Irishness but deliberately oppose RTÉ's appropriation of that identity. Since these fans also rejected the government's involvement with Eddie Jordan as being vote catching and too little too late, perhaps the lesson to be drawn is that such postmodern identities do not rely upon the hierarchical, collective, cultural seal of approval. These Jordan fans, creating their own identities through using cultural products, do not welcome the type of central control as represented by RTÉ and the government. RTÉ may serve and fulfil the commitments of their public service role and the commercial needs of their sponsors and advertisers but the encoded and emphasised Irish national identity for team Jordan appears to be irrelevant, as postmodern fans watch to create their own identifications but do not listen. The Irish national sporting identity attributed to Jordan Grand Prix was negotiated with, re-negotiated with, played and toyed with until the identity needs of the audience were satisfied. Ultimately, Jordan Grand Prix became Irish if and when these fans wished it to be.

## Championship positions

'Like everyone else, I was in tears and without doubt that was the greatest sporting day of my life'

(Eddie Jordan, 1999b: 21)

In the interview quoted above in *J*, the official team magazine, Eddie Jordan was not talking about Jordan Grand Prix's first podium finish. He was not talking about the team's victories in Belgium nor in France. Instead, these quoted words refer to the Republic of Ireland's unexpected one nil triumph over Italy during the 1994 FIFA World Cup. For me, the feelings expressed by Eddie Jordan here reinforce the findings of this study. The essence of a unified national sporting identity is to be found in this Jordan expression of collectivity and raw emotion. His identification with the soccer team appears absolute, probably because he has little choice in its creation. He could not influence his birthplace or his ancestral home. From childhood this attachment is strengthened every time the team plays, win or lose. All the joys and sufferings whether they be open top bus homecomings or last minute defeats must be lived through and endured and for Eddie Jordan, this compulsory, natural investment was regained with interest when Ray Houghton's goal precipitated national celebrations. Formula One is a world apart and even Eddie Jordan appears to seek national identification outside its realm.

Postmodern grand prix racing identities are different. They are chosen purposefully. They are selected by consumers. They celebrate individuality and flexibility. They foreground layers of distance using space age machinery, fenced off tracks, glamorous socialites, inaccessible pit lanes and faraway locations. National identities within such a loose framework of reality exist nowhere but occur everywhere. The television screen becomes the point of entry and identity into this created, unnatural environment. Fans have little primary experience and consequently their identifications become throwaway. The ability to easily discard an identity is inherent in a sport that requires massive consumer expenditure to justify its existence. Jordan Grand Prix, RTÉ and Jordan fans shape, use and reuse disposable identities for their own needs. Consumer culture, economic considerations and self-image appear to be of more importance than the raw emotion of Giants Stadium in June 1994. In this knowledge we can now embrace the fundamental rule of the postmodern, globalised, commodified national sporting identity that is Formula One. There is no chequered flag.

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