

TEXT OF THE INTRODUCTORY ADDRESS delivered by **PROFESSOR GERARD T. WRIXON**, Vice-Chancellor of the University, President, University College Cork – National University of Ireland, Cork on 10th May, 2002, on the occasion of the conferring of the Degree of Doctor of Laws, *honoris causa*, on **ROY KEANE**

A Sheansailéir, a Árd Mhéara, a mhuintir na hOllscoile, agus a dhaoine uaisle,

The name Roy Keane conjures up many sporting images. As the captain and keystone for both Manchester United and the Irish national team his success has carried on a long tradition of Cork football and sporting achievement. He stands amongst the great names of Irish football with immense composure and leadership, combined with all-round ability and consistency. It has been said of Roy that he is one of the most influential players of his generation, setting football standards by which others measure themselves.

But as with so many things in life that are worth having, such success was the product of many years of dedicated training, self-belief, intelligence and the highest level of motivation and integrity; traits that are common amongst all successful professional people. Despite many rejections from English clubs at the start of his career Roy's unrelenting optimism and self-determination eventually paid off, and his first semi-professional signing was with Cobh Ramblers in 1987. He has had a remarkable career since he moved to Nottingham Forest in the summer of 1990 and to Manchester United in 1993. He chose United despite interest from European giants Barcelona and Real Madrid. At that time he said: "It was no contest, I supported Spurs as a kid but the rest of my family were United daft. I don't think I would have a family left if I'd not signed for them."

The "level playing pitch" of the football field is perhaps the closest thing to a space in which a genuine meritocracy can operate. Soccer is a sport offering access to young people irrespective of background. It is in such sports that the purest heroes arise; heroes who can be idealised and admired by the mass of people. Roy Keane is such a hero. The initial surprise at his unusual prowess within his local community has been transformed into admiration and pride at his extraordinary achievements.

Stardom has many perils and heroes can carry an undue burden of representation. Roy Keane has done what many stars have not been able to do: he has succeeded in preserving contact with his people and community while living with international fame. He has preserved his own personal privacy and remained true to his essential personality and identity while excelling at the very top of international soccer. His courage, dedication to his profession and commitment to the full realisation of the potential of his remarkable talents are an inspiration to all and particularly to the community in which he grew up on the Northside of Cork City.

Despite his great success Roy has never been one to flaunt his fame. He has never forgotten how fortunate he has been and he has kept in close touch with his roots. "As a family we are very close" he has revealed on several occasions. This is a community to which he regularly returns and to which he has been generous. He intends one day to return to live in the city of his birth. From an early age Roy's parents instilled in him very high personal standards and a fierce resentment of any sort of injustice. He has always been very much his own man, and throughout his life, on and off the pitch, he would speak his mind if he thought something was wrong. With a strong belief in supporting the underprivileged, he is constantly involved in a number of children's charities, which frequently goes unnoticed, often unreported at his own request.

The clubs in which he began his football career continue with his encouragement to be cradles for new talent. His own self-belief, determination and hard work provide a living

example of achievement. He is a role model for all young people and one of Ireland's greatest sporting ambassadors. The initial admiration of a community has come to be shared with a city, a county, a country and ultimately a whole generation across the world. It is not too much to call Roy Keane a great teacher from the 'university of life' who has had enormous impact for good and whose leadership shines brightly, providing inspiration for others.

In all our graduates, we look for three particular qualities, intelligence, skills and industry. In a university such as ours where the existence of multiple intelligence is well recognised, it is easier to see how human intelligence emerges and operates in a spectrum of human activity, well beyond the purely academic. How a Roy Keane might have in other spheres exploited the remarkable intelligence he displays on the football field we do not know. But we can, with Ireland's fans and the informed and critical among the football supporters worldwide, applaud his outstanding football brain. At its best, football is a beautiful example of mind-body unity in the ball-skills, personal movement and team orchestration, which Roy displays for both United and Ireland. Beyond those capacities, also, he is the engine, the driving force that keeps those teams going in the Champions' League against the top clubs of Europe and in the World Cup qualifiers against such world-class teams as Holland and Portugal. For many admirers he is a one-man industrial revolution on the football field.

In the staging of the World Cup 2002 in Korea and Japan, another dimension of our globalising world will be revealed. National identities will be reinforced in a communal experience where tiny islands like our own and empire-size states will do battle on equal terms and by peaceful means. At its beautiful best World Cup football can break down age-old national and cultural barriers and create new, informal communities. With Roy Keane and his team on the field, the by now legendary good-natured Irish fans in attendance and the whole world watching on television, the North-side, Cork City, Manchester and Ireland will have much to be proud of. And after today so will UCC.

It is with great pleasure then that I present Roy Keane to the Chancellor of the National University of Ireland for the conferring of the Degree of Doctor of Laws, *honoris causa*.

PRAEHONORABILIS CANCELLARIE, TOTAQUE UNIVERSITAS:

Praesento vobis, hunc meum filium quem scio tam moribus quam doctrina habilem et idoneum esse qui admittatur, honoris causa, ad gradum Doctoratus in utroque Jure, tam Civili quam Canonico, idque tibi fide mea testor ac spondeo totique Academiae.