

# OLLSCOIL na hÉIREANN

## NATIONAL UNIVERSITY OF IRELAND

TEXT OF THE INTRODUCTORY ADDRESS DELIVERED BY:

**MR TOM KIERNAN**, on 2 December 2015 in the Royal College of Surgeons in Ireland, on the occasion of the conferring of the Degree of Doctor of Arts *honoris causa*, on **PAUL O'CONNELL**

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

It is indeed a great pleasure for me to introduce to you today Paul O'Connell to accept the Honorary Degree of Doctor of Arts from the Royal College of Surgeons in Ireland. Of course we also welcome Paul's father Michael and mother Sheila, and above all his wife Emily and his two children Paddy and Lola. This is a very proud moment for them also.

Paul's achievement in the world of rugby has been immense, but I feel it is important I should mention that he completed 3 of 4 years of his computer engineering degree at the University of Limerick, before deferring the final year of the degree to concentrate on rugby. Rugby was to gain immensely, and he has made a huge contribution to Munster, Ireland and the British and Irish Lions.

Paul began playing rugby at around 14 or 15 years of age and was selected for the Irish schools team in 1997/98 when his colleague was one Gordon D'Arcy, with whom he was to play with Ireland on many an occasion. He went on to play on 5 occasions with the Irish U21 side, with Donnacha OCallaghan as a second row partner. During this period he played with Young Munsters and it

is fair to say that the club was a springboard for his further success. Munsters of course was the home of the late Tom Clifford, a former Munster, Ireland and Lions prop forward, who I'm sure is looking down on Paul with great satisfaction.

Club rugby has undoubtedly taken a back seat on the Irish rugby calendar, and provincial rugby has become the norm . The Celtic League and the Heineken Cup were played at a very high standard, which we were not used to having only 3 interprovincials per annum. However we need not have worried, Munster rose to the task led by one of the greatest players in my lifetime who was to play for the province, Ireland and the Lions.

Paul made his debut for Munster on the 17<sup>th</sup> August 2001 / 14 years ago, at the age of 22 and immediately made an impact. It was in fact in his home ground of Thomand Park in the Brazen Head Trophy. One of his greatest achievements however was with Munster winning the European Cup in 2006, captained by Anthony Foley, and 2008 when Paul captained the team. He was to win 3 Celtic League titles in 2003, 2009 and 2011 and a Celtic Cup in 2005 ( the last Celtic Cup to be played for ). Paul has thus won 7 provincial trophies outright in a highly competitive environment.

Paul O'Connell made his debut for Ireland against Wales in the 2002 6 nations championship, partnered by his friend and colleague Mick Galway of Shannon. He was 22 years old , which appeared young for a 2<sup>nd</sup> row forward, however, it became obvious to all that someone special had arrived. His knowledge of the game and of the priorities of his own position made him a hugely successful and inspirational 2<sup>nd</sup> row in a period in which the national team won many honours – 4 triple crowns, 2004/06/07/09, two 6 nations championships, 2014 and 2015 , it is important to mention that in 2009 not alone was the triple crown won but

the grand slam was achieved. In addition of course, Paul has taken part in 4 Rugby World Cups for Ireland - in 2003, 2007, 2011 and 2015.

He was selected on his first Lions tour to New Zealand in 2005, and played in all 3 test matches. In 2009 he was named Captain of the Lions for their tour to South Africa , he again played in all 3 tests , winning the final test , thus avoiding a whitewash by the Springboks. In 2013 he was again selected for the Lions for the 3<sup>rd</sup> time the tour to Australia. However, while playing in the first test which the Lions won 33-21 Paul was injured and did not play again in the series. But such was his presence and influence that management asked that he remain with the squad in a coaching/advisory capacity – this to me is the greatest compliment paid to an injured player.

And so we come to the present time. Paul , even before his injury, had decided to call a halt to his international career after the Rugby World Cup 2015. His injury will prolong his break but he feels confident that he will turn out again in one of the most competitive arenas in rugby. Toulon , one of the great clubs of Europe, had come knocking at his door and in what is considered to be the twilight of his career , Paul decided to join the club.

Nothing I believe says more for Paul OConnell than Toulon signing him. They recognised that his influence on the field, his knowledge of the game and his ability to continue to play to the highest standards make him a most valuable acquisition even at this stage of his career. I know that all Munster people wish him well in his new environment.

Having played 174 games for his beloved Munster, being capped 108 times by Ireland and lining out on 7 occasions for the British and Irish Lions, and having captained all the afore mentioned teams, Ladies and gentlemen, it gives me great pleasure to introduce Paul O’Connell to receive this Degree of Doctor of Arts.

**PRAEHONORABILIS CANCELLARIE, TOTAQUE UNIVERSITAS:**

**Praesento vobis hunc meum filium, quem scio tam moribus quam  
doctrina habilem et idoneam esse quae admittatur, *honoris causa*, ad  
gradum Doctoratus in Artibus, idque tibi fide mea testor ac spondeo,  
totique Academiae.**