

OLLSCOIL NA hÉIREANN, GAILLIMH
NATIONAL UNIVERSITY OF IRELAND, GALWAY

Text of the Introductory Address delivered by **DR JOHN NEWELL**, National University of Ireland, Galway on 30 July, 2014 on the occasion of the Conferring of the Degree of Doctor of Arts *honoris causa*, on **DERMOT WELD**.

A Uachtaráin, a Sheánsailéir, a mhuintir na hOllscoile agus a dhaoine uaisle.....

Horse racing is a sport for everybody, in which Dermot Weld has an international reputation for excellence. He is one of the most successful and prolific trainers in the history of Irish horse racing.

It is clear that Dermot was bred for the job. Charlie and Marguerite Weld, his parents and mentors, were central figures in the Irish Blood-Stock Industry as successful point-to-point riders, trainers and breeders. Dermot, despite his height, was an accomplished amateur jockey, riding winners in nearly every racetrack in Ireland and in major races in America, France and England. Over his 12 years as a jockey he was three-times amateur champion and rode the winner of the Amateur Derby at Epsom.

Dermot graduated in Veterinary Medicine from University College Dublin at the age of 21, becoming the youngest vet in the world at that time. While at UCD he continued to ride as a jockey, and during his summer holidays he gained invaluable experience working as a jockey and a vet in America, Australia and South Africa.

When he took over from his father as Master of Rosewell House at the age of 23 it was remarked that “the reins are secure in his hands”. A jockey, vet and trainer, he clearly knows horses inside and out. His subsequent innovative use of scientific methods in

nutrition and hydration has ensured that horses in his care enjoy a happy and healthy environment.

Producing 81 winners in his first season he achieved more than any other trainer for almost half a century. Further successes were to follow. Horses he has trained have won all five Irish Classics and just about every top prize in the Irish racing calendar. While the Master of Rosewell House is mainly a flat race trainer, he has consistently shown his skill in National Hunt racing - winning the Galway Plate, Galway Hurdle, Irish Champion Hurdle, Lexus Chase, Irish Grand National and the Triumph Hurdle at the Cheltenham Festival.

In the context of today's ceremony isn't it fitting that a horse called Notable Graduate became his 3,500th winner. From his "notable" successes, across eleven countries and four continents, I will mention in particular The Melbourne Cup, The Belmont Stakes and his long relationship with the Galway Races.

The Melbourne Cup - the "race that stops a nation" - is Australia's richest and most prestigious race. Dermot's desire to visit Australia came from his love of the poems of Australian poet 'Banjo' Paterson, of *Waltzing Matilda* fame; while his desire to win the Cup was inspired by the months he spent working in Sydney with Australian trainer, Tommy Sullivan.

The first Melbourne Cup was won by Archer in 1861. Legend has it that Archer walked from Sydney to Melbourne to compete in the race. In 1993, the chestnut Vintage Crop, won the Irish St Leger and the Curragh Cup and was entered by Weld that same year in the 133rd Melbourne Cup.

The problem, as with Archer, was getting him there. Clearly walking wasn't an option. The conventional wisdom at the time was that it was impossible for a Northern hemisphere horse to make the 10,000 mile trip to Australia and be in any condition to compete at Melbourne, and there were quarantine difficulties.

With the backing of the Irish Department of Agriculture, overtures to authorities in Canberra were successful and the quarantine regulations were made more suitable for the "internationals" (Vintage Crop was the only one).

Michael Kinane's mount started at 14/1. Rounding the last turn a sod of earth hit Vintage Crop in the face. In the last furlong he responded to Kinane's every call to hit the front and unleashed a magnificent run to claim the cup.

To win the cup is remarkable; to travel such a distance to do so is a phenomenal achievement. In recognition the Prime Minister of Australia honoured Dermot with the Key to the City of Melbourne. It is also significant that no other European was able to emulate this achievement until Dermot and his team went back nine years later and won the race again with Media Puzzle.

Dermot may not know it but he is back in "Belmont Park" – the name of the original estate on which NUI Galway is built – to be honoured once more. The Anatomy Building, or Belmont House, is situated just to my left (about a half a furlong).

The Belmont Stakes, the "Test of the Champion" is an American Grade One race held every June in New York. Dermot worked as a young vet at Belmont Park, no doubt planning to return one day as a victorious trainer. And this he did in 1990 with the aptly named Go and Go, who had previously won his maiden in Galway. The story goes that when asked if he thought Go and Go would be able to handle the Belmont occasion?" he responded, "I think so, he's handled Galway as a two-year-old, so I think he'll be able for Belmont".

Twenty four hours later, Go And Go stormed to victory, beating Unbridled, the Kentucky Derby and Preakness winner who was searching for the elusive three in a row. "I doubt they knew what I was talking about at the time" he remarked "but I meant exactly what I

said. It takes a good horse to win in Galway". Dermot Weld became the first European based trainer to win an American Classic with an Irish-bred and Irish-trained horse.

Today is Galway Plate Day, the highlight of the Galway Races. Dermot Weld is synonymous with Galway. His attachment to the festival began when, as a nine-year-old, he led his father's horse, Highfield Lad, into the winner's enclosure after victory in the Galway Plate. Six years later, Dermot rode his first ever winner, steering Ticonderoga to victory in the Galway Amateur Handicap.

His most noted Galway performer is Ansar, a seven-time winner including the Hurdle in 2001, and then back-to-back wins in the Plate in 2004 and 2005. Dermot described Ansar as "a specialist around a track like Galway where he adored going around the inside and would literally take the paint off the rail".

Dermot holds the record of 17 winners over the seven days and won the Leading Trainer award for the 27th time last year. So dominant has he been at Ballybrit over the last two-and-a-half decades, Irish bookmakers Paddy Power suggested renaming the Galway Races to the "Dermot Weld Retirement Fund".

As a statistician I have a keen interest in odds and probability. I learned a lot of my early probability theory in Ballybrit, in particular, the vagaries of Lady Luck. All Galway punters have a similar story. I was at the races with my brothers. It was the last race, we had enough money for ice cream but not for the bus fare home. A Weld horse was odds-on favourite. "Forget the ice cream" I said, "put the money on the Weld horse and we'll travel home in style, boys". We walked home.

The pedigree of a trainer is often judged in terms of the owners he trains for and the loyalty he shows to his jockeys. Dermot Weld's international owners include Hamdan al Maktoum and Prince Khalid bin Abdullah. Amongst his Irish owners are Dr Ronan Lambe, who has a strong affiliation with NUI Galway; the Moyglare Stud; past Presidents, Mary Robinson

and Mary McAleese; and his own late mother, Marguerite Weld. They shared success together when Nighttime won the Irish 1000 guineas in the Curragh. His jockeys, in particular Wally Swinburn, Michael Kinnane, Pat Smullen and the Australian champion, Damien Oliver, will attest to his loyalty and leadership skills.

One of the roles of a university is to reward excellence. Through awarding honorary degrees it embraces all disciplines and recognises achievement in every field ... "tam moribus quam doctrina".

Dermot Weld is rightly acclaimed as one of the world's most pioneering, innovative, successful and respected trainers. In the words of Banjo Patterson:

"where around The Overflow the reed beds sweep
and sway to the breezes, and the rolling plains are wide,
The man from [Rosewell Manor] is a household word today,
And the stockmen tell the story of his ride... "

Man from Snowy River (Andrew Barton 'Banjo' Patterson, 1890)

A Uachtaráin, a Sheánsailéir, a mhuintir na hOllscoile agus a dhaoine uaisle I am honoured to present Dermot Weld as a most Worthy and Notable Graduate.

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 Artibus**, idque tibi fide mea testor ac spondeo totique Academiae.