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Club Review

VOLUME 38 - Issue 2, 2025

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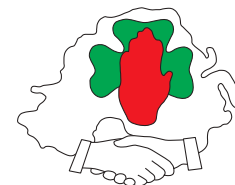
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Treasurer:

Tel:

The annual membership fee is £50.00 payable to:

The Northern Ireland Federation of Clubs

c/o Unit B7 Portview Trade Centre,
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**For telephone queries call:
07889 681714**

(Please include your membership fee or completed standing order form with your application)

For administration purposes only

Accepted by: Secretary

Seconded by: Chairman

Date:

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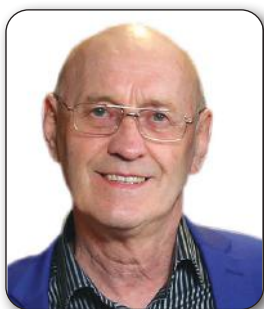
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Navigating financial challenges

The impact of rising costs on Northern Ireland's clubs



John Davidson BEM
Chairman, N.I.F.C.



Harry Beckinsale BEM
Secretary, N.I.F.C.

Registered private member sports, social, and recreational clubs throughout Northern Ireland will soon face increased financial pressures due to upcoming changes to Employers' National Insurance and the National Minimum Wage. These changes could place additional strain on clubs already contending with rising energy costs, supply chain issues, and ongoing economic uncertainty. Clubs that employ staff will need to carefully review their budgets to accommodate the higher wage requirements, ensuring they remain compliant with the new regulations while maintaining financial stability.

It is acknowledged that the hospitality sector, in particular, continues to endure tremendous challenges, with Hospitality Ulsters's, Colin Neill, maintaining a high profile in representing his sector members. The increased wage burden may lead to difficult decisions regarding staffing levels, operating hours, or membership fees. Likewise, the NIFC remains committed to addressing queries through our helplines and email facilities, providing guidance and support to clubs navigating these changes. Clubs are encouraged to seek advice on cost-saving strategies and potential funding opportunities that may help offset some of the financial pressures.

While clubs may be able to adapt due to the volunteer aspect of the sector, these remain very challenging times. The increase in the National Minimum Wage will directly impact payroll costs, and the rise in Employers' National Insurance contributions from 13.8% to 15% will further add to the financial burden. Additionally, the threshold at which employers start paying NI contributions will decrease from £9,100 to £5,000 per year, impacting many smaller clubs. Although the government has announced an increase in the Employment Allowance from £5,000 to £10,500, this will only provide relief to some employers, and clubs must carefully assess how these changes affect their financial sustainability. Additionally, clubs should consider conducting financial audits to identify areas where efficiencies can be made without compromising the quality of services provided to members.

Added to this is the news that the government will be cutting disability benefits, a move that may unfortunately impact individuals who genuinely need the assistance they currently receive. Many clubs offer vital social spaces for individuals with disabilities, providing

a sense of community and support. The reduction in benefits could lead to decreased participation in club activities, affecting both the individuals and the clubs that rely on steady membership engagement. The media has highlighted the substantial increase in government spending on this sector since COVID, but concerns remain about the impact of these cuts on vulnerable individuals.

It was recently reported on our Facebook page that clubs making rule changes or appointing new committee members are required to notify the Clerk of the Court and the Sub-Divisional Commander of their area. This is a requirement that may sometimes be overlooked, and we advise club management committees to remain mindful of their obligations. Ensuring compliance with these legal requirements helps maintain smooth operations and avoids potential issues down the line. A Federation colleague has engaged with Constable Paul Larkin in the North West on this matter, and while a hard line is not being taken, clubs are advised to comply appropriately. Keeping up with regulatory requirements and engaging with relevant authorities ensures that clubs can continue to operate successfully while focusing on their primary mission - serving their members and the wider community.

John Davidson BEM - Chairman Harry Beckinsale BEM - Secretary

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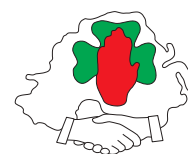
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Federation AGM announcement

Help shape the future of our Federation!



The Northern Ireland Federation of Clubs stands at a pivotal moment. As we navigate the evolving landscape of social clubs and community engagement, your voice matters more than ever. We urge all members to mark their calendars for the Annual General Meeting, scheduled for Saturday, 24th May 2025, at the RAOB HQ Club, 17 Church Street, Belfast BT1 1PG.

This AGM is not merely a formality; it's a vital opportunity to collectively shape the future of our Federation. We will review the past year's achievements, address the challenges we

face, and, most importantly, chart a course for continued growth and relevance. This is your chance to contribute to discussions that will directly impact our clubs and their role within our communities.

We encourage all clubs to send representatives, ensuring every region and perspective is heard. Key agenda items will include a financial update and planning for the coming year.

Your participation is crucial in supporting the executive committee, who will champion our shared interests and drive positive change. Beyond the formal agenda, the AGM presents a valuable

opportunity for networking and collaboration. Share your club's successes, learn from others' experiences, and forge new connections that will strengthen our collective impact. We understand the challenges facing our clubs, from changing legislation to evolving social trends. This AGM is our platform to discuss these challenges head-on, develop solutions, and ensure our clubs remain vibrant and relevant for generations to come.

We are actively seeking input from all members regarding potential agenda items. If you have specific concerns or suggestions, please submit

them to the Federation Secretary before 10th May. This will allow us to ensure the AGM addresses the most pressing issues facing our membership.

Let us come together to strengthen our bonds, share best practices, and ensure the Northern Ireland Federation of Clubs remains a vibrant and essential part of our social fabric. Your presence at the AGM is a testament to your commitment to our collective success. We look forward to seeing you there, ready to build a stronger future together, and to reinforce our shared commitment to community and fellowship.

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Important updates on statutory payment rates from April 2025

As of April 2025, several important updates to statutory payment rates will take effect in Northern Ireland. Businesses should be aware of the following changes:

National Minimum and Living Wage Increases

Effective from 1st April 2025, the National Minimum Wage (NMW) and National Living Wage (NLW) rates will rise as follows:

- National Living Wage (ages 21 and over): Increases from £11.44 to £12.21 per hour.
- Ages 18-20: Rises from £8.60 to £10.00 per hour.
- Ages 16-17 and Apprentices: Both see an increase from £6.40 to £7.55 per hour.

Statutory Sick Pay (SSP)

Starting 6th April 2025, the SSP rate will increase:

- SSP Rate: Will rise from £116.75 to £118.75 per week.

Additionally, the lower earnings limit, relevant for qualifying for certain statutory payments, will be set at £125 per week.

Statutory Maternity, Paternity, Adoption, and Shared Parental Pay

From 6th April 2025, the following statutory payments will increase:

- Statutory Maternity Pay (SMP): Increases to £187.18 per week.
- Statutory Paternity Pay (SPP): Increases to £187.18 per week.
- Statutory Adoption Pay (SAP): Increases to £187.18 per week.
- Statutory Shared Parental Pay (ShPP): Increases to £187.18 per week.

Employer National Insurance Contributions (NICs)

From April 2025, Employer NICs will undergo significant changes:

- Contribution Rate: Will rise from 13.8% to 15%.
- Threshold Reduction: The salary threshold at which employer NICs become payable will decrease from £9,100 to £5,000 per annum.
- Employment Allowance: Will increase from £5,000 to £10,500, providing some relief to eligible employers.

Small Employers' Relief (SER)

The compensation rate for Small Employers' Relief on statutory payments will increase from 3% to 8.5%, effective 6th April 2025. This adjustment aims to assist small businesses in managing the increased costs associated with statutory payments.

Good Jobs Employment Rights Bill

Unlike Great Britain, where the Employment Rights Bill is being introduced, Northern Ireland is progressing with the Good Jobs Employment Rights Bill. This bill aims to improve working conditions and protections for employees across the region. Key provisions include:

- **Improving Terms of Employment:** Establishing mandatory minimum standards for wages, health benefits, and paid leave to ensure fair compensation and working conditions.
- **Supporting Work-Life Balance:** Introducing measures to assist working families, such as flexible

working arrangements and enhanced leave policies.

• **Enhancing Employee Representation:**

Strengthening the voice and representation of employees in the workplace by facilitating union access and participation in workplace discussions.

The consultation period for the Good Jobs Employment Rights Bill concluded on 30th September 2024, and the Department for the Economy is currently reviewing feedback from various stakeholders before finalising the legislation. Businesses in Northern Ireland should follow the bill's progress, as it will introduce new employment standards and practices that employers must comply with.

These updates underscore the importance for businesses in Northern Ireland to stay informed and adapt to evolving employment laws and statutory obligations. Proactive measures, such as keeping up to date with emerging legislative changes and updating policies, can help mitigate potential challenges arising from these changes.



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Managing Director
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Alan Hall,
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Legacy of dedication

Dougie Murray's 44 years of service

In the ever-changing landscape of social clubs, few individuals leave a mark as profound as Dougie Murray. When he first joined the committee of Harland & Wolff Staff Club, little did he know that it would lead to an incredible 44 years of dedicated service.

For four decades, Dougie has served his club, 30 of them as Chairman, leading the club with commitment, passion, and a deep understanding of what makes a community thrive. Yet, his contributions went far beyond leadership.

His remarkable ability to arrange entertainment ensured that the iconic East Belfast club

remained a vibrant hub for its members, fostering camaraderie and a strong sense of belonging. Whether it was organising memorable events, supporting fellow members, or ensuring the club adapted to changing times, Dougie's influence has been invaluable.

Now, as he steps back from his official duties to enjoy a well-earned retirement, Dougie can do so knowing that his legacy is firmly in place.

His leadership has helped shape the club into the welcoming, lively institution it is today, and his presence will no doubt continue to be felt within its walls for years to come.

The Northern Ireland Federation of Clubs extends its heartfelt gratitude and best wishes to Dougie as he embarks on this new chapter.

While he may be retiring from his role, his impact on the Harland & Wolff Staff Club and the wider club community remains immeasurable. We look forward to seeing him at future events and hearing the stories of his next adventures. Dougie Murray's name will always be synonymous with



Congratulations to Dougie Murray on 44 years of dedicated service. We wish you well for a long, happy, and well earned retirement.

Harland & Wolff Staff Club - a testament to what can be achieved through passion, service, and an unwavering dedication to the people around him.



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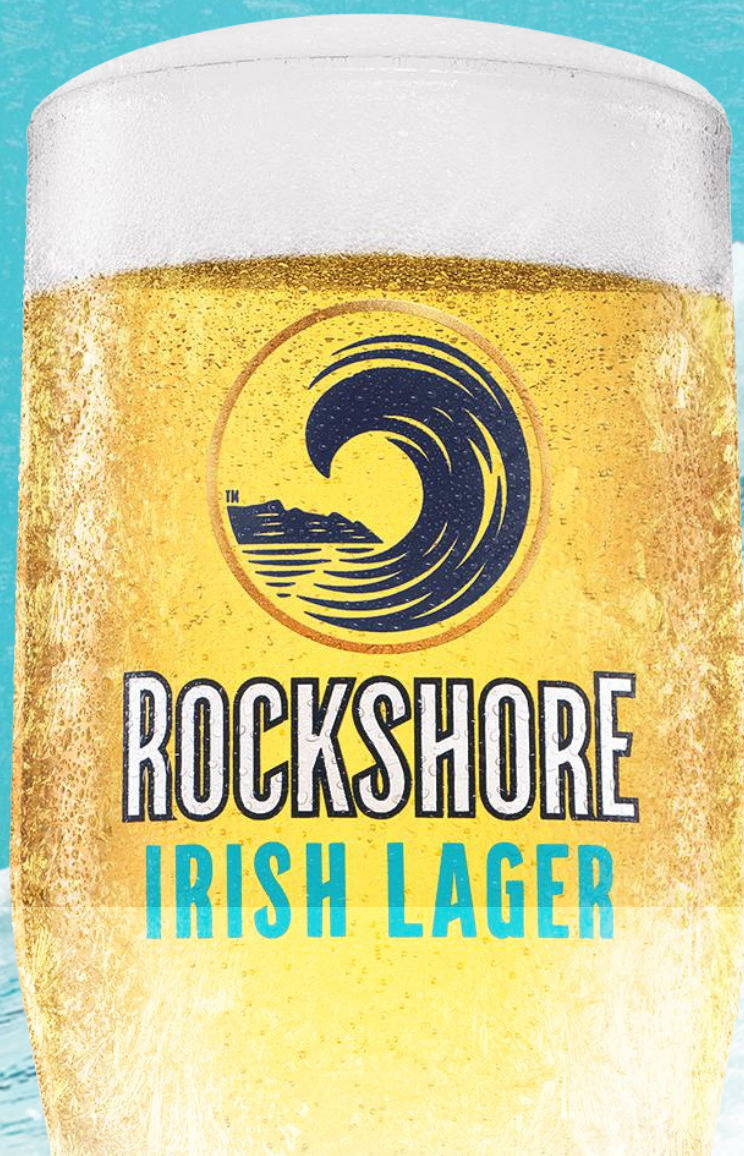
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Whitehouse WMC unveils kitchen upgrade

Whitehouse Working Mens Club on Belfast's Shore Road has recently refurbished its kitchen, turning it into a state-of-the-art facility to provide for its restaurant clientele.

Federation Secretary, Harry Beckinsale, was invited to view the club's new facility recently, together with club officials and Louise Keers of locally based CES Catering which undertook and completed the refurbishment contract. It really is an impressive refurbishment, and CES deserve congratulations on the completed project to an extremely high standard.



Pictured at the official opening of Whitehouse WMC kitchen facility are: Jennifer Moore, Tennents NI; Gary Black; Johnny Higgins, Chairman; Terry Foster; Freddy Hamilton, Secretary; Louise Keers, CES; David Magill, Club Chef; June Magill.

We continually say that those who prepare best suffer less, and this development at Whitehouse

is a shining example of how the club have updated facilities for their members and their guests.

The Federation extend very best wishes to the management committee on

this announcement and for the future of the club.

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Q. The committee are considering introducing the following as a bye-law: *'Acceptance to the committee, no member shall be allowed to stand for the committee if they have business interest within the club (e.g. catering franchise) and/or partner already serving on the committee.'* Would this be an acceptable bye-law?

A. We would suggest that this would properly be dealt with as a rule change rather than a bye-law.

It essentially conflicts with the existing rules which allow any member to stand for election to the committee as long as they have been a member for a minimum period of time. In the event of a conflict between a bye-law and a rule then the rule will override the bye-law.

You would want to therefore incorporate this into the existing qualifying provisions for committee elections and it will have to be approved by the members as a formal rule change.

Whether or not this can be accomplished prior to the AGM depends on how soon the SGM

can be held and the date of the AGM.

You may also want to be sure of the wording of the rule and have in place a mechanism for dealing with a dispute over what constitutes a business interest or relationship - does a casual relationship count for example? It may sound frivolous, invariably these type of fringe cases will occur at some point. The current wording also leaves open the question of what would happen if a husband and wife who were not already committee members both stood for election at the same time. What happens if the members elect them both?

It sounds like you had a very specific instance of one couple being on the committee and this couple also had business interests in the club. The committee may wish to ask themselves how often this scenario is likely to occur and if it really needs a rule amendment to legislate for it. Arguably it would be easier not to award contracts or business interests to members in the first place and not to accept membership applications from persons with pre-existing business interests in the club.

Husbands and wives, for example, may vote the same way but equally so may two good friends. Where do you draw the line and, indeed, is it even imperative to draw a line? Equally, the idea that a husband and wife would always vote the same way is somewhat antiquated in any event.

In short, this would have to be done as a rule amendment but

we do suggest that the committee thinks very carefully before proceeding. A poorly worded rule amendment usually causes more problems than the original situation it was trying to solve.

Q. We are reviewing our membership structure and considering introducing a probationary period for new members. Would this be possible?

A. Whilst probationary membership would be difficult to introduce, a temporary membership is possible and could be used to similar effect.

In theory, you could use a temporary membership option as a de facto probationary membership if you were so inclined. Elect persons for one month and when this automatically ends they can then apply for full membership.

You would obviously need to decide if you were going to make all new members opt for

temporary membership first before offering them permanent membership - this may be off-putting to some potential members and therefore counter productive regarding the recruitment of new members.

Have you frequently had problems with new members and disciplinary issues? It is important to establish the scale of the current problem which will dictate a sensible solution.

Obviously, being careful about who the committee elect to membership to start with is one way of trying to prevent future problems from emerging.

Membership recruitment is the primary objective of any successful club, so I think we have to be careful not to lose sight of this or make it too difficult for prospective members to join.

If you have any questions you need answered for your club, then please send them to us at: info@nifederationofclubs.com

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The Licensing and Registration of Clubs (Amendment) Act (Northern Ireland) 2021 - Section 43 - Review

The following text was posted to the Federation Facebook page recently, but for those of you not on social media we have included it in this month's Review for your attention. We encourage clubs to follow the weblink at the end of the editorial and complete the survey.

With regards the Licensing and Registration of Clubs (Amendment) Act (Northern Ireland) 2021 ('the Act') amended the Licensing (Northern Ireland) Order 1996 and the Registration of Clubs (Northern Ireland) Order 1996. The provisions in the Act were brought into operation in phases, with the first

commencing on 1st October 2021 and the last on 6th April 2023.

Section 43 of the Act requires the Department to review and report on the implementation and effectiveness of each provision in the Act as soon as is practicable after the third anniversary of the commencement of that provision and thereafter, at least once in every five years.

The Department is required to lay each of these reports before the Assembly and must then publish the reports.

The Department is currently gathering information for the

first review which will report on the provisions which were commenced on 1st October 2021. This includes the launch of online surveys to capture the views and experiences of those who may have been impacted by those changes.

The surveys, which are now available for completion on Citizen Space, opened on 17th February 2024 and will close on 13th April 2025. These can

be found on the Departmental S43 Review webpage at <https://www.communities-ni.gov.uk/consultations/first-review-licensing-and-registration-clubs-amendment-act-northern-ireland-2021> with some further details about the review.

The Department is keen to reach out to as many people as possible, and we would encourage clubs to engage with this if possible.



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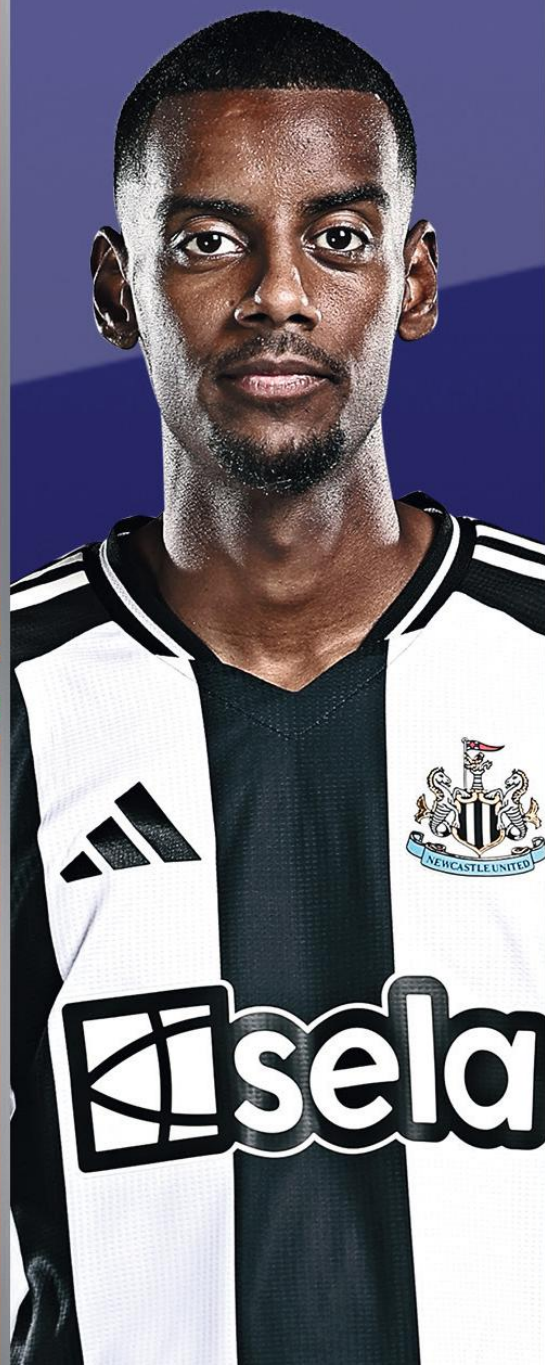
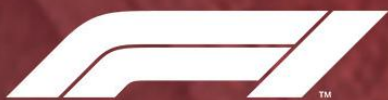
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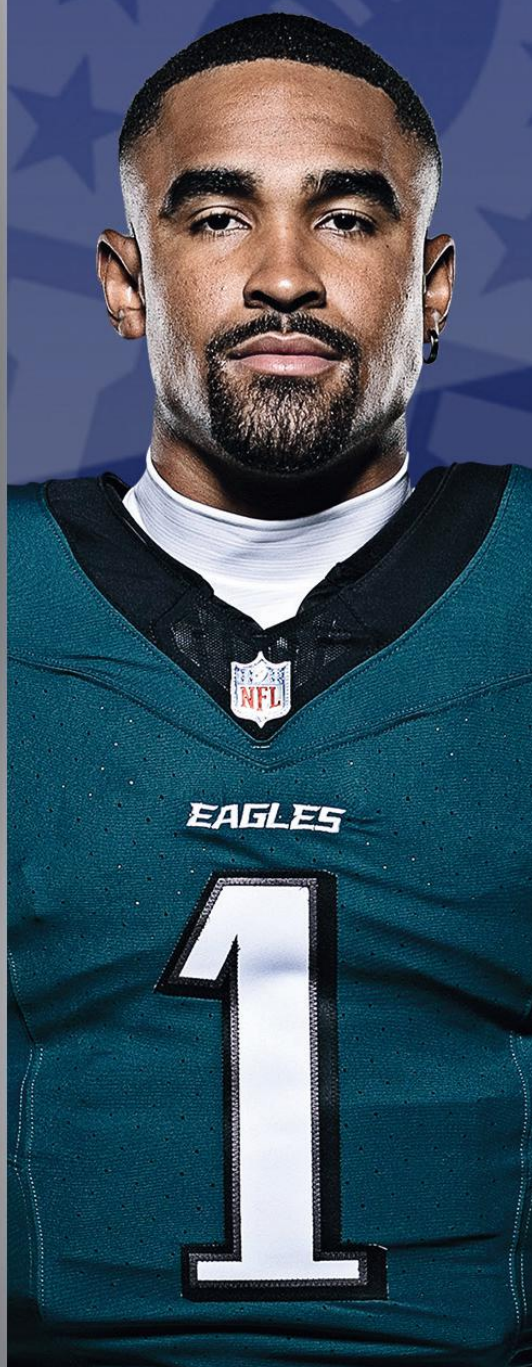
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The essential safeguard

Why club insurance is a must for every club

Running a club is about much more than providing a welcoming environment for members and guests. It's about ensuring safety, security, and financial protection against the unexpected. For members of the Northern Ireland Federation of Clubs, having comprehensive club insurance is not just a precaution - it's an essential safeguard.

One of the most common risks facing clubs is slips and trips. Whether it's a wet floor, uneven surfaces, or poorly lit areas, accidents can happen in an instant, potentially leading to injury claims. Consider a scenario where a member slips on a recently mopped

floor that was not properly signposted. If they suffer an injury, the club could be held liable for medical costs and compensation claims. Without the right insurance coverage, a single claim could result in significant financial strain, impacting the club's future operations.

Public and employer liability is another critical area. Clubs regularly welcome members, visitors, and staff onto their premises. If a visitor suffers an injury due to an accident on-site, or if an employee is harmed while performing their duties, the legal and financial repercussions can be severe. Imagine a situation where a



faulty chair collapses under a patron, causing them to sustain an injury. Similarly, an employee could suffer an injury while handling heavy stock behind the bar. In both cases, the club could face expensive legal fees and compensation payouts. Adequate liability insurance ensures that clubs are protected from costly legal battles and compensation claims.

Additionally, clubs must prepare for the devastating effects of fire and flood damage. Northern Ireland's unpredictable weather and unforeseen incidents can lead to property destruction, loss of valuable assets, and prolonged closures. A fire caused by an electrical fault in the club's kitchen could spread quickly, destroying furniture, stock, and essential equipment. A severe storm could result in flooding, leading to extensive water damage and forcing the club to close for months. Without comprehensive cover, the financial burden of repairs and replacements could jeopardise a club's very existence.

Fortunately, Belfast's Rollins Club Insurance specialises in tailored insurance packages designed specifically for clubs. Their expertise in the sector means they understand the unique challenges clubs face and can provide coverage that meets individual needs. From liability protection to fire and flood coverage, Rollins ensures that clubs can operate with confidence, knowing they are fully protected. Their bespoke policies help clubs recover quickly in the event of an incident, minimising financial disruption and ensuring operations can resume smoothly.

In an era of increasing risk and legal accountability, securing the right insurance is not an option - it's a necessity. Every club within the Northern Ireland Federation of Clubs should review their insurance policies to ensure they have robust protection in place. With the right coverage, clubs can focus on what truly matters - creating a thriving, welcoming space for their members and the community.

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Derbies, Majors, and Grand Prix:

sky sports

A sporting feast from Sky Sports in April!

There are some unmissable derbies coming up in the Premier League over the next few weeks. Liverpool face Everton at Anfield, London rivals Chelsea and Spurs go head-to-head, and United and City battle it out for bragging rights in Manchester. Other mouthwatering fixtures include Newcastle United v Manchester United and Liverpool v Spurs as the season builds towards its climax.

There's also all the action from the EFL as the teams fight for promotion and survival, with the unmissable play-offs live in May. Of course, that's not all: there are all the biggest matches from the Women's Super League, the Scottish Premiership and the Bundesliga, plus the final of the Vertu Trophy.

The Formula 1 fixtures are coming thick and fast too, with the Chinese, Japanese, Bahrain, Saudi Arabian and Miami Grands Prix. Red Bull's Max Verstappen remains the man to beat as he looks to make it an incredible five Drivers' Championship wins in a row.

There are six Premier League Darts fixtures to electrify your Thursday nights, with all the drama from Newcastle, Berlin, Manchester, Rotterdam, Liverpool, Birmingham and Leeds as eight of darts' biggest stars go toe-to-toe on the oche.

Cricket fans can enjoy every ball from the fast and furious Indian Premier League, which features a host of the most exciting T20 players from

around the world, including England stars Moeen Ali, Jos Buttler, Jofra Archer, Phil Salt, Liam Livingstone, Sam Curran and more.

A packed month of golf includes the first Major of the season: The Masters at Augusta National in Georgia. Scottie Scheffler is the defending champion and a victory here would make him the first player to win back-to-back titles in this event since Tiger Woods' wins in 2001 and 2002. However, he faces stiff competition, including Rory McIlroy who will be hoping his victory in The Players Championship in March can inspire him to win The Masters for the first time in his career.

If that's not enough, there's also all the tough-tackling action from rugby's Super League, including every game live from the Magic Weekend in Newcastle. Boxing fans won't want to miss Ben Whittaker and Liam Campbell's eagerly anticipated rematch following a controversial draw in their first meeting, while there's also DP World Tour and PGA Tour golf, ATP and WTA 1000 tennis, Pakistan Super League T20 cricket, the Netball Super League and much more.



Picture courtesy of Getty Images

sky sports

April Highlights

Wed. 2nd April Liverpool v Everton - 8.00pm (PL)

Thu. 3rd April..... Chelsea v Tottenham Hotspur - 8.00pm (PL)

Premier League Darts - Berlin

Sat. 5th April..... Aston Villa v Nottingham Forest - 5.30pm (PL)

Sun. 6th April..... St Johnstone v Celtic - 12.00pm (SPL)

Fulham v Liverpool - 2.00pm (Premier League)

Manchester Utd v Manchester City - 4.30pm (PL)

Formula 1 - Chinese Grand Prix

Thu. 10th - Sun. 13th April..... Golf - The Masters

Sun. 13th April..... Liverpool v West Ham - 2.00pm (PL)

Newcastle United v Manchester United - 4.30pm (PL)

Sat. 19th April Aston Villa v Newcastle United - 5.30pm (PL)

Sun. 20th April Formula 1 - Saudi Arabian Grand Prix

Ipswich Town v Arsenal - 2.00pm (PL)

Leicester City v Liverpool - 4.30pm

Sat. 26th April Arsenal v Crystal Palace - 5.30pm (PL)

Sun. 27th April Bournemouth v Manchester United - 2.00pm (PL)

Liverpool v Tottenham Hotspur - 4.30pm (PL)

Mon. 28th April..... Manchester City v Aston Villa - 8.00pm (PL)

Beamish's new best friend

Shanky's Whip shakes up NI

New to the Northern Irish market is Shanky's Whip - the bold, smooth Irish whiskey liqueur that's about to steal the show. Hailing from the heart of County Cavan, this black beauty blends effortlessly into any serve with its rich vanilla spice kick.

Enjoy it any way you like - neat over ice, a smooth shot, paired with cola or maybe you fancy spicing it up with some ginger-ale. It's also great stirred into a rich Irish coffee or shaken into an espresso martini for a nice treat. Our personal favourite? A perfect pour alongside a pint of Beamish stout.

So versatile, you can even get creative in the kitchen with Shanky's Whip. This whiskey liqueur adds a delicious depth to everything from sauces to desserts, making it your secret weapon for creating indulgent treats. Why not try your hand at baking a tiramisu, decadent cakes, or a batch of gooey cookies?

Available now at United Wines.

For orders, reach out to: sales@unitedwines.co.uk or call 028 3831 6555.



Beamish hitting all the right notes in NI

Beamish sales double as NI drinkers tap into new stout favourite

Irish stout brand Beamish is definitely striking a chord with drinkers in Northern Ireland, having experienced double-digit growth in the local on and off trades, driven largely by the brand's strong associations with music and comedy.

Distributed in Northern Ireland by Craigavon-based United Wines, Beamish has enjoyed stout-standing sales across the province, fuelled by a growing appreciation from people frequenting arts, music and comedy venues.

Last year, sales of Beamish kegs and pints in the Northern Ireland on-trade increased by a staggering 90%, compared to 2023 - a statistic that is music to the ears of United Wines Marketing Manager, Andrew Hollywood. "There's a rhythm to a good pint, and Beamish is definitely in the groove at the moment with more than 250,000 pints sold in Northern Ireland last year," said Andrew.

"With its velvety texture, bold character, and a refreshing cultural edge, Beamish is quickly becoming the stout of choice for a new generation of discerning drinkers, and now we have our sales targets firmly set on passing the half million mark in Northern Ireland," concluded Andrew.

As the stout category continues to grow, ahead of the lager market, Beamish's success locally is by no means a one-hit wonder for United Wines with NI sales of Murphy's - another stout distributed by the



Shaun Gormley (left), owner of Criterion Bar in Belfast, and Paddy Doris of Craigavon-based drinks distributor United Wines enjoy a pint of Beamish.

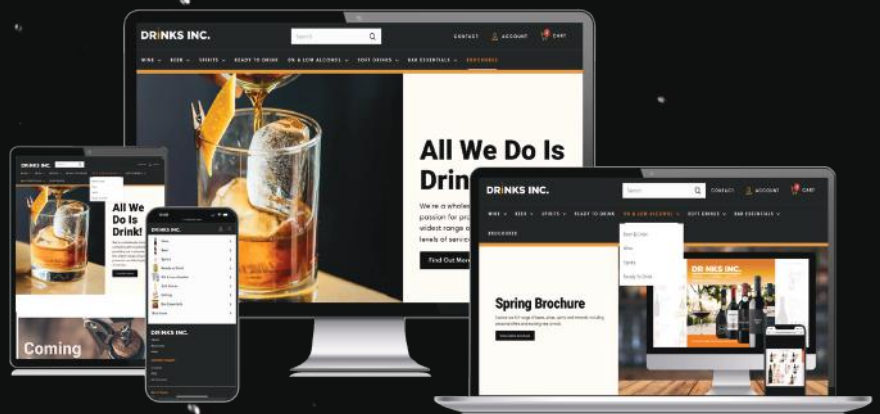
company - also enjoying an increase of 42% year on year, boosted by the Irish Open golf championship, Ulster Rugby and the SSE Arena.

Such is demand that a new Murphy's 440ml can four pack has just been launched in independent off licenses for customers who want to enjoy the same quality stout in the comfort of their own homes.

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SCAN TO SHOP



Sky to remain the home of darts until 2030

Sky and the Professional Darts Corporation (PDC) have announced a five-year partnership extension keeping Sky Sports as the home of darts until 2030, marking nearly 40 years of collaboration.

The new deal will include over 60 days of exclusively live coverage from the biggest darts tournaments every year including the PDC World Darts Championship, Premier League, World Matchplay, Grand Slam of Darts, World Grand Prix and World Cup of Darts.

Sky has been the long-term broadcast partner of the PDC since 1993 and has played an integral role in the sport's

growth and evolution over this time.

Latest data shows a dramatic rise in out-of-home viewing for darts, with a 96% increase in World Championship viewing, a 72% uptick for the Darts Premier League, and Sky's 2024 viewing figures reaching an all-time high over a 10 year period.

James Tweddle, Director of Hospitality at Sky Business, commented, "The growing popularity of darts highlights its unique ability to bring people together. Clubs and pubs provide the perfect atmosphere to enjoy the excitement of live sport, and last year's record-breaking viewing figures show how much darts resonates with fans."



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From passion project to global recognition

Couple behind Antrim Coast Half Marathon share touching origins of the race

Since its inception in 2020, the Antrim Coast Half Marathon has become an international sensation. The race, which began with just 62 participants, now attracts almost 6,000 participants, with world-class athletes traveling from around the world to compete.

However, for the race creators, married couple Ruth and James McIlroy from Larne, the race is about more than just running.

James, a former Olympic middle-distance runner, and Ruth, an international rowing coxswain and runner, have long been immersed in the world of competitive sports. Their personal connection to the Antrim Coast is central to the race's design and success.

James McIlroy, Race Director, Antrim Coast Half Marathon, said, "Ruth and I have extensive experience in competitive sports. We have a shared passion for running and an even bigger love for Larne and the Antrim Coast. So, when we decided to create a competitive race for elite and beginner athletes there was only one location that we were ever going to choose. In a way, the race is a love letter to the stunning coastline and place where Ruth and I were born and grew up. It's more than just a race to us, it's a celebration of community, sport, and the beauty of Northern Ireland."

James and Ruth set out to design an event that would not only highlight the beauty of the Antrim Coast but also bring the world's best athletes to this incredible part of Northern Ireland.

Ruth McIlroy, Race Director, Antrim Coast Half Marathon, said, "With its perfectly flat roads, towering cliffs on one side, and sweeping views of the sea and Scotland on the other, we knew we had a perfect route to challenge runners from across the world. We used the natural landscape to design the race's out-and-back course with a focus on bringing runners through Ballygally village, a picturesque gem that has become the event's focal point."

The route now ranks as one of the fastest and most scenic on the World Athletics calendar.

Ruth continued, "What sets this race apart is the incredible warmth of the local people. Both elite athletes and mass participants are drawn to the friendliness and hospitality of the locals. Many of our headline runners come back year after year because of the amazing reception they receive from residents and visitors alike."

The Antrim Coast Half Marathon attracts many of the world's top runners.

"To see the event grow and gain such international recognition has been incredible," James said. "We never imagined that in just a few short years, the race would be one of the highest-ranked half



Ruth and James McIlroy.

marathons in the world, but it's become a true force for good, not only for the local community but for the global running community as well."

Ruth adds, "We're excited to see how much the event has grown, and with record numbers already registered for the 2025 race, we expect it to sell out faster than ever."

The Antrim Coast Half Marathon is meticulously designed to be fast, with improvements made every year to ensure ideal conditions for record-breaking performances.

James continued, "For 2025, we've adjusted the first 3km to make it even faster. The course has a gentle downhill gradient after the 7km mark, and with the cliffs providing shelter from the wind, the conditions are perfect for fast times."

The event is now firmly established as one of the world's premier half marathons, ranked 7th globally in 2024, and attracting some of the best runners in the world, including multiple World and Olympic champions.

"The growth has been extraordinary," said James. "But what we're most proud of is how it has become a platform for both elite athletes and everyday runners to achieve their personal goals, all while experiencing the stunning beauty of Northern Ireland."

Registrations are now open for the 2025 race, with spots expected to sell out quickly. Runners from all over the world are invited to join the event and experience the race that has earned a reputation for its exceptional atmosphere, scenic beauty, and fast times.

To sign up and for more information, visit
www.antrimcoasthalfmarathon.com

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THE ANTRIM COAST HALF MARATHON
24 AUGUST 2025

Location: **LARNE**

This 13.1-mile course provides breathtaking coastal views of the Antrim Coast and is one of the fastest and flattest courses in the UK, making it ideal for both personal bests and newcomers to the distance.

THE BELFAST HALF MARATHON
21 SEPTEMBER 2025

Location: **BELFAST**

The biggest Half Marathon in Northern Ireland! Starting at Stormont, this course takes you through the heart of Belfast, soaking up beautiful greenways and parks.

THE DUBLIN MARATHON
26 OCTOBER 2025

Location: **DUBLIN**

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NI Football Writers' Awards

Crusaders boss Declan Caddell is the NIFWA Manager of the Month for February.

In the month, Crusaders enjoyed a 100% record with four wins from four games. The Hatchetmen knocked Limavady United out of the Irish Cup before defeating Larne, Ballymena United and Glenavon in the Sports Direct Premiership.

It's the second time this season Caddell has been awarded the monthly prize.

Caddell said, "It's an honour to win this prize once again. It's been a strange season in some ways because we've had great runs of form and then periods where we have struggled for a result. Thankfully we've performed well in the league in recent weeks. Hopefully we can kick on from here and finish as high up the table as possible."

Crusaders star Jarlath O'Rourke is the Sports Direct Premiership Player of the Month for February.

The defender helped his team to four victories and three clean sheets in the month, as well as chipping in with a goal of his own.

O'Rourke said, "We had the perfect month with the cup win over Limavady United followed by the league wins over Larne, Ballymena United and Glenavon. It was nice to chip in with a goal against Ballymena as I don't score too many.

"It's also nice to win an award like this one. I'd like to thank the Football Writers' and their sponsors Sports Direct."

Bangor forward Ben Arthurs has been named Championship Player of the Month for February.

Arthurs had a superb month for the Seaside scoring hat-tricks against Armagh City and Ballinamallard United before finding the net in a famous 3-1 Irish Cup victory over Glentoran.

Arthurs said, "It's an honour to win this award for the first time.

"Our victory over Glentoran was an incredible experience. We are all looking forward to the semi-final against Dungannon Swifts, but our priority is winning the league and getting promoted into the Premiership.

"It sounds boring, but we are not talking about the semi-final until the end of the month."

Portadown forward Ahu Obhakhan has won the NIFWA's Goal of the Month competition for February.

The striker produced a sublime back-heeled finish in Portadown's 2-2 draw with Cliftonville at Solitude. The amazing goal is reminiscent of the one Matthew Burrows scored for Glentoran in 2010 that was nominated for the Puskas prize.

Obhakhan joined the Ports from Glebe North in January.



Crusaders boss, Declan Caddell, collects his Manager of the Month trophy from NIFWA Chair, Michael Clarke



Crusaders defender Jarlath O'Rourke collects his Sports Direct Premiership Player of the Month award from NIFWA Chair, Michael Clarke, and Sports Direct's Matthew Calderwood.



NIFWA Chair, Michael Clarke, presents Bangor striker Ben Arthurs with the Championship Player of the Month trophy.

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that bring us
together



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