

Sport

My Sporting Passion: Bryan Dobson on his love for sailing

'The coastline is something I feel we might not always fully appreciate in this country'

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"I step on a boat and sail out of Dun Laoghaire harbour into the bay and look at the horizon, I think on a different day and under different circumstances I could just keep going. Not turn around. It's that sense of endless possibility." File photograph: Getty Images

Bryan Dobson

Fri Apr 23 2021 - 06:00



What drew me to sailing was that I always had a grá for it. I'd no background there. My family had no connection with sailing or the water. But I grew up in Dublin's Sandymount. So there you were, right on the bay.

The Dublin Port and the harbour and the water, was always there. It was always in the background as I grew up and I clearly remember as a youngster seeing boats out on the water and thinking I'd love to be out there. I'd love see what that's like.

Then, my father in law John Gogan had sailed so he encouraged me. He owned a little boat that he used to keep in Bullock Harbour in Dalkey Sound. That was a small open decked boat. I thought that was great fun altogether.

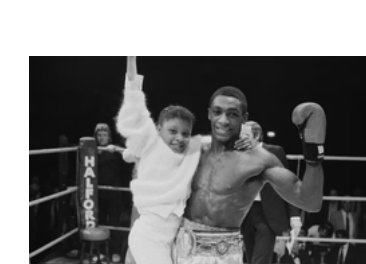
In my mid 30s I went off and did my first course in Glenans, which was a voluntary sailing training organisation and started learning, started finding out about it. I still am learning and finding out.

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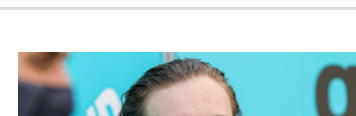
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I discovered that it was a wonderful escape from things that clog up our daily lives. I find as I get older physically and mentally it is all consuming and even now, I still get that sensation of when I step on a boat and sail out of Dun Laoghaire harbour into the bay and look at the horizon, I think on a different day and under different circumstances I could just keep going. Not turn around. It's that sense of endless possibility.

It is very much a completely different world, a completely different environment. For anyone in any walk of life it can be difficult to switch off, particularly in the news business. You are always checking this story or that story even and when I'm off duty I find it hard to switch off. You don't want to. You want to stay abreast of things. But with sailing there is so much to do.

I still suffer a bit of sea sickness. For the first few days if I'm off for maybe a week, the first couple of days I feel it if it's rough. But then it passes. It has never discouraged me.

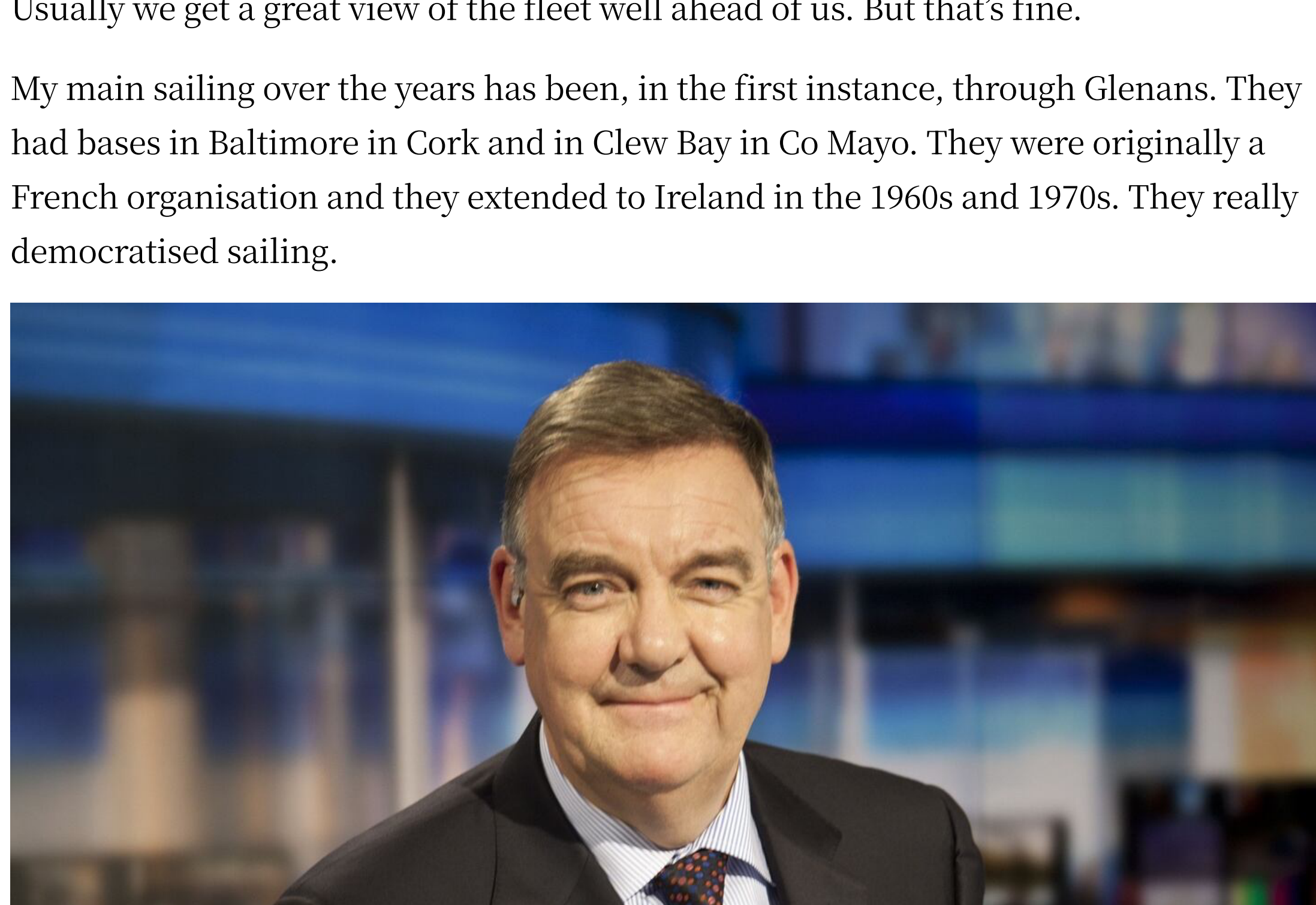
I've sailed in the Baltic and I've sailed on the English coast. They are interesting areas to go but they are flat. They don't have that very dramatic landscape. We have this extraordinary coast and so much of it is mountainous with high land plunging down into the sea. It does make Ireland a spectacular landscape to sail around.

Loveliest

One of the loveliest places is the south west of Ireland. The coast from Kinsale in Cork right around to Fenit in Kerry is special. I haven't sailed all around the globe but it always seems to me to be a world class cruising area. It's magnificent. The coastline is something that I feel we might not always fully appreciate in this country.

I do have a boat with a couple of friends of mine. It's a small racing cruising boat called a Ruffian 23. They are not a boat to cruise any distance but race around Dublin Bay. They are, at this stage, 30-40 years old so they are quite a traditional looking sailing boat and we race it in a fairly casual way. When we get a crew we turn out. Usually we get a great view of the fleet well ahead of us. But that's fine.

My main sailing over the years has been, in the first instance, through Glenans. They had bases in Baltimore in Cork and in Clew Bay in Co Mayo. They were originally a French organisation and they extended to Ireland in the 1960s and 1970s. They really democratised sailing.



Newsreader and presenter Bryan Dobson: "I discovered that sailing was a wonderful escape from things that clog up our daily lives."

I always thought it was a great spirit, a great ethos, nothing exclusive about it at all. Everybody was welcome with some experience or no experience with whatever level or interest you had.

They ran residential courses and weekend courses over the years so I did a bit of training with them and then I was an instructor with them for a few years. Unfortunately after the second downturn the French wound up the Irish operation to our great distress and sadness here. It did have a legacy that goes on.

A club that spun out of it in Dublin called Sailing in Dublin, was formed by people who had been with Glenans. They didn't have boats and didn't have access to sailing so they formed the club, bought dinghies and it built up from there.

There is no clubhouse or any of those kinds of expenses associated with it. I've sailed with them quite a bit, cruised with them quite a bit from the Coal Harbour in Dun Laoghaire. People with more experience would be designated as skippers or vice skippers.

I'm one of the skippers so I might take a boat for a week with a crew and off we go to Scotland, the west of Ireland, the south west. In previous years the boats have gone to the Scilly Isles, but it's mainly around the Irish and Scottish coasts.

I particularly like the night passages. The experience of sailing through the night is wonderful with the movement and sounds of the boat. The stars. Then when you go off watch and rest and begin to close your eyes, it is almost like the feeling of being rocked to sleep.

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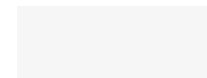
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