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## Rugby

### Hain to mark 1920s GAA massacre?

Monday, February 12, 2007

By Claire McNeilly

The Northern Ireland Office has refused to rule out the possibility that a wreath will be laid by the Secretary of State at next weekend's historic Ireland vs England rugby clash to mark the Croke Park massacre of 1920.






It has emerged that the Secretary of State Peter Hain could be set to lay a wreath in commemoration of 13 Gaelic sports fans shot dead by British forces inside the stadium on November 21 1920.

It is also thought an apology from the British Government is under consideration for what has become known as the first 'Bloody Sunday'.

Speaking to the Belfast Telegraph last night, the NIO confirmed the Secretary of State had been invited to the Ireland-England clash on February 24, but stopped short of denying plans to lay a wreath.

"Clearly, there is particular significance to this game given the history of Croke Park," a NIO spokesperson said.

"If it was felt that should be recognised then an appropriate way to do it would have to be discussed. But speculation about laying a wreath is just that.

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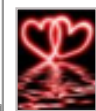
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Speculation."

A furore over the proposal has already erupted among Ulster's political parties.

Democratic Unionist MP Jeffrey Donaldson slammed the idea as having "a total lack of balance" and said it would bring "controversy down on the head of sport in general".

"We need to move away from allowing sport to be embroiled in politics.

"There are issues to be addressed on both sides, but a sporting occasion is neither the time nor the place."

Meanwhile, SDLP normalisation spokesperson Dominic Bradley called the gesture a "small but positive" step.

"The call to keep politics out of sport is simply nonsense, not to mention a bit late. Politics intruded into sport in no uncertain manner when armoured cars machine-gunned the terraces."

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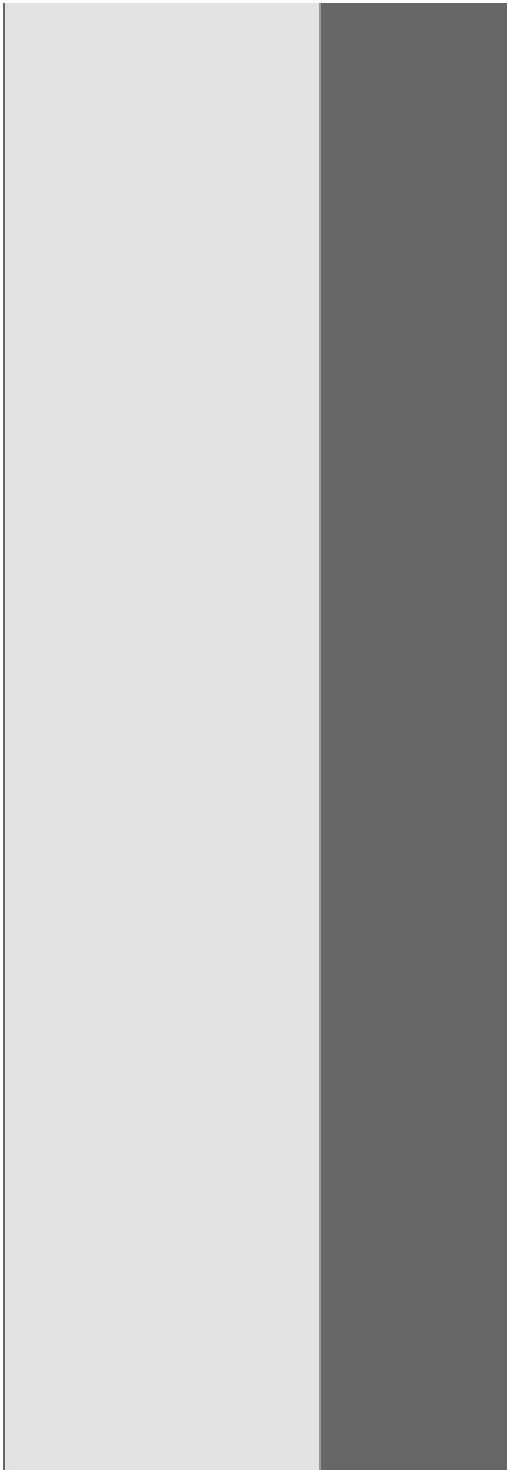
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