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TEXT OF THE INTRODUCTORY ADDRESS DELIVERED BY **PROFESSOR BARRY BRESNIHAN**, UCD School of Medicine and Medical Science, University College Dublin on 16 June 2009, on the occasion of the conferring of the Degree of Doctor of Laws, *honoris causa* on **JACK KYLE**

In March of this year, when Ireland's rugby team won the "Grand Slam" for only the second time by defeating Wales in dramatic circumstances, television cameras at Cardiff's Millennium Stadium were quick to focus on a legendary figure in the crowd. Jack Kyle was smiling broadly. In fact, his face was a picture of joy and relief. At 83 years young, he had finally seen an Ireland squad emulate the feat of the triumphant 1948 team of which he was such a pivotal part.

Time will tell whether any of these new "Grand Slam" heroes is immortalized in verse as Jack Kyle was so cleverly by the esteemed rugby journalist Paul MacWeeney, who adapted Alexander Dumas's lines from *The Scarlet Pimpernel* as follows:

'They seek him here, they seek him there
Those Frenchies seek him everywhere.
That paragon of pace and guile,
That damned elusive Jackie Kyle!'

It was fitting that Ireland's deliverance should be achieved against Wales, for the men from the valleys have always loomed large in the life of John Wilson Kyle. In March 1939, soon after his 13th birthday, the Belfast Royal Academy pupil attended his first international match at Ravenhill, when Ireland lost to Wales by seven points to nil.

Jack had no idea that nine years later, as a 22-year-old medical student at Queen's University Belfast, he would return to Ravenhill for another meeting with the Welsh not as a spectator but as Ireland's fly-half in the fixture that clinched the country's first Triple Crown since 1899 and its first-ever "Grand Slam".

When Ireland retained the Triple Crown and the Five Nations Championship in 1949, Wales were the opponents against whom the success was secured in Swansea, thanks to a try created for Jim McCarthy by Jack Kyle.

And in 1951, at Cardiff Arms Park, Ireland came within one score of capturing a second "Grand Slam" following a 3-3 draw with Wales. If the value of a try had been more than three points, Jack Kyle's touch-down after an exceptional solo run would have been decisive. Even so, Ireland topped the table for the third time in four seasons.

Those great years for Irish rugby in the 20th century coincided with the Kyle era. He was one of nine Irish players selected by the British and Irish Lions to tour New Zealand and Australia in 1950. Captained by Karl Mullen, the Lions played 29 official fixtures between May and

September. Jack Kyle appeared in all six Test matches, and scored a try apiece against the All Blacks and the Wallabies.

Praise from rugby experts in New Zealand is a precious commodity. Jack made such an impression during the Lions tour that the *New Zealand Almanac* named him among its six best players of the year, praising him as ‘an excellent team man, faultless in his handling, able to send out lengthy and accurate passes, and adept at making play for his supports’. All these attributes were duly recognized in 1999 when Jack Kyle, who captained Ireland six times, was inducted into the International Rugby Hall of Fame.

At the end of his international career in 1958, Jack’s 46 caps constituted a world record. His third last selection, in January that year, was a memorable one, as Ireland overcame Australia to record their first victory against a touring team.

Off the field, Jack built a career as a skilled surgeon, having graduated in medicine from Queen’s in 1951. He worked for many years as a consultant surgeon in Chingola, Zambia, and undertook humanitarian work also in Sumatra and Indonesia. In 2007 *The Irish Journal of Medical Science*, in conjunction with the Royal Academy of Medicine in Ireland, presented him with a Lifetime Achievement Award.

The statistics compiled in the course of an illustrious rugby career speak for themselves: 52 international appearances (46 for Ireland, 6 for the Lions). Three tries against Scotland, two against France, and one each against England, Wales, New Zealand and Australia. One drop-goal against Wales. Ireland, in fact, never lost a match in which Jack Kyle

scored. His tries for the Lions in Tests at Carisbrook and Brisbane Cricket Ground embellished his reputation as the complete fly-half.

But beyond the numbers lies the indelible mark Jack Kyle made by virtue of his talent, courage, sportsmanship and generosity of spirit.

UCD is proud today to honour one of the greatest players in the history of international rugby, and an outstanding ambassador for the sport in which he excelled.

Praehonorabilis Praeses, 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 utroque Jure, tam Civili quam Canonico; idque tibi fide mea testor ac spondeo, totique Academiae.