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EXCLUSIVE WE MAKE THE NEWS

HOW I KICKED HENRY UP THE BARCA



CHEAT: The camera doesn't lie

BY GERALDINE COMISKEY

THE Sunday World lived up to its name last weekend as our Thierry Henry scoop made headlines across the globe.

Images of our eight-foot poster featuring the legend's face, along with yours truly, appeared on the main TV news bulletins and national newspapers from Hong Kong to Peru, Jakarta to Moscow, Hiroshima to Orange County, USA. We were headline news in South Africa, Finland, Turkey, France, Malaysia, Afghanistan, Italy, Azerbaijan, Bali and just about everywhere else.

Here in Ireland, however, it was a different story where apart from our front-page exclusive and an item on TV3, the Irish newspapers struggled to catch up with the likes of the Times of India, who reported it extensively.

One daily even scored an own goal as it failed to spot the Sunday World logo at the end of the photo of our poster, and described our campaign as a protest by Irish fans.

The reaction of the Irish media was at odds with the views of Irish soccer fans themselves - including quite a few lifelong Barcelona fans who contacted me to thank the Sunday World for showing Henry just how angry we were to be cheated out of the World Cup.

Apology

It all started on Friday as I stood outside Barcelona FC's Joan Gamper Sports Centre ground where the French captain was training with his club.

Our goal: to get the world-class cheat to sign our apology poster like a true sportsman.

We wanted him to stop hiding behind a ghost-written press statement in which he issued a self-serving apology designed to take pressure off lucrative sponsorship deals with brands like Gillette and French team sponsors Adidas.

But if he thought he could hide he was wrong.

The Sunday World's campaign to get him to fess up like a man soon attracted the attention of the Spanish and international media, who interviewed me instead.

Photographers from the main international wire agencies as well as Spanish, French and English paparazzi asked me to pose with the poster, aim a kick at the image of Henry - and even "kiss" him.

Some also wanted to know if I found him attractive. The hunk certainly looked hot, I said - but added that I found cheating of all kinds a turn-off.



NO JOY: Henry wouldn't sign for us

Our crusading campaign hits headlines all over the globe

That night, all Spain's main TV channels carried the story. I got to express the frustration of the Irish people including our one million Sunday World readers right on Henry's doorstep.

Next day, full-length pictures of me and the poster featuring Henry's face made the front and inside pages of French and Spanish dailies El Mundo, El Pais, La Vanguardia, Publico, and the bibles of Spanish soccer fans, Marca and AS.

They, correctly, described the Sunday World as "one of the most important newspapers in Ireland."

And there was no escape for Henry even at home. Like a Doppelganger, the larger-than-life picture of his face sat outside his posh villa in the hills above Barcelona when he emerged to travel to Bilbao for a Spanish first division tie.



I felt like a matador about to inflict the coup de grace as I stood, pen in hand at the gate waiting for him to charge out to his waiting car. He had to meet the team at the stadium to travel to the airport for the game.

Snapper

Spanish snapper Marti Berenguer, was ready with his camera when I came face to face with the man who had ruined our World Cup dream and shattered the trust of tens of millions of his fans worldwide.

With his big puppy eyes he didn't look like a villain.

And I almost felt sorry for him. But when I asked him to sign the poster, the coward backed off. He glanced anxiously towards the bodyguard who was standing some distance back, and greeted him in

Spanish, before jumping into his car and driving off to catch the team bus.

Later that night, Spanish TV reported that he was booed as he went onto the field in Bilbao. The mighty Barca drew one all with underdogs Bilbao.

Meanwhile, in Barcelona's cafes, people recognised me as "the senorita of the Sunday World". I had never been world-famous in my life but now, as representative of the world's most famous newspaper, and the Irish people, I did my best in broken Spanish.

I found myself trying to be a soccer pundit. Well, at least I knew the rules forbid the use of hands. The clue was in the name of the game.

The frenzy continued this week as I got hundreds of messages from footie fans around the world

RUNAWAY: Henry scurries past Geraldine and the world-famous poster