



Press Book

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Irish Examiner

O'Connell: No such thing as God-given talent

Jimmy Woulfe
Mid-West Correspondent

Munster Rugby legend Paul O'Connell has warned against the notion of 'God-given talent' or 'born naturals' in sport and life.

"It's dangerous," he said. Speaking to award-winning students in Limerick at the weekend, he said success comes through hard graft and dedication.

The former Ireland and Munster great, whose autobiography has been voted sports book of the year, said: "You hear a lot about a person having a God-given talent. I hate that phrase.

"It's a dangerous saying. I'm not against God, but God is a reasonable guy who doesn't go around distributing talent.

"You hear about somebody having an ear for music, a born natural and inheriting a talent for a game in their DNA. There are a whole load of sayings like this that permeate our conversation: That excellence is somehow pre-ordained. It is not.

"This belief denies the incentive to practise and make that huge effort needed to reach your goal. There is this myth and I don't buy into it. Beware of this talk about God-given talent and

don't let anybody put their dreams of success aside because they might feel they don't have the same talent as others."

O'Connell told students there is no substitute for hard work. "Everybody has the same opportunity to work and practise. People who are excellent at what

they do have practised more and often fail more but work harder and bounce back. It's about being prepared to work and graft very hard."

He was speaking at the JP McManus all-Ireland third-level scholarships awards at the University of Limerick, where 125 students from the

Republic and the North received annual bursaries worth €6,750 or £5,500 to pursue studies in colleges here and abroad.

He said when he started his international rugby career he used to take biographies of great achievers to read at night while away with the Irish team. He said: "After Tiger Woods became the youngest winner of the Masters in Augusta he was written about as being the most natural golf talent ever seen.

"But if you dig into his past you see the real story of his father working on his golf game even before he was a

year old. It was relentless hard work and dedication and did not come to him naturally."

He said the Beatles were hailed an overnight success, but the group had put in enormous time, often working in seedy nightclubs across Europe, developing their music. "In one 18-month period they did more than 270 concerts before they hit the charts. Their success was not about a God-given talent, but sheer dedication and hard work," he said.

The scholarships funded by Mr McManus were established in 2008 and almost €22m has been distributed.