

# RUGBY UNION'S CELTIC FRINGE: ANALYSING ATTENDANCES IN THE PRO-12 LEAGUE.

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# Background

- Prohibition on professionalism until 1995.
- Szymanski (2009) - leagues work particularly well for team sports - supporters maintain attachment to team for years or even a lifetime.
- Governing bodies opposed to leagues – seen as inevitable stepping stone to professionalism.
- South Africa 1889 France 1892 exceptions.
- Scottish league 1973
- England 1987
- Ireland and Wales 1991
- Ireland provincial leagues – mixed.
- Ireland provincial championship 1947
- Scottish inter-district championship 1953

# 1995 - A Brave New World

- 1995 European Cup – IRFU enters provincial teams
- English and Scottish teams do not participate.
- November professional ban ends after 100 years.
- Ireland and Scotland – Vertically integrated model
- Wales – Business as usual
- 1996 SRU enters district teams.

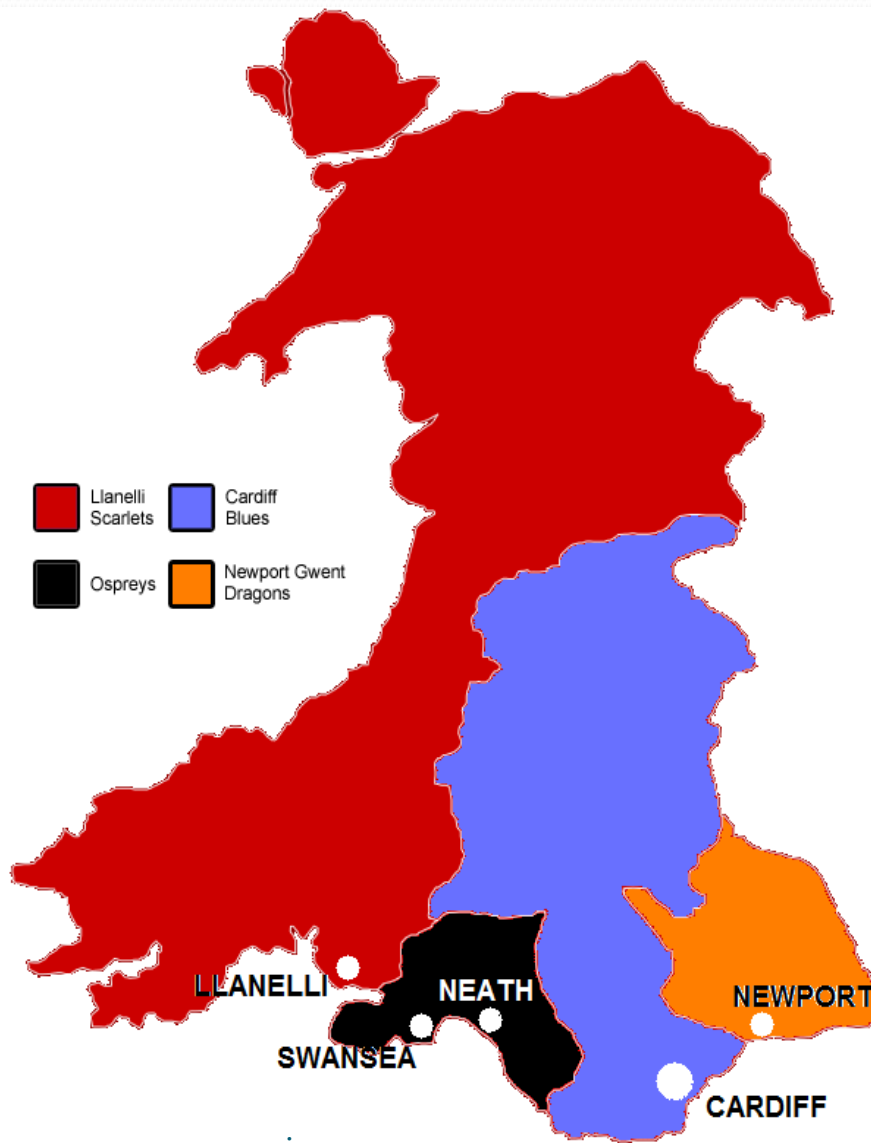
# Birth of the Celtic League

- 1998 SRU cuts teams from 4 to 2.
- Welsh Scottish League - Glasgow & Edinburgh join WPR.
- 2001 Celtic League launched
- 15 teams 9 Welsh 4 Irish 2 Scottish
- 2 sections teams play once.
- Top 4 from each section reach knock-out phase.
- 2002 16 teams - SRU re-launch Borders

# Restructuring of Welsh Teams

- South Wales neither population or economy to sustain 9 professional clubs (Collins, 2015).
- WRU propose vertical integration
- “To no one’s surprise uproar ensued...” (Collins, 2015, p.489).
- 2003 – Mergers result in 5 Welsh regional teams.
- 12 team league - 22 match home and away schedule – straight league format.
- 2004 WRU close Celtic Warriors after first season reduces league to 11 teams.

# Welsh Rugby Regions Post 2004/05



## From Celtic League to Pro-12.

- 2007/08 – League reduced to 10 teams as SRU close Borders again.
- 2009/10 – Play-offs introduced to decide champions.
- 2010/11 – 2 Italian teams join bringing league back to 12 teams – renamed Pro-12.
- 2012/13 Italian team Aironi collapses enter Zebre.
- 2013/14 Welsh teams agree salary cap.
- 2016/17 Oct. IRFU – Munster cannot repay loan.  
Jan. Zebre may not continue beyond February.  
Apr. Dragons (Wales) on brink of collapse.

# Pro-12 Performances by Country

	Pro-12		European Cup	
	Winners	Top 4	Winners	Quarter-Finals
Ireland	9	33	5	26
Wales	5	18	0	9
Scotland	1	9	0	1
Italy	0	0	0	0



# Pro-12 TV Coverage

	Ireland	Scotland	Wales
2001/02-2004/05	TG4/BBCNI		BBC Wales/S4C
2005/06-2008/09	Setanta*	Setanta*	BBC Wales/S4C
2009/10-2010/11	Setanta (Irl)*	STV**	BBC Wales/S4C
2010/11-2013/14	RTE/TG4/BBCNI	BBC Alba	BBC Wales/S4C
2014/15-	TG4/BBCNI/Sky*	BBC Alba/Sky*	BBC Wales/S4C/Sky*

\* Pay TV channel \*\*Only Scottish derbies live.

Problems in Scotland and Italy.

Scotland only audience for Scotland internationals.

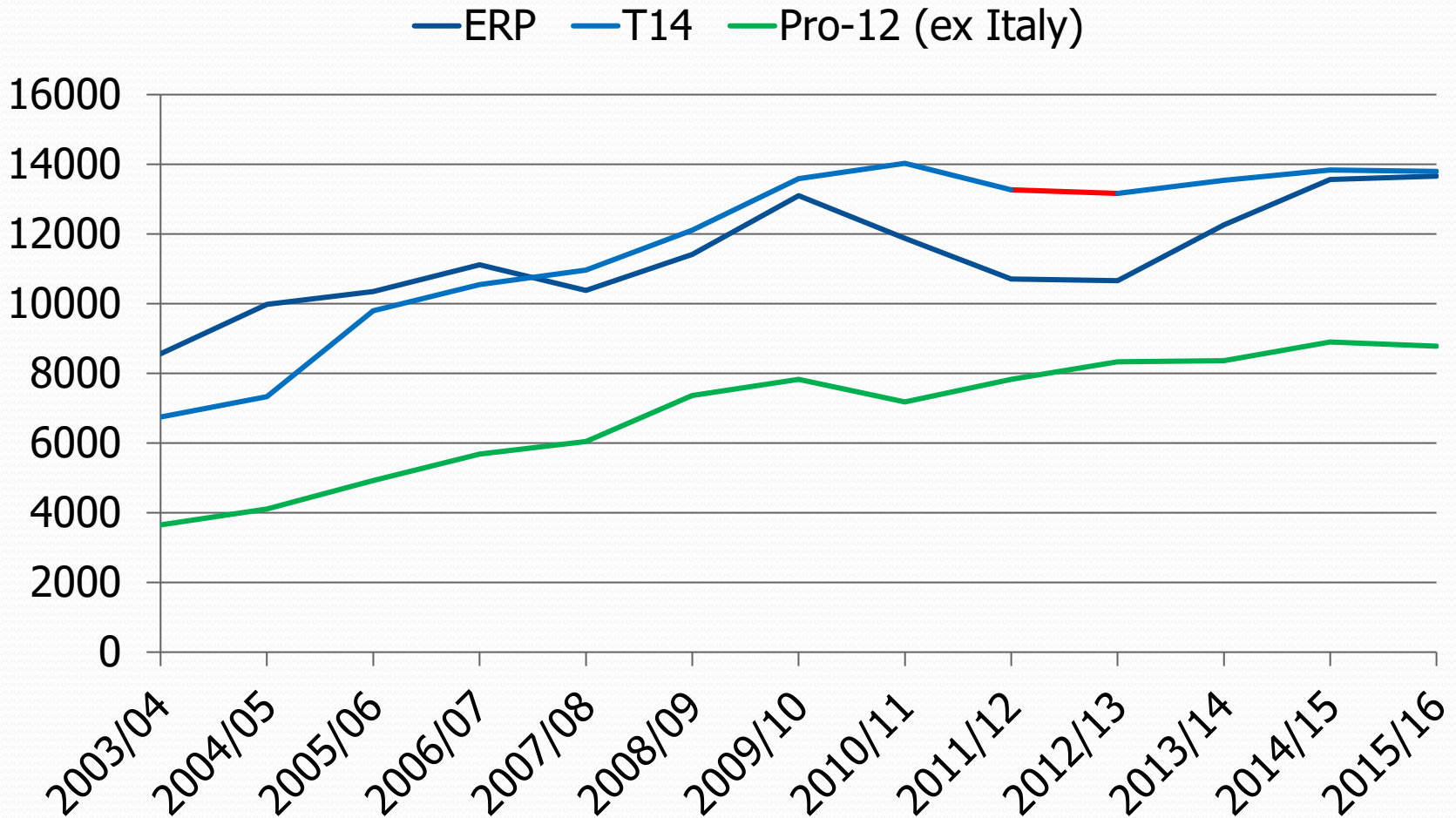
Italy – coverage varied from season to season sometimes season commenced with no Italian broadcaster.

Pro-12 broadcast revenue €11-14m

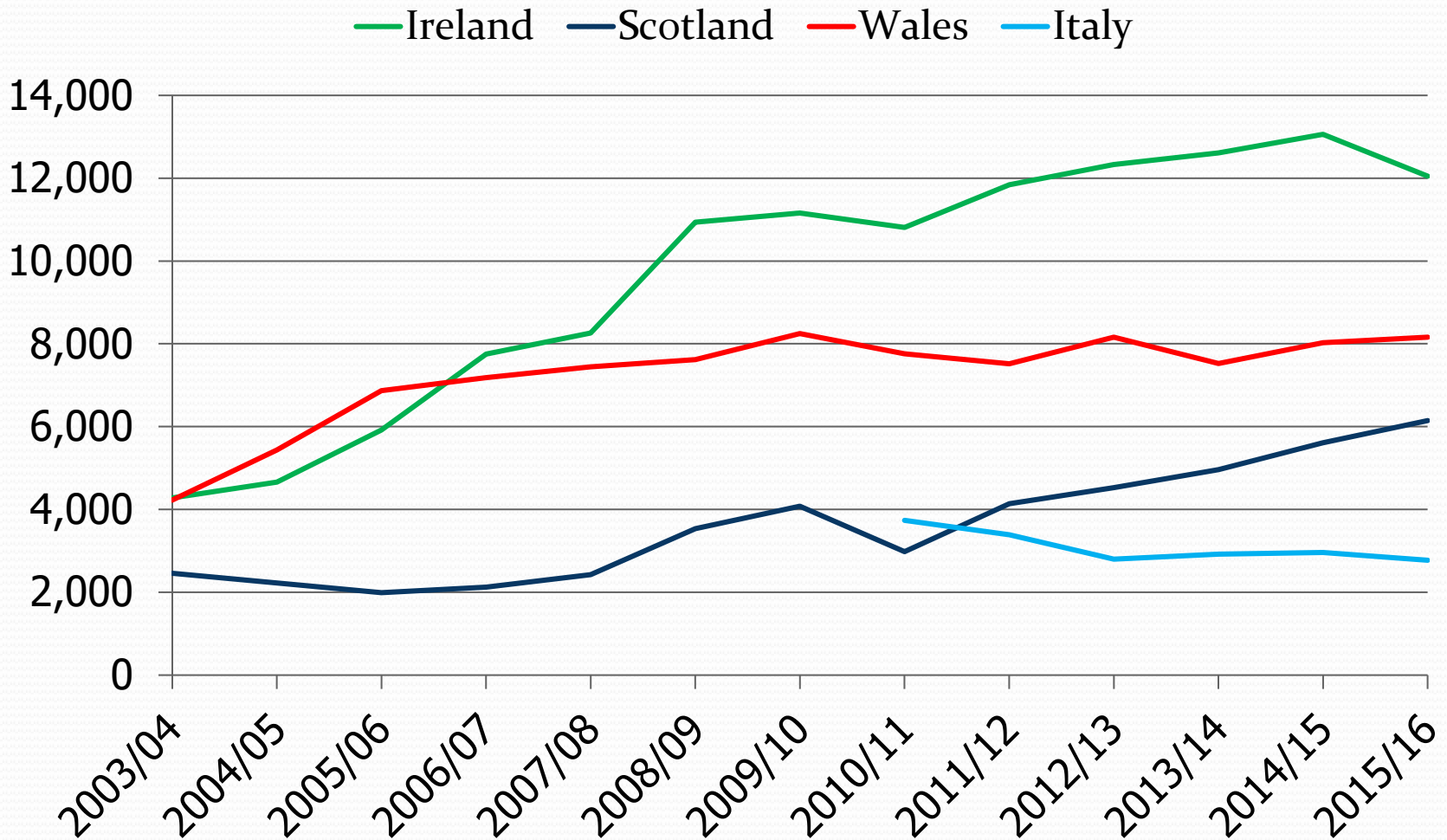
EPR - €50 approx

T14 - €71m (due to increase to €90m in 2019).

# Average Attendances in European Rugby Leagues.



# Average Pro-12 Attendances by Country



# Cultural Differences.

- “In Wales, the nation and rugby were one and indivisible” (Collins, 2014, p.91).
- Rugby in Ireland “is a minority sport when compared with the scale of Association Football (soccer) on the one hand and the GAA on the other hand”. (IRFU, 2009).
- “In 1995 I played for Munster against Leinster in Thomond Park with maybe at best 1,000 supporters who were passionate and typically drawn from the clubs and families that provided the players on show.” (Toland, 2014).
- Scotland half as many adult players as Ireland and Wales.
- “Outside the small [Scottish] Border towns, rugby was unknown in working-class areas and soccer reigned supreme.” (Collins, 2015)

# Extensive Literature Analysing Sports Attendances.

- Strength of home team and whether it is in contention to win championship or reach play-offs important determinant of attendances.
- Szymanski, 2007; Szymanski, 2009; and Gitter & Rhoads, 2010.
- Previous work Hogan, Massey & Massey (2013) analysed attendances in all 3 European Leagues. Hogan, Massey & Massey (2017) analysed attendances in European Rugby Cup

# Attendance Model

- Analyse attendances 1,524 Pro 12 matches from 2003/04-2015/16.
- Home/Away Team Win Ratio Previous 6 Matches
- Home/Away Team Championship/Play-off Chances
- Derby match – Teams from same country.
- Country Fixed Effects.
- Other variables.
- Home/Away Champions
- Home/Away European Cup Winners
- Match Day and Month
- Clash with international (Teams missing top players).
- Competition from soccer – Whether FAPL or SPL team in same city.

	(1)	(2)
Home Win Ratio	5.17 *** (0.57)	4.78*** (0.55)
Away Win Ratio	1.64*** (0.51)	1.43*** (0.47)
Home Team Qual	1.46*** (0.35)	0.93*** (0.34)
Derby	3.83*** (0.40)	3.97*** (0.37)
Trend		0.35** (0.16)
Home Team Irish Trend		0.73*** (0.10)
Home Team Scottish Trend		0.31*** (0.08)
Home Team Welsh Trend		0.44*** (0.09)
Intercept	0.80** (0.41)	3.88** (1.79)
R2	0.35	0.42
Obs	1,524	1,524

White corrected standard errors in parentheses.

\* p<.1, \*\*p<.05, \*\*\*p<.01

	(3)	(4)
Home Win Ratio	3.79*** (0.50)	3.83*** (0.51)
Away Win Ratio	1.50*** (0.43)	1.35*** (0.45)
Home Team Qual	0.87*** (0.33)	1.30*** (0.37)
Derby	3.62*** (0.34)	3.00*** (0.41)
Home Team Irish Trend	0.74*** (0.09)	0.65*** (0.09)
Home Team Scottish Trend	0.27*** (0.08)	0.20** (0.09)
Home Team Welsh Trend	0.42*** (0.08)	0.44*** (0.09)
International (Home)	-1.41*** (0.16)	-1.60*** (0.25)
Home Champions	3.59*** (0.45)	3.65*** (0.43)
Home ERC	6.27*** (1.00)	5.98*** (1.04)
Soccer		-1.06*** (0.31)
R2	0.52	0.54



# Some Conclusions.

- Attendances depend on team quality and whether team in contention for championships play-offs.
- Irish attendances higher mainly due to team quality and absence of competition from soccer.
- Saturday attendances higher than Fridays and Sundays – Welsh teams no longer have home matches on Sundays.
- Christmas/New Year attendance boost.
- Attendances higher March onwards – no clash with internationals and European matches.
- Impact of live broadcasts?
- Uncertainty of outcome?



Thank you for your attention.