

# A mammy's love nourishes a son of Ireland in Britain

Boxing champions Steve Collins and Chris Eubank arrive for a screening of the documentary *One Night in Millstreet*, part of the Irish Film Festival London. Photograph: James Manning/PA

Former world champion boxer Steve Collins is in the good room on the top floor of the Irish embassy in London, stroking his goatee and musing on the vagaries of fame. Beating Chris Eubank in 1995 made Collins world famous. But he says they'd never let you get a big head back home. He lives on a farm in Hertfordshire now, wearing wellies and driving a jeep.

"People in Ireland can take you for granted. It's a small place. We all know each other. You'd see Bono on the street and go 'so what?'," he says, his eyes twinkling.

"Here in Britain, I feel appreciated. The phone never stops. But people on the street here wouldn't always recognise you. See this goatee? I haven't had it for ten years. I only grew it back for recognition for this event. It'll be gone by Monday."

Collins is promoting a new feature-length documentary, *One Night in Millstreet*, about the Cabra man's famous first victory over Peckham pugilist Eubank. Sporting his then-trademark goatee, he psyched out the British boxer in a legendary St Patrick's Day bout.

The film, directed by Welsh-born, Irish-based filmmaker Andrew Gallimore, had its London premiere last week at Leicester Square during the Irish Film Festival London, a week-long event run by [Irish Film & Television UK](#). It held its annual awards ceremony at an event hosted by Ireland's ambassador to the UK, Martin Fraser, at the embassy in Belgravia on Monday night. Collins was there with Gallimore.

The eccentric Eubank, who is interviewed in the film, wasn't at the embassy. But he showed up for the premiere. By all accounts, there was almost as much of an edge between the two former boxers at the accompanying Q&A as there was when they fought, twice, in 1995.

Eubank never fully came to terms with his two defeats. Collins got inside his head. He showed up at one pre-fight press conference in a three-piece tweed suit, with a flatcap, a shillelagh and a wolfhound. Life coach guru Tony Quinn told the world he had hypnotised Collins not to feel pain. Eubank was freaked out.

As the Celtic Tiger took hold, it was one of the most famous nights in Irish sporting history. Almost as much as the exploits of the Boys in Green in football, Collins's victories over Eubank helped to banish Ireland's sense of sporting inferiority towards the English.

Twenty-eight years on, the now 59-year-old Collins's enthusiasm is undimmed. He looks at Gallimore as he excitedly recalls the fight, then at me, back at Gallimore, back at me. Then he looks off into the middle distance and sees God knows what. The Millstreet crowd? Eubank's sweaty chin? His own destiny?

Collins is often teased in his homeland for being "a bit of a character". Perhaps that is partly why he feels under appreciated. At the embassy, he is affable and generous with his time. On this drizzly, dark night in London, his unbridled joy at the recollection of a dream fulfilled is a tonic.

Collins loves his homeland. He was the Celtic Warrior. But he is one of those Irish people who now slots seamlessly into Britain. Hertfordshire is his home, shared with the farmer's daughter, Donna, whom he married.

"I'm very settled. The Irish community here is very good. But Britain is a great country. I love England and I've no intentions of ever leaving it. I'm very happy with my life here and the way I'm appreciated. If you work hard you get the rewards."

Downstairs in the function room, Fraser introduces awards proceedings. There are gongs for Verdigris, an independent drama, and for filmmaker Joe Comerford, who picked up a lifetime achievement award. Gallimore's *One Night in Millstreet* wins best documentary. At the crucial moment, the Welsh filmmaker appears to have stepped out of the room. "Give it to Steve," an organiser whispers. Collins is overjoyed on the stage.

"I don't know what to say. I'd have prepared a speech if I'd known. Thank you," he says. By now, Gallimore is back

and at the side of the stage, but there's no sign of his subject stepping aside. Gallimore shrugs his shoulders. Let Steve do it.

Collins tells the arty crowd that the film is "emotional". He thanks his mother, "Mammy Collins", who he says is in her late 80s and is in the film. She found out she was to be interviewed only an hour beforehand. "Yet she is on screen still looking immaculate."

He's still smiling, but his voice falters now as he pays her tribute. "I can't thank her enough. She made my dreams come true."

Whether it's Ireland or Britain, who needs the adoration of a nation? You have it from your mammy. One night in London.