

# AWARDS FOR EXCELLENCE IN **PUBLIC RELATIONS** **2021**



# Best Long-Term Campaign



*Pictured is Ireland and Connacht Rugby Player & Tackle Your Feelings ambassador, Jack Carty. Tackle Your Feelings is a mental health and wellbeing campaign, run by Rugby Players Ireland and funded by the Z Zurich Foundation, that encourages people to 'Take Control' of their mental wellbeing using principles from both sport and positive psychology.*

## Campaign

Tackle Your Feelings

## Description of Campaign

Wanting to give something back to the communities they represent, Ireland's professional rugby players developed **Tackle Your Feelings** – a campaign that set out to leverage their collective influence to encourage people across the island of Ireland to safeguard their mental wellbeing.



## Public Relations Consultant

Wilson Hartnell



## Client

Rugby Players Ireland

## Background to the Campaign

Over the last 10 years, working with psychologists became an integral part of preparation for Ireland's professional rugby players. Regarded as tough, given the physical nature of rugby as a sport, Ireland's rugby players felt that if they could showcase the steps that they have to take to proactively manage their mental wellbeing, they might help dismantle the stigma that surrounds mental illness.

In 2016, equipped with these learnings from their players' experiences, Rugby Players Ireland ("RPI"), the representative association for Ireland's rugby players, set out to develop Tackle Your Feelings (TYF). The programme is designed to leverage the experience of Ireland's professional rugby players in proactively managing their mental wellbeing and in doing so, encourage others to do the same. Enabled by funding from Zurich Ireland and the Z Zurich Foundation, the Tackle Your Feelings programme centres on using the profile of Ireland's rugby players to signpost people towards professionally designed resources that encourage, enable and equip them to take control of their mental wellbeing.

The TYF programme has evolved over time. The initial three-year campaign focused on the rugby community and the

primary objective was to destigmatise mental health. An additional long-term commitment in funding from the Z Zurich Foundation meant that in 2018 the programme outreach was extended into schools throughout Ireland. This new phase coincided with the launch of a new TYF website and app, which act as a permanent repository, as well as an Instagram channel, to engage a younger demographic.

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## Statement of Objectives

### Phase one objective:

- Changing the narrative around mental wellbeing in Ireland.

### Phase two objectives:

- Generate advocacy and awareness for the Tackle Your Feelings programme.
- Build Engagement with the programme.
- Build Zurich Brand's Strength.

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## Programme Planning and Strategy

### Phase one strategy (2016 - 2018)

News generation across earned media, amplifying RPI's owned channels and leveraging rugby's social media footprint was integral to the initial success of TYF, given the absence of any paid media budget. Aware of the stigma associated with mental illness in Ireland, particularly amongst males and females aged 18 – 35, our strategy focused on breaking down the emotional barriers that exist around mental health by leveraging the stories of five Irish rugby players who were willing to share their struggles with mental health.

Our strategy focused on creating visibility and conversation around TYF with a view to initiating the required behavioural change from passiveness to proactivity in addressing mental wellbeing. This was underpinned by unique storytelling, which drew on players' experiences with tragedy, loss and the pressures associated with playing sport at the highest level, all identified as triggers to periods of mental struggle. Reaching out to the rugby community, we staged TYF workshops in each of the four provinces, which were supported by extensive local media outreach.

### Phase two refining the challenge (2019 - present)

Three years into our campaign, TYF research revealed in 2018 that one third of people consider how they're feeling once a month or less. 14% of people admitted that they would only consider how they're feeling when faced with a challenge or life crisis. Yet central to the TYF mission was to encourage people to be proactive in managing their mental wellbeing. We sought to reframe our strategic communications to increase the frequency with which the Irish population addressed their mental health.

Assessing the impact of phase one of our campaign, we opted to reshape the TYF narrative away from major crisis, instead building it around more relatable everyday challenges. We also identified an opportunity to leverage the significant popularity and following of professional players amongst the younger demographic.

Targeting this younger audience meant that if we could equip them with the tools to safeguard their mental health, it would stand them and society, in good stead as they progressed into adulthood. We built a TYF schools app, which set out age-appropriate tasks and exercises, including a game designed to make students more aware and knowledgeable about their own mental health and well-being. We identified Irish women's international and teacher, Eimear Considine, to be the lead ambassador on this element of the programme.

We sharpened our messaging, working with the players to tell personal stories of how they "take control" of their mental well-being every day to inspire others to do the same using positive sports psychology principles. We needed more Irish rugby players to open up and display a vulnerability to enable others to do the same.

## Strategy

Our strategy centred around three pillars; to inform, educate and inspire using a series of compelling and shareable animated stories featuring our talent. We would leverage our campaign research in relation to several aspects of



mental health and wellbeing to spark conversation. We continued to time our marketing and communications bursts to moments when rugby was top of the cultural conversation, amplifying our paid media and strategic partnerships with news generation focused on earned media.

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