

Irish Hearts and the 49ers: A Legacy of Passion and Pride
Super Bowl Watch Party for the Niners and for Our Irish Heritage



January 30, 2024

SAN FRANCISCO, CA The United Irish Cultural Center of San Francisco (UICC) has plenty of athletic fans and champions of Bay Area sports within its membership and community. The UICC loves hosting watch parties for members, friends, and neighbors when post-season play heats up, and the Super Bowl-bound 49ers have us on the edge of our seats once again! And there's a little friendly wager on the line with our Irish Center counterparts in Kansas City to keep it interesting!

But, as we get word out about our upcoming 49er Super Bowl Watch Party at the UICC [Feb. 11; 2700 45th Ave, SF Outer Sunset; inside/outside; doors at 2 pm; no cover; must register: www.irishcentersf.org], we, as an Irish American community, are relishing the deep threads of green in the storied franchise that is the San Francisco 49ers. From legendary athletes and sports leaders to passionate fans, the Irish influence within the San Francisco 49er's is unmistakable.

In the vibrant heart of San Francisco, the 49ers, a team steeped in history and cultural diversity, continues to be significantly shaped by the Irish American community. The team's "49er" moniker, with homage to the peak of the California Gold Rush frenzy in 1849, is indelibly woven through the Irish immigration story. More than a million Irish left Ireland during the potato famine (1845-1852), and many headed to Northern California at the prospect of gold. The Irish laid down roots and made significant contributions in all facets of society.

Take Mike McGlinchey, 49er defensive tackle #69—he exemplifies the Irish spirit in the NFL, while the legendary coach Bill Walsh revolutionized football with his strategic genius. Mastermind of “the west coast offense” Bill Walsh, who grew up in the Bay Area, led the 49ers through the Joe Montana era. General manager John Lynch grew up outside of Chicago, before playing for legendary NFL coach (and fellow Irish American) Bill Walsh at Stanford. Niner’s Head Coach and Bay Area native Kyle Shanahan, along with his father Mike, both renowned coaches, continue this tradition of Irish American excellence in leadership. Christian McCaffery (49er running back #23) and his father (and former 49er) Ed McCaffrey, showcase the athletic prowess of Irish Americans, making remarkable contributions on the field and looking to be only the second father-son combo to win a Super Bowl for the same franchise in Super Bowl history.

The 49er Faithful are a force in and of themselves. The story of Bay Area resident Matt Shaw, a dedicated niner fan from Kilkenny, Ireland, embodies the deep-rooted passion of the Irish American community for the 49ers. His season ticket holder journey began at Kezar Stadium, and moved to Candlestick Park and now to Levi’s Stadium. Marked by legendary tailgating traditions, his dedication symbolizes loyalty and the blending of cultures as the traditions have been passed down to so many.

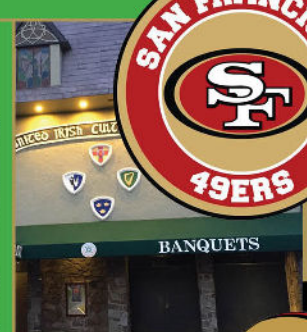
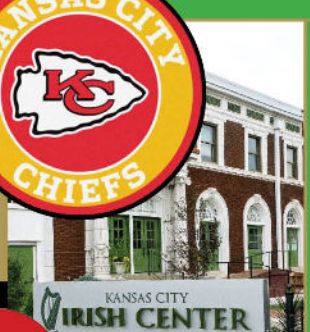
Speaking of stadiums—not to mention fancy footwork on the field—let’s not forget the halftime entertainment at these games. The UICC’s *Keepers of the Steps* program that keeps track of the history of Irish Step Dancing in the San Francisco Bay area has a wonderful photo in its collection of the Healy School of Irish Dancers performing at a 49er halftime show at Kezar Stadium in 1963. In the photo among the young dancers are three of the San Francisco school’s founder, William Healy’s, grandchildren (and children of the then teacher, Ann Healy Curtin. One of those dancers being PattiAnn (Curtin) Ranum who operates the school to this day along with her daughter Alisa Belew—thereby representing the longest continuously run Irish dance school in the world in its 5th generation.

Adding to this rich tapestry, a new wave of Irish talent is emerging in the NFL. Athletes like Rory Beggan, Mark Jackson, Charlie Smyth, and Darragh Leader, participating in the International Player Pathway Programme, represent the evolving landscape of Irish participation in American football. Their transition from Gaelic sports to the NFL showcases the adaptability and skill of Irish athletes, further deepening the connection between Ireland and American football.

The UICC is building a new, reimagined community center in its current Outer Sunset location, and the increased square footage will allow ample space for a dedicated Irish American Museum and Library. We cannot wait to share this story in a vast collection that showcases the contributions of the Irish to American society. In this run up to Super Bowl LVIII, we have football on our minds. The blend of historic and contemporary narratives creates a vivid picture of the Irish American influence on the 49ers and the NFL—celebrating a legacy of passion, resilience, and cultural fusion within the world of American football. May the luck o’ the Irish be with the 49ers and all their faithful fans on February 11, 2024. If you can’t be in Las Vegas, come on down to the Irish Center for a fantastic fan experience with an Irish flair.



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