



# REUTERS

Ireland win first Triple Crown in 19 years

By Gideon Long

DUBLIN, March 27 (Reuters) - Ireland won the Triple Crown for the first time in 19 years and only the seventh time in their history on Saturday when they beat a spirited Scotland 37-16 in the Six Nations championship.

Ireland's margin of victory was nowhere near big enough to keep alive their faint hopes of winning the title which will be decided in Paris later when France host world champions England.

Two tries from centre Gordon D'Arcy and one from Geordan Murphy, Peter Stringer and David Wallace were enough to see off Scotland who, despite a gutsy first half display, slumped to their fifth straight defeat and take the wooden spoon.

Not since 1985, when Ciaran Fitzgerald was captain and Mick Doyle their coach, had Ireland completed a clean sweep of their "home nation" rivals - England, Scotland and Wales.

"The whole team is going to go nuts, it's such an honour for the whole country," said D'Arcy, one of the revelations of the championship.

Wales end in fourth place after beating Italy 44-10 earlier, with the Italians taking fifth spot.

Ireland had been expected to trounce the Scots but were made to work exceptionally hard for their victory. Only in the last quarter of the match did they break free and establish a comfortable lead.

The Irish lineout, awesome against the English three weeks ago, failed to fire on all cylinders and flyhalf Ronan O'Gara had a jittery afternoon, missing three of his five first-half kicks.

Scotland drew first blood with a Chris Paterson penalty in the opening minute. O'Gara replied four minutes later and Eddie O'Sullivan's men started to probe the wings for holes in the Scottish defence.

Midway through the half O'Driscoll spun a glorious ball out wide to Girvan Dempsey whose reverse pass sent wing Shane Horgan free. He fed D'Arcy and the fleet-footed centre, Ireland's player of the tournament, charged over to score.

O'Gara failed to convert, and a Paterson penalty followed by a Dan Parks drop-goal kept the visitors in touch.

Murphy gave the Irish breathing space with a try in the corner on the stroke of halftime to make the interval score 16-9 but the Scots fought back once again after the re-start.

A period of pressure allowed flanker Allister Hogg to break from a ruck and go over in the 50th minute for his first try in international rugby, and Paterson converted for 16-16.

Only in the last 25 minutes did the Irish turn on the style.

Flanker Wallace, back in the side for the first time in six months, wriggled over for a try and O'Gara finally found his touch with the boot, converting for 23-16.

Scrumhalf Stringer darted in for a try 10 minutes later and D'Arcy sealed Ireland's win with a brilliant effort, exchanging passes with Murphy before sliding over for his second try.

O'Driscoll and O'Sullivan led a lap of honour around Lansdowne Road as the Scots headed for the changing rooms to contemplate one of their worst seasons in the 121-year history of the tournament.

