

Marching into the month of green beer and basketball (02, 03, 13)

© by Mike Keenan

After the raucous debauchery of February has finally passed, we arrive bloated and hung-over at the month of March, a much more sombre period indeed, and in that light, my favourite Shakespearian month. Remember the soothsayer – “Caesar, beware the ides of March,” which I thought was a misspelling for brides of March, which was quite odd because Caesar was already married to Calpurnia.

Anyway, I discovered that ides referred to the Roman calendar; in some months, the ides is on the 15th, and in others, it’s the 13th. If you were decent about it, you might simply compromise and make it the 14th. It’s supposed to be on the day of the full moon. Nonetheless, Caesar soon got the point; in fact he was subjected to many sharp points that day. Julius Caesar is my favourite political play. He thought that he was all powerful. Do we know other politicians afflicted with such huge hubris? Yes indeed, but more about March.

Did I say March was sombre? Well, we have Easter and Passover and all the holy days. I used to hate Holy Week as a kid. Sometimes we attended mass twice in one day! That was asking a lot of a kid who would rather play ball hockey outside. So, to rescue us in March, we have yet another religious holiday, but it has taken on a secular bent. St Patrick’s Day is celebrated on March 17. At University, it was Green Beer Day. I would venture with a few friends to the Ox-Box on Oxford St. in London, where we would honour St. Patrick by drinking copious amounts of green beer.

St. Patrick worked in Ireland as a missionary, and died on March 17 in the fifth century. He played an important role in converting the inhabitants of Ireland to Christianity. Actually the Irish will drink to anything, so the green beer was just an excuse to become Christians.

Superstition abounds in Ireland. They believe in leprechauns and shamrocks are a green metaphor for the Trinity. They have interesting superstitions about birds. If a rooster comes to your threshold and crows, you may expect visitors. While on a trip, if you see three magpies on your left, it is unlucky; but two on the right is a good omen. If you hear a cuckoo on your right, you will have good luck for a year. Whoever kills a robin redbreast will never have good luck, even if they lived to be a thousand years old. As for me, I will stick with a bird in the hand is worth two in the bush, which can also be applied to golf balls. If you witness my slice, you would readily agree.

In some Canadian cities such as Toronto and Montreal, large scale St. Patrick’s Day parades are held, often on the Sunday closest to March 17. The parade in Montreal has been held every year since 1824.

In some places there are Irish cultural events organized such as drinking green beer. (see above). The Irish Association of Manitoba organizes a three-day festival of Irish culture in the week of St Patrick’s Day. As for food, colcannon, a dish of mashed potatoes mixed with kale or cabbage and Irish stew, traditionally made with lamb and root vegetables, are both served. Traditional drinks include stout, a dark beer, and whiskey, and parties are often themed around the color green.



St. Patrick supposedly dispersed with all of the “snakes” in Ireland. More realistically, the snakes were pagans or Druids or perhaps politicians. The Irish love their metaphors.

Finally, let us not forget America’s “March Madness,” the NCAA Men’s Division I Basketball Championship held each spring which features 68 college basketball teams whose players wear droopy shorts, are a minimum of seven feet tall, and can run like deer. The 68 coaches are a minimum of 66 years old which is quite impressive for us seniors sitting at home drinking myriad colours of beer.

