

## Six Nations 2020 Preview

### Ireland

**2019 finish:** 3<sup>rd</sup> place.

Ireland enter this year's six nations on the back of yet another disappointing World cup campaign. On casting our minds back to October and the latest edition of the competition, one cannot escape the overwhelming sense of dé-javu that accompanies it. Like every Irish team that came before them, Ireland flattered to deceive, once again failing to end their quarter final hoodoo, this time at the hands of the All Blacks.

### What's new

A lot has changed in the Ireland setup since the World cup. For starters, Irelands head coach Joe Schmidt has stepped down as head coach following 7 years in charge which yielded 3 six nations championships a 2018 grand slam and 2 incredible victories over the All blacks. In his place steps Irelands former assistant coach Andy Farrell who is set to sink his teeth into his first job as head coach. The Ireland squad also sees major changes with a total of 11 from the world cup lead by the retirement of captain Rory Best. While some of the changes have been injury enforced, stalwart Rob Kearney misses out as well as his Leinster teammate Rhys Ruddock highlighting a changing of the guard. Johnny sexton takes over as Irelands new captain with five new uncapped players also included in the squad, adding a freshness and exuberance that was critically important post world cup. Of the new debutants it is perhaps that of number 8 Calen Doris that is the most highly anticipated. The 21-year-old who stands at 6 foot 4 inches tall possesses a destructive ball carrying ability which will also alleviate the pressure on CJ Stander for go forward ball.

### Player to watch

#### John Cooney

Once viewed as the third best scrumhalf in Connacht, Cooney's rise to prominence has been nothing short of heroic. Cooney now playing his trade in Ulster has most certainly been the best scrum half in the pro 14 this year racking up more meters and beating more defenders than fellow Irish scrum half's. Cooney also has an exceptional placekicking ability that means he is one man we must certainly keep our eye on.

### Predicted finish

Attempting to predict the fate of Irelands 2020 six nations almost seems a naive task with the wholesale changes that have taken place in the squad. While many see this year's six nations as a chance for Andy Farrell to blood and bed in new players, we must not forget that Irelands finish has major ramifications regarding seeding for the 2023 world cup with the draw taking place later this year. When looking at Irelands fixture list it is the trips to Twickenham and the Stade de France that look like defining moments in Irelands campaign. With these fixtures in mind and remembering the wholesale changes that have taken place in the squad and the coaching team, a **2<sup>nd</sup> place** finish is expected.

