

IRISH DAILY
STAR**inside****sport**

12-PAGE SPORTS PULLOUT



BEHIND THE VELVET CURTAIN: Deputy editor-in-chief Jean-Philippe Leclaire welcomed The Irish Daily Star into the offices of world-renowned sports paper L'Equipe
■ SEE INSIDE

WE'LL ALWAYS HAVE PARIS

With the curtain set to fall on the 2024 Games, we look back on an epic few weeks for our Irish athletes

HEAD OVER HEELS: Rhys McClenaghan shows off his gold medal in front of legions of fans at the Eiffel Tower this week

JEAN-Philippe Leclaire holds up the front page of L'Équipe.

It's a photo of Swedish pole vaulter Armand 'Mondo' Duplantis on his way to a world record at the Olympics.

The headline reads: 'Le Record Du Mondo'. "That's bingo!" says the deputy editor-in-chief of the famed French sports newspaper.

"When people who can't speak French and they get the headline. That's the bingo."

It's Thursday afternoon in the south Paris suburb of Boulogne-Billancourt and Leclaire is preparing for the daily editorial conference.

Portraits of sporting greats like Alain Prost, Eddy Merckx and Michel Platini line the walls of the corridor.

Production staff are already piecing together the paper and placing completed pages on the wall.

So how does the world's greatest sports-only newspaper cover the biggest sporting event in the world?

"It's the biggest event we ever had to cover in the history of L'Équipe," says Leclaire.

"We have been waiting for it for 100 years, so we had time to prepare. We had a whole century to prepare for it," he adds, laughing.

"The only comparison is the 1998 football World Cup. But I think it's bigger than that."

"With these Games, we woke up on the first day — it was raining, there was a sabotage on the national rails, so we thought, 'Oh, what kind of hell are we going to go through?'"

"But right in the middle of the Opening Ceremony when the lights start to go up, there was a major change."

Paris has embraced these Games in a major way.

Online

French athletes have been winning medals too — new heroes like Leon Marchand have emerged and old ones like Teddy Riner have delivered again.

L'Équipe has been covering every second of it — between print and online. It's a mammoth task.

"In Tokyo we had 32 people there. In Paris we have 72 accredited — including 14 photographers," says Leclaire. "In total we have 250 people working on the Games."

Their comprehensive coverage has given L'Équipe a huge lift — both in circulation and subscribers.

The print edition has seen a daily rise in sales of between 25 per cent and 45 per cent with an average circulation of 300,000 copies over the entire period of the Olympics.

Their website has been getting 14 million visits per day — double the daily figure for the first half of the year — with a record 16 million on Friday, August 2.

"Our record ever in terms of sales was the day after the victory of France versus Brazil in the 1998 final. It was 1.6 million. But there wasn't



David COUGHLAN
EXCLUSIVE

really any internet then," says Leclaire.

"That's the record and we will never break it again unfortunately. But we're doing pretty well."

Crowds have flocked to each and every venue, making incredible noise. It hasn't come as a surprise to Leclaire.

"We have this kind of Bastille Day culture. When it's big, when French are doing well, we are there," he says. "If French are not doing well, we are not that interested. You have the Games at home, the athletes are doing well, so that's the best combination."

The Olympic rivalry between London and Paris has been long-running — going back to the 2012 bids when the French capital just missed out. But Leclaire sees it as a friendly one that has helped Paris put on one of the best ever Olympics.

"When we lost to London for 2012 — the bid was led only by political or business figures," he says.

"So when we tried again for these Games it was led by a sport figure and it was (canoe star) Tony Estanguet."

"So we were inspired by what London has done with Sebastian Coe, we wanted to have our own Sebastian Coe."

Image

"But now the worst rivalry we have is with Argentina, since the World Cup in Qatar and the racist chants at the Copa America."

"That's the bitterest rivalry I've seen for a long time."

One aspect of L'Équipe is their use of sports photography, with a two-page spread given over to a stunning image each day.

The cover shot is most important of all.

"You can have beautiful pictures online, but to have a cover like this," he says, pointing at the Duplantis cover, "That's the magic of paper."

"We are lucky to be the last French newspaper to have our own staff of photographers. It helps a lot. For us it's very important."

"What we wanted to achieve with the paper is to sell a paper that people would like to buy and keep even if they are internet subscribers."

"We wanted to conceive it as a kind of souvenir from the Games, that people will keep



INSTITUTION: A L'Équipe reader on the streets of Paris

We've been waiting 100 years for this, so we were ready

L'ÉQUIPE STAFF PROUD TO IMMORTALISE GAMES

the 15 or 16 editions and say, 'Okay I have them and I will look at them in 10 or 20 years.'"

François Gille is the photography editor-in-chief at L'Équipe. He has worked

there since 1991 and it's his job to marshal the staff of snappers and find the most suitable images for the paper.

"Deadline is about midnight — maybe to 12.30pm for some very last pages," says Gille.

"We have 14 photographers at the Games sending in 5,000 or 6,000 pictures per day."

"But it has been a fantastic Olympic Games, for Paris and for L'Équipe."

He walks downstairs to the basement where he is overseeing the digitising of their photo archives.

"The beginning of L'Équipe is 1946, but we have photos from other newspapers that existed before then," he says. Boxes and boxes of glass

photographic plates are stacked on shelves — each box has a number on it that corresponds with details in a book of contact sheets (thumbnail frames) and captions.

He takes out a glass plate with the photo of Marcel Cerdan, the great French boxer of the 1940s and another of Just Fontaine, the France striker who scored 13 goals at the 1958 World Cup.

Archive

"We have 13 million pictures which documents 100 years in our archive," says Gille. "So far we have digitised five million of these pictures."

Gille holds up a photo of

competitors crossing the line of the 100 metres final during the 1920 Olympic Games.

"I have worked for L'Équipe since 1991, so more than 30 years, but every day I'm discovering pictures I've never seen before."

"We used the digital archive during Covid when there was no live sport — it was a great thing we had this archive."

"They are a piece of history. We have to take care of them."

He points to a picture of Sean Kelly, but is hesitant at the mention of Thierry Henry's handball.

"We have the picture, but I don't want to start a war!" he says, laughing.

Back upstairs Leclaire is

viewing some of the early pages. On the walls beside his desk are old front pages about Michel Platini, Johann Cruyff and a framed photo of Don Revie and Bill Shankley leading out their teams for the 1965 FA Cup final.

Election

He has written books about Platini and is a St-Étienne fan with a fondness for Liverpool and Leyton Orient.

For two weeks L'Équipe's pages have been filled with French fans waving tricolours, wearing France jerseys and with blue, white and red painted on their faces.

It's a stark contrast from just a few weeks ago when Marine

Le Pen's Far Right National Rally party looked set for power after a snap election. "If you go to the US you have all those American flags in the gardens. It's hard to know if it's a Democrat or if it's a Republican," says Leclaire.

"But if you have a French flag in a garden in France, there's a very strong chance — apart from times of a World Cup — that it's someone from the right or extreme right."

"Because the flag and even the Marseillaise have been confiscated by the nationalists and by the right and the extreme right."

"When it comes to sport, like a World Cup, a Euros, all of a sudden everyone is proud

again and everyone waves the tricolour again. Everybody sings the Marseillaise."

Mood

"I think one of the reasons that people are so happy during this two weeks is that they were so miserable before, because of the politics," he says. "The mood of the country was so down. All of a sudden you have this big event and people have the opportunity to go on the streets, to celebrate together."

"I'm not sure it's going to

last. I don't think so. It never lasts. You can't expect much. If you have two or three weeks of happiness, that's all you can expect from a sports event."

"It won't solve the problems of the country. The day after it finishes, on Monday morning we will still have problems."

"The problems of this country are so deeply rooted that it will take more than medals to solve them unfortunately."

"But at least we had a beautiful summer."

A beautiful summer beautifully documented in the pages of L'Équipe and it's not over yet.

Impossible n'est pas Français. That's the bingo.

'If you have a French flag in a garden in France, there's a very strong chance — apart from times of a World Cup — that it's someone from the right or extreme right'



RARE INSIGHT: Starsport's David Coughlan with L'Équipe deputy editor-in-chief Jean-Philippe Leclaire and (below) enjoying the photo collection



HISTORIC MOMENT: L'Équipe photography editor-in-chief François Gille with a photo from the 1920 100m final



NEW HEROES: Nicolas Batum of France after their basketball team beat Germany to reach the Olympics final



FRIENDS TO FOES: Evans and Murray

WE'RE RIVALS ON THE GREEN

■ Scott TROTTER

ANDY MURRAY has quickly moved on from partnering Dan Evans for Team GB at the Olympics to declare his teammate is now his opponent.

The duo formed an emotional partnership during the Paris Games as Murray attempted to fend off retirement long enough to earn a gold medal. Murray and Evans reached the quarter-finals at Roland Garros before being knocked out by American's Tommy Paul and Taylor Fritz.

While tears marked their exit, Team GB's entrants enjoyed a rollercoaster journey during their time in the French capital.

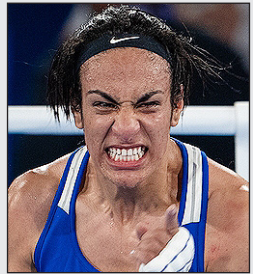
Evans is set to see a tumble down the world rankings after sacrificing enough ranking points to drop 100 places, to feature in the Olympics alongside Murray. It was a competition that meant a great deal to both players and with the journey over, they are now facing each other in another sport.

Friendly

Away from the Olympic village, the British tennis stars have taken to the golf course for their next competitive endeavour. It wasn't for a friendly round either with Murray taking to Instagram to declare: "Partners last week... opponents today".

Before heading home, Murray also kept busy while in Paris. Former teammate Laura Robson revealed he had been hunting down nation's pins that commemorate their attendance at the Olympics.

Robson said: "He's taking [collecting pins] seriously. In the athletes' village, he's trying to find the most niche country, the smallest country."



HARD BLOW: Khelif
KHELIF'S ONEROUS ROAD TO TRIUMPH

■ **Nia DALTON**

IT'S been a long road to triumph for Imane Khelif who now has the world watching her in the ring after a 'really difficult' childhood. The Algerian boxer has been the most scrutinised athlete of the 2024 Olympic Games after her match against Angela Carini ended in tears.

Her Italian opponent quit the round-of-16 bout in Paris just 46 seconds in after she claimed Khelif threw the hardest punch of her career.

Khelif (25) is a biological female and her father, Amar Khelif, has even gone as far as showing her birth certificate on TV.

Rare

It has been reported that Khelif has a rare condition categorised as differences in sex development (DSD), which can result in female individuals having male chromosomes or anatomy.

The Olympics marks Khelif's comeback after being disqualified from last year's World Boxing Championships after the IBA said she failed a gender eligibility test.

Speaking about the setback, Khelif said: "It was a hard blow for me but I came back stronger to show my strength and my determination and show the whole world what a brave woman Imane Khelif is."

Khelif previously described her youth as "really difficult" in an interview on the Algerian TV channel Canal Algérie. She said: "I come from a conservative region and family."

She told of how she struggled to make ends meet and sold bread to pay for travel to boxing training.

But it was all worth it because she "fell in love" with boxing as soon as she stepped into the ring for the first time.

I'm just getting into the swing of things



McClenaghan part of new generation of Irish stars who don't hide ambitions

RHYS McClenaghan doesn't know any other way.

McClenaghan is standing in the shade of the mixed zone at the Place du Trocadero, moments after participating in the parade of medal winners at the Champions Park.

He had that Olympic gold medal around neck for company and with 15,000 people braving the early evening heat to applaud the gymnast.

He is part of a wave of successful new Olympians who are different, unabashed in their belief that they could perform on the greatest stage — and had no problem telling the world that.

"Of course I'm not shying away from what my goals were," McClenaghan stated. "I said I wanted to be the best in the world, to become an Olympic champion."

A record flurry of medals for Team Ireland has captured the imagination of those roaring them on but so too did the straight-talking, can-do attitude of this new generation of Olympians.



Michael SCULLY REPORTS

They took over the Games in their own way and helped to raise Ireland to a record high.

The older guard had their own ways of getting it done. Paul O'Donovan tried to pull the old underdogs card but just got everyone laughing at the idea of it as he became Ireland's greatest ever Olympian.

Desire

Five days later, The Kellie Harrington Show had a happy-ever-after ending after she expressed the desire just to be happy in her work and to finish her career on a high.

For Ireland's first-time gold medal winners, however, success had been

planned out over a long period of time. McClenaghan and Daniel Wiffen were not shy during this Olympic cycle about the sky-high ambitions they had. For McClenaghan, who won pommel horse gold last Saturday, there was actually no other option but to say out loud what he intended to achieve.

"But if I didn't do that, like, why wouldn't I have done that," said the 25-year-old. "Obviously I'm standing here with a medal and saying that, but back then I was perplexed when people said, 'Oh, you're actually saying your goals'."

"Hell yeah, I'm saying my goals. I'm making them as clear as possible so that if something goes wrong and yet it veering off the pathway of achieving that goal, I know exactly, 'OK, this is not in line with this goal here'."

"But the mistake a lot of people make is making their goals all foggy and it takes away that responsibility you have to try to achieve that — and that's when you veer off course and don't even realise it."

"So I say openly what I want to achieve, I aim for it and it doesn't go swimmingly smooth — obviously, Tokyo was an example. But we can veer back onto that course and continue to aim for that goal."

Winning

So, too, Rhasidat Adeleke, who declared after winning her 400m heat on Monday that she was in Paris to do something special. Their thinking is, why be afraid to state your goals when you have the belief and confidence that you can achieve them?

It is a mindset that comes naturally to athletes of this generation and yet it is pretty alien to Irish fans who are used to their heroes talking in clichés, platitudes and parroting coach-speak — or not talking to the media at all.

McClenaghan puts this approach down to having watched loads of athletes give interviews and gaining an understanding of what makes them tick.

"It's just that I pick and choose from

other athletes, not how they speak or how they present themselves but how their mind works, it's what you seem almost behind their eyes that is what's interesting to me," he explained.

"It's not the bravado that impresses me, it's what they genuinely believe. "That's what I try to take away from any interviews — and I hope that athletes give genuine interviews and they're not fooling people, but I think we can all tell when someone is putting up a front."

Jack Woolley, Ireland's first taekwondo Olympian, spoke of enjoying the moment he became a two-time Olympian on Wednesday.

Woolley lost both of his contests but left the breathtaking venue with his head held high. It had been a very tough Olympic cycle for him, as it had been for Harrington, for McClenaghan and for many others.

Away from the glamour of competing on the biggest stage there were dark days but McClenaghan made

the decision to enjoy the path to Paris, all of it.

"Well it's like you're going for that goal anyway, why not enjoy that journey to it," he reasoned. "I mean, it's not going from point A to point B that would be that goal, it's your entire life between that as well."

"So you've got to not have tunnel vision your entire life to this one goal because all of a sudden you're 25 and you've accomplished that goal, then it would be, 'OK, well I didn't actually enjoy the journey'."

Terms

"But I'm glad that I came to terms with that and recognised the importance of enjoying the journey and enjoying life in general along the way."

It is an attitude gymnastics superstar Simone Biles embraced after she exited the Tokyo stage, the pressure of performing under such a harsh spotlight affecting her mental health.

Rhys has observed a change across gymnastics in that regard, but points

to the different approaches that make Olympic sport such a rich tapestry.

"I know different things allow me to be successful, but other people have their own strategies and that's the joy of watching different athletes, they have different characters and their own methods of doing things," he said.

"With more athletes that are being successful in that way, people back home can pick their own inspirational characters that they resonate with



GREEN GIANTS: Rhys McClenaghan during his gold medal routine in Paris; (below, right) Daniel Wiffen with his gold medal and (left) Paul O'Donovan and Fintan McCarthy after their race

'The mistake a lot of people make is making their goals all foggy and it takes away that responsibility'



Toby: Plan took me to top

MAIN MAN: Roberts in action on the wall

■ **Andy DUNN**

TOBY Roberts was a few months short of his 12th birthday when he heard the news that would shape his teenage years and lead to a historic Olympic gold medal.

In late 2016, sport climbing was announced as a new Olympic sport and would make its debut in Tokyo.

And at that moment, just under eight years ago, English rock climber Toby and his father Tristian formulated the plan that saw him climb to the top step of a Paris 2024 podium.

They already had a vision to take him to elite climbing levels but the news of sport climbing's Olympic status was further inspiration.

"Me and my dad created a plan to get to this stage," Roberts said. "It's been a journey, a lot of competitions, ups and downs; to finally get to this stage in front of this crowd and win a gold medal is just a dream come true."

Nerve

Roberts, from Elstead, Surrey, was a climbing prodigy, well-known in the sport from as early as the age of 10.

But his win in this remarkable Olympic discipline was not only down to incredible technique and strength, it was down to nerve.

After the boulder event, Roberts was third in the eight-man final. Going second last in the lead event — where, basically, points are awarded for how far you make it up an astonishingly difficult climbing wall — Roberts knew he needed to put in a stellar performance in round

two of the competition to be in with a chance of a medal.

"I had tried to remove all expectations going into the competition," he explained. "I knew I had had a decent boulder round but it was important to calm down, not to get nervous on the wall."

And the athlete who became hooked on climbing when he was seven years old certainly did not get nervous on the 15-metre wall, his ascent scoring 92.1 points out of a possible 100.

Fell

That took him into first position but the only man left to climb was 17-year-old Sorata Anraku, the Japanese superstar of the sport, who held a good lead over Roberts after the boulder round and was long odds-on for the gold medal.

But to a collective gasp from the 6,000-strong crowd, Anraku lost his grip relatively early in the climb and fell towards earth.

And no-one was more shocked than a briefly tearful Roberts.

"This has been a journey," said Roberts, whose Great Britain team-mate Hamish McArthur finished fifth. "There was a rush of adrenaline and a rush of happiness when I realised I had won."

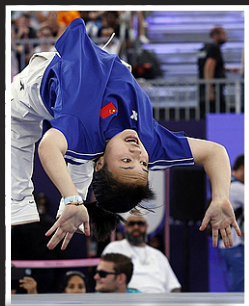
And, of course, there was the same rush for his dad and Tristian said: "It was just really hard to watch, I have no idea what my heart reached just from sitting still. It was an emotional rollercoaster."

"It is hard to watch when you are helpless and you know it means so much to him. But to get to experience things like this is incredible."

Anyhow, does Toby plan to celebrate post-competition?

"I'll do some climbing in some nice places," he says.

Which will be nice. But young Toby has already reached the highest sporting summit of all.



COLOURFUL: China's Liu Qingyi does her stuff in the women's breaking round robin

Afghan B-girl breaks ranks

■ Neil McLEMAN

BREAKING made a loud and colourful debut at the Olympics last night — and the Afghan competitor made a strong political statement.

The new sport — commonly known as breakdancing — originates from dance battles between competing crews in New York City in the 1970s. Now it is an international sport, with the Olympic competition opened by Snoop Dog in front of a raucous crowd in the Concorde urban park yesterday.

Ramp

Two DJs and MCs ramp up the music as the athletes — including an American called Logistx and the Aussie Raygun — competed in five-minute dance-offs with the nine judges deciding the winner between the B-girls (break girls).

But the first loser in the pre-qualification round stole the show when Manizhan Talash, who fled Kabul three years ago, unveiled a blue cape with the words: "Free Afghan Women".

The 21-year-old, who lives in Madrid, where she trains as part of the Refugee Olympic Team, said: "If I were in Afghanistan, my girls, my friends, it is very difficult but I want to act, not just speak."

"But I am here doing it. I am not afraid. I want to do something for my people who are in Afghanistan, my girls, my friends. It is very difficult but I want to act, not just speak."

Elsewhere, China's Chen Yiwen finished with gold, while Australia's Maddison Keeney took silver in the women's 3m springboard final.

ALL HAIL Ireland's winning four gold medals and, in a wonderful new tradition, our guys getting to ring the trackside Olympic bell four times.

Paul O'Donovan and Kellie Harrington repeated their Tokyo Olympics heroics; Daniel Wiffen parted the water as if powered by an outboard engine and Rhys McClenaghan pommelled like, well, like no other Irishman had ever pommelled before.

Pre-Games analysis had O'Donovan and Fintan McCarthy as Ireland's best chance of taking a medal, Wiffen the third best chance, McClenaghan fourth and Harrington fifth — gaining four gold and one bronze from our top five prospects was quite the delivery.

As it would turn out it was the water babies who were responsible for the shark's share of the Irish podium finishes, five.

Acclaimed satirist/comedian Garron Noone, of "Follow me, I'm Delicious" fame, offered a novel take on Ireland's great relationship with water.

"We had to, we are an island... otherwise how would we ever get away from the place?" ...

Yet as ever with Ireland and sport, our relationship here is complicated; we have also had too many scandals from water-based sports in a lifetime.

Bronze

Individually though, huge kuos go to Grange, Co Sligo swimmer Mona McSharry, who took bronze in the 100m breaststroke, despite the swimming expert on my TV channel telling the audience twice in their opening gambit Mona would be taking things 'step by step'...

Wiffen ended up like the kid who eats the ice cream first at the buffet before being told he has to eat some dinner, and his parents won't let him back on his phone until after he has eaten the icky greens.

Having gone from ecstasy with his gold medal from 800m freestyle he admitted to being deflated at only getting a bronze in the 1500m freestyle before finishing 18th in the marathon swim.

"It's the worst and the best thing I've ever done," he said yesterday after emerging from the marathon covered in what's best described as l'au de Seine. Skibberen's finest, O'Donovan, deserved the hero's welcome he will eventually get at home, his second consecutive gold medal making him a standout athlete on the world stage.

McCarthy, also from Skib, also has the right to hold his head up high.

Perhaps the oddest part of their adventure was in arriving home to all those cheering fans. And, then, having got through customs and those fans, found themselves standing outside the front door of the airport, luggage on the pavement, wondering how to get home.

It beggars belief that neither a self-promoting politician nor advertising-seeking company couldn't hop to it.

In the first case, put their publically-funded official car to good use; in the second case, have some kind of liveried bus along the lines of a rock'n'roll tour bus (Kneecap!) at the ready; it was an airport, surely



DIAMOND SMILES: Fans cheer on Kellie Harrington (below) in Diamond Park



SEVENS UP: The Ireland men's rugby Sevens team ring the Olympic bell and (below) Gemma Dunleavy



WATER DAY: Daniel Wiffen emerges from the Seine yesterday and (above) Paul O'Donovan and Fintan McCarthy after getting their famous lift home to Cork



LEADER: Kim Jong-un

North so bad reward

■ Will SCHOFIELD

NORTH KOREAN athletes who win a medal at the Paris games could be showered in gifts.

Kim Jong-un's state doesn't have the best pedigree in the Olympics — and they're yet to strike gold this summer.

However, they have picked up six medals in the French capital (two silver and four bronze).

Diving and wrestling have proved to be North Korea's favourite hunting grounds — with Kim Mi-rae and Jo Jin-mi winning silver in the Women's synchronised 10 metre platform and Mi-rae going onto win bronze in the individual event.

Pang Chol-mi bagged a bronze in boxing, while Ri Jong-sik and Kim Kum-yong took home the silver medal in table tennis mixed doubles.

Back in 2013, North Korean state news agency KCNA lifted the lid on what gold medal athletes had been awarded for their performance at the London games.

Report

The report states several athletes moved into luxury homes along the Pothong River, which flows through capital city Pyongyang.

Luxury cars — and even fridges — had been made available to those who lived in the high-end apartments.

Weightlifter Om Yun-chul, who won gold in London, said: "We sportspersons could exalt the dignity and honour of Songun (military-first) Korea with gold medals in international games thanks to the deep loving care of Kim Jong-un who has always led us in each match, instilling strength and courage into us."

Long-distance runner Kim Kum-ok was reduced to tears: "I could hardly enter the flat as every room of the wonderful flat is associated with the profound loving care of the Marshal (Jong-un)."

"I was deeply touched by the benevolence under the grateful socialist

WHOLE NEW BELL GAME

ONEFINFOLEY



with DEREK FOLEY

there was a helicopter to be had!

In the end, a kind man offered them a lift. Watching Harrington's gold medal fight in Diamond Park, adjacent to where she is from in Portland Row, it was actually quite the low-key pleasant event.

The north city Dub remains quite the trailblazer, an athlete fiercely proud of her neighbourhood, where she has done so much to help out locals, with hidden social work and where her presence beats the hell out of any statue to the past dotted around.



That the locals came out to such a small park between 9.30-11pm, brought their kids — from teenage rsto runaround to buggy age — and that there wasn't a hint of trouble, speaks volumes for their core community.

As it transpired, Harrington's semi-final against the Brazilian professional Beatriz Ferreira was one of the best fights of the entire Games

Irish stars boldly trek to new frontiers

and credit the Irish woman for thinking her way through it.

The final was always in hand, she was a deserved gold medalist.

The answer to the question as to why Harrington never sought to turn pro — as Katie Taylor did — is that she is a quintessentially an amateur boxer.

Orthodox

She can change feet, change from orthodox to southpaw, fight from the centre or perimeter of the ring, when needed.

Thus, she out-foxed Perreira. But had that fight been over the 10 rounds that Taylor, who doesn't have a knockout punch either, has to fight from as far back as her seventh pro outing, Harrington would not have survived.

Amateur and pro fights look

similar but they are very different because of what's needed, the endurance, the stamina, the slog and more slog, after the first three rounds.

Harrington's joyous and impromptu singing of Grace was a spectacular added touch.

That song, written by Sean and Frank O'Meara, is accepted as best-versioned by the first-up Dubliners & Jim McCann, albeit it is also associated with The Wolfe Tones and Glasgow Celtic fans at matches.

There will, no doubt, be a flurry of artists looking to record it now; one idea of the right Irish artist would the superb do-things-her-own-way Gemma Dunleavy (of Up De Flats fame.)

And if you don't know it go to YouTube for the video — she is 100 per cent local here.

At the same time, it would

have been interesting to see how Fontaines DC, those boys from the better land, might interpret a song that, to be fair, would have 'made' for the departed Luke Kelly or even the faithful departed Phil Chevron.

Rhythmic

Rhasidat Adeleke is a rhythmic, musical athlete in her own right, that free-flowing style is so smooth — reminding one of Waterford hurling (Austin Gleeson!) which seems to thrive on grace and elegance.

Consider this: the Tallaght teenager turned Texas Tornado is still only 21 years of age and 400m runners don't get to their best until their mid-to-late twenties.

There is so much more to come here, and barring injury, she may well become Ireland's

greatest-ever track and field athlete, male or female. Can't wait for LA 2028!

As mentioned, O'Donovan/McCarthy, Aoife O'Rourke (boxing, but who lost out to controversial judging) Wiffen, McClenaghan, Harrington and Adeleke were the best half-dozen Irish medal hopes and the return from there was superb.

The next best half-dozen prospects featured the more staple sports of golf and rugby, where Rory McIlroy, Shane Lowry, Leona Maguire, Stephanie Meadows, the Men's Sevens and Women's Sevens were very competitive, on paper at least, heading to Paris.

The men's golf event was bizarre.

But as anybody who was watching circa 3.30pm on Sunday will attest to, there were more leaderboard golfers having disasters at the same time it seemed that nobody wanted the damn gold medal.

Hideki Matsuyama was actually first to implode when leading on the 18th on Day 2 and firing a double-bogey.

Jon Rahm imploded when leading on Day 4 with a quadruple bogey on the 14th; Tom Kim was getting into position that day and double-bogeyed the 18th; McIlroy had fought himself into bronze contention from a long way back and then posted a Day 4 double bogey on the 16th.

Bogeyed

Remarkably, Rahm, Kim and McIlroy were all doing this almost simultaneously!

The last of the head-wrecked unfortunates, Tommy Fleetwood, level on Day 4 with Sheffler, bogeyed the 17th to fall behind.

Hopes the Ireland Seven's team, boosted by Hugo Keenan, would be competitive proved true but losing to New Zealand in the four-team pool meant not topping the group and facing

Fiji in the quarter-finals, where they lost out.

Lowry, Maguire and Meadows had poor opening days while, in losing to Team GB in their opening game, Ireland's Women's Sevens were left with too much work to do.

Ireland did well in these weeks, we like the us-the-against-the-world fun, and there was enough to support among our own.

But if forced, had arms twisted, to pick an Olympian from another country it would have to be US mutt Beacon, officially travelling as a 'therapy dog' sometimes referred to an 'emotional stress dog'.

Apparently the cutesy four-year-old golden retriever is available for all the US team to be stroked, cuddled, petted and nuzzled when needed.



BIG STEP: Mona McSharry with her bronze medal



GAFFER: Mark Robins

Better Dayzzz for Sky Blues

■ Neil MOXLEY

MARK Robins will not be losing any sleep over Coventry this season and nor will his players.

The Sky Blues chief gave the green light to a slumber specialist visiting the club's revamped training base this week to give his squad tips on what to do when the lights go out.

"Yes, someone's been in this week, looking at the best things we can do to help ourselves and recover as best we can," he said.

"We've got Stoke City today, Bristol City on Tuesday, then we go again on Friday night. So recovery is important. Why not look at every aspect and maximise it?"

"That was why performance director Claire-Marie Roberts came in, to put things in place like that.

Personal

"The takeaways from it were personal to the individual. But we're trying to work in a way that helps us.

"Last year, Callum O'Hare was a player we identified that needed more rest, for example.

"In terms of sleep patterns, some people need to have their regulated.

"I'm making no apologies for it. We're trying to give ourselves the best chance possible to be successful."

Robins is in his eighth campaign as Coventry chief and has overseen steady growth.

"We're looking to go higher. But that's the dream of all 24 in this division.

"We've added new faces and money's been spent on and off the pitch. Expectation levels will go up — and that's happened since the new owner Doug King came in. He made it clear that he wanted three play-off seasons out of five. Why not?"

I've always liked Roy's style. He's always been fine with me'

WE KNOW enough about him by now to know that Roy Keane is many things, and there's general agreement that he's a mass of contradictions.

When the 'Saipan' movie is released next year, the tired spin about Keane being an ultra-professional who just wanted to raise standards will be wheeled out again.

Now there is a grain of truth to that but it's also become increasingly clear that the Corkman loved his time in the Ireland set-up when rules were there to be broken.

On The Overlap podcast, his eyes often light up when detailing nights out when on Ireland duty, and how hangovers were common on the training ground.

There was one story that left Gary Neville, Ian Wright and Jill Scott bent over with laughter.

It concerned Bernie Slaven, the Scottish-born striker who won seven caps under Jack Charlton from 1990 to 1993.

Jersey

"When we used to go with Ireland, back in the day, you would have a squad of 18. There would always be a couple of extra players called up for training," said Keane.

"Bernie Slaven used to come up. Bernie had been left out a number of times, but you still get a jersey.

"What Bernie used to do was go around and get his jersey signed by all the players, because he was saying 'I will be left out'.

"There was one



Kieran CUNNINGHAM
CHIEF SPORTS WRITER

kieran.cunningham@thestar.ie

time where he was told he was sub and he didn't expect it.

"He was on the bench with his jersey on with all the signatures of the players!

"It was brilliant. I was thinking 'I really hope Jack brings him on'."

Can't be true? You don't know Bernie Slaven...

"The amount of times that clip was sent on to me is ridiculous. Is the story true? Yes. Do I still have the shirt? No."

All Ireland players of that era seem to have a Slaven story.

There was the World Cup qualifier with Malta where he didn't expect to make the bench so didn't bring his boots to the ground.

Sod's Law meant Charlton turned to him with 10 minutes to go. Slaven managed to corner Noel King, one of the coaching staff, and begged him for his boots.

He pulled them on as quick as he could and ran on to the pitch.

Charlton was oblivious.

Anyone who follows

Slaven talks being isolated at Italia 90 and respect for Keane

Slaven will know a few things about him. Not only is he a fanatical fan of The Smiths, he is a dead ringer for Morrissey.

And Slaven has quite a collection of Smiths t-shirts, but his favourite these days is from his other life. It has an image of Brian Clough from his playing days with Middlesbrough.

It's not hard to figure out why Slaven pays homage to that time in Clough's life. Clough is high on Boro's all-time goalscorers list with 166 goals, Slaven is the next closest to him with 144.

Lunches

Middlesbrough start their Championship campaign against Swansea today and Slaven is still attached to the club. He lives in the area, presents a Boro podcast and often speaks at pre-match lunches.

His time with Ireland saw him go to the 1990 World Cup and, even now, he's not sure if he enjoyed the experience.

"This was a time before mobile phones, let alone iPhones. We didn't have iPads or laptops or the internet.

"So there wasn't much to do in our free time and boredom kicked in."

There were a group of players who weren't getting any game time, and they dubbed themselves 'The Muppets'.

They'd outdo each other in trying to come up with ways to combat cabin fever.

"The highlight was often a TV show — Colpo Grosso — that would come on at 11pm every night," said Slaven.

"It was a game show, but the women contestants would strip off and go topless.

"The hotels we stayed in were terrible. I remember the one in Sicily was particularly bad. There were bunk beds and your backside would hit the floor if you jumped into them. They were a joke.

"I wanted Ireland to do well and progress, but I was missing home too. A lot of the lads were like that, especially the lads who were training and not getting a game.

"You're training hard, but you're isolated, to a degree, because you don't play."

Slaven got so homesick that he used to phone his pet dog and bark down the line to him.

"We were away for a good seven or eight weeks between going to Turkey and Malta for preparation and then on to Italy," he said.

"The lads were bored. I used to phone home and say to my wife 'put the dog on'.

"That's because I'd get more sense out of the dogs than some of the lads that were over there. I was rooming with Alan McLoughlin and he spilled the beans.

"So I'd come down to breakfast in the morning and Jack would go 'hey, Bernie, been talking to the dog?'"

It's fair to assume that many listeners of The Overlap had to Google Slaven after Keane namechecked him.

Since his playing days ended, Slaven



GREEN AND GOAL: Bernie Slaven in action for Ireland in a friendly against Wales in March 1990, a game in which he scored his only ever international goal and (left) Keane

has come into Keane's orbit on occasion.

"I admire Roy, and he wears his heart on his sleeve," he said.

"I've always liked Roy's style. He's always been fine with me, approachable, and wouldn't pass without saying hello. When he's on TV, he says more in two minutes than other pundits in half-an-hour.

"He's nitty-gritty, gets straight to the point and some people can't handle that, but I like it."



AMBITION: Regis Le Bris

Cats get ready to power on

■ Simon BIRD

REGIS LE BRIS has vowed to harness the "power" of Sunderland's history to claim a top-six finish this season.

The new French head coach has set a play-off target for the Black Cats as he bids to turn the club into a front-footed, intense outfit.

He will have to overcome "inconsistency" shown in pre-season games, where periods of top quality have been matched by a lack of concentration.

Le Bris will also be hoping star man Jack Clarke is not a late transfer window departure, and that the club deliver a recognised lead striker.

Ahead of today's opener at Cardiff Le Bris said: "We have this power as Sunderland in the city.

Identity

"We have energy from our identity. We can play as 12 players. I had it as coach at Lorient, St Etienne and Lens.

"The first ambition is to represent the identity of the club. This is a club with a big history in English football. Top six is one expectation."

Le Bris is modernising Sunderland's style and there is promise but he added: "We know we can reach a high level but for the whole performance we need to reach it all the time."

Meanwhile, Millwall will pay tribute to Matija Sarkic today following the goalkeeper's untimely death over the summer.

Sarkic died suddenly at the age of 26 in his native Montenegro while he was with his partner, Phoebe.

She and Sarkic's family will be at The Den before the Lions' opening Championship fixture of the season against

Watford, where a mural of the goalkeeper will be unveiled in the Cold Blow Lane stand.

The mural, funded by the Millwall Supporters' Club, has been hailed by Jake Cooper, who played alongside Sarkic last season. He said: "The mural is amazing."



TEE-M WORK: Ireland's Bernie Slaven and John Sheridan and (above) Slaven in his favourite Brian Clough t-shirt

Cats face
Leesiders
at Croke

Cork v Kilkenny,
All-Ireland Intermediate
Camogie Final,
Tomorrow, 3pm, Croke
Park (Live RTE2)
Referee: Brian Kearney
(Kildare)

THESE two teams both emerged as winners of their respective groups but had to escape massive examinations in their semi-finals.

Kilkenny needed a Danielle Morrissey equaliser from a free that she had won herself in injury time to bring their game to extra time, where they finally escaped Kerry's shackles.

Cork, who already have the Very League Division 2B title in the locker this season, were flattered by a two-goal margin against Offaly, Cliona Dooley goaling in injury time.

Where Morrissey is the primary scoring threat for the Cats, it is Lauren Homan who the Leesiders rely upon primarily.

Cork are in pursuit of a fifth title and their first since 2018. They are now bidding to go one step further than two years ago, when they lost out to Galway.

Kilkenny have won the intermediate championship twice before, most recently in 2016.

Their last appearance in the final was in 2021, when Antrim had the upper hand.

IMPOSSIBLE
TO CALL IT

Laois v Tipperary,
All-Ireland Premier
Junior Camogie Final
Tomorrow, 1.05pm,
Croke Park (Live RTE2)
Referee: Karol Collins
(Galway)

LAOIS are Division 3A runners-up (they lost by a point to Armagh in the final having beaten the Orchard girls in the round-robin) and qualified for the All-Ireland semi-final as easy winners of their group.

They overcame Cavan in the semi-final to seal a first appearance in an All-Ireland final since their 2015 success, their sole triumph at this grade after losing the decider in the previous two campaigns.

Tipperary, who are chasing a third title, having won most recently in 2001 but lost last year's final, reached the Division 2B final.

They only lost that by three points to intermediate finalists Cork and indeed, won the Munster intermediate crown subsequently.

Managed by former senior boss Bill Mullaney, they had to battle hard to overcome Armagh, who had just beaten Laois in their League final.

It looks like there won't be much between them whatsoever.

None of
it is ever
taken for
granted

YOUNG FANS INSPIRE O'SULLIVAN

CIARA O'Sullivan seems a bit shocked by the notion that there are sportspeople that will refer to 'doing it for the supporters,' but are doing it by rote.

Ticking a box. Not cognisant of what that actually means.

Surrounded by a slew of young children, mostly but not exclusively girls, brought to the Cork Camogie Grounds on Castle Road for an open night ahead of tomorrow's All-Ireland senior camogie final against Galway, the Newcestown attacker is utterly aware of there being a greater cause.

"There's a girl

■ Daragh Ó CONCHÚIR

here that has a scrapbook full of photos from every time she's with us over the last two or three years," says O'Sullivan. "She's just adding to it every week, newspaper articles and photographs.

"And it's brilliant when you see that. It makes you want to play, because you're playing for them as well as the pride in Cork."

O'Sullivan was that girl once too but now, when she is giving autographs, she is sharing canvases with the traditional giants of Cork sport.

Studying

"I remember getting signatures off every Cork player, and then you'd be going home studying whose signatures was whose, and asking your parents to help you figure it out," she recalls. "You'd only be thinking about that when you're signing the jerseys, and you'd see Shane Kingston and a couple more of the hurlers' signatures on it as well.

"And when they hold you as highly regarded as they hold the men, it's brilliant to see."

Gemma O'Connor and Ashling Thompson were her Cork heroes and now, the 22-year-old shares a dressing-room with Thompson.

The first role model though,

ALL-IRELAND SENIOR
CAMOGIE FINAL
CORK v GALWAY
CORK CAMOGIE
GROUNDS
TOMORROW 5.15PM
LIVE ON RTE2

TIME TO SHINE: Ciara O'Sullivan is ready to go into battle for the Rebel girls tomorrow

and thus the most important one, was the one that proved you could perform at the highest level, even if coming from a non-traditional camogie hub.

"Colette Desmond was in with Cork teams and was definitely one I've always looked up to through underage," she admits.

"She was fantastic for Newcestown and it was just brilliant to see that someone from Newcestown, that's not a city club or anything, can go and they can represent their county.

"I'll never forget one of my first trainings with the Newcestown senior team. And Colette had come back after taking a break for a few months, and her touch was unbelievable.

"Her hurling was unbelievable. It just makes you want to be like her and play like her."

A two-time All-Ireland minor winner, O'Sullivan completed a memorable personal double in 2019

when she followed up that second All-Ireland with a player-of-the-match performance in Newcestown's county intermediate final victory.

A Black Tip belt in taekwondo, she is clearly a multi-talented operator and not one to be messed with.

Paudie Murray was impressed enough to hand the youngster a starting role in the 2021 All-Ireland final defeat to Galway.

Missed

Matthew Twomey also picked her on the first 15 when they tasted that bitter defeat against Kilkenny the following season.

Last year, however, was a write-off: "I did my ACL in the Ashbourne semi-final in February.

"I was still in with the panel last year, but I just missed out on playing when we won the All-Ireland final and I missed club as well. I was only coming back into it this season.

SPECIAL GROUP:
Cork's Aoife O'Neill,
Isobel Sheehan, Ciara
O'Sullivan, Laura
Hayes and Orla
Cronin celebrate
after a big semi-final
win against Kilkenny
three years ago



REBELS THREAT

CORK ended an eight-game losing run going back four years by defeating Galway in last year's semi-final and went on to win the All-Ireland.

The Rebels have looked even better this year, with only Wexford getting to within a single-digit margin on their route to this year's decider.

Galway were among those victims, losing by 12 points at SuperValu Páirc Uí Chaoimh. Cahal Murray's crew were already qualified to the knock-out stages and were without Aoife Donohue but it was pretty one-sided.

They have rebuilt well with battling performances in overcoming Waterford and Tipperary respectively to get to the final, showing all their experience and character by scoring the last three points to prevail over the Premiers to clear the penultimate hurdle. Cork are without multiple

All-Star full-back Libby Coppinger (hamstring) but Méabh Cahalane is available once more, while Pamela Mackey is likely to be called upon to shadow the competition's leading scorer from play, Niamh Mallon.

It is Cork's running power from deep that is causing consternation in opposition defences, opening gaps and creating opportunities for any number of forwards.

Vital

So while the likes of Carrie Dolan is vital to Galway in terms of scoring, her work rate and that of the likes of Niamh Hanniffy will be crucial to neutralise the influence of Laura Hayes and Saoirse McCarthy.

Róisín Black and Dervla Higgins will also need to be on their mettle with Amy O'Connor, Katrina Mackey and Orlaith Cahalane serious scoring threats.

'It makes you want to play, because you're playing for them as well as the pride in Cork'



EYES ON THE PRIZE: Róisín Black of Galway and Cork's Molly Lynch ahead of the senior final and (below) Paudie Murray

Davy Fitz the
bill for the
Boys in Blue

■ Karl O'KANE

THREE huge inter-county hurling jobs are up for grabs with the news that Micheál Donoghue has left the Dublin post.

The 2017 League and All-Ireland-winning Galway boss Donoghue (inset, top) is likely to top his native county's wishlist, with Tribe chairman Paul Bellew already indicating they plan to appoint from within.

Donoghue's proven pedigree in helping his native county land a first All-Ireland senior title in 29 years — and lead them to the following season's final — leaves him the standout candidate if he wants the job.

The Clarinbridge All-Ireland-winning manager's decision to step aside in Dublin after three years also paves the way for the capital chiefs to swoop for Davy Fitzgerald.

Clare All-Ireland-winning boss Fitzgerald (inset, middle) has been linked with Dublin on several occasions.

With his track record of building and improving sides, the double All-Ireland-winning goalkeeper, who recently stepped aside after two years in Waterford, looks ideal for Dublin.

Seasons

His work across five seasons in taking Wexford from second tier League hurling to landing the 2019 Leinster title — a first in 15 years — and ending Kilkenny's dominance over the Model will not have gone unnoticed.

Fitzgerald has already indicated that if the right project came up he'd be interested in it.

He has only taken one season out of inter-county management across the last 17 years.

Speaking about his future, he told Red FM: "I don't know just yet. My intention definitely was to take a small bit of a breather and it was great. I got a number of weeks there where I had no one talking to me."

"But then you get a few people talking to you. I'll wait and see. I

love being involved."

Galway's desire to go within may rule him out of the running here.

Waterford is the third post up for grabs with local chiefs also likely to appoint from within.

There are no shortage of candidates, which is unusual for a county that has often looked outside for inspiration.

Waterford turned to the likes of Cork duo Justin McCarthy and Gerald McCarthy — and Fitzgerald in a previous stint — to help them land Munster titles across a decade and a half.

Title

The way Ballygunner are coached and their success in landing an All-Ireland title, three Munster Championships in a row and 10 Waterford titles on the bounce makes their manager, Darragh O'Sullivan a prime candidate.

Former boss Derek McGrath (inset, bottom) led Waterford to the 2017 All-Ireland final and recently revealed in a podcast that he would be up for an inter-county challenge again.

Stephen Molumphy has just stepped down as Kerry manager, while Waterford legend Ken McGrath managed the county's Under-20s this year.

A new 12-month role in Brussels with the EU military staff is likely to rule former county mid-fielder Molumphy out, though.

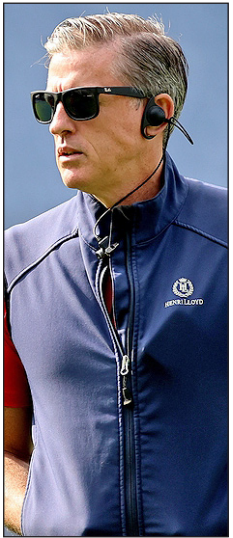
Another potential candidate is former player Peter Queally who was a coach alongside Fitzgerald and previously went for the post, while Tony Browne was working with Tipperary this year.

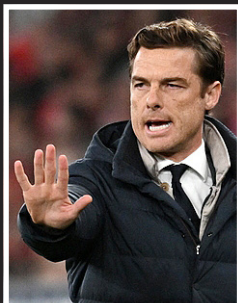
Sean Power has an impressive managerial CV, having led Waterford to minor and Under-21 All-Ireland glory and taken the county's camogie team to last year's All-Ireland final — a first in 78 years.

One candidate who has flown under the radar is Donal O'Rourke, who's been head coach with Pat Ryan's Cork for the past two seasons.



STAR POWER: O'Sullivan signs a shirt for a young Cork fan



**IRISH DAILY
STAR**
insidesport

PLANS: Scott Parker

Parky is up for the challenge

David ANDERSON

SCOTT PARKER doesn't just want to win promotion with Burnley — he wants to establish them in the Premier League.

Burnley have had a yo-yo existence over the last three years — they were relegated last season after just one campaign in the top flight.

Parker, who took Bournemouth and Fulham up, wants to make the Clarets a Premier League club like they were under Sean Dyche, when they spent seven seasons out of eight in the top flight.

"I think everyone's aim will be to bring real stability and a sense of getting to the top league and trying to stay there," said Parker, who succeeded Vincent Kompany.

Gulf

"The dynamics of that and the context around it are very, very hard, of course they are."

"But to have a real consistency at the top level when a team comes up there's real infrastructure and processes needed to get you there and keep you there."

"In saying that, there's a big gulf as well and you need to try and get through that. If you can, it gives you a better footing to stay."

Burnley have stability in their squad and, although the likes of loan stars Jacob Bruun Larsen have departed, they have not sold a single first-teamer.

Kompany rebuilt them last season with young, exciting players and, although they did not survive, they should be strong in the Championship.

Internationals Zeki Amdouni and Lyle Foster are still there, while Parker also has James Trafford, Dara O'Shea, Luca Koleosho, Josh Cullen and Josh Brownhill.

FOCUS: Leitrim captain Clare Owens and (right) lifting the Mary Quinn Memorial Cup with Brónagh O'Rourke last weekend



Owens has given so much to Leitrim for nearly 20 years

SURVIVOR!

HAVING just missed out on her county's previous success in the competition in 2007, Leitrim's Clare Owens was deeply satisfied to finally get her hands on an All-Ireland Intermediate title last Sunday.

Despite being just 16, Owens first broke onto the adult inter-county scene in 2006. She played a prominent role in helping the O'Rourke women to reach that season's All-Ireland junior decider against Sligo — back when it was the next grade below the senior Championship.

Leitrim bounced back from that defeat by overcoming Wexford in an All-Ireland intermediate showpiece 12 months later but a desire to focus on her Leaving Cert meant Owens wasn't on the panel that year.

It was a long road back to All-Ireland finals day in Croke Park, but Owens, who didn't feature in that 2006 final, and Leitrim finally returned to the biggest stage at GAA HQ last weekend.

Thrilling

Lining up in the full-back line alongside 2007 survivor Charlene Tyrell, she played a significant role as the Connacht side secured a thrilling 3-11 to 3-10 win over Tyrone.

"That feels like a lifetime ago really and I don't know what I had to offer as a young player back then really. I suppose it's just

Daire WALSH

different," said Owens.

"Maybe I had more to offer in different ways than I do now, or more to offer now. We play football for lots of reasons."

"Mainly because we love it, but of course you have to have the ambition to make it to the All-Ireland final day with the other teams involved and to bring a cup back down the road."

Satisfying

"It definitely feels very satisfying from that point of view to dedicate a life to doing that and finally doing it."

"It just shows you, no-one knows how a season will go or end."

"I was involved first in '06 with that great team that went on to win in '07 and it's lovely to have been involved as a 16-year-old and still be involved as

a 34, nearly 35-year-old."

While Owens — whose cousin Bronagh O'Rourke appeared as a second half sub last weekend — had been a regular fixture in the Leitrim defence down through the years, she opted out for the 2023 season.

The Longford-based school teacher had elected to take a career break and was going to be outside of Ireland for an extended period.

Some queried if this was the end of her career as an inter-county footballer, but she was back in the starting line-up for a National Football League Division Four opener away to Kilkenny on January 14 of this year and life has been good for the St Joseph's player ever since.

"People asked was I retiring. Was I this, was I that. It certainly wasn't a big decision that I was retiring," she explained.

"It was just a case of, I couldn't commit. I've always been a very committed player. If I'm playing, I don't miss training and I couldn't commit to training last year."

"Maybe came back with a renewed attitude. It's not the template for winning an All-Ireland necessarily, but it was absolutely fantastic."

"I felt like I was starting all over again this year with the break away. Certainly glad I got involved again."

Leitrim's success in Croke Park is even more remarkable when you consider they found themselves on the brink of relegation to the All-Ireland Junior Football Championship

just five years ago.

Despite Owens having to miss the game herself through injury, the O'Rourke women dug deep to secure a play-off triumph over Wicklow in Kinnegad and — by extension — retain their second-tier status for 2020.

Progress

When you remember Tyrone, their opponents last Sunday, were taking on Cork in an All-Ireland senior football championship quarter-final on the previous weekend in 2019, it really hits home how much progress Leitrim have made in recent years.

"I'm not one to dwell on the past or harp back to 'it wasn't always like this', but it is amazing to think of the few girls that were involved in 2019 and we all remember so clearly going up to play Wicklow that year in Kinnegad in the relegation play-off."

"We probably didn't appreciate how important it was to win that game."

"You're a different prospect as a junior team or an intermediate team, or a senior team. Some managers will be mad keen to take a junior team, some will want intermediate, some will want senior."

"I definitely think, as much as we mightn't have realised it, it was hugely significant that day up to Kinnegad and beating Wicklow in that game."

"The management that were involved that year and the county board, it was a real labour of love."

"It's nice for those people that were involved because I hope today and the weekend feels like a reward for them."

BATTLE: Owens tackles Chloe McCaffrey of Tyrone in last weekend's final

