

SUPER BOOST

FULHAM V ASTON VILLA

WATKINS TO HAVE A SHOT ON TARGET

NOW 4/5

WAS 2/5

BOYLE SPORTS

ONLINE & IN-SHOP 18+. Online customers & in shop for BOYLE Xtra cardholders. 90 minutes only. Singles only. Max stake £/€10. Prices subject to fluctuation and availability. T&Cs apply. GAMBLINGCARE. Bet Responsibly

2+ EARLY PAYOUT

WHEN YOUR TEAM GOES 2 GOALS AHEAD. WE PAY OUT!

BOYLE SPORTS

ONLINE & IN-SHOP 18+ Applies to bets placed on match betting ahead of kick off. Get paid out as a winner if your team goes 2 goals ahead even if they win, lose or draw. 90 mins only. Applies to Singles & Multiples. Max £/€50k on losing selection. Account & payment restrictions apply. T&Cs apply. GAMBLINGCARE. Bet Responsibly

EXCLUSIVE
BY DEREK FOLEY

FERGUS FARRELL was injured so badly in 2018 that doctors told him he would never walk again.

His spinal cord injury was devastating. He could not move anything from the waist down and was taking 26 tablets a day, including morphine, oxycontin and other similar drugs — a whole lexicon of “contins”. He recently marked what he describes as his 750,000th pill — “celebrated” only in the sense that it was not his millionth, because he is now down to *only* 16 tablets a day. Now the former rugby and soccer player is preparing for an adventure that dwarfs even those numbers: a six-million-step walk, covering 4,500km — or 2,800 miles — across a dozen or so US states, from Brooklyn Bridge to Los Angeles.

It is a far longer walk than the short journey from Galway city centre to O’Brien’s Bridge, where Farrell went at one of his lowest points after the accident, intending to take his own life, only to find the tide coming in and needing two hours to turn.

Those two hours, and the two inky black pints of Guinness he drank in nearby Carroll’s pub while waiting, helped save his life.

“I have never been in the pub since, I couldn’t be 100 percent sure of the name of it, I just went there to wait out the time, didn’t even have a package of Taytos, just sat there on my own,” he remembers.

“The time came and I got up, out the door and was heading for the bridge when this car pulled up. It was a policeman, Ger Brady (the brother of GAA legend David by the way), who shouts at me ‘Gussy!’, runs over, grabs me and takes me into the car.

“Turns out he had been nearby and heard my name being mentioned, I’d been gone a long bit and someone had wondered where I was. He says back, and I dunno how he knows this, ‘Gussy Farrell from Athenry?’.

“I’ve been trying to meet him up a good bit over the last, say, six or eight months, especially since I want to get full clarity on exactly what happened on that day.

“But one thing I didn’t find out, I didn’t realise this, is he had been looking for me for over two hours. My name came out over their CB. You know, he just dropped everything, and he looked out in Silver Strand, Knocknacarra, Blackrock, Salthill, all the well-known places.”

There will be plenty of well-known places on Farrell’s own version of Route 66, though he will have neither the 1948 Buick that inspired the song nor Thelma and Louise’s turquoise Thunderbird as a travel aid.

It will be Shanks’s mare through, for the most part, New York, New Jersey, Pennsylvania, Ohio, Indiana, Illinois, Kansas, Nebraska, Colorado, Utah, Nevada and California.

The sights will be varied, and Farrell’s recce trip has him primed.

“I really enjoyed St Louis, just a really nice city to walk around and that big Gateway Arch is actually more impressive when you’re there.

“A second place would be Durango, just a nice Rocky Mountains town with this insanely big hill that brings you up over 3,000 meters and you’re just beginning to walk through those snow-capped mountains. It’s just the scenery, it’s incredible, lovely.

“Kansas is impressive in its own way, it’s just so vast. It is going to take me 12 days to walk through there alone. And also there’s a lot of fracking around the route which surprised me. So that has its own kind of interesting thing.”

The walk is now the 44-year-old’s 2026 focal point, eight years after he sustained the injury

The tide was out so I went for a couple of pints that saved my life

FERGUS: DOCTORS SAID I MIGHT NEVER WALK AGAIN... NOW I PLAN TO TREK ALL THE WAY ACROSS THE USA

that doctors said, being kind, left him with only a five percent chance of avoiding a wheelchair for the rest of his life.

In 2018, the owner of a coach company, Farrell had put on a shirt and tie to take a bus out. Noticing a piece of old machinery obstructing the driveway, he went to move it.

It was too big and too heavy. The effort caused catastrophic damage to his spinal cord. Life would never be the same, or even close to it, again.

“I don’t want to go into too much, I’ve been very lucky in my life, right? I know what it’s like to be a fully abled person, right, no issues, mentally very strong.

“I also know what it’s like to have a severe disability where I am completely dependent on everybody around me.

“But now I also know what it’s like to have a

hidden disability, and I can tell you this much right now, the hidden disability is the hardest one to deal with mentally, because people just do not understand.

“They don’t understand we get tired and fatigued, and they don’t understand why you might fall over. You don’t understand why I have toilet issues, don’t understand that I’m here having a coffee and, suddenly, I have to go, there’s all these things.”

These days, Farrell sees people with disabilities as inspirational.

“Because they get on with their lives every day and don’t complain, don’t want, and we don’t realise that person in that wheelchair takes half-an-hour to an hour to get up and get dressed, where it takes a normal person five

minutes.

“And the same thing going to bed, the same thing going to try anything. They can’t leave any place without careful planning because there might be no toilet around, because they might not have toiletries.

“So for me, anybody with a disability is an inspiration and my heroes, because they get what they can out of life, and they don’t complain.

“Whereas you see people out there, you know, living the dream and all that stuff and all they do is complain. You know that phrase ‘first world problems’, the coffee is too hot, the traffic too heavy, your socks don’t match...”

“I remember when I was in the NRC (National Rehab Centre in Dun Laoghaire). It was



THE NEWS FROM HOME
Fergus Farrell will be monitoring the Ireland rugby team in November during his walk



Fergus ‘Gussie’ Farrell picking up a prize from his old team in 2023 for Connacht Rugby Unsung Hero

as an underage Connacht inter-pro, an Ireland U18 player alongside future senior international Jeremy Staunton, and his spell as part of the Galwegians AIL squad, earning €400 a week while playing alongside players such as Gavin Duffy (left) and Johnny O’Concrete/Connor.

Farrell was eligible for the inaugural year of the Connacht Academy but was not offered a place, which led to him spending a couple of years playing in South Africa.

There was cross-code talent, too. He played in goal for Athenry alongside the gifted Seamus Crowe, who was in the Wolves Academy alongside Robbie Keane in 1997/98 and was so good at double-jobbing that he was an All-Ireland Club SFC winner with Salthill-Knocknacarra in 2006.

Asked whether he still drinks Guinness, given its connection to that dark day on O’Brien’s Bridge, Farrell does not hesitate.

“I love it! It saved my life! There’s so many things when you look back at that day, right then, if X or Y or Z was different, I wouldn’t be here.

“You have to wonder, is that the energy of the universe? I’m big into affirmations and things like that. Why do these things happen? “I don’t know what to this day, but all I know is, if any one of those things didn’t happen, I wouldn’t be here.”

“I’m a lucky man.”
» To support Fergus, head to [FergusWalks.ie](https://www.ferguswalks.ie) where, if you can, donate, or just follow his journey across America. The vital funds raised will go to Spinal Injuries Ireland and their work supporting those in need.

And while, somewhat astonishingly, he says he does not listen to music through earphones, he will be sustained by meeting people, walking with others for sections of the route, listening to podcasts and, most especially, November and the Ireland rugby fixtures.

“I’m hoping to learn a language, maybe Portuguese.

“I’ll be listening to YouTube, documentaries, and podcasts.

“But most importantly that new championship in November, I’m looking forward to those results. My family are my true loves, but rugby is also there, I believe it still loves me back. Well, that’s what I say to myself!

“So number one that month, no matter what, I’ll be listening to the matches, listening to every podcast, reading every paper, all the stuff.”

The rugby connection dates back to his time