

Interview Amy Broadhurst

‘I was on the Irish team, then the British team, now I’m on no team’



Gordon Manning

As she expects her first child, boxer Amy Broadhurst still has raw memories of last year’s Olympic Games fiasco

Amy Broadhurst remembers the puzzled expression. Eventually, the veteran assessor checking her hand wraps looked up and ventured, “Ireland?” She shook her head. Not today. GB Boxing was printed on her singlet. He was trying to make sense of it all. He wasn’t the only one.

Moments later, Broadhurst entered the ring at the Indoor Stadium in Bangkok. Up in the stands, members of Team Ireland watched on as their former recent training partner boxed for Britain. Everybody was trying to navigate a path to Paris. For Broadhurst, along the way, it had somehow all turned a little Robert Frost.

“The whole experience of what happened last year was quite traumatising, to be honest,” she says. “It still hurts, it’s still quite raw.”

It’s coming up on 12 months now since Broadhurst’s life was turned upside down. At the start of March last year, the Dundalk boxer was hoping to fight in the Olympics for Ireland. Just a few weeks later, she was on a plane to Sheffield to train with Great Britain.

In advance of that Olympic qualifier last May, Team Ireland and Team GB pitched up at the same camp. Canteen tables became independent islands, friends avoided making eye contact, and water cooler pleasantries came with a health warning.

“It was a really horrible atmosphere,” she says. “We could be sitting next to each other at lunch and you are kind of like, ‘Do I speak to them, do I not?’ It was very difficult.”

Flicking a switch
Before life became tangled in knots and acrimony, hers was once a much simpler story. One she had scripted herself.

After winning the IBA world title in 2022, Broadhurst was invited back to her old primary school. They had a surprise – a letter she had written when just 11 years of age. They read the piece back to her, the story of a girl imagining she had won gold in the Olympics and on arriving back to Dundalk the entire town turned out to welcome their champion home. Ever since she was a youngster training at Dealgan Boxing Club, that had been her dream.

She was untouchable in 2022 – winning gold at the Worlds, Europeans and Commonwealth Games. She won The Irish Times Sportswoman of the Year award and was shortlisted for RTÉ Sports Personality of the Year. All roads were leading to Paris.

And there was no time to waste. On New Year’s Day 2023, she went sparring. But her opponent was big and strong and keen. He caught Broadhurst hard, almost knocked her out. Her legs went, and the sparring session was stopped.

“After a great year in 2022, on January 1st, 2023, it was like somebody flicked a switch on my whole career,” she says.

Later that month, she was beaten 3-2 by Gráinne Walsh in the Irish National Championships. But the following month at the Strandja tournament in Bulgaria, Broadhurst beat all comers to take gold. She hoped January had been a blip.

However, in June she lost on a split decision to Rossie Eccles in the European Games in Poland – a qualifier for the Olympics. During that competition, she also made public her relationship with Eoin Pluck, one of the coaches in the Irish Athletic Boxing Association’s High Performance Unit.

“That’s when the sh*t hit the fan,” she says. “Everything changed from that moment.”

Lousy timing
Broadhurst spent the winter rehabbing a shoulder injury she had picked up during the Europeans while Pluck eventually returned to coaching.

But 2023 ended as it had started, shipping a couple of heavy jabs. In late December, Broadhurst received a message requesting her sponsored car be returned. “On the same day, about 20 minutes later, I got an email from Sport Ireland saying my funding had been cut from €40,000 down to €18,000.”

In boxing, timing is everything. In and out of the ring. It’s fair to say being a talented lightweight (60kg) woman boxer in Ireland over the last two decades would constitute pretty lousy timing.

During that period Ireland has boasted two of the best fighters on the planet in that division – Katie Taylor and Kellie Harrington. The latter won gold at lightweight in Tokyo, and the moment she declared she would defend her title in Paris, Broadhurst (a natural 60kg fighter) had little choice but to move division.

She graduated upwards to 66kg – meaning Broadhurst, Walsh and Lisa



■ Amy Broadhurst pictured near her home in Dundalk, Co Louth: ‘I also want to show you can be a mother and fight in the Olympics.’ PHOTOGRAPH: BRYAN O'BRIEN

O’Rourke were all vying for one Olympic spot.

Walsh had the opportunity at the first qualifier in Italy in March 2024, but came out on the wrong side of a controversial decision. It opened the door for the others to challenge for a crack at the second qualifier in Thailand.

Broadhurst hoped there would be a box-off between the three. But the assessment never came. It was decided Walsh would go to Thailand. Broadhurst’s dream was over. Her world unravelled.

“When I was told that I wasn’t picked for the qualifier, I was absolutely devastated. God forgive me but the first thing that came to my head was, ‘I want to kill myself,’” she says. “My mum came down to me straight away. I cried my eyes out for hours. It had been my whole life, I’d worked my entire life for this one competition and suddenly it was gone. I was lost. ‘What do I do now?’”

But two days later, a window of opportunity was pushed open. Team GB were aware of her circumstances and they were interested. She was eligible to fight for them because her dad, Tony, is originally from England.

The days that followed were a haze. One moment her dream was over. Then it wasn’t. But what would it mean to declare for Britain? What would people think? What would 11-year-old Amy do?

The 27-year-old Amy rolled the dice, she chased the dream.

The plan was to try for the 60kg class. Naturally, the British boxers in that division didn’t unfurl a welcoming mat. Broadhurst understood, she wouldn’t have done so either.

Back in Ireland, there was collateral damage. Harrington said she would not be working with Pluck for the Olympics, believing it was akin to having a “spy in the camp”. Broadhurst says: “She made the right decision. I would have done the same thing.”

Meanwhile, the high performance director of Irish Boxing, Tricia Heberle, defended the selection process.

“There was no hesitation that she [Gráinne] was the number one,” Heberle stated.

But news of Broadhurst’s efforts to switch allegiance became public knowledge before the move was approved.

“I felt they portrayed it that I was the one doing wrong as if I was a traitor,” Broadhurst now says. “But they never gave me an opportunity. If they gave me an assessment and then I lost, I would have said, ‘Fair enough’, but they didn’t do that. If they had just given me a fair shot, I don’t think me moving country would have happened.”

When she arrived in Thailand with Team GB last May, Broadhurst knew she wasn’t right. Physically, she was in superb shape, but mentally her head was scrambled. She won her first two fights before losing on a split decision to South Korea’s Yeonji Oh in the quarter-final stages. This time, it was over.

“I couldn’t even give you a percentage of where my head was at that day. It was horrible, you are trying your best but you just have this big cloud in your head,” she says. “You are walking out with GB on your back and you know some of the Irish team are up in the stands watching you.”

“The Amy that got in the ring that day, that’s not me. I knew from the very first fight that mentally I couldn’t switch on. I tried so hard to block out everything, but I just couldn’t.”

She was a rock tossed into the waves. Sinking.

It was, Broadhurst acknowledges, a difficult situation for many others too and she will forever appreciate the members of the Irish team who did offer her some quiet support at the time. And she always felt Team GB coaches such as Gary Hale, Rob McCracken and Phil Sellers also had her back.

Still, the moment she lost in Bangkok, Broadhurst knew the backlash was coming. Had she qualified for Paris, it would have given her leverage. But coming up short, she was a carcass for the hyenas. They circled.

“That’s when the social media really abuse really cranked up. ‘Good enough for you’, ‘That’s what you get for changing country’, ‘You’re not good enough’.

“To go from being a hero in 2022 to, not that people disliked me, but to have such a negative sort of conversation around me, I didn’t know how to handle it. It felt like people were going to hate you forever.

“I was sad after losing that fight but more than anything I was just numb. For a while afterwards, I did think, ‘maybe I’m not good enough, maybe in 2022 I just got lucky.’”

But the Olympics brought both pain and reassurance. Algerian Imane Khelif beat China’s Yang Liu in the Olympic welterweight final. Broadhurst had beaten Khelif in the final of the Worlds in 2022 while she had overcome the Chinese fighter in the semi-final of the Strandja tournament in 2023.

The year 2022 was no fluke. Amid the squall, boxing had almost destroyed her. But after the storm came the calm.

“I went through a stage where I thought I hated boxing, but I didn’t hate it, I just hated what I was going through. Everything changed the moment I found out I was pregnant.”

Sporting politics
She’s due in May. It’s a boy. From the fog of 2024, this has become Amy Broadhurst’s clarity.

Last summer, the couple decided to try for a baby. They would give it until September and if Broadhurst was not pregnant by then, she would turn professional.

With their deadline rapidly approaching, in September it happened.

“It was kind of fate, really, because that month was going to decide everything for me,” she recalls.

“I believe 100 per cent that I’ll be at the Olympics. I think that’s why I ended up pregnant. Had I not got pregnant, I would be pro now. Everything happens for a reason.”

The dream is back on, Los Angeles 2028.

“When I got pregnant first, a lot of people said, ‘So are you hanging up the gloves now?’ It used to annoy me. Just

because you are a woman there’s a perception that automatically some people think, ‘That’s her done now, she’s finished.’

“I want to fight in the Olympics and I also want to show you can be a mother and fight in the Olympics. To demonstrate to other women what can be done.”

But every decision she makes now will also have to account for the newest member of the family.

“He will hopefully be going to school in five or six years and I don’t want him to be listening to, ‘Oh, your mum is a turncoat’ or any of that kind of stuff.”

Anglo-Irish history is a topic she’s always felt was best stored away on a very high shelf. It doesn’t interest her, doesn’t stir her.

“The whole Ireland hates England thing, I don’t get it. My dad is English, I see everybody the same, that’s it.”

But the politics of sport might well determine what happens next.

Three years of non-participation with a federation is normally required before a switch to another country can be granted. In the case where two governing bodies agree, as happened between the relevant federations last year, it is possible to ask for that period to be shortened.

However, in this instance, there would also be the issue of trying to move a second time.

Broadhurst learned much during her time working with Ireland’s High Performance Unit run by Zaur Antia and his team of coaches, while she also realises Team GB went out on a limb for her last year.

Her relationship with Heberle, who has since stepped down from the IABA, however, is unlikely to ever be reconciled. The fallout there was too great. Too brutal. There were no goodbyes.

“I don’t think there is anything that is ever going to affect me the way the whole thing did last year,” she says.

“But one thing I’ve learned is you cannot predict what is going to happen. This time last year I was on the Irish team, then I was on the British team, now I’m on no team, I’m pregnant, I’m sitting at home watching TV.”

“Everything is up in the air as regards where I’m going to go, but I’m so lucky with my family, my mum and dad have always been there for me, Eoin is so supportive too. When the time comes, we’ll all sit down together and decide what is best.”

Ultimately, she knows, whether it might end up being Ireland or Team GB won’t solely be her decision.

Fair shot
The Women’s world Championships begin in Serbia this weekend. Pluck is with Team Ireland in Nis. Walsh is Ireland’s boxer at 66kg while O’Rourke has moved up to 70kg.

With Harrington not fighting, Ireland travelled with no entry at 60kg. After all the logjams, there is now an opening in that category.

Broadhurst will turn 28 on St Patrick’s Day. Harrington won her second Olympic gold medal at 34. Katie Taylor is 38. Rio 2016 gold medallist Estelle Mossely, mother and boxer, fought at the Paris Games. It can be done.

Broadhurst can still see the perplexed face of the assessor stamping her wraps in Bangkok last May, wondering why she wasn’t in an Ireland singlet.

“Of course, I’m disappointed the way things ended up but I can sit back and say I tried everything I could to get to the Olympics. And if I had to go back, I’d do it all again,” she says.

“People might criticise you for what they see as turning your back on your country, but with the Irish team, I went up six kilos from my actual weight only then not to be given a fair shot.

“My dream since I was a kid was to go to the Olympics. When that didn’t happen with Ireland, I didn’t want to give up on it. I suppose we all kind of thought the story was going to end up with me meeting Kellie in the Olympics. It seemed like a fairy-tale, but it wasn’t to be. Still, what happened last year, that’s part of my story.”

But it’s not to be the final chapter. The truly gripping tales are rarely linear. The 2026 Commonwealth Games in Glasgow next July stand out as a likely first milestone target. Broadhurst is not explicitly looking for a redemption story, but if it plays out that way, no harm.

By declaring her LA intentions, Broadhurst knows she is making herself vulnerable again. There’s no guarantee any of it will work out. It’s a gamble. But that never stopped her before.

Anyhow, life is forever moving forward. The couple have gone with a Winnie the Pooh-themed nursery. A large Tigger teddy that Brodahurst received for her communion has been refreshed and rehomed. Pluck is digging out a childhood toy of his own.

“I’m really looking forward to our little boy arriving,” says Broadhurst. “There is so much to look forward to now. I’m mad to get back training as well, really excited.

“My parents travel everywhere when I’m competing, so we will be able to bring him with us. How cool would it be if he got to watch his mum and dad in the Olympics?”

Now, there’s an ending.



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