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Medals, money and modelling: The life and goals of Rhasidat Adeleke

Ireland's sprinting superstar on what drives her to succeed



Rhasidat Adeleke in her University of Texas kit

Rhasidat Adeleke on campus at the University of Texas w corporate communication.



Sinéad Kissane

Wed 23 Aug 2023 at 12:00



Rhasidat Adeleke was in a hotel in Albuquerque, New Mexico, on a Saturday evening in March this year when she faced up to some home truths about herself. She did something that day that no Irish athlete has done before. She won an individual sprint medal in the American collegiate championships, the NCAA, with silver in the 400m. Adeleke's piece of history closed an indoor season during which she broke her own Irish 400m and 200m records.

It should have added up to satisfaction. Adeleke felt the opposite.

She didn't run the 400m final right at the NCAA Indoors earlier that day. She didn't pace herself the way they planned. She didn't finish with another personal best like she wanted. She was beaten over 400m for the first time this season.



The rise of Rhasidat Adeleke: The inside track from Texas

Adeleke wasn't in the mood to pretend all was fine. Her coach, Edrick Floreal, had to convince her to go into the team photo after the University of Texas finished runners-up in the women's team event. Photos on the college website show Adeleke didn't mask how she really felt. Smile for the camera? When she really feels it, thanks.

All the indicators pointed to Adeleke doing everything right this year. She only started training for the 400m in October after finishing fifth in the European Championships last August. She opened 2023 with a bang (50.45), lowered her time again a few weeks later (50.33), which was the fourth fastest indoor time in the world this year. She's only 20. What more could she have done?

More, it seems.

Adeleke told Floreal that things were going to change after they got back to their hotel in Albuquerque. She wasn't going to complain about doing 600m reps, which she hates doing, anymore. She wasn't going to complain about gym work, which she doesn't like doing, anymore.

"She was p**sed and angry," Floreal remembers. "As soon as we got back to the hotel, she was like, 'Some things have to change. I know I need to train harder'."

"In the past, poor performances would un-motivate me," Adeleke says. "After a poor performance, I'd be like, 'I don't want to do this anymore, this sucks', but now I'm in such a different mental space. A poor performance would motivate me even more. After that happening, I was like, 'ok, I need to be able to be stronger when it matters'."

"Before, I wouldn't want to do 600m or anything that long because I just wasn't used to it. But I'm like, 'This is what I need to get to where I want to be'. I'm going to do whatever it takes. I had that conversation with Flo. I need to do whatever it takes to be in a better position when the time comes around again."

"She gets angry with bad performances and then raises her game," Floreal adds. "She will train harder if she doesn't perform well. After the indoors, she was just mad. She came to me she said, 'I will not complain about training again'. She hates 600s. She's like, 'I will never open my mouth about a 600m again. I'm done. You tell me how many I've to do, I'm just going to do it'."

"She's realised that these girls are much stronger. I said, 'With your leg length, if you can have some strength, they have no chance'. She kind of admitted that she made some mistakes."

"And, so far, she's just training with a purpose."



Rhasidat Adeleke on campus at the University of Texas where she is combining athletics with her studies in corporate communication.

It was a day of unseasonable thunderstorms in Austin in April when a hooded Adeleke walked into the field house of the 20,000-seater Mike A Myers Stadium where she trains. The 431-acre University of Texas (UT) campus is so vast it's easy to get lost here. But not a talent like Adeleke. When the prestigious Texas Relays took place here the previous week, the Tallaght woman was the female athlete used in the centre of college posters to advertise the event.

It was said about Michael Phelps that he had an exemplary body shape for a swimmer with an arm span longer than his height. To meet Adeleke in person is to fully appreciate how long, as they say in America, she is. Standing 6ft tall and almost still growing into herself, Adeleke is statuesque. Everything about her covers more ground, her feet are long and narrow, her fingers are piano-esque, her stride length reminds her coach of Usain Bolt's because "so rarely you see somebody that tall that can generate that kind of frequency or stride rate".

Adeleke has been rewriting Irish athletics history at a phenomenal pace. When she opened her individual outdoor season last weekend by smashing her national records in the 200m (22.34) and 400m (49.90) – a time that would have placed her fourth at last year's World Championships – it's easy, in hindsight, to say the signs were there when we visited her in Austin earlier this month.

Her routine is to train six days a week, twice most days. Floreal thinks she's still only "eight out of 10" when it comes to reaching her pain threshold in training, but sessions have been taking her to places her body wasn't used to.

"When I was a short sprinter, I wouldn't be on the ground dead not being able to breathe as often, but pretty much every single session that we do as a long sprinter, I'm like that. For about 20 minutes, I can't get up. Everything hurts. I rethink my whole existence as a person, do I even want to do this sport anymore?" Adeleke laughs.

"But then after the pain goes away, it's like I got some good work in. It's definitely a lot of mental strength that it takes when you're coming up to the 600m/500m repetitions that you have five minutes rest and you're absolutely dead."

A sport psychologist is available for athletes, but Adeleke doesn't use the service. She's trying to work it out for herself. When she first came here on scholarship in January 2021, there were performances in her freshman and sophomore years that affected her "mentally for so long", but she's trying to develop a "short-term memory" to quickly bin runs she's not happy with.

"I'm hard on myself. I might be a little bit too hard on myself, but I probably used to be a lot harder on myself. Now there's so many more races in the future that I'm hard on myself at the time, but then I move on.

"There's always this quote that you're not as important as you think you are. I feel like that's important to remember because sometimes when something bad will happen or when you run slow or you don't win, you think your whole world is crashing down. But it actually isn't as important as you think it is.

"In the past, I've seen races as a threat. Like, 'Oh, if this happens and I don't perform to a certain expectation people would think less of me'. I think less of myself. My team-mates will think less of me. My coach will think less of me. But now I think about it as an opportunity. I can show people this is what I do. This is what I've been working on the past few months."

The maturation of Adeleke has been noticed by those closest to her on the UT team. Jamaican sprinter Kevona Davis says Adeleke was initially "overwhelmed" by the attention her performances received but is handling it better. Yusuf Bizimana from London – 2023 NCAA 800m Indoor champion – is one of Adeleke's close friends and believes she's "almost a different person from when we started".

"Now, she's very driven. We have (the) Olympics around the corner, so it's a time when she can do special things," Bizimana says. "Definitely, the focus has shifted to be like, you know what, I want to bring something back home."

The lead-up to next year's Paris Olympics could see Adeleke switch lanes. Floreal believes that, by the end of this season, Adeleke could turn professional, which generally means signing a contract with a shoe company. He "wouldn't be surprised if she gets half a million or more" per year. The way Floreal looks at it, if an athlete is offered at least three times their scholarship – he says Adeleke's scholarship of around \$70,000 (€64,000) per year adds up close to \$80,000 (€73,000), including medical, travel expenses, etc – then she should take it. Floreal says UT will continue to pay for her education.

"I told her, I will keep coaching you. You'll stay in school, nothing will change. All that changes is you're wearing a different jersey. You have the same coach, the same training environment, the same place to eat. Nothing has changed. All that changes is when you put your jersey on it says something different than Texas. And I told her with mom and family at home, you have a responsibility to just do the very best you can. And if they're giving you that kind of money, you're going to have to take it. We will keep looking after you, but I'm not going to let you come back and compete for Texas and pass on that kind of money just for potentially what's going to happen in the future."

“There’s definitely been a lot of opportunities that’ve presented themselves, but you know it’s all about the right timing,” Adeleke adds. “If it is at the end of the season and I feel it’s the right timing, it might be something I look into. But I’ll definitely graduate. That’s something that I need to do for myself personally.”

Adeleke talks like someone now keeping pace with their rapid rise despite her relatively young age (she turns 21 on August 29). For anyone else, the mention of a tweet posted about her by multiple Olympic gold medallist Michael Johnson after the NCAA Indoors might elicit a wide-eyed response. But a smile doesn’t pass Adeleke’s face.

Instead, she’s straight into talking about improving her arm action, as Johnson pointed out. She lists all the improvements she wants to make, like becoming more tactically aware over 400m going into the outdoor season.

Yet she’s still dropping times.

Sitting inside from the rain in the fieldhouse of a huge stadium, it was hard not to escape the sense that the summer forecast is set to be hot.



Rhasidat Adeleke with her coach Edrick Floreal, who says: "She gets angry with bad performances and then raises her game."

In Edrick Floreal’s office on the second floor of the Frank Denius Family University of Texas Athletics Hall of Fame building is a framed picture with the words: ‘I trust the next chapter because I know the author’.

Adeleke says nearly everything Coach Flo – as he’s known – has predicted, she’s done. When he first recruited her, he forecast that she’d run under 23 seconds for the 200m. She balked at the idea. Four months after arriving in Austin in January 2021, she ran 22.96 to break Phil Healy’s national record.

At the start of this year, her goal was to run 51 seconds for the 400m. He balked at the idea. So she changed it to 50.8. He said it would be more like 50.4. She opened her season with 50.45.

Coaching Adeleke had been a “constant struggle”, according to Floreal, between what he thinks she can do and what she thinks she can do in training. He believes in her big potential.

“I think she can run 49.2, 49.3, if she actually runs it,” Floreal says (Shaunae Miller-Uibo won the World Championships in 49.11 last year). “The problem is it doesn’t really matter what the training says, there’s a point in the race where your mind is saying this is insanity, we need to slow down. So there’s going to be a point where she’s going to have to make a decision to sort of abort the mission and coast in, be probably about 49.9. Or push through the pain and maintain. And that’s when you have sort of the magic.”

There are 33 athletes in Flo’s training group, including collegiate sprint champion Julien Alfred who Adeleke trains with. Within the ecosystem, there’s competition. When Adeleke was deciding whether to go to last August’s Europeans after a long season, Floreal told her he would travel to Munich and be there for all her week. That helped nail the decision for her.

“She wants different things at different times. Sometimes she just wants me to yell at her and make things clear. And sometimes it’s just attention,” Floreal says. “Alpha males, as long as they get their attention, they’re great. They can coexist. Alpha females, they can coexist, but they want to know. So going to Munich was like, ‘My coach came for over a week and I had him in Munich just to take care of me. I am important’. Sometimes, I think it helps them perform better.

“She’s still in that discovery stage of finding out ‘who I am and what I do and how good I could be’. So once you figure out how good you could be and accept that, then you have to live with everybody else’s expectations of you.

“She’s not passed the first step, which is: how good am I and how good can I be? Once she figures that out and accepts it, then it’s like, ‘Oh my God, I could be the first medallist from Ireland. That would be insane’. I think that part comes second.”

Adeleke has another year and a half left of studying corporate communication and also wants to do a master’s in finance. Floreal brings up another interest of hers: modelling. He shows me a few photographs on his phone that she sent him of a recent photoshoot.

“I honestly would like to do modelling,” Adeleke smiles. “Maybe once I’m a professional athlete and I’m on a working visa and I have a bit more flexibility with my schedule. Maybe it’s something I’ll look into more.”

Floreal is currently working on her summer schedule, which he’ll have to adjust if she turns pro. There’s the NCAA outdoors on the Texas home track in June, the Irish Championships where she’ll likely run the 100m (the only Irish sprint record she currently doesn’t hold, but it’s on her radar), a few Diamond League meets and then the World Championships in Budapest in August where Floreal believes she can be a finalist and possibly a medallist.

Adeleke doesn’t speculate to accumulate when it comes to medal talk.

“I compete against myself a lot. I want to always better my last time, better my last performance. And I put a lot of pressure on myself as an athlete so when I have something in my head that I want to achieve and I don’t achieve that, it just makes me really angry.

“Why didn’t I achieve that? What could I have done differently to make sure that I achieve this certain goal? That’s what I want to try and focus on in the future.”

And what a future that could be.



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The Efrem Gidey journey – from war-torn Eritrea and spell in a Calais refugee camp to running for Ireland



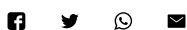
Efrem in action during the men's 10,000m final at the European Championships.

Efrem hugging Joe Cooper in Dublin airport after he returned at European Cross-Country Championships in December



Sinéad Kissane

Sat 3 Sep 2022 at 02:30



Clonliffe Harriers coach Joe Cooper had a wish that he asked of his wife, Gladys, before he died in December 2020. Joe asked Gladys to continue to look out for Efrem Gidey.

Three years previously, Joe got a call from a care worker asking if he could coach a teenage boy who had started athletics and showed great promise.

At the time, Efrem was living in temporary accommodation in a house in Hollystown in north-west Dublin with around 10 others after fleeing war-torn Eritrea.

Efrem arrived in Ireland in March 2017. He was 16. He had no English. He had no family with him.

Gladys Cooper has held on to her late husband's wish. Last Saturday fortnight, she felt something within her urging her to go to Germany the following day to support Efrem in the 10,000m final in the European Championships.

She rang her son, Joseph, and within half an hour it was booked. She flew to Munich on the Sunday morning and watched Efrem compete in just his second senior international race for Ireland at the age of 21.

Efrem was ranked 16th in Europe but he brought his best to the big stage and finished sixth in a new personal best time.

Efrem knew Gladys had come to the Olympic Stadium to watch him. He also felt Joe's spirit. He told Gladys afterwards he felt Joe running on his shoulder.

There was a large map of the world posted on the wall in the house Efrem stayed in Hollystown but his journey from Eritrea to Ireland is almost unimaginable.

After fleeing the country of his birth in 2016, Efrem spent months in a refugee camp in the French coastal city of Calais. The camp became known as ‘the Jungle’ and according to a 2019 Amnesty International report, it was home to approximately 10,000 people at its peak but never got legal status as a refugee camp and “received very little aid or humanitarian support”.

The camp was demolished in October 2016 but it was reported that hundreds, including lone children, continued to live in the surrounding region.



Efrem Gidey with his coach, the late Joe Cooper, on his 18th birthday

Over five and a half years since arriving in Ireland and a week after his sixth-place finish in the Europeans, Efrem is sitting in a cafe in Santry, having cycled out from his flat in Dublin city centre.

Efrem is still learning English and finding a way to express himself through it. There are times in his life that remain too painful to talk about. His family now live in Tigray, Ethiopia and he’s living with the anguish of being unable to maintain communication with them.

“I don’t have contact, still now, it is still fighting. I don’t have sometimes contact from my family because the internet is locked down,” says Efrem.

“I have applied for my family to bring here but they are rejected, why, I don’t know.”

Amid the devastating void left by separation from family and homeland, Efrem found a connection with Clonliffe Harriers and the Cooper family.

Joe became more than a coach to Efrem. He helped with his English. He got him a bike to get around.

Efrem used to stay at the Cooper family home between training sessions and Gladys and Joe used to visit Hollystown to celebrate occasions like his birthday.

When Efrem had to move out of that house after he turned 18, one of the Cooper sons, Ian, took him (and one of Efrem’s friends from Eritrea) into his house in Larkhill.

Joe became a father figure to Efrem.

“He’s helping me to train. To hope. I miss, everyday, my family you know. He’s coming to train. It’s giving me motivation. He’s making me laugh. Sometimes I feel bad, having the energy to run when you miss some family. Sometimes your body has got damage you know,” Efrem adds. “He give me big hope.”

Efrem’s natural talent as a runner quickly found freedom of expression. Representing Le Chéile Secondary School, Tyrrelstown (where he sat his Leaving Cert), Efrem won the senior boys’ race in the 2018 Irish Schools Cross Country Championships and he won the senior boys’ 5,000m at the All-Ireland Schools Track and Field Championships. He repeated that double the following year.

He got Irish citizenship and, in December 2019, he was a late addition to the Irish U-20 team for the European Cross Country Championships in Portugal after a travel visa was secured. He showed his ability to beat the odds by finishing third and he was the one who really put it up to Jakob Ingebrigtsen.



Efrem with Joe's wife, Gladys, wearing a suit he made himself

“He might have been second only that, of course, he doesn't pay great respect to any reputations. So he had a go at Ingebrigtsen that day and, if he hadn't, maybe he might have got silver,” says Peter McDermott, Efrem's current coach. “Unfortunately, very soon afterwards, Joe was diagnosed and passed away in December 2020.”

Joe couldn't travel to Portugal to see Efrem run his first race for Ireland and Gladys remembers that it “broke his heart”.

He was there for Efrem in Dublin Airport to welcome him home. Before he died, Joe asked Peter to take over the coaching of Efrem.

“He knew Peter was going to look after him,” Gladys says.

Resilience is a word sometimes used too easily in sport but resilience backbones Efrem's story. He did a post-Leaving Cert course in health and nutrition after he finished secondary school but needed to earn a living as he trained so he got a job as a delivery cyclist for the online food company Deliveroo.

There were weeks when he worked every day, notching up countless miles on the bike and working the night shift which left little time for sleep before training in the morning.

In October last year, Efrem fell off his bike and injured his knee, which ruled him out of the Irish U-23 team for the European Cross Country Championships in Abbotstown last December.

Through a tear in his jeans, Efrem shows me the bump that's still visible on his left knee, even though scans showed nothing was torn or broken.

Efrem's season last year was undone by injury and McDermott feared it might hurt his funding for 2022. But in May, Efrem was part of the Athletics Ireland carding scheme.

He was also one of the athletes supported for the year by the Jerry Kiernan Foundation, with more than €30,000 shared between 22 athletes – “Jerry would be so proud of that,” Peter says.

Clonliffe Harriers also give Efrem a small amount of money every month to live on. Efrem was able to give up his job as a delivery cyclist a few months ago to concentrate on being a full-time athlete. He's now also got an agent, which McDermott hopes will eventually lead to a proper shoe contract.

“Hopefully, that will all happen in the future, which will allow him more time for rest and recovery. It's been kind of a hand-to-mouth existence for too long,” McDermott, says.

“Things have improved that way. I can't imagine any of the guys on the starting line in Munich last Sunday having had to deliver food for a living up to a few months ago.”

It wasn't a straightforward run-in to that 10,000m final for Efrem. On the Friday before his race on Sunday, he came down with a severe migraine which he can suffer from a couple of times a year. He didn't get much sleep on the Friday night and had to do a Covid test, which came back negative. After taking paracetamol, Efrem began to feel better and he was finally able to eat on the Saturday afternoon.

“I have positive think for myself,” Efreem says, and the following day he ran faster than ever before to finish in a superb sixth place.

Among the top 10 were two other Eritrea-born athletes. Zerei Kbrom Mezngi, who fled to Norway in 2012, finished second. Samuel Fitwi Sibhatu, who fled to Germany seven years ago, finished ninth. Efreem was proud of his run for country and club.

“Clonliffe is, for me, my family. They are giving me before the race good hope, lovely messages. It is making me strong.”

The change in seasons is coming. Efreem will switch to cross-country, with the main target being the European U-23s in Turin in December.

Anything can happen to a roadmap but what’s his potential?

“I think it’s very foolish to make predictions. All I will say is if he remains healthy and injury-free and if he continues to train hard and smart and consistently, he can certainly go a long way,” McDermott says.

“I think his greatest potential may lie on the cross country and the roads. I’m not sure that he has real track speed. It could be the marathon eventually for him but that could be five years down the line – not going to push him in that direction too soon or too early. But certainly, yes, he has enormous potential.”

Gladys – who’s also a coach with Clonliffe – tries to look out for Efreem in other aspects of his life, like his love of making and designing clothes.

When one of her friends was giving away an old sewing machine recently, Gladys took it for Efreem. He’d bought a much smaller sewing machine in Lidl to make his own clothes and fix clothes for his friends.

He shows me a picture on his phone of a colourful running singlet he made out of a few old singlets that he cut, shaped and stitched together. He values making the most out of what he’s got.

It’s Efreem’s 22nd birthday today. He often joins Gladys to visit Joe’s grave and he always brings flowers to lay at the graveside, even though she tells him there’s no need.

After the years of support shown to him, Efreem has been a source of support to Gladys.

“He’s a delight because if I was upset or anything, he’d say, ‘he’s not gone Gladys. He’s there. He’s there looking down. God is minding us’.

“You’d get great strength just listening to how he feels. He’ll be attached to us now for as long as I’m there.”

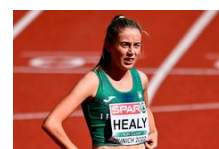
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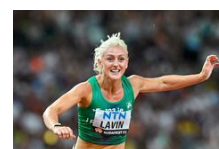
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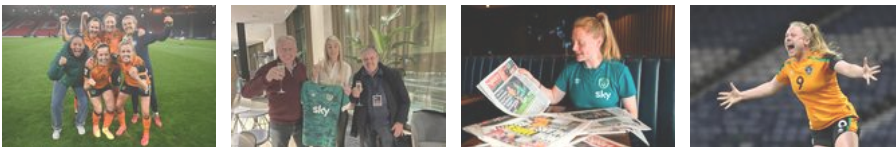
'I'm 50 years of age. Never in my lifetime did I think that I'd see the girls doing this'

The Republic of Ireland's historic qualification for next summer's Women's World Cup was a huge emotional release for those close to the game and the team



Ireland players, from left, Rianna Jarrett, Harriet Scott, Ciara Grant, Megan Campbell, Denise O'Sullivan and Grace Moloney after the FIFA Women's World Cup 2023 Play-off match between Scotland and Republic of Ireland at Hampden Park in Glasgow

Tony O'Donoghue, Stephanie Roche and George Hamilton



Sinéad Kissane

Sat 15 Oct 2022 at 02:30



Tuesday night meant so much, for so many reasons, to so many people watching.

Karen Duggan watched the Women's World Cup play-off from the pundit's chair in the RTÉ TV studio. She was one of the players at the press conference at Liberty Hall in April 2017 when they publicly fought for rights for our women's team. She didn't foresee the sense of liberty she would feel by the end of Tuesday night.

Olivia O'Toole was up at 3am on Tuesday to make the journey to Scotland from her home in Sheriff Street. She played nearly 20 years for Ireland, retired in 2009 and remains Ireland's top female goalscorer (54).

She goes to every single game. Qualifying for a World Cup? She never thought she'd see the day.

Rianna Jarrett was on the 8.55am flight from London Stansted to Glasgow. She got tickets for the game from Lily Agg, her team-mate with London City Lionesses. Rianna is currently injured. She last played for Ireland a year ago when she came on as a sub in the 2-1 World Cup qualifier win over Finland in Helsinki.

Tony O'Donoghue was working pitchside as RTÉ soccer correspondent. Even The Today Show wanted him live from Glasgow on Tuesday afternoon. Tony was sure Ireland would do the job but he ran through possible scenarios in his head before the game. On occasions like this, when everything is on the line, a painful memory from Atlanta '96 comes back.



Pre-match build-up

Tony: I remember Sonia O'Sullivan in Atlanta. It remains one of the most harrowing memories for me. An athlete at the height of their power, we thought, going into it and for it to end really badly. I was kind of under producer pressure. We had booked one of the prime locations post-race. I was almost forced into continuing the interview when she was absolutely distraught. And that kind of lived with me since. Trying to get the tone right, of victory or defeat, can be a tricky thing.

Olivia: I love football and I love the girls and I love the journey they're on. And I want to be on that journey with them.

Rianna: Obviously with the game being so late, I was like, this is the longest day of my life. And I'm not directly involved in the game so can you imagine how the girls feel having to wait.

Karen: I was so glad that the Champions League coverage had run over (on RTÉ) because I was nearly too nervous to speak before the game. It wasn't that I was nervous about the game because I felt like the girls could win, it just felt like it was finally all going to come together for the team. When you have personal relationships with the girls you just want it so much for them - for the likes of Niamh Fahey and Áine O'Gorman who were there in the trenches with you when the times weren't good.

Olivia: People say to me, why do you go? It's the adrenaline of going to see them play. It's a passion that you have and you have it all your life.

Rianna: It's difficult not being involved myself but I haven't kicked a ball since the end of January so I haven't been in a position to contend for any of the squads.

They have a particular style of play and they've mastered it. It might not be the greatest football to watch but they've absolutely mastered it - they're conceding very little goals (four in this qualifying campaign). I kind of thought coming into this game that there would be one single goal.

Olivia: We were walking into Hampden and the anticipation, the nerves, I must have went to the toilet around 20 times before the game even started with the anticipation. When the whistle goes at the start, that's when the adrenaline kicks in.

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The Match

Karen: I think after the first five minutes the nerves were settled because just the manner that Ireland attacked the game, their pressing was brilliant from the start. We just did not let them settle and I feel that despite Scotland having a lot of the ball we kind of dictated the format of the game. We forced them to go long and change their style of play.

11:57 minutes: Scotland are awarded a penalty after a Niamh Fahey handball.

Olivia: My heart just sank. It just sank. I was like 'Oh my God, please don't'. I was praying and I was saying, please don't do that to the girls. And then when Courtney saved that, ah, there was pandemonium where we were.

Rianna: When Courtney saved the penalty from Caroline Weir, I was like, this is our day. This is going to be our day.

Tony: As soon as Courtney saved the penalty, I was absolutely certain now. I was absolutely a hundred and 10 per cent certain.

Karen: Courtney becoming the hero after taking so much flak after the Euros loss (the own-goal in the 1-0 defeat in Ukraine in October 2020), it just felt like it had done a 180 (turn) at that point.

Rianna: I think for Courtney, it was just having the backing of the manager. Like no matter what, 'you're our number one, we're going to work with you and we're going to push you through this'. She's grown from strength to strength and she's arguably been one of our best players in the last number of games.

Karen: From then on, it felt like it was written in the stars.

71:07 minutes: Denise O'Sullivan passes to Amber Barrett who came on as a sub five minutes earlier.

Olivia: The minute Denise hit that ball and the minute Amber - her first touch and she was away from the defender - I said, this is it. I was screaming. This is it. Like screaming. Go on! Go on! Because her first touch took her away from the defender so she was just one-on-one with the keeper. We were all screaming. And then the minute that goal went in, I got really emotional. Everybody around me was emotional. Everybody.

Rianna: Harley Bennett, my team-mate, was beside me. She's English but she's a massive Irish fan now at this stage. We just grabbed each other and we were screaming, we were jumping up and down. Everybody in our section was going crazy.

Karen: I was just on edge for the whole game but when that went in, you could hear the screams from upstairs, downstairs all around the studio. From then on, I was just trying to keep the tears in.

Tony: It was just phenomenal. I jumped up and I was roaring.

Rianna: Amber's had a difficult spell in terms of there's been no consistency for her in the Ireland shirt in the last while. But she's always working hard, she's got a great mentality. She knew that she would get a chance at some point.

Karen: Amber's first touch was perfect on her left foot from Denise O'Sullivan's pass and it was a phenomenal finish. It was just like it was meant to be: a Donegal woman coming on and being the game-changer in the way she was.

Rianna: Amber is one of the greatest people to be around. She's got the best sense of humour, she's so witty, she's funny. Beyond all that, she's there for you. And even when she's going through tough times herself in camp, she notices when people are struggling, she notices when people are having a bad day and she's one of the main people to go and put her arm around your shoulder.

Tony: I still felt absolutely certain even if they equalised, we'd win it in extra-time, even if it went to penalties, we'd win it in penalties. I've never been more certain of a result in my life.

Olivia: I thought our defending was out of this world. Louise (Quinn) and Di (Caldwell) just played the game of their life. Di just came straight in and blocked a shot with her face and then just got up and started playing again. I mean, that's a warrior to me.

Rianna: The nerves set in from there. I tell you I was bawling my eyes out with about five minutes to go. I couldn't sit still. My head was in my hands. I couldn't watch.

Full-time: Scotland 0-1 Republic of Ireland

Olivia: When the ref blew it, there was pandemonium. There was around 10 or 15 Irish in our little group and we all just ran amok.

Karen: I couldn't compose myself. I think Peter (Collins, presenter) kind of recognised that I was on the verge at some point so he kept his questions pretty short. I didn't realise how emotional it was until it happened. There was almost like a weight lifted off our shoulders. That finally, all of the shit that all of the girls had gone through, it was all worth it you know. You're so invested in football in this country for years, so immersed in it that sometimes it's felt like an uphill battle. And then it just felt like everything just levelled off in that moment. You could just breathe a sigh of relief.

Tony: Amber - what a speech she gave. She just captured the mood, the moment and it was so heartfelt. I was in awe I have to say. When you're the interviewer, if something is going well just get out of the way. It was her moment and she knew what she wanted to say and it came so deep from the heart. It was the happiest moment of her football life and she reflected so brilliant on what an awful tragedy (in Creeslough) that the whole country is feeling at the moment.

Rianna: The final whistle blew and everyone's friends and family were making their way down to see if they could get as close as they could. Ruesha (Littlejohn) and Katie's little sister (Lauryn) wormed their way onto the pitch before the stewards got there. I kind of followed them but the stewards got me but then Grace Moloney just dragged me and said, 'c'mon you're part of this team, c'mon down to the pitch'. I ran onto the pitch and I was just giving everybody a hug. I was crying with them.

I was laughing with them. And they were just like, "it's so good to see you". And even in that moment just giving me little words of inspiration like, get yourself fit, get yourself back in contention for this squad. I was just so happy to be able to get down there and kind of share the best moment of Irish football history with them even though I wasn't directly involved myself.

Olivia: I'm 50 years of age. Never in my life-time did I think that I'd see the girls doing this. Never. You just don't because of the past. I just felt that all the odds is always against us. But when Vera came along and we start winning..

Karen: I was one of the people that was putting question marks over it (Pauw's approach) when they were playing all of those friendly games and getting beaten in them. I wasn't sure what the identity of the team was. But she really stuck to her guns and I think that her belief in herself and not taking outside influences is something, I guess, that a lot of people can learn from.

Tony: I was moved by (Pauw's) emotion and by her answers and considering what she's been through. But then when she did the shirt thing (Vera presented Tony with an Ireland jersey at the end of their post-match interview), I thought it was a wind-up or something.

And then I got worried, was it inappropriate? Because this isn't about me. This is their moment. I'm just a reporter. I was gobsmacked and delighted and blown away. It was a lovely gesture.

Olivia: I was just standing there and I was screaming, 'well done Di, well done Louise'. And Di screams: 'Louise, it's Livvy O'Toole'. So, when the girls came over to me, I was sobbing, really sobbing. They lifted me over.

There was a barrier, a walkway and then a barrier for the pitch and your man (a steward) says to me, 'if you don't get off this pitch, you're getting arrested'. I says, 'I didn't do this, they're after lifting me over'. He says, 'well I want you back over there. If you don't go over there, you're getting arrested'. But I'd have done a night in a Glasgow prison cell, I wouldn't have given a s**t. That's the truth!

(Katie McCabe name-checks Olivia in her post-match interview with Tony and how she was one of those who "paved the way for us to be able to do this tonight". Olivia used to wear 11 for Ireland, the same number Katie wears now.)

Olivia: It was brilliant to hear that. And I love the fact that she's a proper Dub.

Karen: Katie McCabe has always been one of the most talented footballers that this country has produced and probably will ever produce. To be handed the captaincy at 21 years of age, that's almost a burden on a lot of players. Katie's always been kind of that cheeky chappy personality and, in some regard, she had to change her behaviour and her approach to the Irish camp.

She wasn't just able to come in and express herself - even though we want her doing that on the pitch. There are certain responsibilities that come with being captain and to take that on at 21 and bring all the experience she had over the last five years to this moment, it's been phenomenal to witness.

Rianna: Obviously, there's this added incentive of: I need to get back playing, I need to get back playing as well as I can to stand any chance of being in contention (for the World Cup squad). For me that incentive is something to work towards. It's something that we've all dreamed of, that Irish women's football has dreamed of for a long, long time.

You can just see the growth and the investment and hopefully that's going to continue to rise. If we can see it at all levels then there's no doubt that Ireland will continue to qualify for major tournaments. This may be the first but it won't be the last. I'm sure of that.

Olivia: When all the commotion and all the celebrations was over, I stood in Hampden with me scarf around me and I just said to myself, we're going to a World Cup. It's like an outer-body experience. Is this really happening to little old Ireland?

Tony: By the end of it I had an unbelievable headache. I don't know why. Maybe the stress of it all or the tension or whatever. It really was an unforgettable night, wasn't it?

Karen: When I was involved in the Irish team, we'd never finish a campaign without a big night out. I felt like I was in that mode like I needed to go straight to Coppers. And then you realise it's a Tuesday and I've work in the morning.

It was such a weird feeling leaving the studio and getting in my car. When I got home, I was honestly so exhausted. I lay down and I just let myself have a little cry because I was trying to keep it together so much in the studio from the second we went on air.

Tony: We went back to the hotel and we were probably going to have a beer and George Hamilton said no, I think this moment calls for bubbles and we had a bottle of prosecco between us.

Olivia: I'm waiting for the 22nd (of October when the World Cup draw takes place) and booking the flights on the 23rd. I'll be off to the Credit Union next week. I don't care how I'll get over there, I'll get over there.

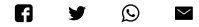
Karen: It was just that release of all of the s**t you'd gone through when you played and that you witnessed with the girls over the years. It was always a fight.

There was always that undercurrent that you need to prove yourself. And when that final whistle went, it kind of felt like that fight was over. That was such an unburdening feeling. It was wonderful.

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Irish News

Mortgage lending soars at credit unions as rates of just 2.95pc attract borrowers

(/irish-news/mortgage-lending-soars-at-credit-unions-as-rates-of-just-295pc-attract-borrowers/a388450447.html)

Latest News

Crime

Local people in Bordeaux express sympathy with Irish alleged gang-rape victim

07:30

(/irish-news/crime/local-people-in-bordeaux-express-sympathy-with-irish-alleged-gang-rape-victim/a584778352.html)

Videos

Kim Jong Un arrives at cosmodrome in Russia's far east for meeting with Putin

07:30

(/videos/kim-jong-un-arrives-at-cosmodrome-in-russias-far-east-for-meeting-with-putin/a1603255583.html)

Videos

Southgate defends Harry Maguire against media criticism

07:28

(/videos/southgate-defends-harry-maguire-against-media-criticism/a1289532048.html)

Videos

Archive: Niall Horan ‘welcome back any time’ says Joe Biden after White House performance

07:20

(/videos/archive-niall-horan-welcome-back-any-time-says-joe-biden-after-white-house-performance/a2042307995.html)

Videos

ARCHIVE: Swarms of flying ants cover exterior of Dublin house

07:17

(/videos/archive-swarms-of-flying-ants-cover-exterior-of-dublin-house/a1319549982.html)

Videos

The Irish US general behind the horrific Bear River Massacre

07:10

(/videos/the-irish-us-general-behind-the-horrific-bear-river-massacre/a764790663.html)

Videos

Irish musician Tolú Makay participates in Oxfam's September campaign

07:09

(/videos/irish-musician-tolu-makay-participates-in-oxfams-september-campaign/a1210218919.html)

Europe

LATEST | Vladimir Putin gives Kim Jong Un tour of rocket launch centre after North Korean leader arrives on armoured train

06:55

(/world-news/europe/vladimir-putin-gives-kim-jong-un-tour-of-rocket-launch-centre-after-north-korean-leader-arrives-on-armoured-train/a428845828.html)

Celebrity News

Taylor Swift is the Anti-Hero of 2023 MTV Video Music Awards

06:05

(/style/celebrity/celebrity-news/taylor-swift-is-the-anti-hero-of-2023-mtv-video-music-awards/a2108278779.html)

Agri-business **PREMIUM**

The question farmers should ask before renting more land is ‘who will I actually be working for?’

05:00

(/farming/agri-business/the-question-farmers-should-ask-before-renting-more-land-is-who-will-i-actually-be-working-for/a948910793.html)