

# ROAD BOWLING

**ONE TO WATCH** | Hannah Sexton (18) has already won three All-Ireland titles (U16 twice, U18)



Hannah Sexton has won three All-Ireland and eight Munster underage titles.

## Hannah spearheading Sexton sisters' success

Sexton sisters from Timoleague are serial winners as five have won county underage titles

BY GER MCCARTHY

HANNAH Sexton's underage success suggests the rising West Cork bowling star has plenty to look forward to in the years ahead.

It's fair to say that a rich bowling heritage exists within the Sexton family that resides in Carhue, Timoleague. Sisters Katie, Hannah, Margaret, Ellen and Laura and their brother Sean have been bowling from a young age thanks to the encouragement from their parents, Brian and Mary.

Hannah (18) is the third eldest and was listed as one of *The Southern Star's* 21 West Cork stars under 21 to watch. It's a wise choice considering the raw talent Hannah possesses and the astonishing success she has already enjoyed.

Hannah has already won eight Munster underage titles – U18 (2), U16 (3), U14 (2) and U12 (1) titles – and three All-Ireland crowns (two-time U16 All-Ireland winner and 2018 All-Ireland champion). That's an unbelievable trophy haul for someone so young. It is even more impressive when you consider Hannah balanced that success whilst also lining out for Cork camogie underage squads and won an All-Ireland minor medal in 2019. So, when

and how did the bowling bug first bite?

'My earliest memory of getting involved with bowling was being at home one evening and my dad saying, "come on, you are throwing a bowl today"; Hannah says.

'I was ten years old at the time but never held a bowl at that stage of my life even though dad would have been taking Katie and Sean to scores. I'd never been that interested until dad took me to the Shannonvale bowling road where Gretta Cormican showed me how to hold my first bowl. My dad showed me the ropes before Katie and I threw a score that day.

'It took a bit of time to start loving it, to be honest. It is very frustrating when you are starting out. You have no control over the bowl at first and you are trying to hit the sop but it's going all over the place and into the ditch. It takes practice, a lot of practice, to learn how to gain control of a bowl.'

Hannah overcame her early frustrations. Determined to improve, she practised as often as she could with her older sister Katie. The sisters spent countless hours out on the roads attempting to hit the sop and would not return home until satisfied that progress was

being made.

'Katie and I would be out on the roads for hours so if you threw a bad bowl, you were made throw it again and again until you got it right,' Hannah says. 'Naturally, constantly pushing each other to improve meant loads of arguments and a few tears as well! It was just us being sisters really. When all six of us started going out along the road, as soon as anyone threw a bad bowl, the (verbal) shots would be flying.

'Once I started bowling then it was a case of the other three – Margaret, Ellen and Laura – following myself, Sean and Katie out on to the roads. We were out bowling together as often as we could. My dad would take us to as many women's scores as possible to show us what we would be up against in years to come.'

As her bowling skills developed at a rapid pace, Hannah drew inspiration from her sister Katie and rival Maria Nagle's epic scores. The latter two faced off against one another on numerous occasions up through the various underage ranks. The quality of those closely-fought scores showed a mesmerised Hannah what was needed to become successful.

'Katie and Maria seemed to be in a final every year so that



Margaret, Ellen and Hannah Sexton – representing the South West region – were winners of the 2019 youths team bowling event at Phale Road, Ballineen.

quickly became my inspiration, to reach and then win a final,' Hannah explains.

'Those scores showed me what was needed to step up to the big stage. Winning the U12 county in 2014 was brilliant as I'd lost out the previous two years. I practised and practised and eventually won it. That U12 title was the first time anyone in our family won a county which made it extra special.'

That U12 triumph proved a pivotal moment as sisters Katie, Margaret, Ellen and Laura would each go on to claim county bowling titles of their own – Katie was All-Ireland and county U16 winner in 2013

and a three-time county runner-up; Margaret was county U16 champion in 2016; Ellen won the county U12 title in 2018 and Laura was county U18 winner in 2019. Yet, Hannah's unprecedented underage success meant, after turning 18, she would skip the adult junior grade and immediately move into the ultra-competitive intermediate instead.

Reaching the last four of the 2020 intermediate championship in her first year competing, Hannah showed she belonged at the grade.

'2020 was my first year competing at intermediate but that was cut short because of Covid,'

she explains.

'I also missed out on representing Ireland at the European Championships in Germany. Intermediate is tough but I really put the head down and want to win something out of it this year. I want to see how far I can go even though it is a huge step up from underage.

'I'm an 18-year-old up against much stronger and more experienced women. Concentration is probably the most important thing I've noticed at this level. You must concentrate on every single shot. You have to try and follow every good bowl from your opponent and then beat it.

'I realise I am very young so these years at intermediate will hopefully stand to me in time to come. My aim is to get to the senior grade as soon as possible. That's another huge step up in standards so I have to better myself if I want to get there.

'Fitting in everything else like my club and Cork camogie demands isn't easy. Just ask Gretta Cormican who has to try and find one night in the week that I'm off so I can bowl! The summer can be a bit hectic with training three nights a week with Cork and two nights with my club.'

Hannah's only getting started, as are her sisters. There's more to come from them all.