

ROAD BOWLING

CLASS ACT | Geraldine Daly has won three Munster senior women's titles

Three-time Munster senior women's champion **Geraldine Daly** has a tough decision to make

'If I work really hard, can I get to that level again?'

BY KIERAN MCCARTHY

GERALDINE Daly has a decision to make: will she commit to another year of competitive road bowling at senior level or will she take a step back?

She has asked herself those same questions every year since 2018, before throwing her name into the ring, again.

In the weeks ahead she's expecting a text message to notify her that affiliations are needed for the 2021 championships so, again, she knows it's almost decision time.

If she commits to another year in the women's senior championship she wants to have a realistic chance of being in contention for the big prizes

because the Caheragh woman – now living in Timoleague – is not content to just make up the numbers.

Geraldine is a competitor. This is a player who has won three Munster senior women's titles, the latest only in 2016 when she then suffered heartbreak in the All-Ireland final against Kelly Mallon. That loss hurt. The senior title she craves was within touching distance, but then it was snatched out of her grasp by Armagh woman Mallon on her home road in Madden.

Since then life has taken over for Geraldine. She got married in 2016 to Paul, they now have two little boys, Jerry (3) and Kevin (nine months), and her



Geraldine Daly has won three county senior titles, the last of which came in 2016.

priorities have changed. That's not to say road bowling doesn't matter anymore because it does, it's in her DNA, passed down from her father Eugie, but Geraldine is unsure if she can give it the commitment it needs. '2016, the year I got to the All-Ireland final and got married, that was my last seriously competitive year, I was almost training full-time. Since then we've had two kids so bowling essentially took a back seat,' she explains.

'I competed in 2018 and 2019 but I didn't have as much time to commit to it as I had in the past and I'd like to in the future.'

'The last year I bowled, 2019, it was a will-I-or-won't-I moment, and I was asking myself was I silly going back doing this when I haven't put in as much training as I previously would have.'

'I still won a few scores, I didn't make a show of myself or anything. When I was pitched against Carmel Ryan in a quarter-final, she is at the top of her game, I realised how out of my depth I was. I was asking myself "do I keep doing this and possibly be brought down to intermediate level?" I don't want to do that.'

'It's a case that I have to make a decision as to whether I can

give training the time that it needs or do I take a step back altogether.'

'In one way, Covid, from a bowling perspective, has given me some breathing space to weigh up what I do next. I'm at a crossroads, really.'

Given her love for road bowling, it's easy to appreciate how tough this decision is. She has a passion for the sport. That stemmed from home and from her dad, who was a West Cork champion in his heyday.

'We'd have Christmas Day dinner early so he could go off bowling!' she laughs, so juggling with the thought of stepping back from the competitive side has seen her sway one way and then the other.

Finding the time to commit to training is a challenge. She works as a Garda and has a young family. Then there's her competitiveness: if she goes again she needs to feel like she can make an impact, like she has done in the past.

Since she won the All-Ireland intermediate title at Kealkil in 2002 the West Cork woman has been competing at senior level. She won Munster titles in 2008, '09 and '16. But it's that recent All-Ireland final loss, after Kelly Mallon came from a bowl down in her last shot to

dash Geraldine's dreams, that also mean she has unfinished business with the sport.

'I have been to three All-Ireland finals and I lost the three,' she says.

'The loss in 2016 is by far the hardest one because I literally had it in my grasp. It was swept away from me. It's the one day that haunts me and will haunt me, because it's been my dream to be an All-Ireland champion, that's what I have worked so hard for. That's why making this decision – will I stay or go? – is really hard because I'm asking myself if I work really hard, can I get to that level again? At the moment, I don't get the opportunity to train enough to do that, but who knows what the future holds. I don't want to go back to throwing at senior and not being at an adequate level for that. No player wants that.'

The women's senior championship is very competitive right now. Carmel Carey has had a stranglehold on the Munster title in recent times. Meghan Collins is another to watch. Young guns like Mairead O'Driscoll, Maria Nagle and Veronica O'Mahony can make an impact. Then there are Murphy sisters, Aileen and Catriona, Emma Fitzpatrick, Claire O'Sullivan and Louise Collins, so there's

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little room to error. Geraldine, who has represented Ireland at three European Championships, knows she needs to be at her best to fight her way through such a competitive field.

'Don't get me wrong, it's not all about winning,' she says.

'There are a lot more important things happening in the world and there's a lot more to life than bowling. When you are born into it, though, the connection is strong.'

'What I have experienced and attained throughout my years of bowling is phenomenal. I really do appreciate everything that I have won, and everything I haven't won I appreciate too because that shows how difficult it is to win anything.'

Geraldine's dream has always been to win an All-Ireland senior title. She has knocked on the door a few times, but it hasn't opened yet. Now she needs to decide whether she'll knock again.



**Ból Chumann
na hÉireann**

Road Bowling is not allowed in present circumstances.

Ból Chumann Chairman Michael Brennan has issued the following directive: It is very clear and unequivocal that no games or competitions are to take place.