

# ROAD BOWLING

**ITALIAN JOB** | Meghan Collins won gold at the 2012 European Championships in Pesaro

## Classy Collins has her sights set on that elusive county senior women's championship title

BY GER McCARTHY

EVEN though road bowling is on pause right now, Meghan Collins has been kept busy these past 12 months.

On the road the Crossbarry bowler is a former county U18 and intermediate champion who now competes for the big prizes at senior level, while off the road she has been busy working on the frontline during the Covid pandemic.

'I work as a COPE Foundation Care Assistant in the south side of Cork city,' Collins explains.

'I have been working at the job for the past five years after completing a social science degree in college. I was working part-time at the job while I was in college, really liked it and decided to take it up full-time when the opportunity arose.

'Things have been extremely difficult since the lockdowns began because, as carers on the frontline, you are going in to work every day and putting ourselves at risk. I can't work remotely from home.

'Look, there are positive aspects as well in that I'm able to get out of the house every day and meet people.'

Her grandfather, Tom Collins, is a famous bowler from the Mid-Cork region and a former All-Ireland veteran's title winner following success in Armagh in 1991. Her grandfather's sister, Mary Brown, was heavily involved in intermediate and senior bowling circles as well. Living next door to her grandparents, it was inevitable that Tom Collins would be the one who introduced Meghan to bowling.

What was not inevitable was the northern style of underarm bowling she would settle on and stick with throughout her career.

'I've been bowling since before I can remember, but it was my grandfather who started it all off,' Collins says.

'We grew up in Crossbarry and I would only have been about four years old when I started. Grandad had a smaller bowl than the usual 24 ounce one for me starting off. He tried his best to show me how to do the traditional-style swing but I couldn't grasp that at all for some reason and stuck with the Northern Irish underarm style instead. The bowl would fly into a ditch if I tried the traditional bowling style now!'

As a youngster, she practiced whenever she could. Success followed as the years progressed including U12 county titles in 2007 and 2008 plus a notable county U18 title win in



# Meghan is on a mission

Meghan Collins is one of the top contenders for the women's senior county championship title.

2012. Collins beat Ciara Buckley on that occasion, one of her toughest opponents through the underage and senior ranks, to become champion.

'Yes, Ciara and I would have been rivals but teammates also that same year,' Collins says.

'In 2012, we travelled to Pesaro in Italy and competed in the European Bowling Championships. I won the gold medal on the road in the girls' U18 category over there. It was a huge thing at the time for me.

'Being so young and getting the opportunity to go over to such a beautiful place and win a gold medal was unbelievable. It helped grow my confidence and I bowled more than I ever did that year. It was rewarding considering all the trials and practice I went through to get to Pesaro. My mother Marguerite and grand aunt Mary Brown travelled over with me and it was an experience I'll never forget.

'In 2013 I won my first county intermediate title and qualified for the senior grade. Unfortunately, I lost the intermediate All-Ireland final to Armagh's Denise Daly on the Blackwater-town road in Armagh.'

Since then, like any bowler, Collins has experienced plenty of highs and lows along the roads whilst progressing up the senior ranks.

'In December 2019, myself and James Donovan beat Kelly Mallon and Cathal Toal in the semi-finals of a charity Armagh/Cork Unlimited fund-raiser at Sam's Cross,' Collins explains.

'That was a huge deal at the time because Mallon and Toal are two of the best bowlers around. I felt that win set me up for 2020. We went on to beat Emma Fitzpatrick and Gary Daly in the final which was fantastic. It was the best win of my career.'

Clearly, that memory plus winning gold in Pesaro remain some of the high points of Collins' career. Intermediate county success followed her Italian odyssey but since then finishing runner-up in three county senior finals has proven frustrating.

Collins will not stop trying until she lifts that first senior title and turns her attention towards All-Ireland glory.

'I suppose it is the ultimate dream really, to become a senior county champion,' she says.

**'The bowl would fly into a ditch if I tried the traditional bowling style now!' – Meghan Collins**

'Winning that as well as a senior All-Ireland are my ultimate goals. It is not easy to fit in all the necessary training when you are working 12-hour shifts and that's before Covid-19 hit and turned everything upside down.

'You don't have the long evenings in the winter to practice so I was finding the summer that bit easier to prepare for championships when I went home or on my days off. Instead, I focussed on the strength and conditioning and cardiovascular side of bowling, something a lot of people outside the sport don't necessarily appreciate or understand.

'Maybe I've been lacking in that I haven't been able to make the time to give bowling everything I have. Life and work must go on too. That's something I thought a lot about pre-Covid. I was sick of the defeats and was ready to give



Meghan Collins won gold in the U18 women's category at the 2012 European Championships.

bowling everything I had but then the pandemic hit.'

Collins is like any other sports person in that she is desperate to get back to doing what she loves the most. For her, it's

bowling scores on the roads around Cork and beyond. Her time is coming and as soon as she is able, she'll begin another quest for that elusive county senior title.