

SPORT, BUSINESS & PROPERTY SECTIONS INSIDE



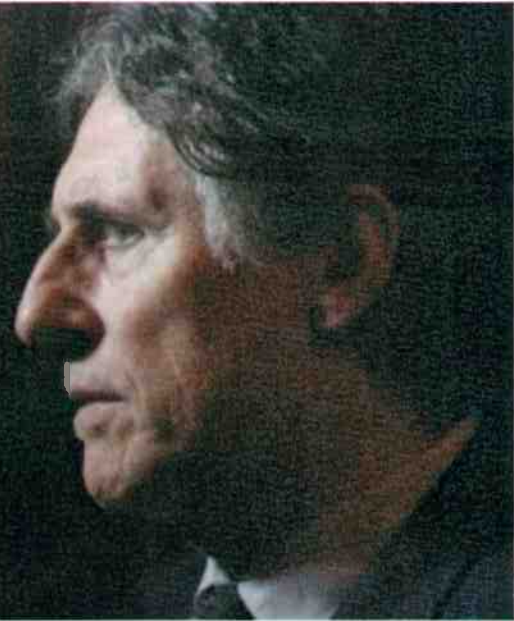
17 MAY 2020

Sunday Independent

LIVING

POLLY SAMSON
AND THE CURSE
OF THE MUSEBARRON
O'CONNOR'S
MID-LIFE CRISIS

'I have demons I wrestle with ... I'll never defeat them but I try to keep them at bay'



Gabriel Byrne turned 70 last week. In an exclusive interview, the actor talks to Barry Egan about not being afraid of death, loving silence and nature, hating bullies, disloyalty, and how he 'avoided boasters, lick-arses and people who don't listen'. Some of Byrne's closest friends also give their opinion on the birthday boy

IN the mid-1990s, a Guinness worker's son from Wallingstone rented a house opposite Marion Brando's in Los Angeles. "Brando," Gabriel Byrne told me a few years ago, "was very articulate about what fate does to people and how dangerous it is. He talked about Mephistopheles and the pact that you make with the devil at your own peril."

"If you are not a strong person, I will destroy you. You can list off the people in film or music that fate has destroyed. What happens is not that you change so much as people's perceptions of you change, and that changes you."

Working in an industry where treachery is on a Shakespearean scale, Gabriel has made his mark in Hollywood since his big-screen debut in 1981 as King O'Pondragon in John Boorman's *Excalibur*. The former teacher has also played — among many others — Lord Byron in Ken Russell's *Gothic*, a gangster in the Coen Brothers' *Miller's Crossing*, a bent ex-con in *The Usual Suspects*, a Jesuit priest investigating demonic possession in *Stigmata*, Satan himself in *End Of Days*, D'Artagnan in *The Musketeers*, and a psychologist in *Twelve Monkeys*. "It is a tremendous need in human beings to be listened to," Gabriel noted of Paul's influence on his patients.

"A favourite film? I really don't have any," Gabriel said last Tuesday. "I never watch my own films but I remember my life and how I felt continually while I was making them. The result is something I have no control over. You do your work, give it everything and you can hate and forget it."

After Gabriel played James Tyrone in Eugene O'Neill's *A Moon for the Misbegotten* on Broadway in 2006, he said what he learned from the play was that "nobody's love can save anybody else. There are people who want to die, and nothing or nobody will stop them. The only one who can save you is yourself."

Gabriel saved himself when he stopped drinking 23 years ago. ("One day I woke up and I said, if I don't stop this, I am going to die," he said on *The Late Late Show* three years ago.)

"I have demons I wrestle with — as everyone does," he says now (his demons could be as a result of the abuse he suffered at school and as a young boy while training to be a priest in England). "I'll never defeat them but I do it every day to try to keep them at bay."

And death? "I'm not afraid of death. I am afraid of suffering. Or being a burden on my loved ones. I'm not very courageous with pain. I almost broke the bones in a nurse's hand holding on to her as I got an injection

from a doctor," Gabriel says, recalling the incident with comic aplomb.

Doctor: "I've never seen a grown man so afraid of a needle. Thank God you're not giving birth."

Patient Gabriel: "Me too. Because that would be not just painful but very, very weird."

If he ever needs a laugh, "I'll put on a flimsy cartoon and I'm restored. Or I'll watch politicians acting. Especially sincerity. That's always good for a laugh."

Gabriel says he is "an introvert by nature. I'm very content by myself. Always have been. I love nature and silence. I'm utterly happy tramping fields and walking in forests or mountains. Fortunately my wife understands that side of me," he says, referring to Hannah Beth, who he married at Hollywood House in Clark in 2014 and with whom he has a young daughter, Maisie.

"I have the most wonderful memories of working all over the world on more than 90 films with some of the world's greatest actors and directors. I never thought it would happen like that. I would have been happy teaching, and being in an amateur drama club."

'I would have been happy teaching, and being in an amateur drama club'

How does he think his life would have panned out if he'd stayed as a school teacher at Ardara Eanna in Cramlin?

"I think I would have developed as a teacher," he says. "It is a most undervalued and important profession. I have the utmost respect and admiration for it. But like nurses and firemen and ambulance drivers, we don't pay them. I would probably have gotten involved in the union to fight for better conditions."

"A good teacher leaves a lifelong impression. I had the most wonderful students. And I remember each and every one of them, and I wonder where life has brought them. I often wish I could return to teaching now that I've experienced something of the world."

When he was starting off as a struggling actor in Dublin, Gabriel used to sign on in Wolborough Street dole office, "with a pencil that was tied by twine to the bars, in case somebody would run off with it. There was a sense of shame, despair and hopelessness, a sense that it was your fault. It was tough being on the dole. Because deep down you believe it is

your own fault — deep down somewhere inside you, you start to deny a part of yourself."

Gabriel told me a few years ago that he didn't really understand what a powerful impact finishing work must have had on his father Dan, a barrel-maker for Guinness, "to be not working any more, when your whole life was proscribed by clocking in and being with your workmates and going for a drink afterwards. Anybody who hasn't been unemployed doesn't understand."

I ask him now could he get all that in the context of the 20 million people unemployed in America and the million on the dole now in Ireland because of Covid-19.

"When you are unemployed, you not only lose your financial security but very often your core identity takes a hit," he says. "The collapse of self-esteem, purposeful time, your sense of order and being of use in the world. Often there is anxiety and depression, drinking and drugs to escape a sense of hopelessness. Hope for the future can seem futile. But we will overcome this and it may paradoxically lead to a better and fairer world. I have that faith."

The eldest of six children growing up in Wallingstone, at the age of nine he was on the hop from school on a bus into town when by chance he saw Gene Wilder being filmed in St Patrick's Park eating an onion sandwich for a scene in the movie *Quacker*. *Fortune Has a Cousin in the Bronx*.

"That was the first time I had ever seen an actor working," he said years ago. As a young boy, he wanted to be a priest because, he told *The Guardian*, "in a way I didn't then understand, the church tapped into my love of theatre."

He didn't become an actor until he was nearly 30. For most of his 30s, he taught history and Spanish. He loved going to the theatre. "The students came to me one day and asked if we could start a drama club," he said years ago, "and that's how I got interested in acting as a form of expression. He got some work at Focus Theatre, where he became a student of the legendary Deirdre O'Connell, who taught young actors her understanding of the Stanislavski/Lee Strasberg method. One fateful day, John Boorman came to the Focus and Gabriel got a role in *Excalibur*. Not long after, he and his girlfriend and mentor Aislinn O'Connor — a TV producer and presenter — moved to London."

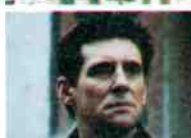
They were living in a policy flat and were far from flush. One day when Gabriel had landed a role at the Royal Court Theatre, Aislinn spent all the money they had for the month on a suitcase for her boyfriend, who went white with shock when she told him the price — £200.



With Mick Lally in 'Dracula'



With Ellen Barkin in 'Into the West'



In 1992's 'End of Days'



Gabriel Byrne and Hannah Beth King

"This won't be the last big job you'll get and you're going to need good luggage in years to come." Aislinn's words were prophetic. Gabriel has been travelling with good luggage ever since.

The *New York Times* described his ascent as "from Cult Hero to Renaissance Man". Another critic described him as "the rare contemporary actor who... can turn that air of splendour into a sustained gate-to-gate dramatic wind". Gabriel, of course, took to fame like a duck to water.

He moved to America in 1987 and married actress Ellen Barkin. They have two children: Jack, now 21, and Komy, 27. They divorced in 1999.

"It's not only that Gabriel's an innocent — which is part of his charm in a town like this — but he just can't see the bad in people," Ellen told *The New York Times* in 1995. "He's the exact opposite of me. If he has a bad thought about someone, Gabriel thinks that will make him a bad person."

"I've had a blessed career," Gabriel says. "I've always done what I've wanted to do. Never had a plan or really much ambition. Was never proactive. Didn't go to showbiz parties."

He adds that he "avoided boasters, lick-arses and people who don't listen."

What does he listen to?

"I shun disloyalty and people who abuse one's trust. Gossip-mongers. Cyn-

ical, bitter and angry people."

Gabriel adds that he "really detests bullies who use power to suppress those in weaker positions."

He is "fascinated" by history, politics, economics and literature. And his politics?

"Politically, I would be much to the left," he says. "I have a moral view of society — it is what is just and what is good for our fellow man. I despise neo-liberal economics and those who espouse its horrendous doctrines. I'm acutely aware of propaganda masquerading as truth." In 2012, Gabriel dismissed *The Catching* — a newspaper initiative to entice people with Irish connections to visit the country — as "a scam". "Most people [in Ireland] don't give a shit about the diaspora except to shake them down for a few quid."

He has nothing but praise for the President Mr Higgins. "I'm very proud of Michael D and Sabina. They're inspirational. Michael D was a passionate and compassionate politician and always had a world view. Would that he were leading the country."

He recalls "voraciously" "My role models in Dublin," he says, "always had a paperback sticking out of a coat pocket. I adore Irish and British humour. Although I've lived outside Ireland for a very long time, I have never lost my connection to it."

Last Tuesday, Gabriel turned 70. For his 60th birthday, his children Jack and Ronny presented him with a videotape congratulating him on his big day. The tape included Jack and Ronny in a mock-Irish bellow saying: "Da, would ya shut your effing hole for Jagsen's sake!"

Of Ronny, Gabriel told *The New Yorker* in 2006 with a chuckle: "You got to pick up my 13-year-old daughter for a magic show. What a girl! She's interested in magic. She said to me, 'I want to learn how to make almost everybody I know disappear'."

Not likely to disappear for some good years to come, Gabriel doesn't want to make a comment about the big Severn O. But he is philosophical about life, about the world, about people, about his career. He is "full of gratitude for the life I've been given. I've lost dear friends and family members," he says referring to, among others, his sister Marian who died at 33 in 1989 of cancer and his ex-partner Aislinn, who died in 1998 at the age of 50, also from cancer. "But they are with me constantly in spirit. I will never forget them. I have a loving wife and family and great and loyal friends."

One such loyal friend is the broadcaster Caroline Ertline. "I've known Gabriel since the 1970s and the begin-

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BIG INTERVIEW

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ning of his long relationship with my great friend, the late and very lamented Aine O'Connor. Gabriel was, and still is," she says, "the smartest and funniest company you could ever keep. More recently, I'm proud to have worked with him on a campaign to make end-of-life care in hospitals more in tune with hospice principles. Gabriel is a tireless champion of the Irish Hospice Foundation and, as patron, passionately promotes its work on behalf of the dying and the bereaved."

Another close friend is TV producer Colman Hecton, who worked for many years on *The Late Late Show*. He and his wife Sharon first met Gabriel in the late 1970s. "I had been working with Aine, who was a talented and beautiful television presenter."

Colman can remember Aine suggesting that they meet up for a drink. "So off we went to the Grosvenor Hotel. Aine was a household name and everybody in the bar wanted to come and talk to her. Sharon and I ended up talking to Gabriel at length as nobody was interested in talking to us or Gabriel, who was a teacher and part-time actor at the time. We liked him immediately, he made us laugh with his wit and repartee."

Their friendship grew over the years, and Colman and Sharon "took great delight in seeing Gabriel's star rise, first in *The Roadman*, then *Brasserie* and then Gabriel and Aine's move to London and his stint at the National Theatre.

"As his fame grew we were lucky enough to be asked to join him on the set of one of his early films, *Christopher Columbus* in Granada in Spain. Gabriel had the starring role. Sharon and I were extra in the movie, but we ended up on the cutting-room floor. We had so much fun out there, amazing lunches and dinners, and we were put up at the Alhambra Palace hotel."

"We asked Aine and Gabriel to be godparents to our daughter Ava. Gabriel has been a loving and supportive godfather down the years. Gabriel has been a true friend and we wish him the happiest 70th birthday," says Colman who went on to produce *Who Wants to Be a Millionaire* on TV and is now producing content for Sony Pictures Television.

"Gabriel is not a big self-publicist,"



Gabriel: 'Tackling my demons and turning 70'

says musician and producer Barry Devlin. "So I think we sometimes overlook just how big his corpus of work has been – and how good. As well as his acting career, he's produced, directed and written for stage and screen. And he's still hard at it. And there's definitely a portrait in the attic. He's still a handsome devil at it, what, 50? Is he even 50?" laughs Barry.

"He's great company. The best. And he's generous with his time. When I was making *All Things Bright And Beautiful* back in 1983, he took on quite a small role in the film. Not because it would advance his career, but because it might advance mine."

The President Michael D Higgins said: "Both Aine and I have been privileged to have him as a friend, from his

early days as an artist. Beyond the world of the arts, he has also participated in some of my campaigns in Galway West. I recall in one of these campaigns, Gabriel, the late Mick Lally and myself campaigning in the midst of a herd of cattle."

"He has been a strong supporter of the arts, both here in Ireland and in the United States. He has a deep commitment to culture and the livelihoods of artists."

Teri Hayden, Gabriel's agent of 30 years said: "While most people know the serious side of Gabriel his friends are lucky to be treated to his funny and playful side. Favourite memories include the many phone messages on my answer machine with him mimicking a wide variety of people demanding and complaining about anything and everything."

He did this on a new staff member in the office on her first week.

"The poor girl was shaken up but handled it perfectly and had a good laugh when the voice cracked into gales of laughter. We have a unique relationship both professionally and personally for over 35 years and I consider my self very fortunate to be his friend."

Ten years or so ago before Christmas, Gabriel appeared, out of nowhere, in the Merrion Hotel lounge area in Dublin, where I was interviewing someone, and for reasons best known to himself, was suddenly standing over me, rubbing those trademark brooding eyes...

"You know what? I'm just out of bed," he said, quickly adding: "Do I look like I just got out of bed?"

The blonde lady I was interviewing politely answered: "Not at all."

Gabriel was far from convinced. "Are you serious?" he asked. "A long evening," she joked. "It wasn't even a long evening," Gabriel said. "I went to sleep and I woke up again. It's jet lag. It kind of kicks in on the fourth day."

"I'm here," Gabriel went on "to have my breakfast." (It was 2pm). "Lisa Murphy, isn't it?" the actor said as he departed. "I saw you in the paper yesterday. I try to keep up with things." Gabriel (who I first met in 1986) is fantastic and gracious company. Generous with his time, he has given me interviews in London, Chicago, Dublin, Los Angeles and New York down through

Enormous talent... Gabriel with Jessica Lange and Michael Shannon during the Broadway opening night curtain call for *Long Day's Journey Into Night* and lifelong friends Liam Neeson, Colman and Sharon Hutchinson and musician Barry Devlin

the years, introducing me, along the way, to everyone from Liam Neeson to Yoko Ono as well as the movies of Fellini and Bergman et al.

I remember talking to him in 2002, around the time he was finishing *Spider* with Ralph Fiennes. The 9/11 attack had happened as it was being filmed. He recalled walking onto the set one day and seeing people gathered around a television set.

They were watching what Gabriel thought was a clip from the film, "then what appeared to be a plane crash that just happened." Seconds later, Gabriel and the crew got the horrific news of what had happened in New York.

"The movie is about what madness is," he said of *Spider*. "RD Laing said madness is a sane response to an insane situation. Sometimes it is a perspective: you see it that way. I see it this way."

I asked Gabriel did he think he had that little bit of madness in him when his father and sister died.

"Yes," he replied, "I think we all, to a greater or lesser extent, go along the same journey. There are very few of us who escape it. It is not that the incidents [are the same], it is your reaction to the incident."

"I know people who go to pieces, and the people who remain calm will surprise you with their heroism. I know one thing that all of us in this life will confront: loss, separation, death, disappointment, great joy, great happiness, hope – all these things. These are the things that make us human. These are the things that make us feel we are living."

Happy birthday, Gabriel. Your movies have perhaps helped many of us feel we are living.

Holding tech giants to account and taking on Covid-19

Oxford academic Dr Jennifer Cassidy has represented Ireland at the UN and does book club with Samantha Power but in March, the coronavirus stopped her in her tracks. The digital diplomacy expert tells **Donal Lynch** about what she went through and explains why Ireland might soon need an ambassador to Facebook

DONAL, Stephen Fry once observed, "tend to be so horribly glib". He must not have met Dr Jennifer Cassidy, the brilliant and beautiful academic who has become one of the stars of Oxford University. Cassidy's area is digital diplomacy, an apposite speciality in an era of Trump, Twitter and Russian election meddling. The Dublin woman has hosted Ted Talks, represented Ireland at the UN in New York and helped to monitor elections in Cambodia. And she did all this before turning 33.

That recent birthday was celebrated in lockdown, and for Cassidy the pandemic has been eventful and occasionally traumatic. Weeks before Covid-19 officially took hold in the UK, Cassidy contracted the coronavirus. When she picked it up it was "the million dollar question", she says. She was involved in evacuating a student who came from Wuhan Province in China, but he was not believed to have passed it on. In February she had travelled to Italy with Ireland's Department of Foreign Affairs but she had also used the tube in London. So her provenance remains a mystery.

"One of the symptoms I'm highlighting is a lot, and it's not the most attractive but it is real, is nausea and stomach issues. Everyone was mentioning a cough but these were the first things I noticed. They were very bad. Since then many people presented with these same issues. I had to sleep with a bin beside my bed, it was that bad – that went on for a few days."

Jennifer was particularly worried because she'd had major surgery on her eye 18 months ago and felt that her immune system was still at a low ebb. She has a huge presence on social media and when she was laid low and failed to post updates to Twitter, some people became dramatically concerned. "A random Twitter follower called the police because I hadn't tweeted in five days," she says, adding that the man's fears were assuaged. "Another person told me they had checked ripple."

Her flatmate became ill as well but not as ill as Jennifer, who was hospitalised on March 22. "I was on a drip and had oxygen," she says. "It was quite frightening at the time but three or four days after that I was back to normal."

At that time there was no coordinated national response to Covid-19 in Britain and Jennifer was "horrified" at the now notorious press conference where Boris Johnson said the country would pursue a herd immunity strategy. "It was unbelievable how it was all handled. It was difficult even to get tested. I'm just very grateful I was able to get the care I needed."

Growing up in Dublin – she went to Wesley College – the want to become a violinist, but the upper echelons of excellence in that hyper-competitive field seemed unreachable. "I never won an academic prize but I loved history and I studied politics for undergrad in Trinity," she says. "I had a phenomenal lecturer (and former current affairs producer with RTE) called Jacqueline Hayden and it was a transformative class – she really changed my life."

Cassidy applied to Oxford, Cambridge and the London School of Economics and got into all three of them. She chose Oxford, where Professor Louise Richardson had become vice chancellor, the first Irish person to hold the prestigious post. Oxford, she says, was a culture shock in some ways.

"Although there's wealth in Ireland, I'd never seen wealth at that level. You did feel like you had to put on a face," she recalls. The intimidation factor of being surrounded by so many bright peers was also real: "I didn't speak once in the whole first term. I had huge impostor syndrome, even though I knew I earned my place."

'A random Twitter follower called the police because I hadn't tweeted in five days'

After Oxford, where she got another first, she represented Ireland as an attaché at the UN in New York. The assembly is organised alphabetically, she tells me, and she was stuck in block with Israel and Iran.

"Seeing that political theatre play out made me feel privileged and lucky to experience that high level of politics at the beginning of my career. It made me see politicians as human beings. Some of them were condescending to me. There were many comments about my age and gender, and that's why I wrote a book on gender and diplomacy."

She was also involved in election monitoring in Cambodia and says that sexism was worse there: "In Cambodia there was open sexism, and one of the reasons I left diplomacy was that I didn't want to dissent my whole life."

She went back to Oxford when Ireland had the presidency of the European Council.

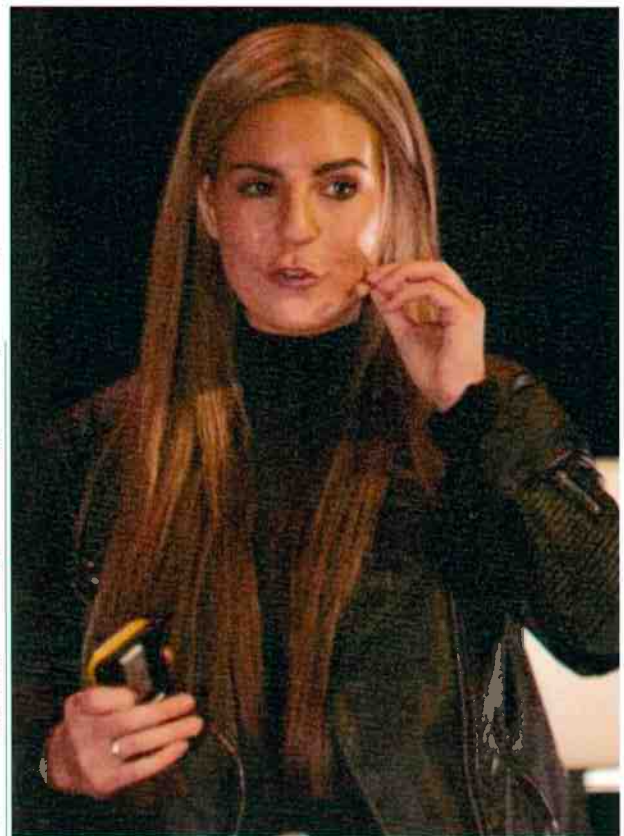
"At that time nobody was really using Twitter in diplomatic circles but I had a feeling it wouldn't stay out of the general assembly hall forever," she says. "For my PhD proposal I looked at whether social media could be used to interfere in elections online. Trump came along in the last year of my PhD and he basically proved my thesis."

At Oxford she is now part of a digital diplomacy research group which does consultancy work with different ministries abroad. She says that some countries have now tacitly acknowledged the enormous role that tech giants have in shaping elections and have, in effect, begun to treat them as states.

"Ambassador Casper Kyng (of Denmark) made history when he was first ambassador ever to Silicon Valley," she says. "The only other country which has followed suit is this is France."

"It should happen more in my opinion because there is no denying that these companies can shape diplomatic outcomes and elections more than states can."

"The problem is that they are not governed under international law. Whether they should be is a question I struggled with. Diplomatic bureaucracy is very slow-moving."



Dr Jennifer Cassidy celebrated her recent birthday in lockdown Oxford and is really missing her family in Ireland

Twitter can change its algorithms twice a day – we don't know whether this is the case. The law will never be able to keep up with the change of pace. There needs to be something to hold them to account, however."

She says all of the moving around made close relationships difficult. Her closest friend is a Saudi woman whose mother was the first female representative in the Saudi parliament. She says she had a romantic relationship that ended last year. "I ended it with him, I won't go into it."

She says that looking around at other women her age gives her pause. "My sister, for instance, is a year-and-a-half older than me. We're basically Irish twins. And she has a relationship, a second kid on the way, a house. And I don't think I'll ever own a house in my life on an academic salary. She runs her own business and I can't even drive."

There have been some small consolations to lockdown: she is involved in a virtual book club with former Barack Obama advisor Samantha Power – a particular thrill

for her. She continues to isolate at her rooms in Oxford.

"A few days ago I got quite low because I'd recovered and the reality bit," she explains. "My entire family was in Ireland and I was so looking forward to seeing my god-daughter. My sister was pregnant and I had my mother frisking out quite a bit."

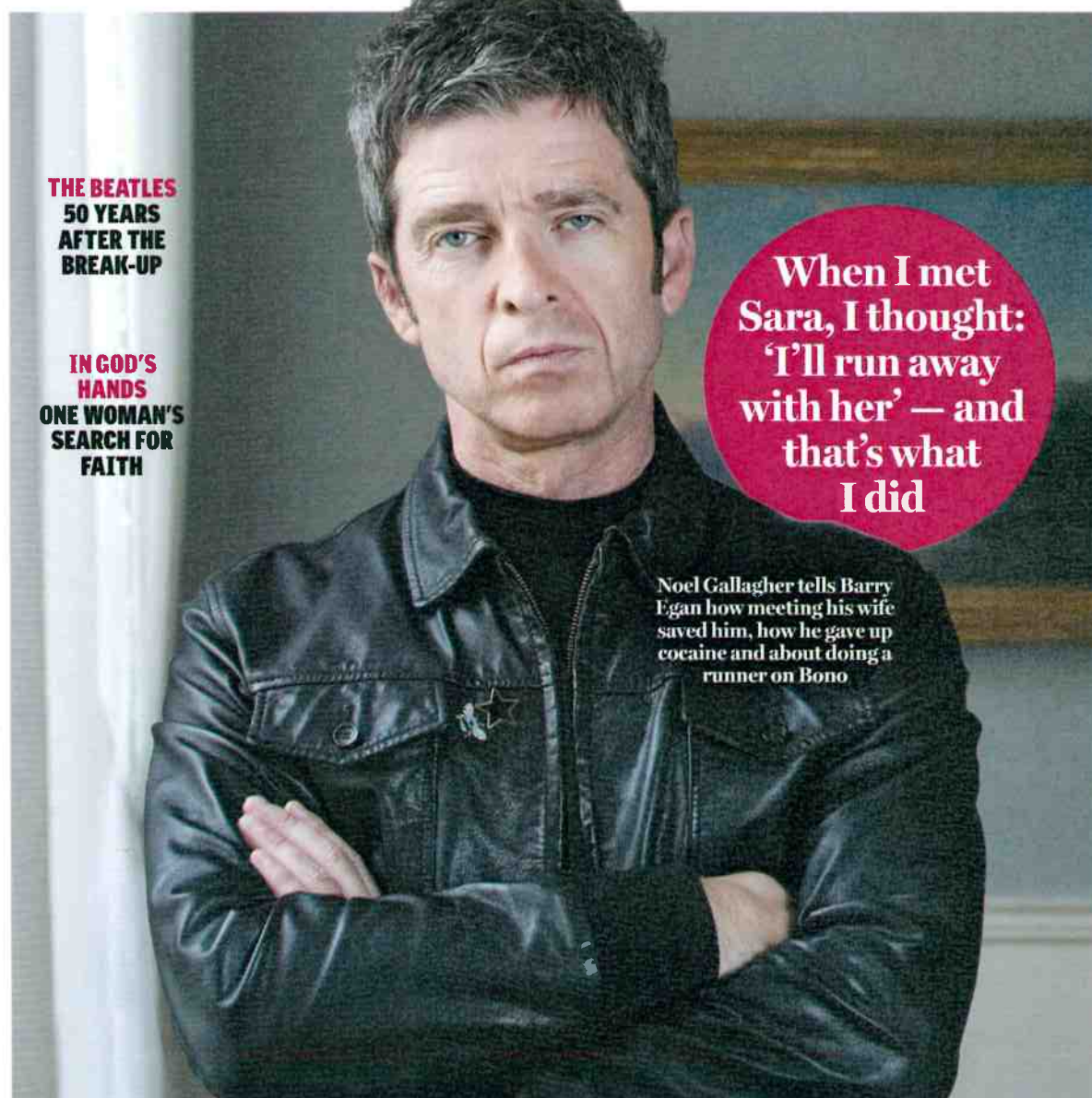
"I've tried to establish a routine but I'm the least domestic person you could meet. I'm just really looking forward to coming home and seeing everyone. That's going to make my year."

11 AUGUST 2019

Sunday Independent

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LIVING



THE BEATLES
50 YEARS
AFTER THE
BREAK-UP

**IN GOD'S
HANDS**
ONE WOMAN'S
SEARCH FOR
FAITH

When I met
Sara, I thought:
'I'll run away
with her' — and
that's what
I did

Noel Gallagher tells Barry
Egan how meeting his wife
saved him, how he gave up
cocaine and about doing a
runner on Bono

INSIDE: PEOPLE, PLACES, RELATIONSHIPS, CULTURE, INTERVIEWS AND REVIEWS

'I did a runner on Bono one night'

In an exclusive Irish interview, Noel Gallagher tells **Barry Egan** about quitting cocaine, selling his party house Supernova Heights, the break-up of his marriage to Meg Mathews — plus 'running away' with second wife Sara MacDonald — no longer wanting to flog the British royal family, and his beloved mother Peggy

NOEL Gallagher is smaller in person than he appears on stage in front of thousands upon thousands of people. The smiling Mancunian — who prefigured *Game Of Thrones* Robb Stark as the original King of the North — once quipped: "I said we were bigger than God, but what I meant to say was taller. I believe Jesus was 5ft 7in and I'm 5ft 8 and a half." Over the next 60 minutes, Noel will be a giant of ragged wit and uncensored repartee.

There was a headline a few years ago which read, 'Noel Gallagher got so drunk with Bono on tour that he tried to escape'.

What was Noel escaping from? "Being f***king drunk!" he laughs. "It sounds like a scene from the movie *Withnail & I*, I joke."

"No! No! No! [laughing] when you've had enough, you've had enough!" reflects Noel (who in 2000 jokingly told *The Guardian* that he has three pints of Guinness "and then falls over").

The epically charismatic U2 star

Bono is probably not the easiest person to say goodnight to. Did Noel have to do a runner on Bono?

"I did do a runner! I was staying at his house. But he f***king knows how to throw a party. I'll say that."

So does Noel Gallagher. His one-time mansion, Supernova Heights in north London, has long-since passed into Bacchanalian legend. "You know what? I only had that house for two and a half years."

Did Noel sell the house when he gave up drugs?

"Yes, is the short answer to that. I had the house for two and a half years and it felt like a f***king lifetime. It felt like I lived in there for a lifetime, for a decade."

Could anyone just call up to the house?

"Not anyone. But to be honest, though, on more than more occasion, you'd look around the room and I'd say to somebody: 'Who the f***k is that guy there?' 'Oh, he delivered the pizzas here about four or five hours ago'. It was great. Steve Coogan was my answering machine message."

And Kate Moss was a regular guest. On one occasion, when the British supermodel had been staying at Supernova Heights for a couple of weeks, Noel was going in through the

gates when four young girls pressed books into his hands and asked him for Kate's autograph.

"You're coming round 'ere, to my house, asking for supermodel autographs? Do you not want mine?" Well, I'll tell you what, you're not going until you have mine. You're having my autograph now!" the Oasis superstar told them.

"Supernova Heights was great for the time but then there came a point when I thought: 'I need to get out of this'."

Where did he go?

"I went out to the country. Unfortunately, the party followed out to the country. And what happened then is, they would just f***king stay forever. It was at that point where I was, 'I need to get f***king rid of all these people'."

And how do you that, I ask?

"Well, I had to. It was coming to the end of my marriage [to Meg Mathews, his wife from 1997 to 2001, and mother of daughter Anais] and all that. 'They've all got to go'. At that point [clicks fingers], which is incredible... when I think of it now... within two months of that thought, I'm thinking 'How do I do it? What do I do?'. I met Sara, and that was the catalyst for everything. And I

was just like 'Well, I'll run away with her, then. That's what I'll do'. And that's what I did," he says of Sara MacDonald whom he met in Ibiza. They married in June, 2011 — Russell Brand was the best man — and have two sons, Donovan, born September 22, 2007, and Sonny, born October 1, 2010.

Is the lyric from 2000's *Where Did It All Go Wrong?* ("Do you keep the receipts, for the friends that you buy?") about the discarded friends from Supernova Heights?

"Yeah," he nods. "I didn't see those people for a good five or six years. We've since all re-acquainted and become friends again. We were all too up in each other's faces 24 hours a day."

What did his mother think of Noel with all that gang?

"I didn't ask her. It goes back: once you leave home, mums don't have an opinion any more. If she is complaining about shit now, I'll say, 'You are f***king aware that I'm 52. Okay? I'm sorry. Those days are over. Over.' But you know, parents are parents. I'll be the same with my kids. I'll be giving out to them when I'm Peggy's age."

Will Noel ever make up with his father Tommy?

"I wouldn't have thought so, no." Will Noel be on his deathbed and wish he had reconciled his differences with his father?

"No. No. He doesn't mean anything to me."

There were good times like when he used to bring Noel to the football as a kid, I begin and then stop.

"Right," says Noel with a quizzical look that says 'Your point is?'

"The bad stuff completely outweighs the good stuff. Okay, he got me into supporting Man City. Thanks a lot. That's the least you could f***king do for me."

Is it true that a Manchester United fan broke Noel's nose?

"I did get in a City and United fight, yeah, in the late... maybe the mid 1980s in Manchester. I woke up in a bus-stop [laughing] and the only memory I had before that was that I

'We didn't want the kids growing up in London... We've had two stabbings outside our house in the last while'

INTERVIEW

guest of new Prime Minister Tony Blair, and he thought of Mr Howard: 'I hope you're f***king watching this now!'

"There were things surrounding my visit to Number 10 that I had never seen on TV," Noel says looking back. "There was something on *Newsnight* where Jeremy Paxman said, 'These are the kind of people that they are letting into the corridors of power now' — meaning me! I don't know what to make of all that episode. It was just a crazy f***king time."

You rocked up to 10 Downing Street in a Rolls-Royce, I say.

"Me and Alan [McGee, head of his record company Creation, and the man who signed Oasis in 1993]. Alan had bought me the Rolls-Royce the previous Christmas."

And you couldn't drive, I say.

"I still can't! I never had a driving licence. Yeah, we turned up at 10 Downing Street. It was 1997. I had only signed off the dole four years previously. Do you know what I mean? So, I was like, 'This is f***king insane!' Alan used to work in British Rail and all that. We were two working class guys who conquered the music business."

"I remember him saying to me; 'They [Tony Blair, etc] really want to meet you! I was like, 'What do they want to meet me for?' 'Well, you pretty much helped get them [New Labour and Tony Blair] elected'. I was like, 'Yeah, but, I'm not...' Alan was like, 'Come and meet them...'"

Did Noel's pal Paul Weller say to him at the time anything along the lines of how he had been messed about and used by the Labour Party in the mid 1980s with Red Wedge (a collective of well-known musicians such as The Specials, The Smiths, Billy Bragg and Weller, who attempted to engage young people with Labour politics)? "I didn't canvass much opinion about it. I said to Alan, 'All right, go on then! I got the invite, we went and that was it.'"

Afterwards? "I kind of knew we'd get a bit of flak afterwards. Writers from *The Guardian* and the *Mirror* were like, 'What the f***k is he doing there?' and that kind of thing. But I didn't canvass opinion. Yeah, Weller had been burned by Red Wedge. His view of it — politicians — actually holds true today. He said they're all c***ts. You think because it's people from the Labour Party but they're all in it; it's all sleaze; they're all in it for themselves. It's rare that there's politicians who want to serve their country. Even that's f***king suspicious. It's very rare. And I think the same thing now. I've met — and do receive — politicians from time to time. They're as bad as each other, all of them. All of them."

Who would he vote for?

"I wouldn't vote for anyone," says Noel. "I was New Labour all the way. I believed in that. I believed in that dance he [Tony Blair] did along the middle of the two parties. How he did it was f***king genius. You know, how to get *The Sun* onside and get their readers to vote for Labour is one of the greatest magic tricks that has ever been pulled off by a politician. And that to me was when I was really passionate about what was going on in the country. Now the extreme or the right wing and the left, they're all the same. There's liberal fascists. There's right-wing fascists. It's on the rise in England."

Noel, after he came out of Number 10 Downing Street in 1997, said he thought he going to get a knight-hood. Would he have accepted it?

"No, no. I was hoping I'd get a backhand on the tax bill!"

Would Noel abolish the British royal family?

"What I think about the royal family is, it's not their fault, those kids who are born into it. Say William and Harry, for example, are born into it. That's their life. It's not the people themselves. It's the institution of us being subjects to these people who make a lot of money from land that was taken from ordinary people. I don't feel passionate enough where I'd have them all f***king lined up and f***king shot!"

You've changed, I tease. In 2000, you said you would have the royal family publicly flogged before you named them!

"Well, that was... what? Nineteen years ago!" he laughs.

You also said that the Duke of Edinburgh should lose a leg!

He positively cackles with laughter this time. "That doesn't surprise me!" It shouldn't surprise any discerning followers of popular culture that the man sitting opposite me cackling like a broken drain at Buckingham Palace wrote some of the greatest songs of the 1990s. Songs that are played at funerals and weddings. Songs that have the power to halt time. Songs that changed the world.

Oasis were formed in Manchester in 1991 when Noel joined his younger brother Liam's band, then called The Rain. They released their zeitgeist-defining debut album *Definitely Maybe* in 1994 and the following year (*What's The Story? Morning Glory?*), which became one of the biggest selling UK albums of all time, and one of the best.

In 1996, Oasis played two nights at Knebworth to an audience of 125,000 a night.

The writing was soon on the wall for the group with their 1997 album *Be Here Now*, a creative low which was matched in 2000 by *Standing on the Shoulder of Giants*.

In August 2009, Noel left the band after a row backstage in Paris with Liam. He would go on to form Noel Gallagher's High Flying Birds.

Warm and witty in person, a storyteller as fine as Noel Gallagher is engaging company to while away an afternoon with.

Does he still have the two cats, Benson & Hedges?

"No, Benson & Hedges went back to the cattery. My cat is called Boots."

I heard a rumour that Noel was a massive fan of *MasterChef*. Is this true? "I wouldn't say I'm a massive fan. But every time there's a new series of *MasterChef*, there's always this thing where I always seem to have 12 weeks off where I can sit and watch it. So, I missed *The Wire* and f***king *Breaking Bad* and all that because I was away on tour, but, for some reason, I'm always around for *MasterChef*. We do like it as a family. The four of us will sit down. The kids love it."

Does Noel cook?

"Do I f***k. [Laughing] No! That's what I got f***king married for! [Laughing]. I don't cook. Sara could run a restaurant, she is that good a cook. I mean, when she goes away I won't starve. I mean, I can cook."



Noel with wife Sara, son Donovan and his daughter Anais



The Gallaghers with mum Peggy in the 1970s



Noel and Liam in Hong Kong with Oasis in 2006

Noel tells the story of when he and Sara were looking at a house in London a few years ago, whereupon the estate agent mentions that there was a flat at the end of the garden that could be converted.

"I'll have that as a creative space. And Sara said, 'For what? What do you want a creative space for?' 'To write songs'. And she said, 'I've never seen you write any songs'. I was like, 'Are you being f***king serious?' 'Well, I've never seen you write any'. But you do accept that I do write them?' 'I've just never seen you write any!' I still to this day don't have a f***king studio."

I ask does U2's Adam Clayton still live on their street in London's Little Venice district.

"Yeah, he's on my street. He's my neighbour. He lives about five doors down," he says. "We're just about to move out to Hampshire," he adds. "We didn't want the kids growing up in London."

Paparazzi?

"No. We've had two stabbings outside our house in the last while. I live as you can quite imagine in quite an affluent area. At one end of the street is one housing estate and the other end is another housing estate, and they are currently at war."

"One guy was multiple stabbed in the middle of the f***king day and an air ambulance had to come and land in the middle of the street and all the streets [around] were taped off. Anyway, our lad is 11 and is now coming to go to secondary school and we were just saying it would be too f***king stressful if he is on the Tube and he is coming home and he is being mugged for his phone. So we decided that we are going to go out to the country and put them to school in the country. We'll just commute into London."

The famous monobrow still wobbles when he laughs. Which is a lot. He is a mystic Manc giving glimpses into how he arrived at the happy place he occupies now. Compare the sublime new single *This Is The Place* ("It's about the journey of life, and finding a place," he explains) to the warp-speed drug-paranoia of *Gas Panic* from 2000: "My eyes are dead

and my throat's like a black hole/ And if there's a god would he give another chance/ An hour to sing for his soul."

How does Noel look back on the man who wrote that?

"Well, I'm not a drug addict any more. So, that's the main difference."

Was Noel too working class and too cool to go to the Priory, the celeb-tastic private mental health hospital in London?

"I don't think I was too working class. I don't think I was too cool. I didn't need to. I didn't need to do it," he says, of going to the Priory.

"I woke up one morning and said: 'That's it! I gave up smoking by accident. I just didn't have another f***king cigarette. It wasn't,' says Noel, adopting a cringe-inducing Alan Partridge-style voice. "Today I am going to attempt to give up smoking. [Similarly] I'd had enough of drugs. I think at the time I was thinking that I'm going to give up drugs for f***king six months and see what happens."

"I wasn't planning on such a major lifestyle change. But after about two weeks, I was like, 'I f***king much prefer this! Much prefer it. And then... I haven't looked back. It doesn't bother me. I can sit in a room full of people doing f***king mountains of cocaine — it doesn't bother me in the slightest."

You haven't turned into a just-say-no preacher-y bore, I say?

"No. Not at all. I could sit with people smoking and all that. You just know that when the coke comes out, the night is going to take a shit turn. It's always like fun and games and once someone gets the coke out, then all of a sudden it's, 'Well, it's time for me to go anyway, because this is now boring'."

Has he written songs on cocaine back in the day and listened to them back and thought it was complete gibberish?

"Yeah. But I've written songs on coke and it's been complete gibberish and it has been f***king amazing. *Supersonic* (from 1994's *Definitely Maybe* album), for instance. Do you know what I mean? Then I've written shit like a lot of *Standing On The Shoulders Of Giants* [the forgettable 2000 album] where I had nothing to say. And I was literally trying to make the words rhyme because we had a tour booked and we had to go on tour. But that's part of it."

Does Noel still think Eminem is an idiot?

"Er, he is one of those guys that goes into rehab and then they sing about it for the next 20 years. 'You did a bit of f***king coke. You had a drink. Haven't we all! [Claps hands]' 'I have never felt the need to be one of those f***king people. It's boring. But writing songs about drugs is as boring as writing songs about coming out the other side of drugs.'"

Noel Gallagher's High Flying Birds will release *This Is The Place*, a new EP, on September 27. The title track from the EP and accompanying video are available now. www.noelgallagher.com/



You can read Barry Egan's unexpurgated interview with Noel at Independent.ie

Noel Gallagher, in The Merrion Hotel, Dublin.
Photo: Tony Gavin

was not in a bus stop!"

I return to his beloved mother Peggy who famously rang him up to remind him that she didn't bring him up to say things like that when he told *The Observer* in 1995 that he hoped Damon Albarn from Blur would get "Aids and die".

Did he get many other irate calls from Peggy about things he has said in the media?

"Only the usual, you know, about Liam" (about whom I have been forbidden from asking questions. "That's about it. But it's like, once you get to a certain age it's — 'Mam, I'm not f***king 19 any more!'")

What about his comment in January, 1997 that "taking drugs is like having a cup of tea?"

"Well, I've been taking drugs since I've been 14. But she wasn't too blown away by that comment."

Nor was then Home Secretary, Michael Howard, who was quoted as saying in the House Of Commons that Noel should be kicked out of the country.

"That was one of the best days of my life! Michael Howard!" Noel laughs all these years on.

Further merriment was enjoyed on July 30, 1997 when Noel arrived at Number 10 Downing Street as a



BLAZING A TRAIL

Tracy Piggott tells Paul Kimmage about life as Lester's daughter and learning to love again Pages 8&9

SPORT



DERBY DAY

Klopp's focus on future as Liverpool close in on Premier League title Page 5

HUNGER GAMES

Eamonn Sweeney and Joe Brolly on Marcus Rashford's appeal Pages 6&12



BEING KEANE

ROY KEANE EXCLUSIVE

'I'm not into all this legend stuff'

BARRY EGAN

It was early September last year and Roy Keane was in Dublin with Gary Neville for a gig at the Bord Gáis Energy Theatre, talking about their Manchester United glory years. At the Mariner Hotel, alongside the theatre, I was introduced to Keane a few hours before he went on stage. I'd never spoken to him before, but we got talking over a coffee. It was a chat, not an interview – that much was made clear. Very definitely not an interview.

The previous weekend, Dublin and Kerry had played out a draw in the All-Ireland football final. Had I been to the game, he asked? I told him I'd spent the day at Temple Street Hospital with my four-year-old after she'd broken her arm at the playground.

"That's not a real injury," he smiled. "She could have gotten the bus in herself!"

Off to the side, he photographed a white napkin from a table nearby for my son and said goodbye.

That week, I emailed his agent about a possible interview. It was positively declined... maybe some other time.

That usually means 'never', but every now and then this business

can surprise you. Nine months later, locked down at home along with the rest of us, Keane had the time and the inclination to talk. We agreed to speak at 1pm the following day. He called right on the button.

It was a week before he returned – explosively – in a TV analyst role with Sky Sports, savaging Manchester United goalkeeper David de Gea and defender Harry Maguire at half-time in Friday's 1-1 draw at Wembley. For many, the real talking point on the night was Keane, rather than the game.

But that was hardly a surprise, for he has always been box office.

Barry Egan: What's the difference between Roy Keane, the football legend

and Roy Keane, the man who walks his dog?

Roy Keane: I'm not into all this legend stuff. You put your boots on now and you're a legend, particularly in Ireland. You play five games for Ireland and you're a legend. You score one goal you're a legend. Scratch your arse and you're a legend. When I was going to matches – and I had this throughout my career, going back to Rockmount – I was going to work.

I was going to work. And I'd like to think I am a different person away from my job. I'm not saying it's chalk and cheese, but I was going to earn a living, trying to help my team win a match. At every level I have played, I was trying to win matches. Since I was eight years of age, I took

football very, very seriously.

BE: Do you ever think about things like your legacy?

RK: Nah, listen. That's certainly not something I would be comfortable with. That's not my scene. If I had a bucket in front of me now, I'd be throwing up.

BE: If I told you that you couldn't play, you'd be more comfortable with that, wouldn't you?

RK: I'm more comfortable with criticism. You're right.

BE: Why?

RK: It keeps you on your toes.

BE: Did you get positive stuff from your family growing up?

RK: [Laughs] No, not really! Are you joking? I still haven't got it. Christ almighty! It didn't work that way, as you know. Typical Irish family. Just

got on with it. My family will probably tell me that my three brothers were better players than me.

BE: And were they?

RK: I'd say so, yeah. They were very good players. They played at a very good level. And if they had the luck I had, it could have been them. Most sports people weren't as good as they thought they were. I never won a trophy in my career at Man United or Celtic or Rockmount. The team did.

BE: Where did that come from?

RK: From eight years of age I played the game to win. Would I give that advice to kids now? Obviously not. But I played to win.

BE: I played to win.

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GAA relax lockdown restrictions

DERMOT CROWE

AFTER a 13-week lockdown, the GAA yesterday announced that its grounds will re-open on Wednesday, five days earlier than initially intended. It follows the easing of government restrictions on Friday and the latest recommendations from the Covid-19 Advisory Committee that met yesterday morning.

The previous reopening date for clubs was June 29.

From Wednesday, adult teams will be allowed train on a non-contact basis, on the understanding that they follow strict protocols, with minor and all juvenile teams granted permission to return on Saturday.

All teams will be allowed to resume full contact training and play challenge matches from June 29 but logging of attendance and sanitising protocols will remain in place.

The other significant announcement, made jointly by the GAA, the Camogie

Association and the Ladies Gaelic Football Association, is the approval of a return to club competition from Friday, July 17, two weeks ahead of the original schedule on the GAA's roadmap to recovery.

There has been no change to the proposed inter-county return dates, with September 18 earmarked for the resumption of training and October 17 as the starting point for competition. That stretches the club competition window from 11 to 13 weeks.

In order to return to training club players and mentors need to have completed an e-learning module and a health questionnaire. Before full contact is allowed on June 29, all training sessions will have an upper limit of 15 players in any single group in the 26 counties, with a maximum of 50 permitted in the six counties north of the border.

The GAA said it was "awaiting guidance" from the Northern Ireland Executive in relation to forming proposals for the six counties around contact training.

Restrictions on non-participants at training will also be relaxed from June 29. From then on a maximum of 200 people may be allowed in each ground which is

in line with government guidelines. In recent weeks club volunteers have been familiarising themselves with obligations and measures put in place for a return to activity, including the appointment of designated Covid-19 officers in each club.

Teams have been resuming training activity outside of club grounds – some in O'Leary even used bags – despite the fact that they were not covered by the GAA's insurance scheme. They were not breaching any laws provided they maintained the required social distance and took the relevant precautions.

For now, club dressing rooms remain closed until July 20, and the Advisory Committee is in the process of deciding what approach to take with other GAA buildings such as club bars, gyms, hiring walls and handball alleys. Guidance on this is expected before June 29 and those restrictions may also be eased.

Yesterday's news followed the announcement by GAA of its Return To Play roadmap published on June 5 and will be welcomed by club players and mentors. The earlier return to competition allows county committees an extra two weeks to schedule fixtures before the county

season resumes. Already the matter has sparked controversy with some counties deemed to be over-compensating their schedules in order to allow county team preparation for October.

Liam Griffin, a prominent member of the Club Players' Association, said that the GAA at national level needed to hold county boards accountable.

He said that any perception that county committees were favouring inter-county interests in not making full use of the current window would "further undermine the GAA in the eyes of the ordinary club player".

Griffin added: "If what the GAA has called for is not being carried out, and it is not being carried out because you have independent referees doing it their way, then what is the point if it cannot be enforced?"

The AFL has confirmed a first Covid-19 case among its players, with Tyrone's Connor McKenna testing positive. The former Tyrone player, now with Enniscorthy, had been back in Ireland during the pandemic and is reported to have tested negative for the virus five times before the positive test yesterday.

Arteta hits out at 'unacceptable' loss

ARSENAL manager Mikel Arteta described as "unacceptable" the way his side conceded two late goals to lose 2-1 at Brighton and Hove Albion yesterday, their second defeat since the restart of the Premier League.

Nicolas Pépé's delightful free kick looked like giving Arsenal the points but Lewis Dunk equalised for the hosts before Neal Maupay struck five minutes into stoppage time.

Defeat left Arsenal in ninth spot in the table, six points behind fifth-placed Manchester United.

"I am very frustrated," Arteta said. "It is unacceptable the way we lost the game. We like competing and I know we have a young squad but still, we threw the game away. We had to put it to bed earlier."

Before the Premier League was suspended, Arsenal were on a three-game winning run in the league that had revived their hopes of qualifying for Europe. However, after losing to Manchester City

on Wednesday and now Brighton, it looks a tough task.

"We need to try to lift the players. There's a lot of things that they've done really well, but we don't compete," Arteta said. "At this level you can't give the goals that we give away."

"It's impossible. I know that we are a very, very young team but in the Premier League if you make two mistakes like this, you lost two goals. We can't accept that. Arsenal also lost 'keeper Bernd Leno to a knee injury after he tangled with Maupay if you make two mistakes like this, you lost two goals. We can't accept that."

"None of our players need to learn what is humility – especially one of them," said Maupay. "He was talking all game, he was saying bad things. I don't want to say because I could be in trouble. I just said that this is what happens when you talk too much on the pitch. I just went for the ball. I am that type of player – I don't want to stop until the referee blows the whistle."

Continued on Page 2



'From eight years of age I played the game to win. Would I give that advice to kids now? Obviously not. But I played to win.'

Continued from Page 1

I was from a competitive family. I'm a Keeno, but my mother's a Leach. Sport is in her family. I have sport running through my blood. So, along the way, I was going to push people. I had to.

A good old Irish friend said to me years ago, 'Boy, you just need to lighten up a small bit.' And I try. I try to lighten up. But regarding football, I couldn't lighten up, because if I lightened up too much in football, I would never have got to England. And if I did, I wouldn't have lasted two minutes.

I had to be intense. I had to train properly. I had to push myself. I had to push people around me. I don't make apologies for that. That was who I was. Even pre-season, any game I ever took it easy in, I guarantee you I was the worst player on the park. I couldn't do it. I just couldn't do it. It just wasn't in my make-up. And sometimes that would rattle a few people, even in training. I'd go, 'I can't do it [take it easier]. I wish I could. I just can't.' I wish I had. You know when you want to let a bit of steam off? I couldn't. If I thought, 'We've no game for two weeks and my hamstring is a bit tight, I'll just go easy, I couldn't do it. I had to be full on.'

RE: Why was that?
AS: Fear. Fear of failure. Fear of letting people down. When I came to England, I had wanted to be a professional player for a long time. I wanted to win trophies. I wanted security for my family. I wanted a nice house. I wanted a nice holiday. I wanted a nice car.
RE: What are you frightened of now?
AS: Some people who have that fear earlier on in life, it just keeps transferring on to other fears.
RE: Not for me, thank God. It was that football bubble that I was in. There is no guarantee that I'll be doing TV next year. There are no deals lined up. I'm speaking to one or two, [but] if none of these things fall into place I am actually quite relaxed. And maybe that's because I am out of football now.

RE: I have always loved the game. I wanted a nice house. I wanted a nice holiday. I wanted a nice car.

don't always like what goes on around the game. If people want to plagiarise me and say, 'Here's this or that, the legend stuff, or he's an oddball...'. Here, my job was to win football matches. And generally speaking, the teams I played with were all okay with my attitude to the game. Did I always get it right? I made mistakes, like everybody else.

RE: What mistakes did you make?
AS: Stuff like letting teammates down by getting sent off. Sometimes I would try and push them. Sometimes I was too soft. If I was critical, looking back on my own career and how I dealt with people, even in management — and people mightn't believe this — but I reckon that sometimes I was too nice to people.

RE: Too nice?
AS: Absolutely, yeah. That was one of my weaknesses. Being too nice. I try and look after people. I try and please people. And you end up trying to please everyone, and we all know what happens to people who try to please everyone. You come unstuck. I had that in my career.

The bottom line is, I finished at 34 because of the injuries. The guilt is part of being a sportsman. You play when you shouldn't, not the other way around. I put my body on the line when really I should have been strong enough to say, 'I'm not fit today. I'm not fit to train.' I was constantly pushing myself. And you get criticised for missing games because you were injured. As I say, all the experts are out there.

There is always that element going on when you are in top level sport. Even dealing with managers or players, sometimes I turned a blind eye. I was too nice to them. And then eventually when people trust you and they think they've got... what's the word I'm looking for? Eventually they think they can take the mick out of you. Obviously people stab you in the back. People stabbed me right in my chest, it wasn't in my back. Because I was too nice to them.
RE: Who stabbed you in the chest?
AS: There's plenty. There's plenty.

Plenty stabbed me right in the chest. People who I thought I trusted throughout my life, whether it be contract stuff, managers. People. That's what they do. That's the nature of the game we're in, with football. I understand that. It's tough going. You're battling on the pitch. You're battling off the pitch, whether it be injuries or contracts [or] the way people are treating you. And sometimes you have to put a front on.

Because of the position I played, in the middle of the park, people were hitting me. I was hitting them. Every time people talk about my career they talk about the people I tackled or hurt, forgetting obviously that I was hurt quite a number of times myself. But that's the kind of game people play. That's the deal. It's give and take. But this idea that you're working with good people all the time... I've been very, very lucky. Some of the best people in my life, the majority of people I know, are through football. But I met people as well who I still regret that I got involved with. A number of people. People I trusted.

RE: You're talking about Fergie [Alex Ferguson].

AS: I'm talking about a number of people. Listen, don't be putting words in my mouth here. I'm talking about a number of people here and not automatically just United. I have been involved with other clubs. And I have been involved with Ireland. And from a player's point of view, I have been involved with off-the-field stuff, whether it be people doing contracts... whatever it might be. And there are a number of people who I look back now and go, 'Shame. Shame on you.'

RE: Was it that much of a shock to you that a big corporation like Manchester United would treat you the way they did in the end?

AS: I didn't say it was a shock. Where did I say it was a shock? I never mentioned United. But in this way: I'm certainly not the first or the last player to be treated badly by a club. I read that poor Terry Dennis passed away the other day and from what I hear, and read, and I know you can't believe everything, he was very disappointed with the way he was treated. So, again, I'm not the first. It doesn't keep me awake at night.

RE: Is there anything that does?

AS: At the moment, no. No. No. Sleeping well.

RE: What about Covid-19?

AS: You know, I haven't been too bad. I know people are suffering and it has been a huge setback. Obviously, I am very lucky. I was supposed to have some work, the usual stuff. I had the Euros coming up. But in terms of dealing with it and being in the house with the family and all, if I'm honest, I've enjoyed it. I've enjoyed the bit of not chasing around. I've enjoyed getting myself a bit fatter. I've been out of me like.

We've got a pool in our house, luckily enough, which I've cursed for the last 13 years. But the last two months I've not been out of it. I've really got into the bit of swimming, the bit of exercise, and obviously I've got my couple of dogs. There's lovely walks near where I live.

I've missed the football. I miss getting back to Ireland. This is the biggest I've not been back to Ireland for a number of years. There is obviously a huge downside now. People are a lot worse off and struggling and so many have died. But in my own house, we coped okay with it.

RE: What else are you doing with yourself?

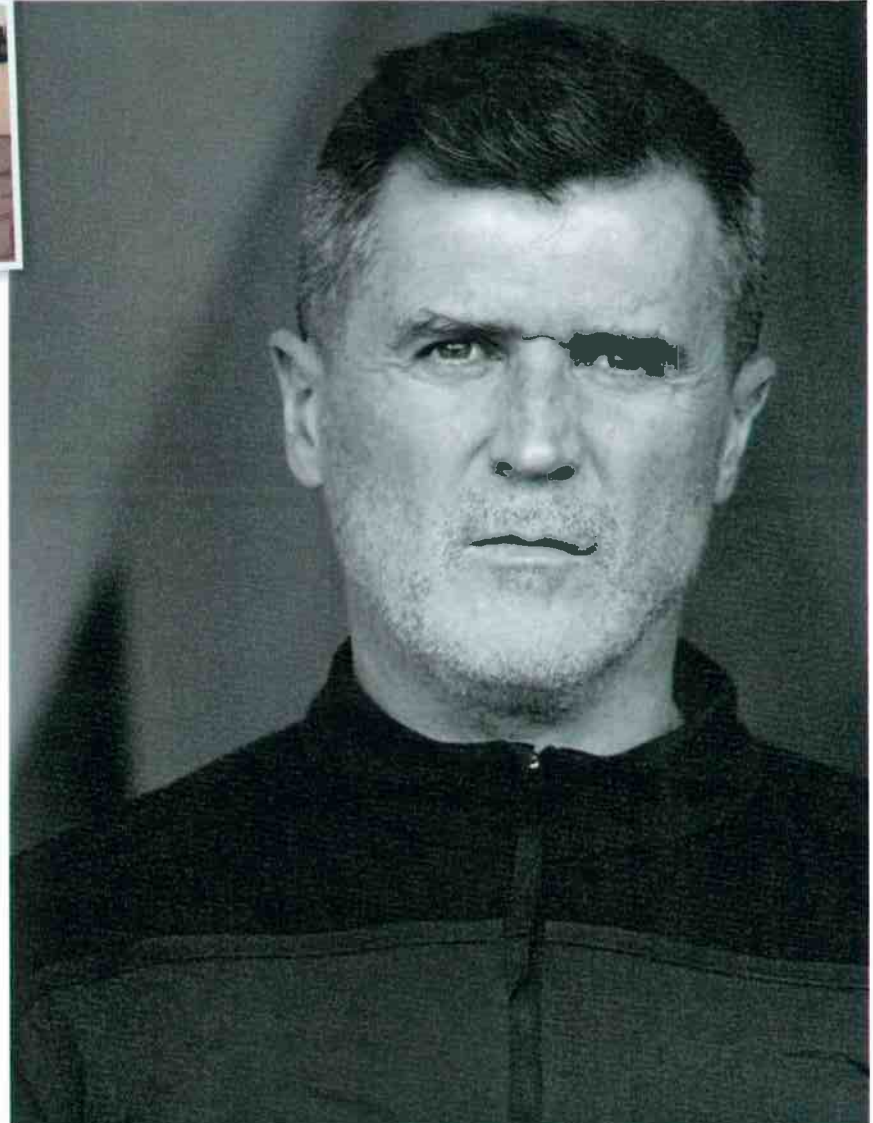
AS: I've managed to get back into a bit of reading over the last one or two months. I've not actually been watching that much television, which is unlike me. It goes to show I'm just used to watching football. When there is football on, I have watched one or two old matches on the television. I watched Liverpool v Aberdeen from 1979 the other night. I really enjoyed that. I also watched two old United games.

RE: What have you been reading?
AS: I read Woody Allen's book a couple of weeks ago and I really enjoyed it. I was laughing out loud. I enjoyed him. He was funny. At the moment I'm reading something a bit heavier, *Eastern 1916*, about the Irish rebellion. I wish I listened a bit more at school during my history lessons, but I'm enjoying it.

RE: What do you think of the rise of Shin Keen in Ireland?

AS: Ah, listen, I just started out reading this book. I don't want to go there.

RE: Apart from Woody Allen, what else makes you laugh? I watched an old clip of you throwing the ball at Alan



I'm not going to beat myself up about it. I was always waking that few few away but that was the gig I had. I had to play on the edge. But that was stupid. That's not playing on the edge, that was stupidity.



Shearer at Newcastle in 2001 and I laughed.

RE: No, that wouldn't make me laugh. It would make me think that ultimately I'm getting sent off and letting my teammates down. I'm not going to beat myself up about it. I was always waking that few few away but that was the gig I had. I had to play on the edge. But that was stupid. That's not playing on the edge, that was stupidity.

RE: What's the biggest mistake people make about you?
AS: I don't know. There's a lot of people coming out. There's been a lot of stuff about me. People on podcasts and this and that. All these stories, and I'd say 99 per cent of them are certainly not true and the other per cent is highly exaggerated. So, these constant stories, whatever is put out there. Whether it be the way I handled players or whatever it might be, when I left United or with Ireland or with different people... I get pigeonholed. It's hard to shake that off. So people might be a bit wary, shall we say: I don't know.

RE: Do you care what people think of you?

AS: I think nobody likes to be criticised. Criticism is part of the game. I have never minded being criticised but I think there comes a point, when people literally are telling lies about you, I'm including media with that. I don't just mean players. You certainly know it is not going to help you get back into work quickly. But that's up to people. They can carry around their own guilt, if they want to tell lies about people. And I do mean lies.

RE: I think people's memories play

tricks on them. And I'm sure also that they get stitched up themselves in things they've said. But you asked me to do these things keep me awake at night. No. I'm okay.

RE: How do you reflect on Saignes in 2002 now?

AS: Saignes? Well, if you want to analyse that spell in my career, I always think you should look at what management and playing is. And when you're a manager you want players to go out and have a go for you. We played 10 games in the [qualifying] group. I think we were unbeaten in 10. I'm not saying that was down to me. But I would like to think I helped the team.

Obviously I played the first game of the play-offs [against Iran], missed the second leg. Again, I finished when I was 34, and all of a sudden I am having all these accusations made against me in front of a group of players about a game I missed. But it is a case for me to understand. That's for other people to sort out themselves.

All of a sudden I'm having a manager [Nick McCarthy] making accusations about me about a game I missed, and who, all of a sudden, was a medical expert. You know?

But instead of focusing on Saignes and what happened, I do count my blessings that I played in '94. I think if I had never played in the World Cup that would have been... I just played in '94. Again, my relationship when I was with Ireland was slightly different to at club level. But when I was playing with Ireland, my job was to give my best — and I did.

When people say, 'I love playing for my country', I get fed up with that. As if you need to say that. I never used to say it. When I hear people get interviewed [saying] 'I love my children', I'm like, 'What? Now need to say that you love playing for your country?' I was constantly fed up with people saying that. I was fortunate to play for the

under 16s, 21s, Ireland Youth. I think I played 67 times [for the senior team] and considering I missed three years when I left after Saignes and I was out with a cruciate for a year, I have no guilt whatsoever about any issue I had with the Irish team. I enjoyed it. It's just unfortunate. But that's for other people to answer.

I don't understand why a manager would get worked up about a player having missed a game when we had already qualified. It's bizarre, really. But then again, I shouldn't be surprised.

I was fortunate to play under some brilliant managers. But I also played under one or two shit managers. I saw an interview the other night — Alan Shearer was interviewing Terry Venables.

I'm like, What? You need to say that you love playing for your country?

lies about England in the 1996 Euros when they got in trouble for the dentist's chair and allegedly they damaged it. There was drink involved, whatever. And Alan Shearer said, 'Do you think the players let you down?' Terry Venables, who is a pretty good manager, a pretty experienced manager, said, 'No, no, my job was to focus on winning football matches.' Maybe if other people I worked with just focused on trying to win football matches or not get stupid advice from people, or go on an ego trip, then I don't think that would have happened [in Saignes]. But that's not my stuff to deal with.

RE: What was the going through your head on the plane home?

AS: You've got to be careful there. Because when I hear people talk about

NEXT WEEK People spend two minutes in your company and they think they're friends with you. My God... come on!

I was too nice to them. People stab you in the back. People stabbed me right in my chest, it wasn't in my back. Because I was too nice to them



'All of a sudden I'm having a manager making accusations about me about a game I missed, and was, all of a sudden, was a medical expert'

stuff that happened 20, 30 years ago, your memory can play tricks on you. [But] I'm pretty sure I was thinking, 'It's done. I was wronged.' Generally speaking my relationship with Ireland, with the dressing room and with Mick, wasn't as strong as club level. When I went to play for Ireland you wouldn't see folks for three or four days. You wouldn't cross paths. You would be working or going for breakfast with a load of strangers. So, I didn't come away from Salpán thinking, 'I can't believe that's happened.' I missed one of two of the people I worked with over the years. I'm kind of out of touch, but I go back to it, life goes on. I'd like to think I might have helped the team. Things can get heated, it's all part of the game. I see it in other sports. All the people — it was the same at United — who are now very good on the TV and are doing a lot of talking and are very good at the media, said very little at the time. They've all found their voices, you know, 15, 20 years later.

In the heat of meetings, these kind of leaders, shall we say, or alleged leaders, never said a word. I know if I was in Salpán and there was accusations getting made against — it could have been any of the players — I definitely wouldn't have tolerated that as a senior player. I'd have stepped in and said, 'No, no, no. Stop all this.' I know things can get heated, but strangely enough with Ireland, and even with United, things were very quiet.

DE: Do you ever laugh when you hear some of the impersonators take you off?

DE: No, No. It takes a lot to make me laugh, you know?

DE: You're supposed to be prickly.

DE: Listen, it's a bit tongue-in-cheek. Sometimes you get a reputation. Sometimes I play along with it. Sometimes they want favors from me. You have a laugh sometimes and you play along.

I'm a footballing person. I love the game. I love having the crack. I like working hard. I like switching off. I wouldn't say I live and breathe football 24 hours a day but I've very serious about my football. You're on about 'Do you laugh?' 'Are you happy?'

DE: Are you?

DE: To me, it's not about being happy. I like being a bit peaceful. To me, it's about being relaxed and at ease and

being with good people.

DE: Do you believe in God?

DE: Yeah, I believe there is something up there looking after me. Absolutely.

DE: Do you pray?

DE: Yeah, I have faith. I was brought up with that. I went to Mass. Listen, I have no halo yet, but we'll see. Put it this way, I'm working on the old halo. But, yeah, I like a laugh and a joke. When I'm doing the TV, people say 'I'm very serious. Any company I work for, I always say to them: "If you want a comedian, then I'm the wrong man. I am not going to be one of those ex-players who think they're a comedian. I listen to these people on the television who try to be funny, whether it be quiz shows or podcasts, and I'd rather stick a hot poker in my eye. I swear. I don't know why they think they're comedians, these fellas. Listen, they are trying to find a niche for themselves, which is fine."

DE: What's yours?

DE: My niche at the moment is if people want to employ me to do TV stuff then I'll try and be on time and I'll be respectful to the people I'm working with. But don't think you're going to get 'Bunny Cooper'.

DE: What comedians did you like growing up in Cork?

DE: I loved Norman Wisdom. He was brilliant. I think Billy Connolly is really witty and really clever.

DE: Dave Allen?

DE: Yeah, he was fine. I could listen to all these fellas. You're on about me laughing? I've gone to one or two comedians. I'll find people funny, don't get me wrong, but I don't understand when I see people belly-laughing. You know, belly-laughing at a joke? I don't get it. Jesus, I don't get it. People laughing on loud. I don't know about that. I'm not ready for that yet.

DE: When was the last time you cried?

DE: I cry at some things on the television.

DE: Like what?

DE: It's kind of a daft question. What makes you cry? Fucking hell. Sad things make me cry, do you know what I mean? Something happens to people you love, that makes you cry. Sometimes there's a movie, and there's a scene... Yeah.



DE: What was Cork like for you growing up? A few weeks ago, I interviewed the editor-in-chief of *Gloster* in New York, Samantha Barry. She said that when she was six months old she lived three doors down from you in Mayfield.

DE: It's a small world and fair play to her for doing so well. Up the Rebels. Growing up in Cork was brilliant. But my life was all about sport. My life was sport. When people say to me, 'I'm trying to get my kids into sport, I'm like: "Sport? If kids don't want to get into sport, they're not going to."

You're on about coronavirus. I was looking forward to a really good summer. I had visions of being down at Páirc Uí Chaoimh watching the hurling and the football. In a sense,

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DE: You can just enjoy the moment. I know that sounds a bit cheesy and a bit spiritual. Then, all of a sudden, that's taken away.

But growing up in Cork? I always go back to my bit of luck. Being born in Cork, a big plus for me, obviously. Growing up in Mayfield. Rockmount was a really good club. I played for two brilliant managers. I played with brilliant players, players who were much better

than me. When you compare me to players — people talk about Scholes, Gerrard, Lampard — these guys were way better than me.

DE: Frank Lampard was a better player than you?

DE: Yeah, Gerrard and Scholes too. I'm not saying they had the same influence in their teams as me and I couldn't compete with the guys, but, yeah, they were better than me. I had lots at Rockmount better than me. I'm under no illusions about that.

DE: Have you stayed in touch with those lads from Rockmount?

DE: I speak to them all the time. The majority of lads I meet up with when I'm in Cork are lads I played with when I was in sport, or in school. They're all doing well. They've all decent jobs. They've had their ups and downs.

You're on about the news — I try and avoid it. I pick up the news about Cork and people are getting stabbed. The world is changing. Don't worry about what's going on in America. Look at what's going on in Ireland. You need to look outside your front door before you start pointing fingers. I don't like to see or hear these things.

DE: You mean the criminal gang feeds in Ireland?

DE: All that. But I'm sure all that was going on in the '70s and '80s. There's always something going on that we're not happy with, but you know when you see a kid of 16, 17, getting stabbed, you think, 'C'mon.'

DE: Did you suffer any racism when you went over to England as a young Irish man?

DE: Nah, nah, nah. I used to get the odd bit on the football pitch from players.

DE: What would they say to you? 'Irish bastard'?

DE: You keep doing this. You keep putting words in my mouth. It wasn't 'Irish bastard' but it might be Irish anything. I went to games in the last few years scouting for Ireland and I had it outside two different grounds. 'You Irish this' and 'You Irish that'. But, anyway, it's not an ideal world we're in. And football has given me the greatest life ever. But it's like everything else, there is going to be disappointments and distractions.

DE: So, going back to your friend's advice, how did you lighten up in your non-footballing life?

DE: I just didn't let things get on top of me. I mentioned earlier about trying to please everybody. I have certainly copped myself on with that. I've learned to say no more. I know sometimes you have to get out of your comfort zone but if your whole world is just doing favors for people you're heading for trouble.

You can have too much exposure as well — that can kill you. So I have to get the balance right. Over the last few months, because of the lockdown, I've not had to leave my house. I've really enjoyed my home. I've enjoyed sitting around, doing nothing. I've enjoyed being bored. I've enjoyed not having to feel I have to go out to do something. Being restricted in going to Ireland is disappointing, but you have to think, 'Ah, nah, sit with yourself for a few months.'

DE: What do you miss about Ireland?

DE: Just going back. I love seeing the family, seeing buddies, having a cup of tea and a bit of a chat. Going to watch a hurling match. It could be anything. It could be going to watch Cork City or Cobh. Just having a break from England. I would go back for about three or four days. Over the last few years, I've enjoyed going over on the ferry. I love the ferry.

I remember coming to England years ago with a team from Cork. We came over to watch a couple of games and we had a great laugh. So when I go back on the boat now it just brings those memories back to me. I really do.

I love the freedom of my car. I would rather drive back than fly. Obviously if I am back for one or two days the flight is easier, but if it is three or four days, I jump in the car.

I do love my

freedom at the moment. I love not being under contract. I miss the Irish [assistant manager] job, honestly. I really enjoyed that. People like Seamus Coleman, Seamus McDonagh, Steve Guppy. Ah listen, I loved it.

If I can make one point about the new Irish staff, I've heard a lot of bullshitters over the last 10 years and Keith Andrews is up there with the best of them.

DE: Would you like to get back into management?

DE: I hope so. I hope so. Listen, I think it's going to be very difficult to get back into it. I'm not daft.

DE: Why will it be difficult?

DE: I think a number of reasons. A number of people... my reputation wouldn't help. I certainly know that. I don't know many people out there [who would] do me many favours in the game. People say it's not what you know, it's who you know. And I don't really get involved in that environment. Which is fine also, because you don't want too many people doing you favours.

I was fortunate to get the Sunderland job. I think my track record there was okay. Not fantastic, but I think it was okay. I wouldn't, could have been better. I think I did some good stuff at Ipswich.

What I find strange is that some managers get screwed up and that's the end of them, and I've seen other managers with a worse track record than me get seven, eight, nine jobs. That's the bit where I scratch my head. Maybe there is no working that out. But listen, if other lads are getting opportunities, good luck to them. And some get more than others. That's the kind of luck you need. That is one word I have used throughout my career. I think I have become very lucky, and maybe I need all my luck up as a player.

But it's still there. I still have that desire to take over a team and help a team. But I don't constantly look at my phone thinking, you know... it's not red hot. It is red-hot with other stuff, but not stuff that has me thinking

I think I have been very lucky, and maybe I used all my luck up as a player

I would like to get my teeth stuck into [that]. But I still do think there is enough people in the game who, if they analyse it properly... I have good experience. I have managed at a decent level. I think I could do a good job for somebody. That's it. I think I could help a club and work with a team and make them better. Let's see what happens.

DE: Could you see yourself back in management in less than a year or thereabouts? There are no crystal balls, I know...

DE: There is no crystal ball, but to answer that question, I think yes. Sometimes I have a funny feeling. I feel there might be something out there for me that might come up in the next few months and I'll be ready for it.

DE: Liverpool are about to win the Premier League title after 30 years. How does that make you feel?

DE: I'm certainly not anti-Liverpool. When I was growing up in the '80s, Liverpool were obviously a brilliant team and I had a lot of respect for players like Ronnie Whelan and Ray Houghton. I take my hat off to [that] Liverpool. They were a very, very good team. They were constantly winning League titles.

People will always connect me with United, but I would never begrudge a team winning the League. They deserve it. They have been outstanding over the last couple of seasons. The sign of any good team is to be consistent, and that's what they've been.

I think the industry is quick to hand out credit. It's about what Liverpool do after winning it. Teams have had good seasons and faded away.

So, to win the title is amazing, a fantastic achievement, but the important thing for any big club is to kick on. How many titles can they win over the next five, ten years? That's how I judge the really good teams.

It's the same with players. I've seen players have one or two good seasons and they get a bit giddy, a bit excited. And before you know it, you don't hear of them any more.

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