

On breaking barriers

Sonia O'Sullivan



Patience pays off as Mageean records landmark 800m record

It wasn't where I had expected to be – and same with most others there too: watching the third annual Moyné Athletic Club Summer Games, at a four-lane track somewhere just outside of Thurles, chief among the audience being some cows in the surrounding fields. This was meant to be the first Saturday of the Tokyo Olympics. Instead, it was the modest but long-awaited return to live athletics as we now know it, a full track

meeting, with a programme and list of athletes from all around the country, before just a handful of spectators. Over a period of five hours, from three in the afternoon to eight in the evening, athletes lined up and competed – for many the first real competition since maybe an indoor race back in February. The Trip to Tipp was worth the effort, and for the first time in a long while there's some more live action to look forward to on

the athletics stage.

There were no medals but some prize money on offer, and a €500 time bonus on offer for a sub-four minute mile for men, and sub-2:05 over 800m for women. And further inspiration to raise their game when, without much notice or expectation, the news filtered through from Bern, Switzerland the previous evening. In was here, in her first race of the delayed outdoor season, Ciara Mageean became the first Irish woman in history to break the two-minute barrier for the 800m. Better still Mageean also took the win in 1:59.69, breaking the existing record of 2:00.58 set seven years ago by Rose-Ann Galligan at the London Anniversary Games.

Well-timed consolation

It was Mageean's first race since the lockdown back in February, and some well-timed consolation for the postponing of Tokyo.

A bit like the sub-four minute mile for men, breaking two minutes is a barrier women have been chasing since it was first achieved in 1971 by German athlete Hildegard Falck, also the 1972 Olympic Gold medal winner over 800m.

It's also been out there as an achievable target for Irish women since 1974, when Mary Purcell ran 2:02.8, only like anything else, when you set a barrier in your head it can become just that: an insurmountable target.

In 2009, as a 17-year-old, Mageean ran 2:03, so always had high claims of being the first Irish woman under two minutes; still it took her 11 years of persistence and patience to fulfil that promise.

Since Purcell in 1974, there have been as many as 13 Irish women, including myself, who at one stage in their career would have believed that sub two minutes was a possibility.

Instead it has taken nearly 50 years of Irish female athletics for this landmark achievement to be eclipsed. It's no real surprise when you look at the statistics over the last few years, and realise that, each year, only an average of 30 women in the whole world manage this feat.

In contrast, when you look at the men's mile, there's an average of 72 men each year that run sub-four minutes for the mile. In some ways running below four minutes for a mile has become fairly standard, so maybe there wasn't enough respect given to the task last Saturday evening in Moyné.

Sean Tobin, Andrew Coscoran and Brian Fay, plus Hiko Tonoso, Cillian Kirwan and Shane Bracken all lined up with the help of their training partners Paul Robinson and Garry Campbell in an attempt to run the first ever sub-four minute mile in Tipperary.

There was certainly a lot of hype and expectation and the scene was set at the four lane track – interestingly built not too far from a wind farm and the first bend of

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Fast times are great but there is no greater satisfaction than winning a race with the added bonus of a fast time – thus rising to the challenge and delivering on all counts

the track backing on to a field full of those observant cows.

As the old soldiers' marching song goes, it's a long way to Tipperary and so I took the long route from Cobh to Moyné to find the track that just appeared in the most unlikely of places – smack bang in the middle of nowhere as my navigation announced your destination is on the right.

It's hard enough when you line up for a race to block out any negative thoughts, but with the wind grabbing at your hair it's near on impossible to ignore. That possibly played into their psychology too, and try as they did, Tobin, pushed all the way by his Dublin Track Club team-mate and training partner Cosco-

ran, came up just short running 4:00.38 in his home county just a whisker off running the first sub-four in Tipperary.

The women's 800m was stacked too, with 10 runners, where Nadia Power was too strong for the competition but also just missed out on the time bonus, running 2:05.10.

Run the target

It's strange how often when we set a target in our head, we run the target and not below it. Tobin became the youngest ever Irishman to run under four minutes for the mile while at Old Mississippi State University, and he has run 3:57 at the Cork City Sports, but that targeted eluded him here.

In contrast, it appears Ciara turned up for her first race over 800m with little expectation from the fans or media, just knowing it was possible and doing what often delivers the best result – by focusing on winning the race, and the time will come. Fast times are great but there is no greater satisfaction than winning a race with the added bonus of a fast time – thus rising to the challenge and delivering on all counts.

It wasn't an easy task to run fast at the tight oblong track in Moyné, on a windy evening in July, but the stage was perfectly set, and hopefully there will be another chance in this strange year of athletics for athletes to return and maybe set the bar a bit higher in their mind.



Why can't we buy an Ireland women's jersey?

Louise Lawless

Issue remains widespread across sport but some teams have made progress

In February 2019, a record 4,637 people attended the Ireland England Women's Six Nations game in Donnybrook. Despite the disappointing score and the English victory, there was a palpable sense of momentum, knowing that there were more eyes on them than ever before. Undoubtedly, the team's popularity has grown since then, alongside the growth of the women's game, the 20x20 movement and well-known individuals like Sene Naoupu, Fiona Coughlan and Eimear Conside.

Although the Irish crowd rooted for the team, feeling like an extension of the squad, not one of those attending was in possession of the same jersey as the players, unable to buy it anywhere. The most common way for fans to show allegiance and feel personally connected to a team is to wear the same jersey as the players. However, for fans of the Irish women's rugby team, this simply isn't an option.

The Irish women's rugby jersey, sponsored by AON, a global professional services firm, doesn't hang in shops, or feature in life-size window fronts, or even appear on the IRFU website, whose customer service team "apologise for any disappointment this may cause". It actually cannot be bought, and as reported in The Telegraph earlier this year, the IRFU supplied the women's internationals with "just two jerseys

for the duration of the tournament while the men receive two per match."

Stephen McNamara, the IRFU Director of Communications, in response to a request for a comment said: "The IRFU license the production of replica playing and training kit to Canterbury of New Zealand who, based on retailer demand, alongside trends in the sector and in the market place, select what jersey and training offerings to make available to the public."

"At present the Women's National team jersey is not in retail. This is something that Canterbury review and audit on an ongoing basis annually in line with their planned retail collection. Jersey sales can provide vital revenue streams to the game and it is hoped that the significant increase in interest in our women's team will grow to the point where demand for this variation of the product increases. There are a wide variety of women's styles available in Irish jerseys and training wear both in retail stores and online."

Women's fit

On showing the online IRFU customer service team a photo of the AON jersey, you'll be redirected to the women's fit of the

men's. (The IRFU website does provide: a men's alt pro jersey, a men's long-sleeved jersey, a men's short-sleeved classic jersey, a men's alt long-sleeved polo shirt in two colours, a men's cotton pique polo shirt in two colours, a men's cotton jersey stripe polo shirt, and a men's dry singlet.)

Vodafone's TV ad aired during the men's Six Nations proclaimed that they were a #TeamofUs, depicting a range of people asking "are you in?" This included women as fans of the men's game. In this context, "us" applies solely to the men's game, unintentionally rendering the women's team as alternative. Not one of us, but "them". Similarly to Vodafone,

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The Irish women's rugby jersey doesn't hang in shops, or feature in life-size window fronts, or even appear on the IRFU website



the IRFU supports female fans of rugby, as long as they are investing in the already-lucrative men's game. Like the ads, the team of us evidently applies to female fans of the men's game, apparently not extending to include the international women's team or their supporters.

Limited matches

For AON, their investment is seen on a total of 15 jerseys, which are worn in the limited number of matches the women have, feature on the individual team member's social media pages and are occasionally gifted by players. As a New York Times article said about women's soccer jerseys prior to the 2019 World Cup: "Clothes are also the easiest way for fans to assert their own allegiance, aspiration and personal connection."

Not having the option to buy jerseys means you can't gauge market demand, can't enable fans to imagine they could be one of them some day, can't feel part of something bigger than yourself, and ultimately can't actually invest in a team's growth.

It is not correlative, but investing in jerseys and the accessibility of them means investing in your teams. Leinster, the three-time Interpro champions, women's team's jersey is available online, retailing at the same price as the men's (€40 at the time of writing) as is Munster's, where a unisex jersey is available online (€40). For Connacht (€37.50) and Ulster jerseys (€45) you are once again passed on to the women's fit of the men's.

This is not solely a rugby problem, but other sporting bodies seem quicker to react, more likely to change. Kit was the straw that broke the camel's back for the Irish women's soccer team in 2017, who threatened to strike after revealing the poor treatment they'd re-

The AON-sponsored Ireland women's jersey is unavailable to buy for fans while the Leinster and Munster women's jersey are available to purchase (below).

PHOTOGRAPHS: INPHO

ceived at the hands of the FAI including sharing their kit with the underage teams, changing in bathrooms, and ill-fitting gear.

Last year, the latest soccer jerseys were unveiled in a photoshoot with the captains on both teams in the same jersey, sponsored by 3 Ireland. The team are currently top of Group I and hoping to qualify for their first major tournament, Euro 2021.

Across the 32 counties, online shopping can prove fruitful for half of the counties, including the likes of Dublin, Galway and Kerry when searching for women's football and/or camogie jerseys.

In the context of sports progress it is, perhaps, not the most fundamental issue, but it is indicative of what is required of female athletes: they have to not only be elite athletes but must represent so as to deserve jerseys. Irish rugby's women's teams have given back to their loyal fan base, winning the Grand Slam in 2009, hosting the Women's World Cup in 2017, and returning with a vengeance to the 2020 Women's Six Nations, but there has to date – been no capitalising on the momentum, victory and media of these events.

Until the players look out to the stands at Donnybrook, Murrayfield or Twickenham and see Aon jerseys, until potential sponsors can see it as a worthy investment, and until fans can buy a jersey without it becoming a question of the worthiness of women's sport, the Irish women's rugby team will remain a "Team of Them" and the men the "Team of Us".

Killarney Legion focus on return to action as selfish outsiders roam



Joanne O'Riordan

Balls hopping, lads shouting – it's an insight into the new normal in and around the playing pitch

There wasn't a ball kicked, and yet Killarney Legion GAA grounds was full of activity. The grass on their brand new pitch was being mowed, ground for lights was being drawn out, and the anticipation was real.

On the pitch directly across, the sound of balls hopping, lads shouting and managers giving final instructions greeted the awaiting fans. Socially distant, with smiles on their faces on a fine summer evening, football is back, Covid-19 can stay at the gate.

This time, the atmosphere is different. Although this is only a challenge match against Templenoe, those in attendance were discussing how uneasy they were about the new norm.

The play, for a challenge game, is physical. Kerry players are involved in tight markings which always explode into minor tussles, the referee, who now changes in his car, probably prays there won't be any major talking point.

Back on the training ground, everyone is scattered in cars. Some are changing for actual training; some are heading up to the gym to work on niggles while some are just on the sideline counting down the days for the team to return. Pat Flanagan, Legion coach, says everything is going as expected. "Watching the Bundesliga and seeing how muscle injuries spiked, we were expecting a few lads to pick up injuries, but generally everything is going well".

Club players Finbarr Murphy and Danny Sheahan are in the same boat. "So, I picked up a hamstring, I'm ready to go, but it's just minding it at the minute. It's been a long time not doing anything, so things like that were bound to happen", explains Sheahan.

Impressive Finbarr gives us an imaginary timetable if Covid-19 didn't hit. "God, some years we wouldn't be going well, and we'd be back in December! This time we finished December 15th after the East Kerry final and we started back training mid-January. I think we had a few league games and then lockdown happened. So, for us, it was weird because we had no training and no games. Whereas on a normal year we'd have been tipping away, yet no games".

Looking around the club grounds in Dieren, the set-up is impressive as far as safety and implementing measures go. As soon as anyone bolts for the pitch, volunteers are out with a thermometer checking temperatures. An isolation

room is set up if anyone is over 38 degrees, a doctor is called to deal with whatever needs to happen next.

The lads also have designated bottles bought from referee Seamus Mulvihill, who also runs a gift shop with personalised gifts in Tralee. Each player pays €10 or is obliged to bring one of their own. Things are laid out so it's easy for a player to identify his own bottle and sanitiser is also available around the pitch.

Back to the players, they feel safe within their own grounds, but what about other clubs, are they as restrictive and secure?

An awkward silence lingers until Danny Sheahan pipes up. "It's all down to trust really... sure if you don't have that, what else can you do? Like, when teams come here, we actually checked their temperatures to make sure the game could go ahead. I think we did the referees too". The sur-

rounding players seem satisfied, but eventually, the topic of Killarney and Covid-19 parties comes up.

House parties are a whole other debacle. It's people renting Air B&B's, not actual Killarney people and generally, these people are selfish. Has anyone been tempted or maybe passed by one of these parties?

"We are genuinely all good friends. If we go out, it's with each other nine times out of 10. We're training now so we can't go, but none of us are organising anything. It really is outsiders. A few of us did go to the beach, but we kept to ourselves and just hung around together", says Finbarr Murphy. The consensus for the team is individual and personal responsibility is paramount.

Now for the obvious question: are any of you thinking about Covid-19? "On the pitch, I'm just thinking about which leg to kick off! No, look we're cautious anyway. Some have elderly parents, sick children, so you'd be cautious. The club are doing everything possible to be safe. We check into our app every day... it's up to us



The lads also have designated bottles. Each player pays €10 or is obliged to bring one of their own. Things are laid out so it's easy for a player to identify his own bottle and sanitiser is also available around the pitch

like," says Finbarr. Which leads Sheahan to come with the line that makes the whole group laugh. "I'm not worried about anything only if we f*cking win. To be honest, my mother doesn't let you in unless you're clean and my grandfather is elderly, so yeah, it's on your mind but not on the pitch. I get what's going on outside the pitch, but for us getting back out playing it's beneficial for our mental health as well as physical."

Boiling point

And on that note, the inter-county boys, James O'Donoghue and Brian Kelly come into the conversation. "For me, I think we've just to learn to live with it and just to do what we're all asked to do. In the bank [where he works], I'm responsible to keep washing my hands, stay two meters apart and just be behind my screen," says former Footballer of the Year, O'Donoghue.

And what's it like with Kerry and training? The club versus county divide almost reached boiling point during lockdown. "Honestly, there's no pulling off us to go do this and that and cause a divide. Peter [KEANE] and the lads know we're out playing games, hopefully for eight weeks if we keep winning but at least three. It obviously depends on the coach really in each county, but that's where the Kerry management comes from."

"The only time we ever see them is on zoom for individual stuff, but it's all about Covid stuff. I think if we get knocked out with the club, we might be back to Kerry but there's no set date."

"Keepers are isolated, so it's easy for us," jokes Kelly. "No, when we started, it was individual obviously. Then it was groups of four. But sure that was a disaster because it was just us tipping away. Someone would tell us to do five sprints, but sure we'd be slack enough."

"Once it got to 15 vs 15 again, it felt good. I've elderly parents, so I have to be cautious too. They followed all the cooing laws and everything. They're out now, wearing masks and being good. Obviously, it's a concern what if I bring it back, but we all wanted some normality".

The club championship for Legion kicked off with a tight victory over Kilmacmin in Dr Crokes GAA grounds. My beloved wheelchair section in the stand is a temporary away dressing room, which left my father and I in a Dougal from Father Ted scene of minding Kilmacmin gear.

A local derby which was full of tackles, tussles and intensity. As the ball was kicked, a rainbow peeped out over the surrounding houses, where people gathered to watch the game if they weren't allowed in.

Overall, there was light at the end of the tunnel, but in an incredibly fickle time, who knows if that light will remain and bring us back to relative normality.

For now, it's all about trust, personal responsibility and owning up with very little guidance for clubs and their players. And above all a lot of hope that the season will continue without any major glitches.



Now is the time to sow the seeds for women's rugby in Ireland

Last year, almost 100 teenagers turned out for the country's first women's U20 trials

Thu, Feb 18, 2021, 07:00

Louise Lawless



Beibhinn Parsons carries during Ireland's Six Nations tie against Italy in Donnybrook on October 24th, 2020. Photograph: Laszlo Geczo/INPHO

In December 2020, almost 100 teenagers turned up at the Rugby Academy Ireland based in Co Kildare for the country's first ever trials for women U20 players. Limited due to Covid restrictions, they still managed. "We'd gauged an interest for a long time," says former international Jenny Murphy and coach at Rugby Academy Ireland, "there's a massive need for it in the country, and there comes a point where you have to actually do something about it".

Caoimhe Morris, the women's co-ordinator at Rugby Academy Ireland, agrees. "Long term development pathways aren't established here, which will hopefully come in soon. The girls coming to us varied: they might have only picked it up, or they'd been playing for years, played interprovincial underage, Ireland U18s. There was a nice mix of people."

The need for U20s is embodied in senior women's player, Beibhinn Parsons, the winger who became the youngest player to ever don a senior Irish jersey two years ago at 16 years old.



Jenny Murphy trains with Old Belvedere in Dublin in July, 2020. Photograph: Laszlo Geczo/INPHO

It is an anomaly rather than the norm that a teenager plays, let alone starts, for a senior team; usually lacking the experience and skills needed to represent at the highest level. In addition, the physical demands of senior rugby are heads and shoulders above underage, competing against full-grown adults, compared to teenagers with weight still to add and potentially inches still to grow. "There is a big difference, both in terms of physicality, game awareness and skill," says Murphy. "It can be extremely daunting, it's difficult. It creates further obstacles when we want to get as many talented players as possible and to make the pathway to a green jersey as seamless as possible."

However Parsons, on being plucked from underage rugby to the senior team, has leaped over the inevitable cliff that many U18 players fall from: the jump from underage to senior proving too much. (The drop-off rate for players at this age rivals the players who drop off sport on hitting puberty.)



"The women's game is definitely improving, and the U18 standard is quite good, but to be honest it's that jump we're expecting them to make that's a bit of an issue" says Morris, "The knowledge of the game and the decision making are a huge jump in senior. It's a massive leap for girls to make."

This is not something that faces male players, with their (hugely successful) U20 Irish team (current senior players Andrew Porter, James Ryan and Hugo Keenan were all part of the U20 team who were finalists in the World Cup in 2016). At the moment, there is no U20 women's team, so for the likes of Parsons there is no option for international development apart from the senior team.

The men's team are a compelling example of why the same should be offered to their female counterparts. With an annual World Cup, a Six Nations, and IRFU camps, the men's U20s accumulate the skills that are beneficial if/when representing the senior team at a later date. A possible women's team faces a significant disadvantage due to there being no Women's U20 Six Nations, despite England, Wales, Scotland and France fielding teams in the past.

Focus

To the IRFU's credit, they have maintained focus during the pandemic with their online Q&A sessions for women players, in the form of the Ignite and Spark Sessions, aimed at 16 to 18-year-olds, and older than 18 respectively. While no doubt helpful, these sessions provide information on how to work within the existing system, which still fails to provide for anyone in the U20 bracket.

There is an obvious difference between the actual men's U20s team and the possibility of a women's: the former prepare for professionalism, while the latter aim for elite, albeit amateur.

Yet, with women's professionalism inevitably impacted by the pandemic, the need to invest in squad depth through developing international players becomes more urgent. "The minority and the less popular do tend to suffer in times of economic crisis. The gulf in women's teams is widening, invest now, or it's an extremely tough game of catch up," says Murphy. The senior team of today will take the hit but future teams could come through an U20s system, which may lead to better performances and allow for eventual professionalism.



“The trials give them a chance to develop their skills and abilities

Anthony Eddy, the director of Women's Rugby, said: "The development of the women's game should not be viewed through a direct comparison of the pathways in the men's game. Age is not the core issue, participation numbers, regularity of playing and training and accessibility to quality competition are the real development goals now.

"The women's and men's game are at very different stages of development, and while an U20s team makes sense in the men's game, because it has an international U20s competition at both Six Nations and Junior World Cup, and because there are many more boys participating in rugby, that does not directly translate to the women's game.

"For several years now the IRFU have successfully, and will continue to, develop an U18s women's programme at both Inter-Provincial and national levels in both the 7s and XV's form of the game."

As evidenced by the Rugby Academy Ireland trial, there is a demand and an interest for a team of this demographic. "Without it, the opportunity is not there for these girls to be noticed by high level coaches. The trials give them a chance to develop their skills and abilities so that they can make progression to senior rugby a bit smoother," says Morris.

Although it is difficult to create in a time of unprecedented uncertainty, and diminished revenue, the IRFU still have to develop their women's side. They may be unable to implement a fully-fledged team, prepped and raring to go for organised tournaments but there can be progress.

Instead of a Women's U20 Six Nations, the IRFU's administrative arm could reach out to other international rugby associations with U20 teams (Canada, England, Wales, France, Belgium for example) to organise friendlies later this year, restrictions depending. Perhaps a preliminary team based on players who attended the Rugby Academy trials, as well as those who represented their provinces most recently, be assembled for a camp at Abbotstown, once allowed.



Now is the time to sow the seeds that will grow into a viable, deep squad for Irish rugby. The IRFU is doing what it can for the U18s and the seniors but now is the time to fill the gap, stop the drop and invest in the growth of Irish women's international rugby at all levels.

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Team	P	W	D	L	Pts
Leinster	16	14	0	2	71
Ulster	16	14	0	2	64
Ospreys	16	8	0	8	36
Glasgow	15	5	0	10	25
Dragons	15	5	0	10	25
Zebre	16	4	0	12	17

Conference B

Team	P	W	D	L	Pts
Munster	16	14	0	2	64
Connacht	16	8	0	8	45
Scarlets	16	8	0	8	36
Cardiff Blues	16	8	0	8	39
Edinburgh	14	5	0	9	24
Benetton	14	0	0	14	6

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Performative actions are not enough to tackle racism in sport

Supporting black players should not be a box-ticking exercise, say Wexford footballers

Thu, Nov 5, 2020, 06:00

Louise Lawless



Vanessa Ogbonna of Wexford Youths and Kellie Brennan of Athlone Town take a knee in support of the Black Lives Matter movement ahead of the Women's National League match. Photograph: Eóin Noonan/Sportsfile

"I wear sun cream at the start of every game and every single time someone asks me why am I wearing it. And I'm like: 'Cause the sun affects everyone,'" says Vanessa Ogbonna, footballer at Wexford Youths FC.

That one thoughtless question captures the emotional burden black people bear: having to explain their very existence; having to teach the unaware that while something can impact everyone, the consequences often vary.

"I've realised that 'should' is a very privileged word and a lot should be done but I've taken it upon myself to just do the thing," she adds, even if that thing is repeatedly explaining black people's skin is also affected by the sun.

Her teammates, though, are willing to listen and happy to learn. It is the broader picture of the Women's National League and the Football Association of Ireland (FAI), the structures that hold women's soccer in Ireland in place, that Ogbonna and her teammate, Blessing Kingsley, have questions for.

Racism and unconscious bias cannot be tackled by individuals and as we have seen in the men's game, well-intentioned but toothless movements offer little in the way of substantive support for black players.

Since returning to play, Women's National League players have unanimously taken a knee for the Black Lives Matter (BLM) movement, a welcome move to show their intention. But to players it feels performative, designed to keep the FAI out of (further) public opprobrium, rather than substantially tackling racism within football.

"Someone could still take the knee with the team and not support the movement," explains Kingsley. "It's obviously great that the league is showing support for anti-racism but I don't want it to just be support like the box is checked, move on. We need to know that, as a player, if something happened [for example, being called something racist at a match], I need to know that I'd have the league's support, the referee's support. At the moment, I wouldn't be confident about that."

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As it stands, the individuals who feel the sting of racism and unconscious bias have to lead the charge on dealing with it, unable to trust the governing bodies or match officials.

Discussion is key

"Look, it's a double-edged sword," says Ogbonna. "Our coach told us we were going to do it [kneel for BLM] but there was no opportunity to raise questions on either side or have a discussion about it, we were just told. Surely, it should be talked about before we do it? People should have the option of asking if it makes sense, what if someone didn't want to do it?"

Being told that they'll be taking the knee – and the implicit message behind that – is encouraging but the action impacts people differently. As Ogbonna tweeted: "Not just a couple seconds. It's my life."

Putting up a banner is all well and good but the people you're trying to include have to be able to see the banner.

"They can't treat me and a white person the same because we're not equal. They have to understand our separate needs. It takes intentional effort," she says. "It is a form of white privilege, that they just told the team and everyone agreed and did it. This affects me differently to my teammates. We're the only team in Ireland with two black girls on it and no one said anything to us."

According to Kingsley, a lot of the problem comes down to representation: who is playing the game; who makes the decisions? "When you look at me and Vanessa, we're the only black girls in the whole league. That lack of representation makes you disheartened."

Ogbonna agrees: "If soccer isn't actively promoted to minorities, it's hard to break the mould." Having received a scholarship from Oakland University in Michigan in the United States, Ogbonna is painfully aware that "it's not typical for a girl like me to be as far up in football as I am".

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Similarly, Kingsley is due to start a soccer scholarship at the University of Southern Mississippi in January 2021. "For any girl in the country, there's a lack of representation, but when you talk about minorities the numbers worsen.

"Every team will say they're inclusive and will take the knee, but you have to do something to make yourself inclusive. Putting up a banner is all well and good but the people you're trying to include have to be able to see the banner. Are they even in the room?"

She points to the direct provision centre in Tramore, Co Waterford – where she's from – as an indicator of successful engagement. "A couple of sports entities became very involved with the community there so the teams are very diverse. They helped to cultivate the talent."

Although the issue is multifaceted, anyone, whether they are employed in the FAI or at club level, can make a difference. This, acknowledges Ogbonna, won't always go smoothly: "You might fail but you have to try, it's the willingness. If it's part of your club ethos you have to try, if you're a team, person or organisation and saying you care about inclusion whether it's minorities, women, disabilities, whoever, you are in the position of being able to do it, you have to extend your hand and try."

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