



**8-PAGE
PULLOUT**
STARTS PAGE 43

FREE INSIDE DR MICHAEL MOSLEY'S 5:2 RECIPES FOR ONE



**DELANEY
QUITS FAI GIG
(BUT NOT
UEFA ROLE)**

PAGE 5

Cycling superstar reveals he faces arrest if he returns to Spain as he battles to repay creditors

STEPHEN ROCHE: MY DEBTS OF €600K



**Stacey Dooley
waltzed off
with Strictly
snake Kevin**

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**EXCLUSIVE
INTERVIEW**

**In an emotional
encounter in
Budapest, cyclist
opens up about
debt hell: I'm
not a bad man**

IRISH cycling hero Stephen Roche has been accused of acting fraudulently by creditors owed hundreds of thousands of euro in Spain.

But in an exclusive interview with the Irish Mail on Sunday, an emotional Mr Roche acknowledged the debts (some €600,000, he believes), denies he had gone on the run and pledges to find a way to settle his liabilities.

Mr Roche struggled to hold back tears, telling the MoS he felt he had let down friends and

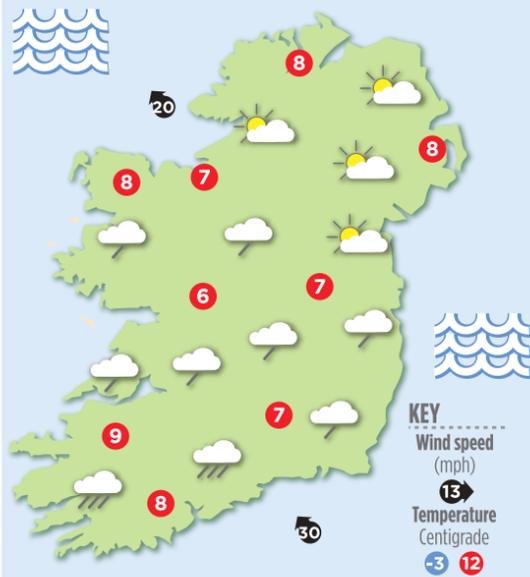
By **Michael O'Farrell**
INVESTIGATIONS EDITOR
and **Gerard Couzens**

family who have tried to help with his financial problems.

'I have been very upfront with the people I owe money to,' he said. 'When I hear I've run away or I'm trying to get away without paying, that's not me. That's not me. Never.' However, Mr Roche

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Weather



FORECAST

GENERAL FORECAST

Cloudy with spells of rain in the south and west, some of which may be heavy in Munster and Connacht. Ulster and northern Leinster will be mainly cloudy but dry, though a few spots of rain cannot be ruled out. Moderate winds.

REGIONAL FORECASTS

Leinster: Cloudy with little brightness and a few spots of rain, mostly in the south and west of the region. Tonight, patchy drizzle. Max temp 8C (46F). Min temp 5C (41F).

Dublin: It will be a dry day, but with a fair deal of cloud, and little in the way of brightness is expected. Tonight, mainly cloudy. Max temp 7C (45F). Min temp 6C (43F).

Ulster: A few spots of rain are possible in the west. Otherwise, dry but cloudy with little brightness, if any. Tonight, clear spells. Max temp 9C (48F). Min temp 3C (37F).

Connacht: Dull and cloudy with spells of rain, some of which heavy. However, it will be more light and patchy later. Tonight, patchy drizzle. Max temp 8C (46F). Min temp 4C (39F).

Munster: A cloudy day with rain through much of the day, though it will turn lighter and patchier later in the day. Tonight, cloudy with rain. Max temp 11C (52F). Min temp 5C (41F).

WEEK AHEAD

It is set to turn increasingly mild into next week with temperatures in the high teens possible for some by the end of the week. However, the week will start off on Monday with rather cloudy and damp conditions, particularly in the south and west. Then, further showers or longer spells of rain are expected on Tuesday, though some brightness is possible too, particularly for western parts. Wednesday looks to be predominantly dry with some good spells of sunshine at times.

SIX-DAY FORECAST

	MON	TUE	WED	THU	FRI	SAT
DUBLIN	10	11	12	14	15	16
CORK	8	12	11	14	15	15
BELFAST	10	11	12	14	15	17
GALWAY	9	14	15	17	18	18
LIMERICK	10	15	15	17	19	19
DERRY	9	11	13	15	16	17
KILKENNY	9	12	13	15	17	17

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LOTTO NUMBERS

6 7 17 BONUS **35**
24 27 44

There was no winner of last night's €2 million Lotto jackpot

LOTTO PLUS DRAW

7 10 20 28 36 42 27

LOTTO PLUS2 DRAW

25 26 29 31 34 35 17

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GOT A STORY?

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From Page One

– who won the Tour de France in 1987 – confirmed that his cycling tourism business in Mallorca is in grave difficulty.

At present, those wishing to make a booking on his website – www.stephenrochecycling.com – are redirected to another site called www.vipcycling.com.

According to Mr Roche himself, his business now owes in the region of €600,000 to various creditors – much of this dating back to 2017.

The first public indication that something was amiss came on March 1 when one creditor – travel firm World Spry Services – petitioned the courts to open a criminal investigation

Paid money owed in March

into Mr Roche and his Spanish firm, Shamrock Events SL.

World Spry Services was owed in excess of €30,000 for organising the transfer of cyclists from around the world who had booked holidays in Mallorca via Mr Roche's site.

Amid accusations of fraud and the concealment of assets, Mr Roche managed to settle that case which was dropped when he paid the money owed in mid-March.

However, on March 20 the owners of two hotels in Mallorca filed a separate case over unpaid debts of €392,446.

This case – being taken by the Ponent Mar Hotel and the Hotel Son Caliu – is seeking to have Mr Roche's firm declared bankrupt and put into enforced liquidation.

The case highlights concerns about the potentially reckless manner in which Mr Roche's firm continued trading in recent times – to the detriment

I thought about bankruptcy – but no, admits cyclist Roche

of those who remain unpaid. Further concerns raised in court include Mr Roche's continued absence from Mallorca and whether or not he is deliberately seeking to evade his creditors.

Under Spanish law, Mr Roche's creditors could be granted leave to pursue his personal assets if the courts conclude that fraudulent or reckless trading has taken place.

Last night the lawyer acting for the Ponent Mar Hotel – Jose Luis Lopez Morey – said: 'I anticipate the judge will appoint a bankruptcy administrator in a very short space of time with all the consequences that carries.'

However, Mr Roche told the MoS he is determined to clear his debts.

He hopes to do so by selling a French investment property and via new cycling projects he is currently negotiating in Switzerland and Hungary.

'Going back with my hands empty is not going to do anything,' he said. 'If I can get something together and I go back and pay all my bills, I can keep things going.'

'If I can pay all my bills, I can keep going'

'The hardest part is I have always been straight up and honest with people I owe money to and the hardest part was to accept their reaction,' he went on.

'I've been in contact with them. I've sent them emails about my plans, saying: "I can pay you so much a month for the next number of months."

Mr Roche said he had considered bankruptcy but ruled it out because morally he wanted to put things right by repaying his debts. 'I've thought of it

(bankruptcy) – but no. Because the people who have helped me are going to lose out.'

The company that is now servicing Mr Roche's previous cycling clients, VIP Cycling, is owned by a friend of Roche's – German former professional cyclist, Guido Eickelbeck.

Speaking to the MoS, Mr Eickelbeck said he was a good friend of Mr Roche and had considered a partnership before the extent of his company's financial problems emerged.

'What we did in the end of the day is we just show the people that we are separate to Stephen Roche but we can do the same job as Stephen Roche,' he said.

'We get the clients – the clients have another option and the guests come to the right hands.'

Mr Eickelbeck said Mr Roche was 'trying very hard to come back – but when you have problems nothing works.'

'I have already crossed my fingers for him many times,' he said.

michaelofarrell@newsscoops.org

NOW READ THE FULL STORY Pages 6-8

'I'm still loyal to Stacey, despite her affair with slippery snake Clifford'

From Page 3

a sign, I needed something. It was a blessing because I wasn't going to be told [by Stacey] that evening. I had seen everything I needed to see.

'All the questions, all the months of thinking what was going on had been put to bed.'

But it did not take long for Sam's resentment towards Kevin to boil over.

'Adults make their own choices. I just know that he is a slippery snake – a proper rat,' he spits. 'To have that relationship where you are best buddies, but then you start going cold because you start fancying their girlfriend – I hold no respect for him whatsoever.'

Sam described how he subse-

quently confronted Kevin in a video call. 'He went white. I just stuck it on him: "You're an absolute rat. How you conducted yourself. Just a slippery, slimy snake."

'He didn't say a word. He looked petrified. He looked so shocked.'

It was a devastating end to a happy relationship that began with a chance meeting at a Brighton boxing gym in 2014.

Sam spotted Stacey across the room, perched on an exercise bike and wearing an expensive leather jacket over her gym kit to keep out the cold.

Sam was quickly smitten with Stacey – who told him just that she 'worked on TV' – and he only discovered her role as a

presenter of hard-hitting documentaries when he was channel-hopping one night and saw her face on screen.

Their mundane lives became an antidote to the stresses of



SO IN LOVE: Sam and Stacey together in New York in 2015

her assignments in war zones.

Sam contrasts those memories with a final, devastating message from Stacey, received a few hours after his confrontation with Kevin on April 1.

Stacey wrote: 'I know you hate me at the moment but you saw I didn't start entertaining and texting him until I split up with you... I was not with you when we started it all. I did fall for him but when we were done.'

A fortnight on, the wounds are still raw yet remarkably Sam remains loyal to Stacey.

'I will always show her respect because I loved her so much and she was a massive part of my life,' he says.

■ How we survived our Strictly kiss – see Magazine

CORRECTIONS & CLARIFICATIONS

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In an emotional interview, Stephen Roche opens up about his

**EXCLUSIVE
INTERVIEW**

By **Michael O'Farrell**

INVESTIGATIONS EDITOR

IT'S been 32 years since Stephen Roche brought home cycling's Triple Crown in 1987 – three epic victories in the Giro d'Italia, the Tour de France and the World Road Race Championship. His Tour de France victory – the first and, so far, only one by an Irishman – is etched on the nation's psyche. That feat made him one of Ireland's most treasured sports heroes.

When we meet – at the 5-star Kempinski Hotel in the centre of Budapest – he is dressed in a sharp tailored suit and open-necked Hugo Boss shirt. He is in a different arena now, facing a new challenge – one he appears determined to overcome – though his creditors have run out of patience.

Hundreds of miles away in Spain his cycling tourism business – which until recently generated millions each year – has imploded. Creditors – owed as much as €600,000 – have gone to court accusing Roche of fraud and of having gone on the run to avoid his obligations.

He has been advised he may be arrested if he returns to Spain.

Aged 59, he looks healthy, tanned and fit – every inch the celebrity superstar, turned millionaire businessman. But in the next hour he will well up twice, struggling to speak through overpowering emotion as he wipes tears from his piercing blue eyes.

'I think when I look at it, a lot of the things I'm doing, I'm doing out of panic,' he says.

'The cycle tours business, we were doing it for the passion'

'From the outside everything looks comfortable. Nice clean shirt. Everything looks clean – very like television...

'But I am 60 this year... This domain now is totally new – even though I've been in business for years. This is hard. A bit hard to deal with. This legal thing has totally blown me away. I never imagined that it was going to be like this – so severe. I thought I had an open dialogue with everybody. It's not as if I started business two years ago and took the money and ran away. I'm 25 years in business.'

Roche began organising cycling holidays in Majorca more than two decades ago via his Spanish firm Shamrock Events SL. Since then the firm has brought perhaps 20,000 guests to hotels during the island's off-season when temperatures are better suited to cycling.

'We were doing it for the passion,' he says. 'I won't say we were really making money but we lived comfortably off it.'

'In 2016-2017 we had a turnover of €1.8m – which for six months' work is not bad.'

He says perhaps 10% was profit and that he always 'reinvested rather than taking money out'. But in 2017 things started to go wrong. And in December 2018 he was asked to vacate the Ponent Mar Hotel where he had maintained a base for years.

Court records in Spain confirm that at the beginning this month the owners of the Ponent Mar and another hotel – the Hotel Son Caliu – petitioned the courts for the involuntary bankruptcy of Roche's firm. This case involves unpaid debts of €392,446.94.

A previous case taken by another creditor – World Spry Services – saw Roche accused of criminal fraud and the concealment of assets. Roche found the €30,000 to settle

It's tough to face up to the shame... I'm not a bad man



GLORY: With Charles Haughey after winning the 1987 Tour de France

this case before it hit the international headlines. But he can't hold the tide back any more. He still owes – at a minimum – €600,000, much of it dating back to 2017.

As he tells it there are multiple reasons for his current predicament. Firstly in 2017 he put a €50,000 deposit on a €300,000 unit in Palma. This was to be his new base in Majorca. 'My idea was to have a cycling cafe. I could have my office, a bike station, do merchandising... There would be a massive car park

at the back where I could have a meeting every morning with cycling groups.'

The unit was trading as a food outlet called 'Pie in the Sky' – an irony he may not appreciate. But Roche – who was waiting on the sale of a property investment in France – could not find the funds to complete the purchase.

'In the end the guy got p***ed off with me and said he can't hold it any longer unless I paid him. I couldn't pay him. I was waiting for the sale of my site.'

The site Roche was trying to sell overlooks the bay of St Tropez in the south of France. It's a development site for 18 houses worth €6m of which Roche says he owns 10%. His stake is worth €600,000 – the approximate amount of his debts.

The majority owner is a developer in the South of France. While the sale of the site has been agreed, there was a problem. 'The buyer had his mortgage agreed by the bank but the notary noticed an error in the land registry.'

Negotiations with local officials in

France are ongoing but even if the sale proceeds Mr Roche says 'it will be another three, four, five months before anything is paid out'.

Unable to secure his new unit in Majorca, Roche then suffered another financial setback in France where he had invested €120,000 in a luxury car sales business.

'I was getting 10% of turnover – sometimes more – and I had my own car, my insurance and whatever car I wanted – a [Porsche] 911 a Cayenne – you know. All I had to do was ensure that if the guy had a buyer that the car was back.'

'I am not hiding from anybody'

But in 2017 two Porsche Panameras, a Porsche Cayenne and a Porsche 911 were stolen.

'There was an insurance claim because the garage door wasn't up to standard so we went against the owner of the garage hoping to win our money back and we ended up losing the case.'

'We lasted until 2018 and in February 2018 we closed shop.'

Meanwhile, Mr Roche's cycling business was frequently unable to pay its debts in Spain. 'It happened

quite regularly but I was sure that the site [in France] was going to go. That's why I was very open with the people I owed. I even sent them photographs and the deal for the sale of the site. I sent them everything. I said, 'Look, this is going to happen. It's mine. You see here – Stephen Roche – €600,000. It's there so you will get paid.' Maybe I had my head in the sand because I was always sure the site was going to get me through it.'

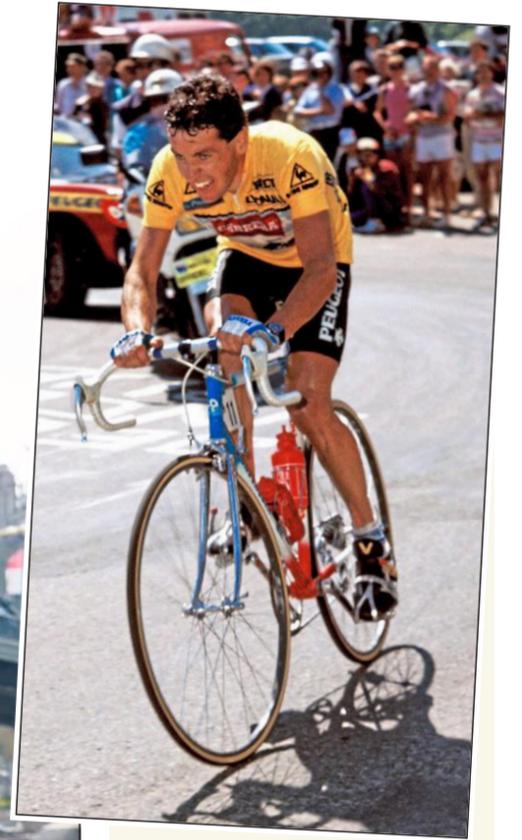
But then he was asked to leave his base in the Ponent Mar Hotel – meaning he could no longer take bookings. His cashflow was gone. He had to return booking deposits. 'I had nothing to work with anymore.'

There have been personal setbacks too. His 19-year-old son Florian, who battled leukaemia as a child, relapsed in May 2018. Although Florian 'is doing great now', last year his illness was 'a very serious mental shock' to Roche. Then Roche's daughter Christel, who was managing his Spanish cycling business, then left the firm. 'She got a bit p***ed off with the situation and because she was close to her brother, she went to help her mum look after Florian.'

'That was very hard,' admits Roche.

Asked about the allegation that he

business failure and his determination to pay off €600k debts



Sportsman who made us all proud

FRESH START: Stephen Roche is pursuing new business projects in Budapest, where he spoke to the MoS this week

STEPHEN Roche was one of a number of elite Irish cyclists to burst onto the international scene in the Seventies and Eighties, bringing the sport to massive prominence in an economically depressed nation.

The highlight of his career came in 1987 when he won the Triple Crown of cycling, becoming only the second ever cyclist to win the Tour de France, Giro and world title in the same year. As the only Irishman to ever win the Tour, he was joined on the winner's podium by then-taoiseach Charles Haughey.

Picture: SEAN DWYER

has acted fraudulently or traded recklessly Roche becomes animated. 'I cannot for the life of me imagine how they could say such stupidity. They put me out of my office.'

'I even offered to work for them for nothing. They know I brought 700 to 1,000 clients a year when nobody was there. So they know the potential I have for bringing in people.'

So how is he managing now from day to day? 'I have to keep going,' he says.

Now - 40 minutes into our meeting - it all becomes too much and tears well up. For a minute or so he cannot speak as he fights to regain control of his emotions. 'There are some friends who help me as well,' he begins before struggling to complete the sentence.

'Friends that I probably have let down.....friends and family.'

Then he regains his composure. 'There are certain people who helped me - who did a lot to help me and once again I was promising to pay them back at a certain time and I couldn't do it.'

Family helped you as well - your parents?

'Yeah, yeah,' he nods. 'I kind of hardly ever see them either - which also hurts. I'm so engrossed in trying to get things going and in the last couple of months I've been afraid to fly because of the situation - you know - so I have been driving everywhere.'

You're literally afraid to fly because you think you'll be arrested?

'Well, people said so many things. It's hard to get proper advice, not knowing the whole amplitude of the situation so it's difficult.'

This has meant repeated 14-hour drives between Geneva and Budapest where he is working on new projects that he hopes will offer a fresh start - and help him repay his debts. For now the projects are in a delicate stage and cannot be discussed publicly. Any negative press about Roche may see

new partners balk. Are the new projects property related? 'No, no, no,' he backs away horrified. 'It's what I do best - it's cycling.'

Meanwhile, his problems in Spain - where his lawyer has asked for €15,000 before he can act - appear to be getting more serious.

As he points out, 'If I had €15,000 I would pay my suppliers.'

This lack of representation has left Roche largely in the dark about the legal processes in train against him, though he says he is not hiding from anyone. 'Anyone can find me. I'm not hiding from anybody. My email has been the same for 25 years. I've been getting notifications - yes, which I haven't read because I don't understand them - they're all in Spanish. When I sent it to the lawyer last week, he said, "Don't open it." But he won't start the case going because he needs €15,000. So I'm in a sticky situation.'

Then there's the shame. That's tough to face up to. 'I have distanced myself

from most people - because of embarrassment. I have no credibility because I cannot say I'm doing this... I cannot say, I can pay you... I cannot say anything... I can't tell them what I'm doing and these people have heard it all before.'

Have you thought about bankruptcy?

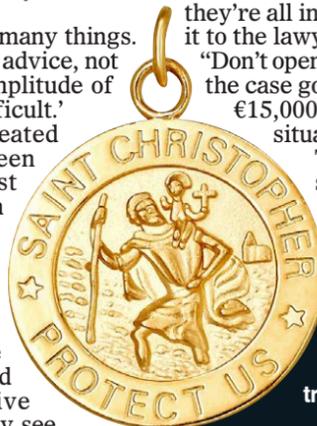
'I've thought of it - but no. Because the people who've helped me are going to lose out. That's why it hurts now the way things have gone because I have been very upfront with the people I owe money to, and when I hear that I've run away or I'm trying to get away without paying - that's not me. Never.'

'I could go bankrupt and start again but morally I couldn't do that just out of respect for the people who helped me.'

For now it appears Roche is going to continue battling and he still believes he can pay all his debts back.

'Life is full of obstacles and you've got to fight to get over them,' he says. 'I'm not a bad person. It's just that things got out of hand and the people coming after me are maybe more financial than emotional.'

Between the open neck of his designer shirt, a gold medal of St Christopher hangs. Roche never takes it off and sometimes touches



CHARM
A St Christopher's devotional medal is believed to keep travellers safe

Tánaiste seen as a threat to Leo leadership after strong handling of Brexit

Varadkar allies urge top Europe job for a reluctant Coveney

By John Drennan

SUPPORTERS of Leo Varadkar are planning to make Simon Coveney a surprise – and not very willing – entrant to the race to become Ireland's next EU Commissioner.

The coveted post pays a total of €336,446.65 a year before tax, as well as a raft of pensions and expenses.

Up to recent weeks, Agriculture Commissioner Phil Hogan, who is believed to have been 'supportive' of Mr Varadkar's leadership before and after the election, was the clear favourite to be reappointed.

Mr Hogan is believed to be enthusiastic about continuing his work in Europe and is characterised as being an 'influential' figure.

In the party, however, the prospect of a 'surprise' appointment of Mr Coveney is being increasingly canvassed. And the strongest advocates for such a move are from the Taoiseach's camp. Mr Varadkar defeated Mr Coveney in the Fine

'Ireland must send our best man to Europe'

Gael leadership race in 2017.

One influential factor in the sudden rise of Mr Coveney has been the strong performance of the Foreign Affairs Minister throughout the Brexit tangle.

A source, close to the Varadkar camp, noted: 'Brexit is far from being resolved. This is a decade-long issue. Ireland must send our best man, or rather individual, to Europe.'

Mr Coveney is believed to be anxious to remain in his current Ministry with a pro-Coveney source saying: 'Foreign Affairs is Simon's dream portfolio. Cork's new Peter Barry and all that.'

'He is not a living saint, of course. He feels he has unfinished business with the leadership, and doesn't want to be too far away from the Fine Gael house in case a fire starts.'

One minister warned though that:



EUROPE BOUND?: Peter Casey is tipped for a seat

CASEY AND THE SOLDIERS OF DESTINY DECLARE WAR ON SF

THE latest polling data suggests the tide is with Fianna Fáil and the Independents in the upcoming European elections.

Sinn Féin, however, are in danger of losing all three of their MEP seats because of the party's decision to abstain from Westminster throughout the Brexit crisis.

Polling data seen by the Irish Mail on Sunday reveals this decision is hitting SF in its heartland – the border counties. Rising star Matt Carthy, who is expected to run for Europe and the Dáil, is now struggling to keep his seat as an MEP in the Midlands-North West constituency.

By contrast, the polls indicate that former presidential candidate Peter Casey is likely to secure the third of four seats available.

A source said: 'Peter is not home and hosed, but he is on

track to secure a seat. It is his to lose. Voters want at least one Independent and it won't be Ming Flanagan.'

In an indication of Fianna Fáil's strength in rural Ireland, FF TD Anne Rabbitte, rather than Luke (Ming) Flanagan will battle Carthy to win the last seat, with the first two being secured by Mairead McGuinness and Brendan Smith.

A senior FF source noted: 'These figures indicate the reality of the FF revival in rural Ireland. We have gone from no seat five years ago, to competing for two with a less than stellar team.'

By contrast they said of SF: 'They are now seen as having run away from the Brexit battlefield.'

ALL SMILES: Luke 'Ming' Flanagan faces threat at the polls

The situation is equally grim in Munster for SF, where Liadh Ní Riada is being targeted by Fianna Fáil and Fine Gael.

A senior FF figure said: 'Ní Riada is going to find it much harder this time. She was badly exposed in the Presidential election; she's the failed candidate who couldn't break 10%.'

Like SF, Fine Gael is concerned by the potential impact of a Clare Daly candidacy. One strategist warned: 'If Daly runs she has the potential to take votes on all fronts; #MeToo, the Civic Alliance...'

SF are even more concerned about Daly, with senior sources warning: 'If Daly does run, we are in real danger of a wipe-out. And if that happens, people will be looking closely at Mary Lou's leadership.'



COMMENT Page 21

'Simon may not know it yet, but Simon is the man. He would certainly be a reluctant candidate, but Simon should note he faces stark choices too.'

'Nothing is certain. He might turn down the Commissioner's job and find himself spending five years as a backbench TD.'

'He is the perfect Leo choice. He represents the new Ireland. Phil is a bit of a dinosaur. He did great work for us once, but that was a long time ago.'

'He and his friend Juncker; they

belong to the past. There is a new broom coming through Europe. The age of winking and nodding is over.'

Phil Hogan, they added, 'is an Enda Kenny legacy issue. It is time to finish the clean-up'.

Another source, however admitted: 'There is more than an element of self interest in this. It has been noted that Simon has seriously outperformed Leo when it comes to Brexit.'

Simon, they said, 'has been the mature elder brother in the rela-

tionship. Leo has been erratic and unsure. It has not rebounded to his credit. It has kind of spooked the Leo camp.'

'Of course, it helps that he is the perfect man for the job – all that high seriousness. You wouldn't find Simon going on about Love Actually in Downing Street or writing notes to Kylie.'

But they added: 'Ultimately, this is all about the court. The concern is that, should things get rough, you don't want to have Simon hanging around the place. Just in case.'

'It would be better to keep him busy somewhere else for a while.'

One senior source close to the Varadkar camp noted: 'Simon would have to ask himself what happens after Brexit.'

'He won't be the star anymore. He will just get the foreign trips Leo doesn't want, and up and down to the North once a fortnight. It's not so attractive, is it?'

Minister Coveney did not respond to a request for comment.

news@mailonsunday.ie

» From Page 7

it almost unthinkingly as he speaks, his hand drawn repeatedly to it.

There's a touching story behind the medal, one that dates back to his early days in the sport. Back then, he was an impoverished young Dubliner plying his trade as a rider in the French pro cycling circuit. On one ferry journey between his native south Dublin and his adopted home in France, he fell into conversation with an

elderly couple who were on their way back from Lourdes. They were hoping for a miracle cure for the wife's cancer.

Six months later – after Roche's first big win in the Paris-Nice race made the papers – the elderly man appeared at Roche's parents' house alone, his wife having died. He left his late wife's medal of St Christopher for Roche, saying that speaking to him on the ferry had been her last moment of happiness.

Roche has worn the medal ever since.

When it was lost during a horrific 1986 crash in which a rider died, his teammates searched all night at the crash site but failed to find it. His then-wife Lydia replaced it with an identical one that he never takes off. Telling the story now Roche's eyes well up once more and he

brings the medal to his lips. 'It's something that I never take off and it's something that I have a lot of faith in.'

Roche says he's not afraid of the challenge ahead and for now he's determined not to go back with his hands empty. 'I kind of feel, if I can make it better than I want to keep at it. I still believe I can make it better but I'm a little bit short on time.'

In the coming months he'll need every ounce of luck that medal can bring.

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