



# OFFALY WOMEN IN SPORT



## Sporting women very well catered for in Offaly

**THE growth of womens' sport has been one of the biggest and most pleasing developments in Ireland in the past few years.**

Womens' sport was once a niche outlet with limited playing and spectator interest but this has changed dramatically in the 2000s.

There is now a fantastic appetite among women for sporting and recreational activity. Like their male counterparts, a desire for a fit body and mind has seen women turn to recreational activity in vast numbers. Sport such as running/jogging/walking, golf and pitch and putt have been invaluable as an outlet to help relieve the stresses of daily life as well as a healthy social activity.

Athletics Clubs have emerged in all parts of Offaly with many participating into their 60s and a handful even going into their 70s. Golf is a perfect sport for those of all ages who want competition but at a more sedentary level than road running or team sports.

Every big sport for women is very well catered for in Offaly. The big field games have witnessed a remarkable growth in popularity in recent years. Camogie and ladies football are at its most popular with clubs all over the county while rugby and soccer have really emerged in the past few years.

There are plenty of more sporting outlets for women with hockey continuing to flourish in Tullamore while tennis, rowing, badminton and many more are the sport of choice for others.

There is a great choice for women of all ages and tastes, and that is a sign of a very healthy society. Participation is the key. Get moving, get active and it helps in every aspect of life. Sport Ireland and the Offaly Sports Partnership do a great job in promoting the benefits of an active

lifestyle and the benefits of this for society are considerable.

Increased participation inevitably leads to a rise in standards and elite performers, and that is also a very welcome development. While normal health goals make sport such an important part of life, it is much more than that for many individuals. It is an opportunity to challenge themselves, to get the competitive juices flowing and to be the best that they can be.

This has led to great personal and collective achievements. Women from Offaly have reached the heights of competing in some of the biggest events in the world. The county has produced Olympians, Paralympian medalists. There have been a couple agonisingly close to making the Olympics, there are others in the county, especially runners, who may get there in the coming years.

There have been outstanding international golfers, rowers, basketball stars, tennis, pitch and putt players.

Players from team sports have been among the best in the land. Offaly teams have won All-Ireland ladies football and camogie titles; several rugby players have achieved international recognition. There are brilliant young soccer players making underage Irish soccer sides.

It is a very exciting time for womens' sport in Offaly and participation levels and standards will rise further in the coming years. The following pages give a snapshot of some of the sports and their biggest achievements and achievers. It is not a definitive list, merely an indication of some of the teams and individuals that have brought glory to themselves, families, localities and county.



CLOCKWISE FROM TOP LEFT

Jeannette Feighery

Grainne Walsh

Michaela Morkan, Tina Hannon and Aine Lyng

Nicole Turner

The Offaly team that played Kerry in the first inter-county ladies football game in Tullamore in 1973

Pauline Curley

Niamh Ni Cheilleachair





# OFFALY WOMEN IN SPORT



## Golden era beckons for female athletics in Offaly

IT is certainly a golden era for female athletics in Offaly. Four hugely promising runners from the county's biggest athletics club, Tullamore Harriers are currently on athletics scholarship, three in the USA with one staying at home in Dublin. Another Offaly native Ann Marie McGlynn was within seconds of qualifying for the marathon at the Tokyo Olympics while Pauline Curley continues to command the utmost of respect, even though she is now in the Winter of her glorious career.

Then you have two young athletes from the county who have excelled in field events, taking national senior medals. Ferbane Athletics Club member Laura Dolan has had great success, winning Irish junior and U-23 titles while she has won medals in the javelin and 28lbs weight for distance event at the National Senior Track and Field Championships.

Birr AC's Ebony Hogan has won national senior and U-23 gold in the 28lbs weight for distance and she is another example of a young athlete achieving great success through pure hard work and commitment.

A Tullamore Harriers runner, Rahan woman Emily Grennan took bronze in the 3,000 metres steeplechase at the 2020 National Senior Track and Field Championships.

It is a very exciting time for female running in Offaly and there are a number of outstanding prospects in the county. The cream of the bunch are four young Tullamore Harriers' athletes on scholarship. Tullamore woman, Nadine Donegan is at Iona College in New York, her younger sister Danielle has stayed at home in UCD; Emo protegee, Ava O'Connor is at Adams State University in Colorado – alongside her Harriers club mate, Ballycommon man James Dunne – and Cappincur's Laura Mooney is in the famed Providence College, Rhode Island.

It is a tremendous opportunity for these young athletes. Most of them have represented Ireland at various levels while a couple may well go on to compete in some of the biggest events in the world.



Pauline Curley finishing the marathon at the Beijing Olympics in 2008



Ann Marie McGlynn racing for Ireland at the 2014 European Cross Country Championships.

Running has experienced a great boom in the past decade plus. There are now athletics clubs throughout Offaly as women and men of all generations take up running to improve their physical and mental health. This has been accompanied by a tremendous growth in road racing and running is one of the most popular recreational sports.

At the elite level, however, great strides forward are also being taking. The juvenile section at Tullamore Harriers has been especially successful and there are many more outstanding young athletes waiting in the wings to emerge.

Danielle Donegan and Laura Mooney ran in the European U-23 and U-20 Cross Country Championships in 2021 and further international recognition beckons for both in the coming years as they are both excellent runners on the track, road and fields.

It is a measure of the ability of these runners that long standing Tullamore Harriers' club records are now beginning to fall.

Many of these records have been held by Pauline Curley, the only Offaly woman to have ran at the Olympic Games and Curley's achievements and those of Ann Marie McGlynn have been a great inspiration to the younger generation. It is worth providing a brief profile of the careers of Curley and McGlynn as they have been the standard bearers for womens' athletics in Offaly – before them, Curley's sister Ann Carroll and Tullamore woman Mary Walsh also had fantastic successful careers.

### Pauline Curley

Pauline Curley achieved every athletes' dream when she competed in the Olympic Games, racing in the marathon in Beijing in 2008.

Nee Gorman and a native of Newtown in Killeigh, Curley had earlier achieved fame when she was on the Irish team that won bronze team medals at the World Cross Country

Championships in 1997 – that great team included two of Ireland's greatest runners, Sonia O'Sullivan and Catherina McKiernan.

Curley has displayed remarkable longevity, continuing to churn out great times and winning races in her 40s. A chef by profession and mother of Emmet, she has won three national senior marathon titles – 2005, 2007 and the last in 2015 when she was 46 years of age.

She has been a remarkably versatile runner, racing everything from 800 metres to the marathon and posting some outstanding times across the distances. A tough, fierce competitor with a great will to win, she has several national medals.

Long distance running became her forte in the 2000s and the marathon was her race of choice. She qualified for Beijing when she posted a fabulous 2.39.05 in Rotterdam that April and in China, she was delighted to finish the race and savoured the whole experience as she ran 2.49.16 in very tough, warm conditions.

Since then, she has been a serial winner on the Irish marathon circuit, winning titles in Galway, Longford, Cork, Limerick, Waterford and Derry.

Her husband Adrian is chairman of Tullamore Harriers and Curley continues to train and run regularly – she is always willing to advice and help younger runners, and recently she has accompanied the above mentioned Emily Grennan on training runs.

### Ann Marie McGlynn

Ann Marie McGlynn's running journey is an extraordinary feel good one. The daughter of Carthage and Maureen Larkin from Mucklagh, she was a super juvenile runner with Tullamore Harriers in the 1990s.

A great, spirited runner, she won a host of national and provincial cross country and track medals in those years, having initially started with the local Clodiagh Valley Athletics Club, before switching to the Harriers.

McGlynn went on an athletics scholarship to UCD in 1998, having run in the European Youth Olympics in 1997 as well as winning gold in the senior and intermediate 3,000 metres at the All-Ireland Schools' Track and Field Championships.

The world was her oyster but then McGlynn fell out of love with athletics, drifting away slowly as she entered her 20s and stopping all together at 25 years of age.

She got married to Trevor McGlynn, an athlete from Strabane, they set up home in the Tyrone town and she became a mother to two young children, Lexie and Alfie.

Running was not on her roadmap but it all changed with Alfie became seriously ill in 2012 with a bronchiolitis virus and collapsed lung. He was in intensive care for a few weeks in Belfast and an understandably upset Ann Marie reached for her runners to help relieve the pressure.

She started running just to get out and it all helped but as Alfie returned home and made a full recovery, the competitive juices got flowing again. She initially joined Lifford Athletics Club, just across the border in Donegal, later switching to Letterkenny AC and she soon reached national standard, followed by international.

From 2012, her times plummeted across a variety of distances to the extent where she ran a



Danielle Donegan at the 2021 U-23 European Cross Country Championships.

super 73.47 in the Commonwealth half marathon in Cardiff in 2018, finishing 9th.

By 2014, she had earned her place on the Irish team for the European Cross Country Championships and a year later, she had a career highlight when she captained the Irish team to bronze medals at the championships, finishing 46th overall and fourth scorer.

She has continued to excel since then, winning national medals, setting Northern Ireland records and stunning all with her brilliance. It almost brought her to the Tokyo Olympics. In 2021, McGlynn was an agonising four seconds short of booking her place to Japan. She ran a sensational

Northern Ireland and Offaly record of 2.29.34 in the Wrexham Elite Marathon in 2021, almost within touching distance of the 2.29.30 that she needed to run to get there.

It was desperately hard luck on the Mucklagh woman and her time was almost ten minutes faster than the one that brought Pauline Curley to Beijing but even without that accolade, her legacy to athletics is a very rich one and her running story still has road to travel as she continues to compete and train at a high level.



Laura Mooney racing for Ireland at the 2021 U-20 European Cross Country Championships.



**TULLAMORE HARRIERS AC**

# 5K

ROAD RACE










## MARCH 13TH AT 10AM

Registration at Harriers Club from 8:30am  
Online registration [www.popupraces.ie](http://www.popupraces.ie)

**ENTRY FEE: JUNIOR €5, SENIOR €10**

**PRIZES FOR MENS AND LADIES CATEGORIES**

1st Finisher | 2nd Finisher | 3rd Finisher

1st Junior | 1st 040 | 1st 045 | 1st 050 | 1st 060 | 1st 070

Over 13's only. Junior Category is age 16 - 20 years.

Hosted by Tullamore Harriers and part of the Offaly Athletics Road Race Series  
Race 1 of the Offaly Road Race Series

- Chip Timing
- Closed Roads
- AAI Approved



# OFFALY WOMEN IN SPORT

## Tullamore basketball players make mark for Ireland

A PROMISING young generation of female basketballers from Tullamore have begun to make their mark at international level.

Twins Emma and Ellie Glavin played last year in a big tournament. Other talented players, Shauna Slattery, Meadhbh O'Brien and Emma



Emma Glavin shooting for Ireland.

Hand, all from the wider Balliamere area, have played at underage international level – reflecting the great work going on in Tullamore Basketball Club.

Ellie and Emma Glavin are members of Tullamore Basketball Club and they were on the Irish panel that competed in the FIBA U-18 European Challengers last year.

They both play at guard and got valuable game time as Ireland competed in group B along with Lithuania, the hosts Czech Republic, Hungary, Turkey and Serbia.

Ireland lost 86-47 to Lithuania, 67-55 to Turkey, 80-52 to Czech Republic, 90-47 to Serbia and finished on a high with a fine 87-64 win over Hungary.

It was a great experience of international competition for the Irish team and the Tullamore girls. They had a hectic schedule of games in a short period of time and came up against some outstanding



Tullamore Basketball Club members who have played for Ireland. L-R Meadhbh O'Brien, Ellie Glavin, Shauna Slattery, Emma Hand.



Ellie Glavin in action for Ireland.

young talent.

The European Challengers were introduced by FIBA for 2021 in place of the European Championships which were cancelled because of Covid

The twins were on the Irish U-16/17 training panels and learnt a lot here, going on to win

their first caps at U-18 level.

Shauna Slattery is on the present Under 18 team squad which is preparing for the Europeans in Austria in August 2022.

Meadhbh O'Brien and Emma Hand both played on the Ireland Under 17 team in 2019 for the

Home tournament. Meadhbh received a basketball scholarship to NUIG last year. Emma is a very talented all round sports person and made her debut for the Offaly ladies football team lately.

There are more promising players emerging on the wings.

Una O'Brien, Ballykilmurray and Sarah O'Rourke, Mucklagh are both on the Leinster Under 15 squad who are training at the moment and will play an Interprovincial tournament during the summer of 2022 along with a planned series of friendlies against Norway.

## Basketball superstar – Susan Moran

AS Tullamore Sacred Heart School enjoyed tremendous success in schools basketball during the 1990s, their stand out player and star of the show was Susan Moran.

Coached by Ann Ganley and Orla Walsh, the school had several other outstanding players. They simply couldn't have won with just one player but nor would they have triumphed without Susan Moran. She was their single most important player, their top scorer and regular player of the match as they mopped up All-Ireland titles.



Orla Dempsey in action for Dart Killester in the 2006 Superleague Women's Cup final

It was no surprise that Susan Moran was the one player from that team who went onto have a great basketball career – Orla Dempsey also went onto compete at a high level in the National League in Ireland and has played internationally.

Moran, however, went onto become Ireland's greatest ever female basketballer, enjoying a fantastically successful professional career in the USA and other places. Inducted into the Irish basketball hall of fame in 2019

and the recipient of similar recognition in the USA, she was a brilliant all round basketballer.

The 1990s was a great time for basketball in Tullamore SHS as they graduated up through the ranks, eventually taking All-Ireland schools honours in the A division. She was sensational as they won U-19 national schools titles in 1998, scoring a phenomenal 52 and 48 points in the finals.

Tennis was actually Moran's first game and she competed internationally in that before taking up basketball in school. Her exploits with Tullamore SHS soon attracted attention from colleges in the USA and she accepted a scholarship from St Joseph's in Philadelphia.

She had a great colleges basketball career. She became the only player in their history to lead the team in both scoring and rebounding for four consecutive seasons and became their all time leading scorer. She was the fourth leading scorer in her last game in US colleges basketball with an average of

22.3 points a game. She was honoured as the Atlantic 10s student athlete of the year.

Her performances here was followed by inevitable attention from the WNBA and she became the first Irish person to be selected when she was drafted by New York Liberty in 2001. She went on to play professionally in Spain, New Zealand and Australia, picking up most valuable player accolades in New Zealand and Australia.

She was a star for Ireland, playing in the Junior and World Student Games and then lining out for the seniors – they just missed out on qualifying at European A level in 2009 and since then, she has worked as a coach with her beloved St Joseph's.

### Orla Dempsey

There was tremendous excitement in Tullamore Sacred Heart School in the 1990s as they embarked on a phenomenal run of success.

Their remarkable success story included:

\* 1994 All Ireland Minor C Division winners

\* 1995 All Ireland C

winners and Schools Cup winners

\* 1996 All Ireland Cadette B division winners

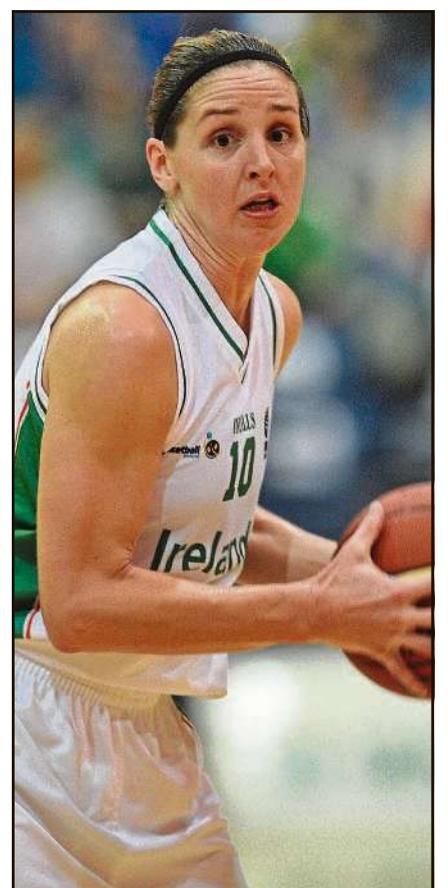
\* 1996 All Ireland Senior B division winners

\* 1998 Sprite Cup winners

\* 1999 All Ireland A division winners.

Susan Moran's exploits have been mentioned above but another star player was Orla Dempsey. The two played in all those successes and Dempsey also went on to have a successful basketball career.

She played basketball for Ireland in 1998 and continued to play senior basketball for Ireland after she left school. She was a part of a successful Waterford Wildcats side after leaving school and subsequently represented Ireland in the Deaflympics and Wheelchair basketball she won a bronze medal with Ireland at the 2017 European Championships for Wheelchair basketball and has the distinction of representing her country in three different basketball disciplines, which is likely to be a first.



Susan Moran in action for Ireland



## CELEBRATING OFFALY WOMEN IN SPORT





## OFFALY WOMEN IN SPORT



# Grainne Walsh – the brilliant boxer who also played soccer for Ireland

**A MULTI-talented sportswoman, Grainne Walsh has emerged as one of the best female boxers in Ireland.**

Walsh has won national titles, boxed internationally for Ireland and remains fiercely ambitious about what she can achieve in the sport.

The daughter of a Killeigh father and Kilcavan mother, Grainne Walsh was initially a soccer player, par excellence who played for Shamrocks Rovers and also achieved international recognition for Ireland in her teens.

She only took up boxing as a means to keep fit in the soccer off season, joining the Spartacus Boxing Club Tullamore but it changed her sporting trajectory and her life. She was also inspired by meeting Katie Taylor at the opening of that boxing club gym in Tullamore and boxing appealed to her on a number of levels – while she loved playing soccer, she really liked the individuality of boxing and the fact that it was all down to her without being dependant on what any team mates were doing.

Walsh is a fiercely dedicated trainer. While an amateur, she lives the lifestyle of a professional athlete, both inside and outside the ring. It is a journey that has brought her into the realm of

qualification for the Olympic Games and at 26 years of age, this remains a possibility for her.

A welterweight, she has won bronze medals at the European Games and the EU Championships, as well as boxing in Olympic qualifiers. A hand injury damaged her chances of making the Tokyo Olympics last year and she is a regular international competitor for Ireland.

After first taking up boxing, Walsh tried to keep both that and soccer going for a couple of years. However, like many sports people before her, she soon discovered that it was impossible to commit to two sports at a high level and boxing was her choice.

Dmitry Dmitruk was a huge influence on her boxing career. He was a founder of the Spartacus Boxing Club in Tullamore, since going onto coach with the Irish high performance team. Walsh made huge progress under his guidance.

Classed as “world class” by Sport Ireland, she has received valuable grant support from them and no doubt, plenty of top class opponents will experience pain from her in the coming years.

She has had her share of injury



Grainne Walsh with her bronze medal at the presentation ceremony at the European Games in Belarus in 2019

problem. Walsh is just back from her third thumb surgery and she commented recently: “I am back sparring the last three weeks and feeling great. Having having two and a

half years of injuries, I have a completely new mindset.”

The Tullamore woman is now in full training for the Golden Belt in Romania at the start of April. Her main

aim this year is the World Championships in Turkey in May while she is dropping down a weight to the 66kg class.

## Great work ongoing with womens' boxing in Edenderry

**GREAT progress has been made with the promotion of womens' boxing at St Brigid's Boxing Club, Edenderry.**

Under the watchful eye of long time club coach, Liam Brereton, the club have produced a number of very talented boxers as well as developing into a world renowned location for training top quality international boxers. In particular Liam Brereton has done trojan work by holding very successful training camps each year.

These camps have attracted boxers from a number of foreign countries and are one of the biggest female training camps in the world. Over 200 boxers from twenty five different countries have gained great training at these, often staying in the town and training for a week to ten days. A group of women boxers from India really added to the international flavour at a recent camp in Edenderry – both men

and women participate in the camps.

In a recent radio interview, Olympic boxing champion Kellie Harrington praised Brereton for his work, stating that he holds camps regularly throughout the year. “He is very good for female boxing,” she declared. “He is always taking teams in. He had the Irish elite team in before they went to the Europeans. It was the first time they went down but they were down there sparring before they went out.”

The camp has won an international reputation and is regarded as one of the best of its type in the world. Edenderry Boxing Club have went the extra mile by providing on site accommodation as well as cameras to film sparring sessions.

Brereton is acknowledged as one of the leading figures with the development of womens' boxing in Ireland and it is a sport

that is being targeted as a breeding ground for future Olympians.

The Edenderry Boxing Club success story, both with producing their own stars and with training brilliant boxers from throughout the world is phenomenal.

They have been voted the best club in Ireland in [boxingireland.com](http://boxingireland.com) and Liam Brereton is currently coaching boxers from Bulgaria, Canada and Ukraine – he has offered Ukrainian boxers abroad the chance to come and stay and train in Edenderry until things settle down in their home.

There has been four boxers from the club on the one Irish European team and the club have produced a host of national and international class boxers. Their enviable list of winners include:

Lauren Hogan: 3 times elite Champion, European youth bronze medallist and she has

boxed at the elite European championships.

Natasha Logan: World youth bronze medallist, unbeaten in Ireland. Brampton Cup, Canada gold medal winner; Queen's cup gold medalist; Germany, best boxer.

Lauren Kelly: 7 times national champion, 3 times European medalist and Youth Olympian. Shannon Edge: 8 times national champion, currently Army elite champion, boxed at the Cecelia Brakehus home coming in Norway in front of an 11,000 sold out crowd.

Sara Haghghat-Joo: 2 times Irish elite champion, Celtic boxing cup champion, Eindhoven boxing cup champion.

Bethaney Dunne, Irish school girl champion and Irish school girl international.

Katelyn King, Irish champion.

Saibhdh Greene: national senior champion.



Lauren Hogan after a big win in the 48kg class at the National Elite Boxing Championships in 2015.

## THE OLD HARBOUR BAR

The Old Harbour Bar is an award-winning Pub located in the heart of Tullamore, on Harbour Street.

It is a modern bar with all the character you'd expect from a traditional Irish Pub.

Family run, with friendly staff, good craic and a great atmosphere. The Guinness here is so good that it was once voted the best place in Offaly for a pint of Guinness!

The bar is well known for showing live sport and for hosting regular live music every week.





# OFFALY WOMEN IN SPORT



## Offaly women have made their mark in international golf

**GOLF is the perfect game for women and men of all ages. It does not provide the tough physical examination that team sports and individual ones such as running, tennis etc provides and as such is perfect for older people, who may not be as mobile as they once were.**

It is a social game, very relaxing and a great way of spending a day but it is also a source of great competition, a vehicle for people to achieve highly, fulfill their potential and compete up to international level.

There is of course a professional game for the truly gifted while amateur level provides oceans of opportunity at all levels – the handicap system ensures that golfers of all abilities can challenge for prizes.

Golf is well catered for in Offaly with excellent golf clubs in Birr, Esker Hills, Edenderry, Tullamore, Portarlinton and Roscrea and several more just a short hop away.

There have also been very successful teams and individuals in Offaly. Tullamore Golf Club have All-Ireland mixed titles and some individuals have really excelled.

Tullamore woman Kitty McCann was the most famous, winning the British Amateur Open in the 1950s while another Tullamore woman Una Marsden has excelled up to international level and a Kinnitty woman, Patrice Delaney reached elite level in the 2000s.

A 16 year old Tullamore Golf Club member Sinead Ni Cheilleachair is showing plenty of promise at the moment. A niece of former rowing internationals, Niamh, Ciara and Mandez Ni Cheilleachair, Sinead was the winner of the Girls under 18 of the Connacht Junior Women's and Girls Open 2021 which was played in Athlone Golf Club on 24th and 25th June 2021. Sinead's score of 184 was three shots better than her nearest rival Ciara Fraser of Dun Laoighaire Golf Club. Past names on the trophy include Leona Maguire, Stephanie Meadow, Olivia Mehaffey all now playing on the Professional Tour in the USA. Her roll of victory continued when she won the FloGas under 19 girls in the Champions Junior World Championship hosted in Tulfarris in August 2021.

Aged now 16 Sinead took up the game when she was ten and quickly showed her potential by graduating from a junior handicap to a senior handicap in a short time. She now plays off 6 handicap. She was junior golfer of the year at Tullamore Golf Club in 2019, has won several competitions both in the junior and senior sections. She has represented the club in senior and junior inter-club competitions. Sinead is also the winner of Golf Ireland's Girls Junior Club Medal for

her performance in the 18-hole competitions in the months of June, July and August last year

Sinead has now been selected for Golf Ireland Performance Development U-17 Squad -Midlands-East.

Below are profiles of Offaly's top three ladies golfers: Kitty McCann, Una Marsden and Patrice Delaney.



**Kitty McCann arriving back in Dublin Airport with the British Open trophy in 1951**

### KITTY MCCANN

Kitty McCann achieved lasting international fame when she won the 1951 British Open Championship.

McCann, a cherished figure at Tullamore Golf Club for decades after it, won the 1951 British Open when she defeated a former winner, Bunty Stephens 4 and 3 in the final at Broadstone, Kent.

Her golden era was in the 1940s and 1950s, though she continued to excel into the 1960s. She won the Irish title in 1949 and 1961 and played regularly for Ireland in the 1940s, 1950s and 1960s – she was also a non playing captain and selector for years.

She was selected on the Curtis Cup team to play the USA in 1952 but unfortunately she couldn't travel because of illness. She led Tullamore to their first womens' Senior Cup title in 1958.

Tullamore Golf Club held a celebration to commemorate the golden jubilee of her British Open win in 2001.

She had been born as Catherine Smye in Clonmel in 1922 and she moved to Tullamore after her father was appointed manager of the local Bank of Ireland. She soon joined Tullamore Golf Club and was soon making excellent progress – her first handicap was 29, it dropped ten shots to 19 in her first competition and she was off 8 by her 16th birthday.

She got down to 4 by the time she was runner-up in the Irish Close Championship at Royal Portrush in 1947. The Leinster Scratch Cup at Royal Dublin in 1948 was her first big win, she took her first Irish close title a year later and she went onto enjoy a

career full of titles and accomplishment.

She played on the Irish home international team on sixteen occasions, was captain in 1965 when she played and in 1979, she was a selector when Ireland won the European Team Championship at Hermitage GC. She was lady captain at Tullamore Golf Club in 1948 and was made a life member after her British Open triumph.

She passed away in 2010.



**Una Marsden, an Irish girls international in 1997 and 1999**

### UNA MARSDEN

Una Marsden has been the best female golfer at Tullamore Golf Club for several years. She started with a handicap of 36 in 1993 when 12 years of age, had it reduced to 11 by 1995, 7 a year later and is now off handicap index two.

Marsden was appointed as captain of the Leinster Central Women's Interprovincial team last year. Golf Ireland made this announcement last year ahead of the Women's Interprovincial matches which took place in Shannon Golf Club in August. Una was the first Tullamore member ever to be appointed to this role.

The following is a snapshot of her main golfing achievements:

Irish Training Panels 1996 - 2000 - High Level (under-age) Coaching, funded by the ILGU, from Vivian Saunders (UK coach), Philip Murphy, Lynn Sweeney, Howard Bennett (UK Coach) and David Sweeney

2021 – Captain of the Leinster Ladies Team for the Interprovincial Championships

2021 – Captain of the Tullamore Ladies Junior Cup Team that reached the Golf Ireland Semi-finals

2018 – Winner of Lady Captain's Prize Tullamore Golf Club

2017 – Joint Team Manager (with Joe Morris) of the Tullamore All-Ireland winning Irish Mixed Foursomes Championship

Teams:

2003 - Leinster Ladies Team

2002 - Irish 2 Person Team – Belgian

Ladies U21 Championship –

2000 - Irish U21 Team Castleconturbia, Italy

1996 – 2000 - Leinster Junior Interprovincial Girls' Team, 5 years a member, Team won in 1997 and 2000

1997 & 1999 - Irish Girls Team for Home Internationals

Ladies Championships: (Individual)

2003 - Leinster Ladies Championship. Runner up

2008 - Irish Close Quarter Finalist Girls Championships – (Individual)

2003 – Semi Finalist in Intermediate U23 Championship

2002 - Leading qualifier Intermediate U23 championship – Athenry

Runner up in Intermediate Championship

1999 - Ulster & Leinster Girls Championships - Runner Up

1997 - Ulster & Leinster Girls Championships – Semi Finalist

1997 - May Fitzgibbon Trophy – Runner Up with Finola Donnelly (Forest Little)

Golf Foundation GB&I Tournament (Weetabix)

1994 - Ireland's Girl representation at Under 14

1996 – Ireland's Girl representation at Under 16

Faldo Junior Series 1998 – Represented Ireland at U-18

Awards:

1997 - Offaly Sports Person of Year in Golf

2000 - Phoenix Festival Person of the Year in Golf

2000 - Phoenix Festival Person of the Year in Golf

### PATRICE DELANEY

KINNITTY woman Patrice Delaney competed alongside some of Ireland's top female golfers in the 2000s, representing her country in the U-18 Home Internationals, with players such as Leona and Lisa Maguire and Stephanie Meadow.

Delaney was very comfortable in their company and was among the best amateur golfers in Ireland towards the

end of the decade. She competed in several country wide and international competitions in golf and also represented Leinster in the U-18 interprovincials.

Her big golfing wins included several underage golfing championships such as the Munster Girls in 2008 and 2009, and the Roscommon Scratch Cup in 2009. She was selected on the Irish Girls under 16 team in 2007, the under 18 team in 2008 and 2009 for the Home Internationals and on the Leinster Interprovincial under 18 team in 2007, 2008, and 2009.

She developed a great interest in sport from an early age, both from a playing and coaching perspective and would look at almost any sport. She is also a very talented camogie player, playing the game all her life with Kinnitty while she has also played for Offaly underage and senior sides. She still plays with Kinnitty and has won several county underage medals with them – she was the Kinnitty camogie player of the year in 2015.

She drifted away from golf after that initial run of success but returned playing as Covid limited camogie and normal activity – she is an honorary member at Birr Golf Club and enjoyed playing with family and friends, mostly non competitively while she did play in a few classics.

A daughter of Offaly hurling legend, Pat Delaney – an All-Ireland medal winner in 1981 and 1985 -, she looks back with great satisfaction on her golfing career, reflecting:

“Golf has given me great opportunities and experiences to travel the country and world playing the best courses and getting to meet new people along the way. Sport has thought me a lot from discipline, hard work, patience, team work and interpersonal skills to name a few. Sport has been and will continue to be a big part of my life.”

Another Birr member, Gemma Butler was captain of the Irish Girls team for a couple of years while Sorcha Moylan is currently on the Leinster junior panel.



**The Irish team in 2009 Home Mary Dowling (Manager), Paula Grant, Carla Reynolds, Emma O Driscoll, Sarah Helly, Laura McCarthy, Leona Maguire, Patrice Delaney, Lisa Maguire, Sinead Keane**



## CELEBRATING OFFALY WOMEN IN SPORT





## OFFALY WOMEN IN SPORT



# How Offaly camogie reached the promised land

ONE of the great sporting achievements in womens' sport in Offaly has been by the county camogie team as they progressed up through junior and intermediate ranks to reach senior level.

And while the ultimate success has been beyond their reach, Offaly have done very well to retain their senior status in the past couple of years, going toe to toe with the best teams and players in the country.

It is a great era for camogie in Offaly. The county team have won All-Ireland Junior and Intermediate titles while St Rynagh's achieved their life ambitions when winning the All-Ireland club intermediate title last year – at the time of writing, they were zoning in on two in a row.

Camogie has become a hugely popular sport in Offaly with clubs throughout the south of the county while Tullamore and St Sinchill's have very strong clubs away from the hurling heartland – Shamrocks have established an underage club in the past couple of years.

There is a great tradition of camogie in Offaly, though it took a while for the game to truly establish itself. The national Cumann Camogaiochta na nGael was formed in 1904 but camogie did not gain a foothold in Offaly at that time.

It was in the 1930s before camogie began to thrive in Offaly as clubs were formed in areas such as Lusmagh, Mucklagh, Ballycommon, Ballycumber, Killoughey, Rahan, Drumcullen, Kinnitty and Tullamore – it is interesting to note that some of those areas, especially Ballycommon and Ballycumber, are ones where there was not a male hurling tradition but camogie teams were fielded. It probably represented the desire of women to play an indigenous Irish field sport and it was the 1970s before ladies football got established.



The Offaly squad that won the All-Ireland camogie intermediate title in 2010.

By the mid 1930s, Offaly were fielding camogie teams. A famous Clare man Mick Falvey was their trainer – Falvey, a former Clare and then Offaly hurler, taught in a few schools, including Tullamore, Edenderry and Ballinagar. Offaly reached the 1935 Leinster junior final, where Wexford pipped them by a point.

In the following decades, camogie in Offaly underwent fluctuations as clubs came and went. The 1940s was a particularly barren decade as there was no club championships for much of it and a county team was not fielded.

The 1950s was similar. There was no County Board, no club championships and players from Offaly interested in playing camogie did so with Laois and

Tipperary clubs. Occasionally teams were put out on special occasions but it was the 1960s before camogie was properly organised in Offaly again. It was very slow beginnings, however. Three clubs were needed to form a County Board but there was only two in Offaly for the most part – one of these was called St Mary's in Tullamore but they soon disappeared.

Gradually camogie got established again as clubs were formed in areas such as Daingean, Cappincur, Drumcullen, Coolderry, Kinnitty and Rahan. Offaly fielded teams again and they won the Leinster junior championship in 1962 and 1963, going up to intermediate after that. They were beaten by Wexford in the 1967 Leinster intermediate final.

An Offaly Camogie County Board had been formed in 1966 but a shortage of players was a major issue. Again, club and county action fell off the scene to such an extent that Tullamore had to affiliate in Laois for a spell in the 1970s as there was no opposition in Offaly, winning the Laois senior title in 1974.

Things improved as secondary schools in Kilcormac and Clara and then Banagher began to promote the game. Clubs were formed in Birr, Drumcullen, Clara and Kilcormac and a County Board was reformed at the end of the 1970s.

The game really began to evolve and grow from the 1980s as new clubs emerged – not all of them lasted the distance and some were fleeting

experiments.

Drumcullen won an All-Ireland community games camogie title in 1986 and they went onto become a dominant force at senior level. Underage championships were run, sometimes with a B one necessary to cater for the numbers and disparity in standards.

By the 1990s, camogie was firmly established in Offaly with Bord na Scoil championships also run. There were eleven Offaly players on the Roscrea Vocational Schools team that won an All-Ireland schools title early in the decade while Drumcullen won the Leinster junior title in 1992 and in 1999, Offaly won their third Leinster junior crown.

They won again in 2001, defeating Carlow in the final while there were great celebrations when they won their first All-Ireland title in 2005, defeating Armagh in the All-Ireland minor final. Underage and schools work paid off as Offaly reached the All-Ireland junior final in 2008, suffering a heartbreaking last gasp defeat to Clare.

A year later, Offaly finally got there, beating Waterford in the All-Ireland junior final with hurling legends, Joachim Kelly and Mark Corrigan at the helm along with Catherine Byrn, who had played in the 2001 All-Ireland junior final defeat by Tipperary.

In 2010, Offaly went a step further, winning the All-Ireland intermediate championship with a superb final win over Wexford.

They have stayed senior since then. There have been All-Ireland B titles at u18 and 16 level and as GAA and Camogie embrace the “one club” model, new teams have been formed in areas such as Edenderry, Shamrocks and Belmont. St Rynagh's success has added to the growth of optimism and while Offaly have to work hard to retain their top flight status, the game is in very good health at the moment.

## Miriam O'Callaghan one of Offaly's great sporting administrators

MIRIAM O'Callaghan has been one of Offaly's greatest sporting administrators, one of only a handful of people who have reached the pinnacle of their chosen sport at national level – a fellow Tullamore person, John Dowling was president of the GAA in the 1990s, Tullamore resident, John Cronin is currently the president of Irish athletics while Rhode man Joe Masterson has reached the top in handball.

Nee Casey, Miriam O'Callaghan has given a life time of commitment to camogie. She has been one of the great advocates of the game from the 1970s, immersing herself in camogie at all

levels. By 1984, she was chairperson of the Offaly Camogie County Board and she did trojan work as the game got firmly established during a decade when a powerful foundation was built for future success.

She was elected as president of the Camogie Association at their 2003 Congress in Arklow, defeating Down's Helen McAleevy, 39-27, in a keenly fought contest. She served as president from 2003 to 2006 and worked very hard to enhance the profile of the game – one of the big initiatives was the twinning of the All-Ireland camogie final with the All-Ireland U-21 Hurling Championship decider, an

initiative that happened from 2006 to 2009.

She was also an advocate for closer relationships and co-operation with the GAA. She has also served camogie well as a player and coach and she was an excellent referee – she took charge of the All-Ireland senior camogie finals in 1991 and 1993.

She has done great work across the sporting spectrum in Offaly. She has been a long time member of the Offaly Sports Partnership and she was chairperson from 2010 to 2020. In 2021, she received other prestigious appointment when she joined the board of Sport Ireland.



Miriam O'Callaghan

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# OFFALY WOMEN IN SPORT



The Offaly team that beat Tipperary in a replayed All-Ireland Senior Football Championship final in 1979.



The Offaly squad that won the All-Ireland junior ladies football title in 2013

## Offaly's pivotal role in the establishment of ladies football

LADIES football has gone onto become one of the great participation sports in Ireland and Offaly can be very proud of the role they played in its establishment in the 1970s.

Offaly played in some of the first organised ladies football games in the early 1970s and they were one of only four counties represented when the Ladies Gaelic Football Association was formed in July 1974 – fittingly that meeting took place in Hayes Hotel, Thurles, where the GAA had been founded almost ninety years earlier.

Teams had come together to play games in Offaly before the official formation – Ballycumber was one of the first, playing games from the late 1960s.

Offaly, Kerry, Tipperary and Galway were represented at that historic 1974 meeting and the first All-Ireland championship took place that year when Offaly were beaten 2-3 to 2-2 by Tipperary in Durrow, Laois.

Ladies football was a very different sport then. It enjoyed nothing of the profile that the modern game does and there was definitely no suggestion of a Croke Park setting for All-Ireland finals. There was minimal public interest and that inaugural All-Ireland final was played before a handful of spectators.

It was in the 2000s before the game really mushroomed but the seeds sown by those pioneers were crucial. Offaly were a serious force for the early years

and the ladies achievement added to the sense of excitement in the early 1980s as the county hunted All-Ireland senior football and hurling honours.

Offaly were beaten by Kerry in the 1976 All-Ireland final, 4-6 to 1-5 while they finally won in 1979, beating Tipperary, 3-6 to 1-6, in a replayed final. They won a second All-Ireland in 1981, getting the better of Cavan by 1-11 to 4-0 and they competed in their last All-Ireland senior final in 1982, losing to Kerry by 1-8 to 1-2. In Leinster, Offaly were unbeatable as they won nine Leinster titles in a row.

As motherhood and other commitments beckoned for many of that great team, Offaly entered a long decline and have not contended for the

All-Ireland senior title again.

The 1990s was a particularly rough decade for the game in Offaly but over the last twenty years, it has begun to prosper again. Clubs have got organised, the local championships have got more competitive and playing standards have risen.

The county team slipped back to junior level but there has been significant improvement in the past decade. There were great celebrations in 2013 when Offaly won the All-Ireland Junior Championship, beating Wexford in the final in Croke Park.

They have stayed at intermediate level since then while the county is always associated with All-Ireland

senior final day in Croke Park as the prize for the winners is the Brendan Martin Cup – it was donated in 1974 by the popular Tullamore native who was a key figure in the formation of the game in Offaly and nationally. Martin was the first Offaly Ladies Football secretary and the first chairperson was Phyliss Price, nee Hackett.

A Belmont man, the late Tommy Kenny was national president from 1977 to 1979. The health of the game in Offaly was shown in 2019 when Naomh Ciaran, a west Offaly club and the dominant force in Offaly senior club fare, staged a terrific comeback to beat St Paul's of Antrim in the 2019 All-Ireland club intermediate final.



LEFT: Naomh Ciaran after winning the All-Ireland ladies football club intermediate final in 2019.



RIGHT: Siobhan Flannery lifting the All-Ireland ladies football junior cup in 2013



## CELEBRATING OFFALY WOMEN IN SPORT



Comhairle Chontae Uíbh Fhailí  
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CELEBRATING INTERNATIONAL WOMEN'S DAY ON MARCH 8TH



## OFFALY WOMEN IN SPORT



# Garryhinch woman fulfilled dream with Paralympics swimming medal

NICOLE Turner received her just reward for years of hard work and pure dedication when she won a medal at the 2021 Paralympics Games in Tokyo.

From Garryhinch on the Offaly side of the border near Portarlinton, Turner performed heroically to take silver in her favourite event, the S6 50 metres butterfly.

Her success was greeted with great celebrations by her family, neighbours and many supporters back at home



Lorraine Regan throwing in the 2015 World Para-Championships javelin final.

and she was given a great homecoming when she returned from Japan.

She finished a brilliant second to the world record holder, China's Yuyan Jiang, posting a time of 36.30.

She had also finished second to Jiang in her heat.

Having finished fourth in this event in the Rio de Janeiro Paralympics in 2016, Turner had set her sights on a medal here and was thrilled to win silver.

"It hasn't sunk in at all. Looking back on Rio, being so close to that bronze medal, the aim was to get on the podium in Tokyo.

"I never in a million years thought it would be silver.

"I always thought it would be a fight for bronze," said a thrilled Turner after her win.

Just 19 years of age at the time of her big win, Turner is a very versatile winner and her dedication has brought her a bag of international and national medals.

She competed in the 50 metre freestyle, 50 metre butterfly, 100 metres breaststroke and 200 metres individual medley in Tokyo.

She now races for the NAC Swim Club which is based out of the High Performance National Aquatic Centre in Abbotstown, Dublin.

She made phenomenal progress in swimming from a young age and her first major event was the World Dwarf Games in 2009 when she won four swimming gold medals.

That gave her the confidence and belief that she had what it took to compete and it was the start of a very successful career. She got great coaching and did daily sessions as she chased her dream.

Her first year to swim internationally in paralympics was in 2015, when she was 13 in the world IPC swimming championships in Madeira.

She has an impressive collection of world and European medals. These include:

2016 European IPC swimming championships won 2 silver and 1 bronze. Silvers in the 200m IM and 100m Breaststroke and the Bronze in the 50m Butterfly.

2018 won a silver European medal in the 50m fly.

2019 won a World Bronze medal in the 50m fly.

2021 won Four European medals 2 silver and 2 bronze. Silvers in the 100m breaststroke and the 50m fly. Bronzes in the 50m freestyle and the 200m IM.

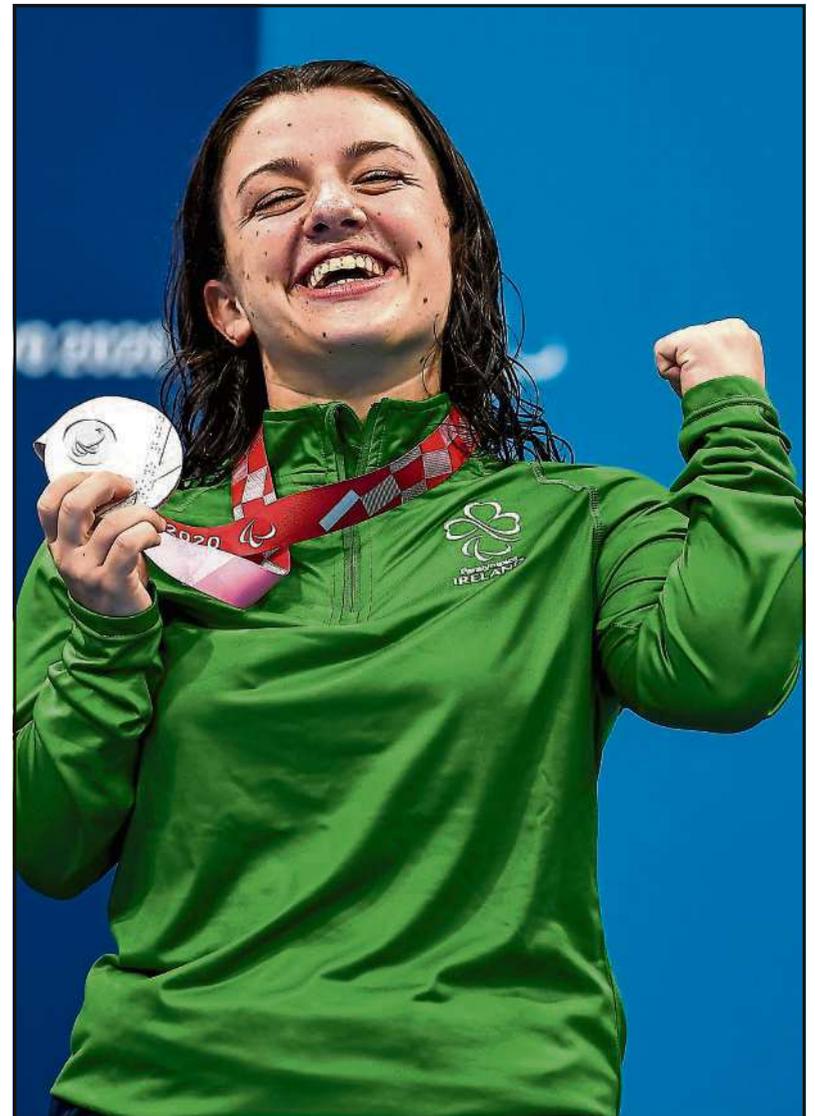
She has displayed consistent improvement over the years and will no doubt achieve much more as she enters her prime swimming years.

Another talented para-athlete was Kilcormac woman Lorraine Regan. She competed in the javelin at the IPC Para World Championships in Doha in 2015 and was very close to making the 2016 Paralympics in Rio de Janeiro when she was the first reserve but didn't get the call up.

She also competed in the 2014 and 2016 Europeans in Swansea and Grosseto.

Another sport well catered for in Offaly is Special Olympics.

Not to be confused with Para events, there is a very well run Special Olympics organisation in Offaly with great volunteers and they provide a very welcome avenue of sport for their competitors.



Nicole Turner with her Paralympics silver medal.

## Killurin woman's great cycling adventure led to international triumphs

KILLURIN woman Francine Meehan had her spell in the limelight in the 2010s as she made her presence felt in the cycling world.

A very hard, committed trainer, Meehan competed in two Paralympics Games, winning silver bronze in the 2012 London showpiece.

Meehan was the sighted partner for a visually impaired cyclist, Dubliner Catherine

Walsh. In London, Walsh and Meehan won silver in the Women's B Individual Pursuit final and won bronze in the Women's B Time Trial.

They also competed in the 2016 Rio de Janeiro Paralympics, this time in the paratriathlon, where they finished eight.

Her and Walsh were a great team and they excelled at events throughout the world, regularly finishing on the

podium. They also won a few World Time Trial medals on the tandem.

She was also a superb cyclist in her own right. She did well in conventional events and loved cyclo-cross: those races generally took place on off road surfaces such as grass, dirt and mud in areas such as woods and fields with obstacles adding to the challenge and they generally lasted on the region

of an hour.

Meehan won six national cyclo cross titles from 2009 to 2015 while she won bronze in the national time trial in 2013 and was woman's national road race series champion in 2009.

She also competed well in the national championships, finishing third in 2014.

She won club events and grand prix races all over the country.



Catherine Walsh, left, and Francine Meehan with their bronze medals at the 2012 Paralympics in London.



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# OFFALY WOMEN IN SPORT



Sylvia Ghee



Becky Watkins

## International recognition an achievable goal for Offaly women soccer players

WOMENS' soccer has experienced similar growth in Offaly as the other great team sports, camogie, ladies football rugby.

There are now adult teams from Killeigh, Clara and Birr competing in the Combined Counties Football League womens' divisions. There are booming Schoolboys/Girls soccer clubs all over the county with many fielding girls teams, including Killeigh, Mucklagh, Tullamore, Killavilla, Frankford, Clara and Birr. Edenderry Town have had adult ladies teams playing in the Kildare District League as well as schoolgirls ones.

Players from the county have begun to achieve international recognition.

Tullamore woman Grainne Walsh was an Irish U-17 international before concentrating on boxing, where she also achieved international standard.

Mucklagh schoolboys and girls club has developed a number of quality players. Recently two of their former members Becky Watkins and Ciara Glackin travelled to Turkey for two U-19 friendly matches against Russia.

The duo are both students at Killina Secondary School, starring for their successful senior schools soccer side this year.

Goalkeeper Glackin now plays her club soccer with Athlone Town while striker Watkins is a very exciting prospect. She signed with Wexford

Youths earlier this year, having previously played with Peamount United in Dublin – she came off the bench to score a goal as they defeated Cork City 5-0 in the 2020 FAI Womens Cup final.

Another Mucklagh and Killina Secondary School player, Ellen Dolan was selected on the Irish U-16 squad last year – Ellen is a midfielder.

There are several others throughout Offaly who have shown outstanding talent, some moving to clubs in neighbouring counties and further afield. There will be plenty of more soccer internationals from Offaly in the coming years but the exploits of one of the first deserve to be singled out.

Shinrone woman Sylvia Gee was a brilliant international and National League player back in the 1990s, 2000s and 2010s. She excelled during an era when this was very much the path less travelled and there were very few if any womens' teams in Offaly.

She displayed fantastic longevity, winning a host of medals and honours. A former hockey player, she played with several clubs at home and abroad during a tremendous career. She played with a few teams in the USA as well as Leeds United in the FA Womens' Premier League in England.

She played with Benfica in Portugal as well as with UCD, Portlaoise, Tullamore Town, Cork City, Dun

Laoighaire-Rathdown Waves, Peamount and Kilkenny in Ireland.

She only finished playing competitively around the 2020 mark and has captained teams as well as winning several awards. A brilliant utility player who could play in any of the outfield positions, scoring plenty of goals and she has represented Ireland at university and senior level. She was a regular on their squad for years, featuring in World Cup and European qualifying campaigns from 1999 to 2005.

She has since got coaching qualifications and has made her mark in this arena.



Ciara Glackin



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## OFFALY WOMEN IN SPORT



# Offaly women playing leading role in ru

**A RUGBY revolution is underway with the womens' game becoming increasingly popular. Participation levels are increasing across the country and standards are rising accordingly.**

Ireland is becoming more competitive at international level and they will improve further in the coming years as more women are drawn to the game.

Offaly players are making their presence felt with a number of players from the county capped at international level while others have played provincial rugby. There is an impressive list of women from the county who have represented Ireland at international level.

Caroline Mahon, an Offaly native with powerful Killoughey and Rahan blood was the first in January 2006, followed by Tullamore's Yvonne Nolan that February and Shinrone's Jeannette Feighery in April 2006. The next was Walsh Island woman, Niamh Kavanagh in March 2011 with Kilcormac's Nichola Fryday making her debut in November 2016. Ailsa Hughes (Tullamore) was 2017, Ballinahown's Michelle Claffey 2018 and another Tullamore women, Shannon Touhey the latest in November 2021. They are all full womens' internationals while Niamh Kavanagh and Jeannette Feighery also excelled at the sevens game, playing in a number of tournaments for Ireland. Tullamore woman Megan Burns has also been an outstanding sevens international, making her debut in June 2018.

Womens' rugby has also become firmly established in Tullamore. They have competed in the All-Ireland League, though they are now in the Leinster League and they are flying this season.

The trend setter was Caroline Mahon, though she has spent most of her life in Kilkenny. She was born in Offaly, spending her first year in Rahan before her family moved to Kilkenny and she has very much regarded herself as an Offaly woman – her family retain great memories of her being brought to the 1982 All-Ireland football final as a baby and the excitement with her grandmother, parents and uncles when Seamus Darby scored his famous winning goal.

Her father Hugh Mahon is from a well known Killoughey family, her mother, Mary is a Kearney from a very popular Rahan family. They moved to Kilkenny when Caroline was one year of age after Hugh got transferred with Teagasc. She played second row for Ireland, featuring in the 2006 and 2010 World Cups and played most of her club rugby with University of Limerick Bohemians, having initially started in Kilkenny. She played every game with UL Bohs as they won 10 All-Ireland League titles in a row and also played with Leinster. She has stayed in rugby as a coach since her playing career ended – she taught PE and maths at Newbridge College where she coached future Leinster players such as James Treacy and Jimmy O'Brien. She now teaches in Kilkenny College while she also coaches camogie teams in Dicksboro.

Yvonne Nolan also played in 2006 and she has a very interesting rugby story. She played well before womens' rugby got established in her native Tullamore. She played at hooker with Leinster and Old Belvedere from 2001 to 2010 and won 24 Irish caps. She was also assistant coach to Leinster women in 2014, she has coached Old Belvedere in the All-Ireland League since retiring and now works as Deputy General Counsel with World



Rugby.

Jeannette Feighery completed the hat trick of international debuts for Offaly women in 2006 and continued to excel into the 2010s – she also played camogie for Offaly and is still playing for her club Shinrone. She starred at both the sevens and 15-a-side games – she was scrum half/out half in sevens and played in the centre or wing in the full game.

She started playing with Roscrea RFC, staying with them for two seasons when 18-19 years of age. She then moved to University of Limerick Bohemians, winning several All-Ireland League and Cup titles as well as captaining them. She is one of the small group of people who has played both sevens and fifteen-a-side rugby at international level - She has twenty caps in the full game and has played over ten games for the Irish sevens side.

From Shinrone, Feighery is one of a handful of Offaly women who started their sporting careers with camogie and then made their mark in other sports. Most of these have retained a great love for camogie and returned to the sport after achieving international recognition in other codes. That was the case here as injury ended her rugby career in 2014. Now living in Waterford and a mother of a young child, she returned to play junior camogie with Shinrone last season even though the commute wasn't simple and she still had to manage injuries. She was a county standard camogie player earlier in her career, combining that with rugby for a while and she played with Offaly in their 2001



Above left: Niamh Kavanagh in action for Ireland.

Megan Burns speeding towards the try line for Leinster.

Michelle Claffey in action for Leinster.

All-Ireland junior final defeat by Tipperary. She also won two Ashbourne Cups, the camogie equivalent of the Fitzgibbon Cup, while studying in UL.

Niamh Kavanagh made her international debut in 2011 and won several caps in the 2010s – she also has a handful of international sevens' appearances. The Walsh Island woman took up rugby around 2010 while studying law and tax at University of Limerick. Her first introduction was at the Tullamore Tag Rugby League, when she played for Hugh Lynch's pub where she did part time work.

Womens' rugby only got established in Tullamore from 2013 and she initially played with UL Bohemians winning All-Ireland League, All-Ireland Cup and Munster Cup medals with them. She later played for Munster and was part of the Irish squad that won the Grand Slam in 2013. A winger, she scored several important tries at all levels and Kavanagh's brother Anthony also won Irish caps at U-19 and 21 level.

Kavanagh is a member of the Board of Directors of UL Bohs, PRO for the club, and womens' representative on the main committee, as well as being on the Munster women's committee. She has just returned to playing again with Bohs after an injury.

Kilcormac woman Nichola Fryday has emerged as one of the best rugby players from Offaly. At the time of writing, she has 22 caps and she has also played with Tullamore, Galwegians, Old Belvedere, Blackrock, and Connacht. She has now

moved to Exeter Chiefs in England and she won her first Irish cap against Canada in 2016 when she was the first Tullamore member to play for the senior side.

Ailsa Hughes has won 13 caps at the time of writing and plays with Railway Union and Leinster. She was an excellent camogie player, winning All-Ireland medals with Offaly before opting to concentrate on rugby. She helped establish the oval ball game in Tullamore before moving to Railway Union as she bid to progress her career. A scrum half, she won her first Irish cap in 2017.

Michelle Claffey has emerged as a key player with both Leinster and Ireland. She comes from a cherished GAA background and her uncle Kieran Claffey was midfield on the Offaly side that won their first All-Ireland Senior Football Championship in 1971. She played ladies football with Offaly but took up rugby while studying economics and finance at University of Limerick when 21 years of age. After completing her degree and moving to Dublin to work, she joined Blackrock College RFC in 2010 and really began to progress from here. Two gruesome cruciate injuries, one of each knee, slammed the brakes on but she recovered superbly – showing she has what it takes by putting in the intense work, much of it alone, to recover from ACL injuries. This was followed by debuts for Leinster and Ireland and the centre has shown her quality at every opportunity. She was the Leinster vice captain in 2021. Incidentally Hughes and Claffey both came into opposition when they played on opposing sides in the Energia Women's All-Ireland League Final recently. It ended with Hughes smiling as she scored two crucial tries for Railway Union in their 24-18 win over the Michelle Claffey captained Blackrock College. It was a great performance by Hughes and the quality of her two tries, one in each half, lit up the evening.

Shannon Touhey is another camogie player who is now making her mark in rugby. A camogie goalkeeper, she has played with Offaly and won an intermediate championship with Tullamore in 2021 – a year when she also made her international debut. Camogie and ladies football were her first sporting loves but rugby drew her in after she was introduced to it at U-18 level in 2015. She played sevens rugby with Leinster and Ireland U-18s but the full sized game is where she is best. She played with Connacht and Suttonians before fulfilling a dream when winning an Irish cap against Japan last year. She has since returned to play with Tullamore while she has also travelled to England to play for London Wasps in 2022.

Megan Burns has made her presence felt in the sevens game. The Tullamore player was part of the Ireland side that won the U-18 Home Nations Trophy in 2018 while she won a bronze medal with Ireland at the Rugby Europe Vichy Sevens the same year. She made her senior Irish sevens debut at the Rugby Europe Grand Prix in Kazan in 2018 and has since established herself as an outstanding sevens international. She took up rugby at U-15 level with Tullamore in 2015 and developed her game over the following years – she has also played dual status rugby with Blackrock in the All-Ireland League and her dream is to compete with Ireland in the World Cup and Olympic rugby sevens in the coming few years – she is studying physiotherapy at UCD.

# Chocolate Brown

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# OFFALY WOMEN IN SPORT



## Rugby revolution

## Birr native was a multiple tennis international



Ailsa Hughes scoring a crucial try for Railway Union in their recent All-Ireland League final win over Blackrock

A BIRR native was a multiple Irish tennis international in the 1960s and '70s, playing against some of the game's greatest stars.

Geraldine Barniville played more than seventy times for Ireland while she also represented her country in squash. Nee Houlihan, she was a member a very well known Birr family – tennis was her first game and she took up squash when she was 24, reaching international standard.

She lived in Dublin for most of her life and played for Ireland for the first time when she was twenty years of age. She played in 10 Federation Cups and played against some of the greats, including Virginia Wade whom she beat, Billie Jean King, Christine Trueman, the 1961 Wimbledon runner up who she took to three sets and Martina Navratilova who beat her in the 1975 Federation Cup.

One of her career highlights was winning the Irish doubles with



Geraldine Barniville collecting an outstanding contribution to Irish Tennis award at Carrickmines from Club President, Alan Looney and Pat Crowe, Tennis Director in 2017.

Australian, Margaret Court in 1966. She won the County Dublin Championships on nine occasions and was married to one of Ireland's great male tennis players,

Harry Barniville with whom she won many mixed titles.

In Offaly, tennis is a popular sport with popular clubs in Birr and Tullamore.



Shannon Touhey, right, celebrating scoring a try for Connacht.



Tracey McGrath



Margaret Hogan.

## Offaly women achieved big honours in pitch and putt

OFFALY women have prospered in pitch and putt with a couple winning national titles and achieving international recognition.

The most successful from the county was Tullamore Pitch and Putt Club member, Margaret Hogan, who was a multiple winner of national, provincial and county titles as well as competing internationally.

Hogan has displayed fantastic consistency over a long number of years and has been a prolific winner throughout her career. Her career has spanned from the mid 1970s and she has taken a huge haul of honours.

She was the National Ladies Senior strokeplay champion in 1977, 1978, 1979, 2006 and 2012 – she also won the national matchplay in 1980, 1987, 1989, 1997 and 2011. There were also several near misses along the way as she was runner up in both championships on a number of occasions.

Hogan's last national title was in 2012 while she has continued to be a force at county level since then, winning the Offaly strokeplay title last in 2018.

Among the other players who has excelled at pitch and putt is Clara woman, Tracey McGrath. A member of Erry Pitch and Putt Club, she was also an

outstanding competitor at local and national level, winning several prestigious events.

In the late 1990s, she won the Irish Girls Championship twice and held the all time record for the Irish Strokeplay Championship. She has also been a prolific winner of tournaments and championships at Offaly, Leinster and National level and has excelled on an international stage. She won the Catalan Open in Spain in 2008 and also captained Ireland to win the 2011 Catalonia Challenge while she represented her country in the European team championships in 2007 and 2003.



# CELEBRATING OFFALY WOMEN IN SPORT





# Offaly Sports Partnership promotes its first Women in Sport Week

TO coincide with International Women's Day on March 8th and Sport Ireland's promotion for a Women in Sport Week, Offaly Sports Partnership has taken the lead in Co. Offaly.

Chairperson of the Sports Partnership, Councillor Robert McDermott said: "We are delighted to promote the first women in sport week for Co. Offaly. The Sports Partnership is totally committed to greater participation, representation and equality within sport."

He added that Offaly Sports Partnership moved in 2021 to ensure gender balance at

management committee level and that its efforts have been nationally acknowledged. Councillor McDermott concluded by saying that the Sports Partnership intends for Women in Sport Week to become an annual celebration and promotion in Offaly.

## Events

The following are some events organised for 2022:

- \* Athletics – The Pauline Curley Marathon Relay. 30 primary school girls to share the running of the marathon distance in the Harriers on Friday 11th March

- \* Basketball – 3 v 3 inter school "street basketball" blitz for secondary school girls on Thursday 10th March in Tullamore College

- \* Boxing – Open female sparring in St. Brigid's Boxing Club, Edenderry

- \* Camogie – Tullamore Camogie Club meet & greet, walk led by Pauline Curley, games and refreshments. Commencing at 10:00 am from O'Brien Park, Tullamore

- \* Canoeing – Canoeing Ireland launch of its Teen Connect video for social media channels on Monday 7th March. This online video featuring local paddler and Special

Olympian Moira Scott and other TY student will highlight the benefits of paddle sports to teenage girls

- \* Cycling – 40km women's cycle on Saturday 12th March organised by Team 905 Cycling Club, Edenderry

- \* Golf – International Women's Day Golf tournament for Seniors in Tullamore Golf Club, Tuesday 8th March

- \* Junior Golf tournament for girls in Tullamore Golf Club during Women in Sport Week

- \* Hockey – Support for Tullamore Hockey Club in its administration of the West Leinster Cup and Plate finals for

U-14 and U-16 girls

- \* Rugby – Secondary School rugby blitz in Birr Rugby on Tuesday 8th March

- \* Soccer – Friday 11th launch of 4 week Glow football programme in Clara Town FC for girls aged for 8 – 10 year

- \* Ladies Football – Edenderry GAA Ladies Football blitz on Sunday 13th March. Open to all club members aged 13 to 16 years with an open call for others to join

- \* Launch of recreational football for women and girls aged over 16 years. Details to be announced.

# Great rowing club ethos of excellence almost led to Olympic qualification

THE 1990s into the 2000s was a great time for rowing in Offaly and it almost led to Olympic qualification with a Tullamore woman agonisingly close to making it.

There were several outstanding female and male rowers in the Offaly Rowing Club.

They regularly won medals at national championships and big regattas all over the country while a long list of them achieved international recognition.

It was a golden era for the club, which has remained very active since then, providing a great sporting outlet for the many who are not drawn to the big field sports or other individuals one.

The Rowing Club developed under the guidance of a passionate rowing man, well known Tullamore surgeon, Frank Durkin and one of their best was Niamh Ni Cheilleachair.

A brilliantly competitive rower, Ni Cheilleachair reached a high international standard in the lightweight double where she was partnered by Donegal woman, Sinead Jennings.

They were a serious force of nature in the 2000s and in 2006, they made history when they won the first ever medal for Ireland in a womens' Olympic

class event, taking bronze in the second leg of the Rowing World Cup in Poland. This achievement resulted in Ni Cheilleachair and Jennings winning the Irish Times/VHHealthcare sports woman award for June 2006.

Ni Cheilleachair also represented Ireland in singles, competing in the lightweight singles scull in the 2005 World Championships in Japan.

Her and Jennings chased qualification for the 2008 Beijing Olympics but came up just short when they didn't make the semi-finals at the 2007 World Championships in Munich.

Ni Cheilleachair also rowed with Castleconnell in Limerick and she won a water sports award in the Offaly Sports Partnership 10th anniversary sports awards of the decade in 2016.

She had been at her best in 2006 as her and Jennings reached seventh in the world as well as winning a World Cup medal that year.

She represented Ireland eight times from 2005 to 2008 in World events and also placed fourth in the World University Games on two occasions.

The 1990s and 2000s were a tremendous era for rowing in Tullamore and Offaly, while the club has continued to work very

hard since then.

They have produced a huge array of national champions at various levels and several have gone onto compete internationally.

A handful have competed at the top, rowing in World Championships, including Niamh Ni Cheilleachair, her sister Ciara Ni Cheilleachair, Debbie Stack, Niamh Dempsey, Mary Hussey, and Eimear Moran.

They are now working hard to reach the top again with one of their internationals, Ciara Ni Cheilleachair in as club captain and many others putting their shoulder to the wheel – the club has an impressive boathouse near Cappincur, between Digby Bridge and Ballycommon and the Grand Canal is their main training venue.

New members are welcome to join and contact details are available on the Offaly Rowing Club social media outlets.

The full list of international competitors from Offaly Rowing Club is (\* denotes World Championships):

- Cailiosa Hickland
- Ciara Ni Cheilleachair\*
- Pamela Spollen
- Miriam Conway
- Anita Owens
- Mandez Ni Chéilleachair
- Debbie Stack\*
- Niamh Dempsey\*



Niamh Ni Cheilleachair, left, and Sinead Jennings celebrate after winning the lightweight women's double sculls at the 2006 World Championships in Eton.

Mary Hussey\*  
Sheila Dempsey  
Sheila Clavin  
Aisling Durkin

Julie Cummins  
Anne Marie Jennings  
Niamh Ni Chéilleachair\*  
Joanne Moran

Siobhan Bermingham  
Eimear Moran\*  
Catherine Graham  
Ciara Grogan.



## CELEBRATING OFFALY WOMEN IN SPORT

