

## A Peace of Us: Episode 2 – Sports and Communities

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Host: Jordan Kenny

Guests: Peter Canavan, Caragh Hamilton

Jordan:

Hello, and welcome to A Peace of Us, a four-part series from the Open University in Ireland, in which voices beyond political institutions explore the impact of The Good Friday Agreement on arts, sports, the community. And they tell us their hopes for the future of Northern Ireland. I'm Jordan Kenny, and in this episode we explore how sport has contributed to community development over the last 25 years. All Ireland's winning captain and proud Tyrone man, Peter Canavan, discusses his own experience as a player, how the GAA has flourished and how important it is for communities.

Jordan:

Northern Ireland Ladies and Glentoran player Caragh Hamilton, considers the progress we've seen for women in sport and how much further we have to go.

Jordan:

So in front of me, right now is a legend, some would say in the GAA world. Peter, for anyone who maybe doesn't know you, introduce yourself to us.

Peter:

Peter Canavan. Errigal Ciarán is my club. Tyrone is my county, and I would've played a bit of gaelic football back in the day.

Jordan:

So, first question, have to get it out of the way. How happy are you to see an Armagh man in the top job?

Peter:

Jarlath Burnes you refer to? Absolutely, made no qualms about it from a few years back that Jarlath was destined for great things, had the privilege of playing with Jarlath back at St Mary's, University, when we were training to be teachers. And then I got to play against him, obviously he captained Armagh, but I've got to know him, Suzanne, the family, very good people from a very good club, good stock. And, the work that Jarlath - when he finished his playing career - the work and administration

that he went through with his own club, with his own county and at the central council as well, it was inevitable that he was going to get to that position.

Peter:

Brilliant communicator. He's got his finger on the pulse regarding so many things and so many aspects. He's still a Principal of a massive school in Bessbrook. So I think the GAA have placed their trust in safe hands, and I'm looking forward to seeing - no doubt he'd want to put his own stamp on it, and as I say, no better man for the job.

Jordan:

You've been involved in the GAA for years, decades. Talk to me a bit about how it's shaped your life over the years.

Peter:

Well, when you're talking about my life and the life of so many others, I suppose you can't mention how someone's life is shaped or how it progresses without mentioning the GAA. I suppose you're immersed in it from a very young age. In my case, it was my father, older brothers, older sisters were very heavily involved in the club. And when you're a wee lad growing up, all you see, all you hear is football and club issues and things that are going on. You're brought to a lot of games.

Peter:

So you're looking at your brothers, primarily and then club mates, and you're looking at, you're talking the Tyrone games, you're looking at brilliant Tyrone footballers. So they shape you in terms of sport and what you want to become. And from very early days, well, so - I would've watched other sports.

Peter:

It was gaelic football was my love. And as it turned out, I found that I enjoyed it, first of all. And the more I played it, the more I practiced, the better you got. And that opened the doors to opportunities at different levels. So that's just on a sporting front and throughout school life, throughout university life and indeed your teaching career. I'm a PE teacher. I'm involved in taking teams and Holy Trinity . So throughout your life it's very hard to get away.

Peter:

When I retired, became involved in management, I was coaching at school, and now I'm involved in administration side of things as vice chairman with my own club. So to try and answer that question, uh, GAA has totally shaped my life and indeed the lives of so many others. But I must say it's been wholly positive. And what would I be doing or who would I be if it wasn't for the GAA ? I simply couldn't answer that question.

Jordan:

And we've introduced you as Peter Canavan here, but there's a few other names. People might know you by Peter the Great, and God, what does it feel like when people call you those names?

Peter:

Not about Errigal Ciarán or not about home do I hear those things called - look, it's nice to be complimented and it's nice to be praised from time to time. And it's good that people can still remember you because it was a long time ago since I played, I have to laugh. There's a lot of wee cubs coming to our school and having no clue who I am or who I was. So that can be humbling <laugh>. So, look, there's other names there that you haven't mentioned that some supporters from other counties might have.

Peter:

So you've been very generous to me there, Jordan.

Jordan:

So your own children now all play football and your sons play on the Tyrone team. What does that mean for you? How have things changed for them since you were a player?

Peter:

Two sons that play for the club and county and two daughters that play for my club and they're mad into football as well. So for any of my children, you want them being involved in something that, number one, is good for them. And I've said this about any sport, be it the physical mental, and social wellbeing of someone - sport can play a massive role in all of those aspects of your life. And thankfully in our club, it certainly does. The vast majority of people that play it accrue serious benefits from it.

Peter:

There are friendships that they have built up, have been very strong and have been very loyal, just through connections with the club. And the experiences that I had at county level, by and large have been very positive. But the one thing if you take sports serious - and Gaelic games is no different -

Peter:

They're serious life learnings and that you're not going to achieve if you don't work hard. And if you are going to achieve anything or going to reach any goals, you're going to have to overcome a lot of obstacles. And anybody that that plays, sees that there's injuries that happen that can be very frustrating. There's lots of form, there's playing with and against people that are better than you and

putting in the hours if you want to improve, if you want to get better, you have to practice and you have to work damn hard and you have to fit into a team.

Peter:

Gaelic football is 15 a side, so you can't win games on your own. You're totally dependent on those around you, and you have to learn from those you play with and the various managers and coaches. So I think through sport, it opens our eyes as to what goes on in the real world as well.

Peter:

And the working world is absolutely no different. I think it's a great grounding and, uh, I'm delighted that they're involved in sport. What Darragh and Ruairí does in the field certainly doesn't define them or it's not the way that I look on them. There's much more important things to people than kicking a ball round the pitch. But I'm delighted that they're doing something they're happy at and they've tasted a small bit of success, both of them. So hopefully if they keep their head down and keep working hard, there may be more be more success for them in terms of their sport and career.

Jordan:

If we go back 25 years, we're obviously talking about The Good Friday Agreement on this podcast. If we go back 25 years and even before The Good Friday Agreement was signed, what were things like for you as a player and as somebody involved in GAA more in your early days?

Peter:

Completely different world - now that youngsters, the environment that we have by and large - than what it was, when I was growing up. When I was growing up for a lot of people, they identified the GAA with, with one thing. And as a result of, of that you were cast to one side by a large element of, a large proportion of the community, which was a shame.

Peter:

And I think what The Good Friday Agreement has done, it has opened the doors so to speak and given people a better idea of, delving in and, and seeing what actually goes on, in terms of the GAA community. I recall growing up, going to games and just because you were part of a football team, you would've been stopped at checkpoints and bags would've been taken out of boots and thrown or taken out of a car boot and thrown on the roadside.

Peter:

You would've seen people being targeted simply because they were involved in the GAA Belfast, at college. And in the late 80s - early 90s, you wouldn't have been walking about wearing a GAA jersey, believe it or not. Whereas now you go up there on lads and lassies, they're free to do that, which is

good from that point of view, it's a completely different environment. The young lads and young lassies who play our games now -

Peter:

They don't have to worry about any hardship by playing the game that they love. And I think what there is, across all sports, youngsters now, young boys and girls have the opportunity to play whatever code they want. When I was growing up, probably didn't have much of a choice, to be honest. It, it was gaelic football or nothing.

Peter:

Now our youth members - a fair few of them are going to rugby training, are going to soccer training, they're members of, uh, basketball club, but they're also members of our club. And it's up to us as a club to make sure our coaching is of the highest standard and give them a sense of belonging that they want to primarily play gaelic football, but they have the opportunity to play other codes . That's the way it should be moving forward. So to answer your question, a big part of this has been down to T he Good Friday Agreement.

Peter:

Without a doubt, children now have the opportunity play whatever game they want and to be able to dream. And they know if they work hard and they know what route, what avenues to go to, to join whatever clubs, and they can be whatever they want to be.

Jordan:

Did you ever have any sort of safety concerns or concerns whenever your kids were starting to come up and getting involved in the GAA about kind of things they could encounter, like you were talking about, you did?

Peter:

Again, it was very much a change in environment. Things were starting to change, you know, Belfast - when I say Belfast, there was plenty of atrocities that happened outside of Belfast - but I was at college in Belfast and you were getting your eyes open to a lot of stuff there. When you look back now and when you recall some of the events and the anniversaries that are marked, you know, my children would be saying, did that really happen? Did that happen down the road from us?

Peter:

Absolutely - it's hard to believe. And the longer you have normality, then the more shocking - when you talk about these atrocities, the more shocking that they actually are. But we had become immune to it, because we had grown up with it, was part and parcel of our life. So maybe at the time, we didn't

have any fear of going out or, going different places. Whereas now, as a parent, absolutely you would be very concerned about where your children are going and what they're doing.

Peter:

But as I say, thankfully, it, has moved on for the best. And we're living in a completely different environment than we were 25 years ago.

Jordan:

Can I just say that, you know, over the past few years, decades even, it does seem that, you know, GAA has really started to flourish in a lot of ways. What's it been like to see that change after the Good Friday agreement?

Peter:

Well, absolutely. Well, media has a lot to do with that because, for years, the GAA has been Ireland's greatest secret. I know there's been pockets of it played abroad - wherever Irish go to, clubs have been formed. But by and large, it was just kept to Irish diaspora and it didn't go any further. But now with social media and with TV rights, the game has become more popular. It's been shown around the world more people are starting to ask questions about it.

Peter:

And anybody that comes over for an All-Ireland final, be it hurling or football, and sees what's going on at Croke Park, gets a tour of the museum and see what the GAA is all about, it's a fantastic story. We've a brilliant product, and it's a case now - we have to get it out there. And I think that's starting to happen.

Jordan:

There's things like the Asia Gaelic Games and in Americas things seem to be taking off - as an onlooker, seeing all that, and knowing the days when that wasn't the case, what does that feel like for you?

Peter:

Yeah, it's brilliant to see - this is our game and this is what we've grown up with and spent so much time in. And so it's fantastic to see it flourish. And again, there's so many people that have went and have set up home abroad that did so much work setting up clubs and maintaining clubs and keeping things going when maybe it wasn't that popular to do it. But as I say, with a great product - and anytime you're out, the more that you go out - a few weeks ago I was at a Tyrone Association dinner out in Philadelphia, and to hear the people out there... You go to New York, the amount of New Yorkers or people from the States that are actually playing the game, or maybe they started when they're younger, their parents might have been Irish or whatever.

Jordan:

Are they any good at it? The Americans?

Peter:

They are, they are getting better at it. And obviously if you start them at a younger age by the time they're 18, 19... But that's the challenge for the clubs abroad now, is to keep those people interested and trying and get the clubs stronger, not reliant on people coming over from home to play it. But the greatest thing about the GAA is not necessarily what happens on the pitch. It's - again, people have an identity, have a sense of belonging, and there's a wider family there that look after you.

Peter:

And I would be confident and reassured whenever any of my family or people from my club go abroad, you touch base with the GAA club and you know that there's people there that will take them under their wing, will look after them, will keep them right, will open doors for them regarding contacts for work and employment, and if something is needed, if things go wrong, that they have someone to call on. And that's invaluable to have that feeling and that security. And that's the wider GAA family.

Peter:

And as I say, often it's only when things go wrong that you hear about the GAA pulling together, but it gives you great reassurance to know that that support network is actually their home, home and abroad.

Jordan:

That is the thing. It feels - it could be said that it's more of a community, and it's not just the sport like you're saying, there is so many other, aspects to it. But how important is that impact on a young person's life?

Peter:

The environment at the minute for youth - there are a lot of challenges, maybe more so than when I was growing up in terms of the downside of social media. The drugs situation is at a level now that was never at before. So it's very easy for young lads and for young lassies to be misled, to feel isolated. And that's again - that's where the club, and feeling part of a club can be so important because you have friends, you have people that are looking out for you and are trying to point you in the right way.

Peter:

And again, I know our own club have got people in, experts in to speak about social media, to speak about the dangers of gambling, the dangers of drugs and so on. And these are role models, the like of Oisín McConville - does a brilliant job going around and people have touched base with him and so many have benefited from him and a lot of other men who are doing great work behind the scenes as well.

Jordan:

I think it's fair to say people who are maybe from a more Protestant or Unionist background or community would perceive the GAA to be an exclusively Irish or an exclusively Catholic organization. What would you say to those who think that?

Peter:

I would say yes, we are, we are an Irish organization and the men that formed the GAA back in 1884, they had a feeling maybe that their Irish ideals and Irish pastimes were being forgot about. And it was their aim to, to re-energize Irish games and to keep them alive. So, you know, that's where this stemmed from. We are a national body, we believe that the games should be played, but in no way - the time was, there was different rules in place in the GAA in terms of the ban, and security forces and people that played soccer were, were banned, you know, from playing the GAA - those things are in a previous era.

Peter:

And I think the GAA now is very much an open organization. People see what we're about, and the P resident that we talked about has made that very clear in different communications that he's had with people, that it's very much an open door.

Peter:

We would welcome anybody of any creed who wants to come and play our games because they're fantastic games, and becoming a member of a gaelic club should open up a lot of doors for you. And as I say, give you a sense of belonging. So I don't think anybody has anything to fear and you know, I think that has been obvious in recent years with the upshot of various clubs, East Belfast GAA I can think of in particular, and the success that they have had simply by young men and women who want to try their hand and when they try their hand at a sport that they see, they find that they really enjoy it.

Peter:

So that's, that's the way ahead and, and that's the way it should be.

Jordan:

We are talking here 25 years on from The Good Friday Agreement being signed. What do you see in the next 25 years for the GAA? What would you like to happen or what would your hopes be for the next 25 years?

Peter:

Yeah, more clubs and, in areas maybe that we wouldn't associate with being gaelic football or, or hurling areas. Again, it's easy for me to say that we've two of the finest field games in the world and we, as GAA people, we need to do more to promote that. So as Irish people, no matter what creed, colour, culture, they should be given the opportunity to, play and to sample these games.

Peter:

And if they find that they enjoy it and that they're very good at it, that they should be given the same routes, the same opportunities of enjoying success, be it club, county level - a number of us at the minute get the opportunity to play Gaelic football at an international level. And I think that's fantastic. You have it in soccer, you have it in rugby, and what an honour it is to be able to represent your country playing gaelic even though it's a compromised sport, against the Australians.

Peter:

So I do think we have more to do in, terms of casting the net, but there's been baby steps taken, and maybe those steps are getting bigger and in recent years we're heading the right way. And as I say, in terms of our President, he's made it very clear that the GAA is not - we are remembering the past, but we're certainly not living in the past moving forward and that's a good thing.

Jordan:

Take me back then to 2003, captaining Tyrone to win their first All-Ireland. How did that feel?

Peter:

Yeah, it's fantastic feeling because as a young lad, that's the sort of stuff that you dream about and Tyrone had never won an All-Ireland before. And going to All-Irelands and watching it was a ritual in our house watching, you know, seventies and eighties. Maybe it was the only live game that was on at the time, was an All-Ireland final. And the older you get, you start to see what it means to people to see their club doing well, to see their county doing well. And for a lot of people, and you've heard the expression that they'll die happy - well, literally we were going round showing, taking the Sam Maguire to people of an older generation and that's with tears in their eyes...

Peter:

That's what they were telling you that they've waited so long to see Tyrone getting their hands on it. So for me to be the man that was asked to walk up those steps of, of the Hogan Stand and lift it is a

massive honour and it's something that I know that I'm very privileged to have been able to do. And what that means now for Tyrone people and for Tyrone young lads growing up, they know that we are good enough to win it, to win All-Irelands and to go down to Croke Park and achieve. So, it's with a great sense of pride that I can say that.

Jordan:

If you were to give a message to the leaders and legends of the GAA that will be sitting in your seat in 25 years time, what would your advice be to them now?

Peter:

I believe we could be doing more for our players, for the effort that they're putting into the game at the minute. I'd like to think that we must continue looking after our players, but we must continue that at an amateur level. You know, it's contradictory, but the amount of time and effort that players are putting into it - it's important that they're looked after and given the chance to do that. But, and this is a very fine line, the Club County scenario - and it's going to be challenged in the next 25 years. The GAA has made a massive call in the split season whereby they're given greater emphasis to the club.

Peter:

And again, it's easy for me to say because I'm heavily involved in the club at the minute. I think that's a very important decision that has been made because it maintains that club comes first in Gaelic games.

Peter:

We've got to tidy up the fixture scheduling. We've got to improve refereeing and we see how the game is refereed at rugby level. So in the next 25 years, I would like the referees that referee Gaelic games being treated with the same respect that our rugby officials do.. And that East Belfast maybe are winning an Antrim championship, they're not just competing and that we have greater membership than we do have now.

Peter:

And that people that are involved in the GAA still get that same feel good factor that I'm getting now, and have got, that we carry on and that we are a benefit to everybody in our society. And we talked here about winning things and, and Sam Maguire's not just all about that. And recently, Ulster Council, I think it's World Down Syndrome Day - they were around clubs making awards and presentations at halftime in games.

Peter:

You know, we see that people who aren't as fortunate as ourselves participating and getting great enjoyment out of Gaelic games. That's remembering everybody in the community and setting. That's what's very important. And remember that the GAA don't get credit for it. So while it's easy to knock when you're in the media and maybe you're always saying that, there's so much good that's going on. There's still challenges ahead that I've mentioned - cross community integration - but I think in 25 years time we'd like to be sitting here saying the things that I've mentioned now that there's been massive progress on, that the GAA is still the strongest sporting body in Ireland.

Jordan:

Peter, it's been a pleasure, thank you very much for chatting with us.

Peter:

Thanks Jordan.

Jordan:

Okay, so now we are hearing from Caragh Hamilton, she's a footballer for Northern Ireland ladies and Glentoran. Caragh, thanks very much for coming on the podcast. For anybody that's listening that maybe doesn't know who you are, tell us a bit about yourself and what you do.

Caragh:

Okay, so I'm 26 years old. I am a semi-professional football player for Glentoran and Northern Ireland. I've been playing football at Glentoran for probably the last 10, 11 years with little stints in Iceland in between. But Glentoran has been the club that I've played for here and I've played for Northern Ireland since I was 15 years old as well. And I call myself a pundit now, that's only a recent thing since the Euros last summer.

Caragh:

But yeah, doing a little bit of punditry commentary work as well as playing football.

Jordan:

Yeah, obviously we can't see your face right now cause we're on a podcast, but if people could see your face, they might recognize you from hanging out with the likes of Gabby Logan, Alex Scott. Tell us a bit about that.

Caragh:

Yeah, I can now, I suppose call them friends.

Jordan:

So tell us a bit about, obviously you've been very modest there, but you got into football at a very young age. Tell me a bit about how you first got into football and what your career was like at the beginning.

Caragh:

So, my family's very sporty, my mom and my dad both heavily involved in sport growing up and I guess they encouraged my brother and I to start sport at a young age. So it kind of just started very innocently, like playing in the garden, kicking a ball about with my dad. But we would've done everything - we watched sport religiously, it doesn't matter what it is, we'll have it on like even as much as darts. We'll have that on and people find that ridiculous. They're like, you actually watched darts?

Caragh:

I'm like, yeah, we love it. <laugh>. Um, every Christmas time when the world championships are on. So football for me, just started with my dad and my brother in the back garden and then went to a local club, a local boys club. So I was the only girl playing for <inaudible> Village, the only girl in the whole league at the time whenever I was growing up. So I played for <inaudible> from, I was 10 until I was 14 or 15. And then at that time the rules were that you had to move to a girls' team after that.

Caragh:

So I moved to Glen to whenever I was around 15 years old, but that's how it started for me.

Jordan:

What is it like being a woman in such a male dominated place in a lot of instances?

Caragh:

I guess it's only something that I've thought more about in the last couple of years and I think that's just because women's sport has exploded and has got such a higher profile. But for me growing up I very much felt like I was accepted. I think because of the team that I was in, they just, they were just delighted to have me there because they were like, "I don't care whether she's a girl or not, she's our best player," so they loved having me there. Now I, guess I got just comments and a little bit of abuse coming from the sidelines or little jokes or jibes coming from other players who, you know, boys at that age they don't really know how to take a girl who's taking the ball around them and maybe beating them.

Caragh:

So there maybe would've been some comments and stuff. But I always felt like I was in a very safe and accepting environment, which is great for me, but I know a lot of girls who weren't. But I suppose now in the last couple of years you are starting to look at - there are injustices, there are differences in how we're treated and maybe particularly payment is the big thing and equal pay has obviously been something that is very prominent and people are starting to talk about and it's starting to come to the forefront and coverage as well in the media.

Caragh:

That's something that we've really pushed for particularly in this country to try and get the women's game to be promoted better within the media and on a, similar platform to the men's game.

Jordan:

So, Caragh, you're only 26 so it's hard for you to kind of tell me what football was like 25 years ago when the Good Friday Agreement was signed. But you've mentioned there about how in the past few years you've noticed women's sport being talked about more and being given more prominence in the media for instance, what's the past few years been like? Tell me a bit more about how you've seen your sport flourish I suppose.

Caragh:

I guess it's come as north - the Northern Ireland national team has generated more success in the past couple of years and then that has given us a platform in the media but before no one even knew whenever we had a game it wasn't put on any social media, it wasn't put out there, it wasn't covered by, you know, BBC Sport or any of those sorts of local media outlets. So it's really only since we've had the success of qualifying for the Euros last summer, that people now are looking out for us and they know who we are and they know our stories and things like that.

Caragh:

But I think had we not had that success, I think we maybe would've very much been in the same place that we wear maybe five, 10 years ago. And that's sad that, you know, you have to get success first to then get the recognition - we're not just, I think, for maybe men's teams, they're just given a platform and they're given coverage because it's the man's national team because interest is already there.

Caragh:

Whereas we've had to have that success in order to build ourselves up and give ourselves that platform.

Jordan:

Have you ever spoken to any former players or players who are a bit older than you about what the game was like during the Troubles or during, around the time of the Good Friday Agreement being signed or 25 years ago?

Caragh:

There really wasn't many opportunities there and even as recent as I think it was at the turn of the millennium, the Women's Northern Ireland team was just disbanded. So they were just told that there's no team for you anymore. And it was as they came back from a trip, they were just told, we're scrapping this now so there's going to be no national team, the funding wasn't there. They just didn't want to fund it and they didn't really see a reason to fund it. So a lot of women who now thankfully are still involved in the game and are very much involved in sort of the behind the scenes stuff of trying to grow the game.

Caragh:

They took it upon themselves then to say, you know, this isn't right and we're going to fight for this. So they wrote letters to national governing bodies to say, look, this is what's happened to us and this is totally wrong and you know, we need to get the game back up and running here in Northern Ireland. And thankfully they did and that's the reason why, you know, I am where I am and I have the opportunities that I have today.

Jordan:

And when did things get back up and running?

Caragh:

It was, I think it was in and around 2004, 2005, one of my teammates, um, Julian Nelson who's the highest capped Northern Ireland player in history for the women, she was part of that first squad that came back in in 04, 05 and they went to a tournament called the Algarve Cup and they had to pay their own way to get there so they had to pay for their own flights and they had to self fund to get themselves there. But you know, now we've come a long way since that in really what's only a short space of time, but the fact that in 2004, 2005 that was still happening is kind of crazy.

Jordan:

How would you say Caragh, that sport has contributed to peace and community building here in Northern Ireland?

Caragh:

I think particularly within the women's game, that's something that people pick out quite a lot is how much of a family and community oriented environment that it is. People always get that feeling

whenever they come to watch Northern Ireland matches. It's always families, you know, young kids and I think that's something that we've done really well and an environment that is really, really safe and is open to everybody and everybody kind of feels accepted.

Caragh:

And I think certainly within our national team, you know, people from all sides of the community are so proud to come together and represent Northern Ireland no matter what their background is. You know, playing for Northern Ireland is the biggest honour and privilege and you know, any of them will tell you that putting on that green and white jersey is such a privilege and I think it's because we've had to fight so hard for it. You know, whenever you think back to 2004 -5 where you had to pay to play and you know, you only do that if you really love it and if you really love the environment that you're in and you really believe in what you're doing.

Caragh:

And I think because some of those girls are still involved in this squad today, they know what it means to play for Northern Ireland and yeah, I think that's why it has the culture that it does.

Jordan:

How would your life be different if you weren't playing football?

Caragh:

Oof. I mean I would be playing sport of some sort. I'd like to think, you know, that's the only thing that I could ever have seen myself doing. So if it wasn't football it would be something else. I always had, you know, a dream of representing my country or representing myself as an individual on a world stage. So growing up I always saw myself I wanted to be an Olympian or I wanted to be at the Commonwealth Games or I wanted, you know, I wanted to be on that sort of global stage so I actually can't imagine life without football, without sport to be honest.

Jordan:

Who were you looking up to when you were younger maybe like in your early teens and stuff, who were your role models?

Caragh:

Probably Liverpool players. Um, Steven Gerrard is my – yeah, Stevie G is my ultimate hero. He's who I grew up watching, I'm a massive Liverpool fan so he was just my idol growing up. Who else? Jessica Ennis is a big one for me. I've always been big into athletics as well, so seeing her win medals and doing what she did and her recovery from injury because I suffered a similar injury, had a really bad

stress fracture whenever I, I was sort of 16-17 so I sort of saw a lot of her story resonate with me so they would probably be two kind of role models for me.

Caragh:

But it was always sports people, like they've always been the people that I've looked up to, people who've been resilient, you know, big characters, leaders that's who I've always looked to.

Jordan:

Do you think the fact that sport and women's sport in particular at the minute, which is thriving so much, is allowing, maybe young boys and girls from Northern Ireland to have role models who are from the same places they're from?

Caragh:

Yeah, definitely. You know, it is still sort of crazy whenever I, now go into say primary schools or go to do visits at clubs and they already know who I am and they know my name and you know, I just couldn't have imagined that a while ago that we would be role models for people and just that Northern Ireland - you know, we do punch above our weight, we really do. And I think more and more as we're getting more investment, more funding, people are getting more opportunities to go and shine on a world stage and I think it's long overdue. I think we have the talent here, it's just whether we're good enough at recognizing it and whether we're good enough at backing it as well.

Caragh:

And I think sometimes we need to back ourselves in Northern Ireland.

Caragh:

You know, we're sort of very modest at times and very self-deprecating and whether we have the confidence in ourselves to just go for it and just go, you know, I don't care what other people think I'm going to chase after my dream. And I think we hold ourselves back as much as anything and I don't know whether that's to do with our past or whatever but I think the more belief that we have in ourselves and the more we try to build each other up, the more success we'll have and the more then that ripple effect will filter down into younger generations coming through.

Jordan:

And obviously, when it comes to playing sports there's some sports are more expensive than others. How do we break through that barrier to entry which is cost to so many young people, you know what needs to happen?

Caragh:

I think it needs to be so much more accessible even within schools. I think PE is a massive thing that we don't push enough and we don't value our kids getting involved in sport and just being active and underestimating how much that will do, not even if they want to be elite but just if they want to be healthy human beings.

Caragh:

You know, I remember whenever I was in primary school if we misbehaved we were told time's being taken off of your PE and I remember a teacher then coming in in my latter years in school, my P7 teacher and he was like PE is a subject the same way maths is a subject the same way English is. No one's going to say to you if you misbehave today we're taking time off of your maths or your English, you know.

Caragh:

So I think that's really where we're missing something massive is within schools and I think we need to fund PE and that after-schools curriculum to give kids an opportunity, you know, to find out what they're good at and what they love and also for them to just know that activity and exercise is such a good healthy thing and it's not you know, a chore. And to try and especially in the modern day, get them away from screens, and get them away from iPads and all that sort of stuff and get outside and be active and that way then their parents hopefully don't have to fork out.

Jordan:

Is it realistic now for a young person from Northern Ireland to want to pursue a career in sport on the world stage, be a world class level sports person?

Caragh:

I think yes, absolutely. I think if you've got the drive and the determination then honestly the sky is the limit. Yes, it might be more difficult here than it is in other places, but I think if you're willing to find the right resources, find the right people, get the right people around you, I think everything is there. It's just whether you're willing to work hard enough to find it and sometimes you have to work harder here than what you maybe do elsewhere where it's maybe given to you on a plate as such.

Jordan:

What do you think's different about here compared to other places?

Caragh:

I think sometimes it's just culturally it's different and it is maybe just like that thing I talked about earlier of not being afraid of stepping out of your comfort zone a little bit and just go and - I'm going to go for this here. Do I think you maybe sometimes need to move away? Definitely I think you can start off here but I still think there are greater opportunities elsewhere. I think that's undeniable and I hope that that's not the case further down the line in future. I think hopefully people will be looking to Northern Ireland as a place where they can come and they can grow and thrive and will be able to facilitate that further down the line.

Caragh:

But certainly from a grassroots level I think there are still opportunities for, people to grow and develop and then yes, depending on what sport it is and maybe what resources they need around them, they might need to make that move and make that step. But definitely I think because we know you can look to people who have gone and done it and you can see role models like we talked about earlier. I think people from Northern Ireland can definitely have those dreams and aspirations.

Jordan:

Tell me this before we wrap up. What is your best moment as a player so far?

Caragh:

As a player? I think walking out to a sold out Windsor Park -

Jordan:

What's that feeling like when you walk out and the crowd's cheering, there's thousands of people looking at you and you know you're going on that pitch for 90 minutes.

Caragh:

Walking out at a full Windsor Park was something that I never thought I would experience let alone, you know, this early on in my career.

Jordan:

And experiencing that in your home city as well!

Caragh:

Yeah, I mean we drove in on the coach on the bus and people were already starting to arrive at Windsor Park and as soon as our coach pulled in off the road, people just stopped turned and they started applauding us and we could see and hear them from outside of the bus. They couldn't even

see us because the windows were blacked out, but they knew that that was our coach and they just started applauding and we got like a hero's welcome coming in on the bus and then to walk out to that full stadium - considering where we were just two to three years ago - to walk out to a sold out Windsor Park for a women's game was amazing and we just can't take a step back now.

Jordan:

In 25 years for the 50th anniversary of the Good Friday Agreement. Where do you think we need to be?

Caragh:

I'd love to see like a world event coming to here. You know, could we host a Commonwealth Games? Can we host part of a World Cup, part of a women's World Cup, a Euros? There's always been this talk of Northern Ireland putting in a bid, but then it always falls by the wayside because we can't facilitate it because we don't have the facilities and the funding. So if we can get world class facilities then I think we would put on an incredible show in Northern Ireland. You know, everybody who comes here for concerts or anything like that just says, the crowds are amazing and we would put on a brilliant show.

Caragh:

It's whether we can facilitate it from the stadium point of view. So if we can get some more world class facilities in here, I think we could host, a Commonwealth Games or part of a Euros or something like that. That'd be incredible.

Jordan:

Caragh, you've been brilliant. Thank you so much.

Caragh:

No problem. It's been a pleasure.

Jordan:

That's it for this episode and there's lots more to explore on our OpenLearn hub, which features music, art, and a series of guest essays. Search OpenLearn Good Friday Agreement online to find it. Thanks for listening.