

Gordon D'Arcy: 34, rugby player, Dublin

I don't have a grand plan for life after rugby. Although I do have a big blackboard with loads of ideas on it.

I've just finished exams in UCD. I'm studying economics, and after that I'm planning to do a Master's.

I'm very competitive. I've started a new business with my wife, Aoife, and we are going to work really hard to make sure it succeeds.

It's called Form School, and it's a pilates studio with a difference. It's quite Zen. It's the type of place we both like to hang out in.

You wouldn't necessarily associate pilates with stereotypically big, beefy rugby guys. But keeping yourself in shape isn't just about lifting weights – you need flexibility and core control as well.

The type of pilates we do is called reformer pilates. It's done on a piece of equipment that looks like a bed frame on wheels, and it gives you a lot more variety in terms of the exercises you can do.

I discovered reformer pilates in Australia, and I really enjoyed it. When I came home I kept badgering the staff at Leinster to get one of the beds – now there's a queue of guys waiting to get onto them every morning.

We're going for the carrot, rather than the stick, approach in the studio. I'm not going to be walking around shouting at people.

I've learned a huge amount about business through being involved in The Exchequer, a gastropub in Dublin that I set up with some old schoolfriends. To open a business in a recession and manage to stay open is a great achievement.

You can't compare the fitness regime of a professional rugby player today to when I started out. It's like a different world.

For the first five years or so that I was playing, there was no real science behind anything we were doing. Even our jerseys were probably three sizes too big for us.

Now we are leaders in the field in terms of strength and conditioning. We even use GPS in training to see how fast we're running, and the level of force in each contact.

The average length of a professional rugby player's career in Ireland is eight years. I'm still really enjoying it, and I'm definitely still competing at the highest level.

But when the time comes, there won't be a long goodbye. The minute my body stops doing what I want it to, I'm gone.

It's harder for young players to break into a team than it was when I was starting out.

Back then, every year or two, you would see someone breaking through, but you don't see that so much now. The quality of the players has got so much better that it's harder for young guys to succeed.

It's not easy to become a professional rugby player in Ireland. Each province has maybe 35 senior players, so that's only 140 people in the whole country.

That's one of the reasons why you are seeing more players head abroad. You'd love to think everyone could stay here but, realistically, that's not possible.

I love travelling. Myself and Aoife have a whole list of places we want to go to when I retire.

I started growing the beard in late August. People kept asking me if I was doing it for charity, or for a bet.

I think every man should have a proper beard at some stage in their life. My dad had an unbelievable beard at my age, so I'm carrying on a family tradition.

For more information, see formschool.ie

Interview: Gillian Nelis
Picture: Maura Hickey



Thinktank

True disputants are like true sportsmen: their whole delight is in the pursuit

Alexander Pope, 1688-1744, English poet