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Davy Fitzgerald: If I'm not the man for the Waterford job, I won't stay for sake of it

Donnchadh Boyle Time spent with Davy Fitzgerald can head in a myriad of directions. He can wander into the world of TV.

Officially, he's in Dublin to help launch the latest series of Ireland's Fittest Family . Sponsored by Londis, it returns to RTÉ One on Sunday, October 29. It's the 11th season of his brainchild which is screened in 10 countries and could yet grow further.

He'll happily pore over golf too. Last month, he found himself caddying at the Women's Irish Open in [Dromoland Castle](#) for Dutch player Lauren Holmey. She went 11-over par for two rounds in Clare but in the following weeks she texted Fitzgerald to let him know she made the first cut of her career. But things always, always, come back to hurling.

After a dramatic and forgettable 2023, the wheels are already turning for Waterford and the new season. Kieran Bennett is back on board. And unless he has a dramatic change of heart, Austin Gleeson is out for 2024.

"I'm not stupid, I'm around a long time," Fitzgerald said. "A fella of his ability and his talent, they don't come around too often. He's a pretty special guy, very talented. And I know you see and feel at times he might react every now and again which probably some of the best fellas will react to different things.

"But he is a special talent and to be without him will be tough. But when you look at the overall side of things, life is short. There is more to life than GAA and I realise that a lot more lately.

"And if a fella isn't in the right head space for doing it and needs a break, I think it's important you listen to him and that. I pushed last year and I realised he just needs that small bit of time. But as we talked about, he's not retiring. And we spent a good bit of time talking about this and that's a definite for him."

A cornerstone of the team gone, Fitzgerald needs to rebuild. He often gets a bounce from his teams when first appointed but Waterford bombed in 2023.

The best thing that could be said about their season is that it finished well, with a win over Tipperary in the final round.

Criticism around style and tactics rained down from some high places. It comes with the territory.

"That's kind of going to be there no matter what with me. You'll have people that like you and people that don't like you for their own reasons.

"Some of them mightn't be just happy with certain ways I've done things in the past, or maybe I picked players or dropped players or didn't do stuff and they're going to have a go. That's fine.

"You know what, that actually didn't bother me at all, I was just bothered because I wasn't getting the results. I was taking it personally.

"Did I read stuff or go to Twitter? No. I'll be honest with you guys – I don't really give a s**t what you have to say. You have to write what you have to write and in fairness to you (the media) you're pretty genuine and I accept that. The nasty stuff that comes, that's going to come no matter what."

Was it always written in stone that he'd return for another season?

"Good question. It wasn't easy for a patch during the middle of the championship this year. I'm not one to walk away after a few months. The bottom line, you're playing championship in April, you've only started training around the first of December or so.

"Where you actually learn things is in the middle of championship. The National League is great for games and players and all of that but the championship is where you find out what you need to find out. And it wasn't easy in patches. There was a lot of soul-searching in games."

Last year was a second successive poor championship season for the Déise, where their Munster SHC form-line reads: played eight, won two.

It has been a dramatic fall from reaching the 2020 All-Ireland final and from the spring of 2022 when they won the league and looked best placed to challenge Limerick.

Confidence has, he agreed, suffered.

"I think that (confidence) was dented before I got there, to be honest with you. I think their last year, Munster

Championship didn't go well. I think the round-robin hasn't gone well for Waterford as you can see over the last number of years they've been there. The defeats in Liam's (Cahill) last year definitely had an effect, I think, mentally.

"But I think we've a better understanding of the 'why' now. I'm hoping so. If we haven't and if I'm not the man for the job, I won't be staying just for the sake of being there.

"If they need someone else rather than me to turn it around then that will be fine, let someone else do it if I can't improve their fortunes. The only thing I'd say to that is don't just judge this over a league game or two – give us until the end of the year and support us like anything.

"That's the message I'd give to the Waterford supporters, don't judge, just support for the year and if you can't see a major improvement then I'm sure Waterford or whoever, like, they'll get the right person for the job. I just want to give it everything and for them to be the best they can be. Because they are really genuine young lads, I'm telling you now guys, these are good lads."

Caption: Caption:

Waterford manager Davy Fitzgerald. Photo: Michael P Ryan/Sportsfile