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Getting into the Swing

Colm Murphy was always interested in sport but he didn't know where it was leading him, writes Brian O'Connell

To many outsiders, Colm Murphy leads a charmed life. While his mornings are spent on tennis courts around Dublin, perfecting backhands or straightening out serves, afternoons include one-to-one physical therapy sessions or tutoring the next crop of physical therapists at the Institute of Physical Therapy and Science in Dublin.

Murphy himself readily admits he is that rare breed - someone who has finally found his professional calling, albeit having first taken the scenic route. Yet to those closest to him.

Murphy's appetite for physical exercise was evident from an early age.

Having attended secondary school at Oatlands College in Stillorgan, school life was focused on one thing: football. "School was great, I wasn't terribly focused on the academic side though. Most of my school memories revolve around football and to a lesser extent tennis and basketball.

"I got what might be termed a reasonable Leaving Certificate. Looking back I didn't get enough honours which was possibly down to the amount of time I spent on the field.

"I also discovered that I am a reluctant studier. I guess I have ability but discipline was always a struggle," he says.

The year was 1983, and without the required grades, Murphy's ambition of pursuing physical education training in Ireland looked unlikely. With employment opportunities limited, and emigration the only other alternative, he opted to sit the Leaving Cert a second time. This time he chose a school in Ringsend, with the hope of earning enough points to study PE at Thomond College. Yet the chances of academic success second time out were quickly eroded when Murphy found himself part of the school's football team.

"At Ringsend I got involved in the soccer team. We were playing in the VEC league and the team did okay. I was training two days after school and it was inevitable really that my results weren't going to be dramatically different.

"First time out I got two honours and second time out I got the same."

With little chance of academic advancement, Murphy decided to look towards full-time employment and after much searching he eventually secured a cashier job with First National Building Society.

"You didn't have to be that clever to do it in hindsight. I mean once you could count and



were reasonably well presented and articulate you had a shot.

"The job was your normal branch cashier role serving customers and dealing

with cash transactions. After a few years I became more established and began processing mortgage applications and that end of things."

With chances of career progression limited, Murphy looked to career advancement within the company and accepted a position in the finance department.

Once there, the opportunity to take accountancy exams presented itself and despite Murphy's aversion to study, he took on the challenge and began a two-year course with the Association of Accounting Technicians (AA T).

At the same time, and with his best football-playing days behind him, he began training to become a tennis coach.

After graduating from the AA T, he took on full accountancy exams, devoting two nights a week to study. This eventually became four nights a week, although the company had good structure in place to accommodate employees pursuing further training.

Yet the course proved difficult and Murphy began to realise that perhaps the accountancy life wasn't for him. "I made a few attempts at the final exams and in the end I didn't nail them down. I finished at certificate stage, before the finals, and I guess it was becoming clear that this line of work wasn't for me.

"I was turning into a square peg in a round hole and the effort of trying to get the exams was sucking the life out of me completely. In the end stubbornness wasn't enough, and in 1998 I left First Active.

"Once I had given up on the exams, progression within the company was closed, so I didn't want to stick around," he says.

Not quite ready for a dramatic career overhaul, Murphy accepted a position in the finance department of an IT company as a financial business analyst. He stayed at the company

until 2002, when business began to slow and he was made redundant.

The first few months of redundancy were like a holiday and then reality started to bite. I was looking for jobs and nothing was coming in the same area or in financial services.

"In the meantime I resurrected tennis coaching more for something to do than anything else, but it got really busy really quickly. Arising out of that, and the difficulty finding another role similar to the one I left, I began to think outside the box.

"I thoroughly enjoyed coaching and so I began to look for something to fit with it. I was coaching for about 20-30 hours a week so had time on my hands. I then stumbled on a course at the Institute of Physical Therapy and Science (IPT AS), a private college providing physical therapy training.

"If I was to pursue tennis coaching I felt this would be a good complement."

Murphy began the three-year course in September 2003 and, unlike past endeavours, he found himself enjoying the academic experience. Despite the heavy workload he quickly realised that he had found his calling.

"I don't think I enjoyed anything as much in my life, it was very hard work and a massive commitment in terms of hours, but I was absorbed by it.

• If I look back over time, I was never really certain what I wanted to be or do. I stumbled on

In hindsight it was probably the best thing to happen to his career, he says.

"

coaching and physical therapy. Now I can't believe I didn't pursue it sooner.

"paradoxically, redundancy opened the door and made a lot of options possible," he says.

Having graduated last June, Murphy's days are now divided between coaching in the mornings and physical therapy treatments in the afternoon, while this year IPT AS have asked him back as a tutor.

He rents a room at the YMCA in Sandymount for his growing practice, and has set up a website to cope with demand. He also enjoys the flexibility his new career gives, allowing him spend more time with his family.

"I really feel like I found my niche. My working day now involves a good variety and the only thing I miss is the camaraderie of a big office, with colleagues around doing the same thing and the bit of banter .

"Having said that I'm not missing it enough to be drawn back - not in a million years. My only regret is that I didn't discover this sooner," he says.

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To contact Colm Murphy:
www.therapyzone.ie

Tel: 0872365209