**Fallon Sherrock: Darts star on fame, illness, trolls, women players and historic triumphs**

By Frank Keogh

BBC Sport

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"If anything, it has really helped me for whatever comes now."

This is Fallon Sherrock. Former mobile hairdresser. Single mother. Darts player. History maker.

The 25-year-old is recalling how she dealt with online trolls in 2017 when her faced swelled in reaction to medication for a kidney complaint.

"It made me more determined to prove everyone wrong," says Sherrock now, reflecting on a whirlwind few weeks where her ground-breaking triumphs made headlines around the world.

The first woman to defeat a man at the PDC World Championship, she followed up by beating another and is now adapting to life as a poster girl for the sport.

"I'm letting it all sink in. Now I feel a bit more proud of myself but I'm in shock about how big it has all got," she tells BBC Sport.

Pioneering tennis legend Billie Jean King is a big fan and Sex and the City actor Sarah Jessica Parker has messaged her.

She has played pro-celebrity darts with former Italy footballer Luca Toni, will appear at Madison Square Garden in New York and seen her Twitter following soar from less than 15,000 to nearer 100,000.

"I'm just having time to chill, read everything and it's literally like 'wow, I've done this,'" says Sherrock at her home in Milton Keynes, Buckinghamshire.

"I was aware of Billie Jean King before but didn't realise actually quite how big she was until it all kicked off and everyone was talking about it. It's incredible, I'm amazed by it all."

**'My boy is just happy to see mummy on TV'**

Her new-found fame has brought offers to play around the world while Sherrock also has her five-year-old son Rory, who is autisic, to think about.

"I've got a lot of help from my family. It's still a new thing I'm adjusting to, and I've got to find a set routine. When I go away, sometimes he will come with me," she says.

"Rory has loved it. He needs a little board as he's trying to throw on my board when I need to practise.

"He understood I was playing and was supporting but I'm not expecting him to understand how big this has blown up - he's just happy to see his mummy on TV."

Sherrock is a recognisable face now. Passers-by look twice, and say 'well done'.

"I've tried not to go out as much," she laughs. "It's so strange, I don't even know how to explain it. I'm just me, a normal person. It's great that everyone is so supportive."

Fallon Sherrock: 'I've just proved you wrong!'

**What next for darts' golden girl?**

First up is PDC Qualifying School next week where she will face a highly competitive four days of action, attempting to secure a coveted place on the organisation's main tour.

She has been named as one of nine challengers to compete alongside the elite players in this year's Premier League Darts and will play in Nottingham on 13 February. Yes, Sherrock of Nottingham.

And she will compete in six international World Series events, in the United States, Denmark, Germany, New Zealand, and an Australian double-header.

"It's very, very busy. I've got a lot of exhibitions, and I still have to fit in all my normal competitions," she says.

"I feel really proud of myself for helping to put the ladies' game out there. Every game I play now, whether it's an exhibition or on TV, I'm not going to think too much that I have to represent them as that would put so much pressure on myself. I don't do pressure.

"I never get really nervous. At the World Championship, I was thinking about each leg, not thinking too far in front or what had just happened - I've trained my head.

"If I'm in a pressurised situation, I've learned to breathe, chill myself out and be calm. I'll look down, have a couple of breaths before throwing."

**Coping with illness and trolls**

Sherrock's World Championship run came despite suffering from a kidney condition which once led to cruel jibes online.

"After having my little boy, I ended up having kidney problems," she remembers.

"I'm not 100% sure what it's called - I'm trying not to think too much into it and scare myself. It's like a kidney disease, but it's all stable now - it's not getting any worse, it's not getting any better.

"The tablets I was taking caused a load of water retention in my face. They were just trying to boost my kidney function.

"When my face blew up and I was getting loads of stuff on social media. I thought to myself I'm not going to read them any more, and got my confidence back.

"Now if I see a silly comment, I literally just go past it. It's not going to make a positive difference to my life reading a nasty comment."

Sherrock in 2017: "That's when I realised reading negative comments was not really helping me."

Sherrock was one of two players, alongside last year's BDO women's world champion Mikuru Suzuki, to win all-female qualifiers to join 94 men in the PDC Championship at London's Alexandra Palace.

Her average of 91.12 in beating Ted Evetts was better than two thirds of the first-round field, and she went on to defeat 11th seed Mensur Suljovic, but is there more to come?

"I feel like I played decent, but I know I can do better. I can't fault my finishing - that was the best I could have done. I know I can score a bit more consistently, so it's nice to have more opportunities to prove myself now.

"There's nothing I can see that is different between a male and a female throwing darts. You are all throwing darts at the same board and us women can compete with their averages."

She believes the spaces for women in the PDC event should be doubled to four in an effort to encourage more female players.

"That could be the next step. We are not going to be able to jump in and say we want that, we want this. We are a minority at the moment. If we can just get more spaces in the World Championship that would help," says Sherrock.

"I've had people contact me on social media saying I have inspired them. Kids who want to play darts. Even the local leagues round here, there are more women showing up."

**What do the men make of her progress?**

While Sherrock made her name against the men in the mixed PDC Championship, she honed her craft in the BDO event where she was runner-up in the Women's World Championship five years ago.

Amid low ticket sales and prize money problems, she pulled out of this week's BDO tournament and played instead in a pro-celebrity event in Germany.

"I love playing in the World Championships. It was a really hard decision for me to make," she says.

"I'm watching it on TV and supportive of everyone who is playing in it, but it was difficult for me to justify."

It gave her the opportunity to play alongside a World Cup-winning footballer.

"Luca Toni was so funny. He loved it when I hit the 180 first of all, and when we lost our match, he was like 'we are going to win the next one'. He was so passionate," says Sherrock.

The 16-time world darts champion Phil 'The Power' Taylor also featured and has given his support.

"When I saw him at the weekend or whenever it was - I've literally lost track of days now - he said 'well done, I'm so proud of you'.

"The men are brilliant. They have their own personas on stage, but backstage they are supportive, and have loved the fact I seem to have helped darts."

Source: https://www.bbc.com/sport/darts/51032210