Boxers fight alone. No one has known that loneliness more clearly than Deirdre Gogarty.

Banned from boxing in her native Ireland because she was a woman, she fought the good fight against the Irish Boxing Union before finally making her pro debut in London in 1991. She would go on to win the WIBF featherweight title from then undefeated Bonnie Canino six years later after moving to Louisiana to train with an at-first reluctant Beau Williford, but she never got to live out her dream and defend that title back on the old sod because soon after winning it a shoulder injury forced her into an early and unwanted fistic retirement.

For most people that would have been enough pioneering for one lifetime but Gogarty had only just begun. After working with young amateurs at Williford's Ragin' Cajun Gym in Lafayette, La., Gogarty became the first woman to become a member of the Louisiana Boxing Commission, where she served for four years. But a commission seat was not close enough to the sweat, the joy and the tears boxing so often produces and so today she has embarked on another singular role as the only known full-time female trainer of a professional fighter in the U.S.

Gogarty recently began training a 28-year-old Texas-born junior welterweight named Wilford Scypion, Jr., the son of the former USBA middleweight champion and world title challenger of the same name, because, well, how could she not?

"There's a terrible void left when you retire from boxing that has to be filled one way or another,'' Gogarty said from her home in Lafayette, where she runs a freelance graphic arts business in addition to training fighters. "I went on the Commission for four years and that put coaching on hold because they thought it was a conflict if I was in the corner. The commission work was interesting. It gave me a different perspective on the sport. But this is more enjoyable to me. I like to be inside the ropes. I like being with the fighter. That's what I was. It's a lot closer to my heart. I feel like I've been released out of a cage.''

Out of a cage and into a squared circle with the undefeated Scypion (6-0, 5 KO), who admits he had some reservations about having a woman train him when the idea first came up. Then he went to the videotape and that ended any doubts he might have harbored about what a little woman from Ireland really knew about surviving in sport's harshest landscape.

"She'd come up and watch me and give her words of encouragement,'' said Scypion. "I'd been at Ragin' Cajun for a year kind of on my own. I didn't have a permanent trainer but she saw how enthused I was and she was amazed at my dedication when I brought my weight down from 192 to 160 like I said I would.

"She'd offer advice and work the mitts but I have to admit I had some doubts at first. I really didn't know much about her. Then I watched some tapes and thought, 'This woman was incredible.' If you didn't look at her as a woman and just watched the tapes you saw she could have outboxed a lot of men.

“I’ve had people say, ‘Man, you got a woman in your corner?’ But my Dad said whatever makes the boat float. Sometimes I forget she’s a woman at all because she’s so hard on me in the gym. My wife loves it. She says, ‘Some woman holds power over you.’

“The chemistry is great between us. She’s always so calm. And we’re winning and winning impressively. She got to where I want to go. She was a world champion.’’

Gogarty got there despite the most difficult of circumstances, being denied the right to fight by her country and being urged to forget the whole bloody idea by her parents. One can understand their perspective on several fronts because not only was women’s boxing banned in Ireland at the time but her father was an oral surgeon and her mother a dentist. In other words, they knew a thing or two about the consequences of a mangled jaw.

“They told me horror stories about what could happen to my teeth and my jaw,’’ Gogarty recalled, laughing at the recollection. “I kept it vague with them but after a while they had to accept it. They thought I was nuts. It’s interesting that all my sisters came to my fights but none of my brothers or my parents.

“The first four years I felt like an outcast. I wasn’t allowed to fight so all I did was train in a gym where most of the people wished I wasn’t there. But I always had that love for the sport. I don’t know where it came from. I didn’t know anybody who liked it but at 15 I watched Barry McGuigan win the world title on my grandmother’s television and I was hooked.’’

That she watched McGuigan beat Eusebio Pedroza with the sound off so her grandmother would think she was watching the ballet should have been her first clue that this love affair might be a rocky one.

Yet she persisted, moving to Dublin to be trained by former British champion Pat McCormack. Months went by without a fight as Gogarty continued to battle the IBU’s rules and she finally asked her trainer why he continued to work with her.

“The first two years I was in the gym I got no training at all,’’ Gogarty recalled. “I kept asking so many questions they kind of tolerated me. After Pat trained me for a while I asked him why he was doing it. He told me if his daughter was in boxing he’d want someone to show her how to defend herself.’’

Eventually she would be befriended by a British referee named Paddy Sower who helped her get fights in England and, eventually, it was Sower who made the connection for her with Williford, a former heavyweight contender who was managing and training fighters from his gym in Louisiana. At first, it was not a match made in heaven. In fact, it almost wasn’t made at all.

“I had written letters to people in the U.S. about boxing and got back things suggesting topless boxing or mud wrestling,’’ Gogarty said. “It was so disgusting. Then Paddy suggested I write to Beau. I never heard a word. He finally called nine months later saying Paddy Sower had called him.’’

Indeed he had. With a reminder to an old friend about what friendship sometimes means.

“I had no interest in training a woman,’’ Williford admitted. “Paddy put the pressure on me. He reminded me that he’d done me a lot of favors. To be honest, she was forced on me. That goes to show you something.

“We won a world championship together and today she’s like a part of my family. She eats at the house three or four nights a week after we’re done in the gym. And she’s become an excellent trainer.

“I’m sure there are people out there who think I’m training Scypion. I swear on my children I am not. I haven’t even worked the mitts with him in six or eight months. That’s Deidre’s fighter. Now look, I’m not a man without ego. Ten or 15 years ago, it might have bothered me. Today I’m proud. I feel the way a teacher must when they see a student go on and do well.’’

Gogarty insists her second road into a boxing ring has been easier than the first. Although she is still a woman in a traditionally male environment she has found people more accepting of her as a trainer than they were as a fighter back nearly 20 years ago when so many forces seemed marshaled against the idea of female boxers.

Why she never left the ring is why she is pushing on today, pushing a young fighter with a dream the way she once pushed herself.

“I just had to do it,’’ Gogarty said. “I wasn’t happy not doing it. I couldn’t walk away from it. I still can’t.

“My dream came true one step at a time. I try to look at the long term not the immediate. Some people worked very hard to try and prevent me from boxing but in the end I won a world championship, fought on a Tyson undercard (in a memorable bout against Christy Martin that helped create the female side of the sport) and now I’m training a young fighter.

“Scypion just asked me one day to work with him. He must have liked what I did because he asked for more. I wasn’t reluctant to do it. I knew I could do the job but I was conscious that maybe he’d feel he was at some disadvantage having a woman working with him.

“It’s a tough sport. Honestly, if a girl expects to be treated like a girl in boxing she’s in the wrong sport. If you want to be a world champion you’ve got to think of yourself as a man when you’re in the gym or in the ring.’’

It is too early to tell how successful this pairing will be. Scypion is still young and untested, although the power he carries in his right hand is obvious. So is the fact that the trainer who stands with him is one of the positives on his side regardless of her gender.

“She was like a coach in my gym right away,’’ Williford said. “As time passed, when I wasn’t there she ran it and not one single guy protested. They stepped aside because she was a better coach and they realized it.

“She trained my own son, Christian (a nationally ranked amateur) when it was clear to me that we couldn’t work together and not take it home.

“She started working the mitts with Scypion and he liked her. A lot of guys holding the mitts try to make themselves look good. She has no desire to look good. She wants her fighter to look good. That’s her only concern. I don’t think anybody could take him farther than she could. Angelo Dundee was in here in February and he was very impressed with her.

“He said, ‘Beau, this girl knows her s---!’ That’s high praise in boxing.’’

And well deserved for a pioneer still trying to blaze a trail through the wilderness of boxing without making a fuss.

“Nothing can replace boxing for me,’’ Gogarty said. “There’s nothing like feeling victorious. Nothing like being in the gym, the one-on-one of it. It’s addictive, that feeling. I guess you need that … adoration…that assurance that you’ve been doing the right thing.

“When you retire it’s all taken away from you. That feeling is gone. It’s important what you fill that void with. For me, it’s coaching. It’s not to the extent fighting did but it’s enough to not want to get back in there. And I don’t have to get up at 5 a.m. and run any more.’’

Unless, of course, Wilford Scypion, Jr., or some other young fighter, needed her to. Then she would because Deirdre Gogarty is a trainer now, working her man’s corner and happy to be there.