

MarketsField



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SPECIAL AS
LIMERICK
FC RETURN
TO MARKETS
FIELD



FOOTBALL'S GOING HOME

LIMERICK FC RETURN TO MARKETS FIELD

What you may not have known about the Markets Field

While the Markets Field is synonymous with greyhound racing and soccer, it has had a very interesting past. Probably one of the oldest grounds in the country in almost continuous use the tradition of the ground stretches back further than most people think. Below we take a look at some of the facts and history that may not be widely known.

● The Markets Field was a quarry in the early part of the 1800s. Much of the Limestone used in the building of St Joseph's Hospital and Limerick Prison would have been taken from the seam that runs through the Markets Field and in a line through to Singland. Limerick limestone is a particularly dark colour and was much sought after internationally.

● From the mid 1800s the quarry was filled in and by the 1870s the field was used by the British Army whose artillery units (pulled by horses) schooled and trained their equine stock on the field which at that point bordered the Markets area of the city, hence its name.

● The first general sports usage of the ground recorded is by the Limerick Cycling Club in the 1880s. However it is believed that it was in sporting use before that time.

● The first ever Munster Vs All Blacks match was played in the ground in 1905. That New Zealand team were their first touring side to visit the British Isles and they were led by the legendary Dave Gallagher. He did not play in the match due to injury but it didn't stop the All Blacks from obtaining a comprehensive 33-0 win on that November day.

● The use of the Markets Field as a sports ground predates the building of the predominant feature on its skyline. St John's Cathedral Tower was completed some 10 years after the ground came into popular sporting usage.

● One of Limerick's most famous breweries bordered on the Geraldine Villas end of the ground. Contemporary

reports of the time state that spectators sat on the walls of the brewery and watched the games over the four foot wall that bordered the field. O'Connell's brewery as it was known opened on April 16, 1780, and continued in operation until 1881. Its owner Johnny O'Connell was celebrated in the great Limerick song "Garryowen in Glory"



● Many great GAA games were played at the venue but probably the most famous was the 1919 Munster Hurling Final between Cork and Limerick. Newspaper reports of the time put the attendance at 20,000. This was the first time that Cork ever wore red jerseys in a Munster final. They won that game putting a stop to a great Limerick team that had won the All Ireland the previous year.

● Garryowen Rugby club shared the ground with Limerick FC up to the mid 1950s when they moved to Dooradoyle. Few sporting venues can, like the Markets Field, claim to have given a word to the English language. The up and under kick known as the "Garryowen" was honed and perfected in the historic ground.



● The ground was in the ownership of the Frost family for many years, before being purchased in the 1970s by Bord Na GCon.

● Currently owned and operated by Limerick Enterprise Development Partnership (LEDP), during the reconstruction over six and a half kilometres of drains have been laid under the playing surface. A well has been dug under the pitch supplying 10,000 litres of water for irrigation purposes.

● Over four kilometres of wiring has been used and over 400 tonnes of material has been moved. Each dressing of the pitch takes 60 Tonnes of specially treated sand and the turf on the pitch is specially selected grass overseen by an agronomist to ensure that it is maintained in best condition.



Front cover: Top pic - An iconic image of Joe O'Mahony in action for Limerick FC in a friendly in the Markets Field in 1970; bottom pic - a general view of the main

stand at the Markets Field this week ahead of its reopening this Friday when Limerick return to the ground after a 31-year absence

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After 31 years

Colm Kinsella looks ahead to Limerick's FC return to the Markets Field on Friday, after an absence of 31 years

WHEN Limerick FC run out to face Drogheda United at the Markets Field on Friday night, it will be the first time in 31 years that the club has played a League of Ireland fixture at the historic venue.

Circumstances forced the club out of the Markets Field in 1984, the result of an unsavoury legal battle for ownership, with the High Court eventually ruling in favour of the late Pat Grace.

Pat Grace famously brought the Kentucky Fried Chicken franchise to Ireland and first became involved with Limerick United as main shirt sponsor in 1979, and took over the club outright in 1983.

Almost immediately, he became involved in a bitter High Court battle with former owner Michael Webb after he chose to change the team's name to 'Limerick City', alter their colours to green and yellow from blue and white, and sought to move the team from its traditional home at the Market's Field to Hogan Park in Rathbane, the former Old Crescent RFC ground.

One of the most bizarre scenes ever witnessed at the Markets Field came earlier that same season, on Sunday, October 9, 1983, when Limerick players, when in dispute with the club, picketed the ground to prevent the Limerick Utd v Waterford Utd game taking place.

The action proved successful when the Waterford panel decided to return home after discussions with the PFAI Secretary. That final season at the Markets Field had been more memorable for its meetings and controversies than for its games and results.

Limerick's last game at the Markets Field was on April 22, 1984 when the Blues captured the Shield trophy for the first time since 1953, beating UCD in a penalty shoot-out.

MARKETS FIELD FIXTURES

Friday, June 5 - Limerick FC v Drogheda Utd
Saturday, July 4 - Limerick FC v Bray Wanderers
Saturday, July 11 - Limerick FC v Galway Utd
Saturday, August 1 - Limerick FC v Sligo Rovers
Monday, August 17 - Limerick FC v Longford
Saturday, September 5 - Limerick FC v St Pat's
Saturday, September 26 - Limerick FC v Dundalk
Saturday, October 17 - Limerick FC v Derry City
Saturday, October 24 - Limerick FC v Shamrock Rovers

The 1980s ended with Limerick narrowly avoiding relegation in 1987 amid serious financial difficulties off the field. Mr Grace left the club in 1989.

Limerick's first ever fixture at the Markets Field venue was a 4-1 victory over Waterford United.

The Markets Field was already providing a home for Garryowen FC, it hosted local club, provincial and All Ireland GAA games and was to become one of the country's best known greyhound racing tracks.

Countless memories were made at the Markets Field for Limerick's legion of devoted soccer fans, living every kick, and tackle, the team's successes and failures, over four and a half decades at the venue.

After a 23-year residency at the Markets Field, Limerick AFC broke the mould in 1960 when they moved their European Cup first round tie against Swiss side Young Boys of Berne to Thomond Park.

The name change to Limerick City FC also resulted in a colour change to yellow and green, a number of Lim-

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LIMERICK FC RETURN TO MARKETS FIELD

Limerick FC are set to go home



Limerick Utd players moved with them and the new club won the League of Ireland Shield and the Munster Senior Cup in that 1984/85 season.

Former Northern Ireland, Burnley and Oxford United star Billy Hamilton was recruited as player/manager in 1987 and Sam Allardyce got his first taste of Limerick senior soccer in 1991/92.

The former West Ham boss remained in Rathbane for one season and after his departure the club was taken over by local curate Fr Joe Young.

Relegation and financial

problems followed and local junior club Pike Rovers stepped in with an offer that saw Limerick play their league fixtures in Crossasgalla at the start of the 2000/2001 season.

A return to Rathbane followed as Danny Drew took over as club chairman and in 2007 Limerick 37 was formed after a deal with the local Limerick District Management Committee ensured that the new club would play their games at LDM Headquarters, Jackman Park in Carey's Road.

Limerick gained promotion back to the Premier Di-

vision at the end of the 2012 season and the Blues played their first two seasons back in the top flight at Thomond Park.

In 2011, former Limerickman of the Year JP McManus provided the donation through his charitable trust to the Limerick Enterprise Development Partnership Limited (LEDP) who reached agreement with Bord na gCon to acquire the Markets Field for a sum "in excess of €1.5m". Work on re-laying the playing surface at the Markets Field venue, which has been unoc-

cupied since 2010, began in the autumn of 2013, starting with clearing of the site.

The playing pitch at the venue was laid some 18 months ago. Construction work at the site began at the end of 2014.

Limerick originally planned on being back at the Markets Field for the start of the season but the ground wasn't ready in time so they started the season back in Jackman Park.

So far it's been a disappointing season on the field for Martin Russell's side and

they've yet to win a league game and are five points adrift at the foot of the table. Their return to the Markets Field coincides with a relegation battle so there would be no better time to claim a first win than this Friday in front of a big crowd on opening night.

That might keep the fans coming to the famous old venue. For the first time in over three decades, Limerick are back at the ground they call their spiritual home.

Now they must make it feel like that once again.



SSE AIRTRICITY PREMIER DIVISION

Limerick FC v Drogheda Utd

Date: Friday, June 5

Venue: Markets Field

Kickoff: 7.45pm

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LIMERICK FC RETURN TO MARKETS FIELD

Markets Field was 'the Mecca' for soccer fans

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WHEN the clock ticks round to 7.45pm on Friday, memories of by-gone days at the Markets Field are sure to come flooding back for the former Limerick soccer players who lined out for the club during the 47 years spent at the venue.

Two of the many former Limerick soccer greats who will be in attendance on opening night are former international defender Al Finucane and goalkeeper Kevin Fitzpatrick.

Finucane made a record 634 appearances in the League of Ireland between December 1960 and April 1988.

In 27 seasons playing League of Ireland football, Finucane was never sent off and was booked only three times. He captained both Limerick AFC and Waterford Utd to FAI Cup glory.

Finucane is one of only two League of Ireland players to captain the Republic of Ireland at senior level.

The three-time FAI Cup medal winner won 11 senior captains for Ireland, captaining his country against Austria in Linz.

Al Finucane's trips to the Markets Field began from an early age as two of his uncles played with the club.

Finucane recalled this week: "The Markets Field was always very important to me because I had two uncles who played with Limerick, John and Batey Neilan and I would have gone to see them play up there from about the age of 10 in the 1950s and into the 1960s.

"I remember going to watch the famous Shamrock Rovers team in those times and Waterford had great teams during that period too.

"I started playing school-boy soccer when I was nine with Reds United. The youngest age you could play at the time was U-11.

"I made my Limerick derby in 1960-1961. It was in the Markets Field against Shamrock Rovers. It was a 3-3 draw I remember. Rovers won the league year in and year out during that period and the Cup as well.

"A few years after I started playing Waterford United started to get very strong. Poor old Limerick weren't winning much. I remember the only trophy my uncles ever won the Shield."

International goalkeeper Kevin Fitzpatrick played for Limerick in the League of Ireland for 22 seasons.

Fitzpatrick recalled: "The first memory I have of the Markets Field is of 1948, going up with my father Pat from about the age of six. He used to bring me to every home game. I remember the first day I went up, I think they were playing Shelbourne and Bill Hayes was in goal for Limerick. He played a great game, saved a penalty and I always wanted to play in goal after that. I was mad for Billy Hayes for that.

"My two brothers played with Pike Rovers at the time. I got into soccer and I loved it.

"I made my Limerick debut at the markets Field against Celtic in May. I did my leaving cert a month later."

"I played schoolboy with Reds United and the late Jack



Cup champs: the Limerick FC team (above) that won the FAI Cup in 1982; below - the Limerick FC team in 1970



Tuohy who was involved with the club became connected with Limerick in 1956/57 and he brought me up to Limerick. I was on the minor team, then onto the B team and finally the senior team.

"I made my Limerick debut at the Markets Field in May 1960 against Glasgow Celtic. That was my first game. I was doing the Leaving Cert in June at CBS Sexton Street and I played for Limerick in June.

"Playing against Celtic was a thrill and a half, unbelievable. You were trembling going out to play, but when the game started you were ok. It was a fantastic feeling. I got great encouragement. We did well, drew 3-3 and I didn't play too bad!

"The following August, Ewan Fenton became manager of Limerick and his whole idea of youth. Within five to six years, the team was made up of

20-21-22 year-olds. It probably took me three years to become established in the team in late 1963."

Finucane joined Limerick as a 17-year-old under manager Ewan Fenton. While Finucane spent the majority of his career playing with Limerick teams, his eight seasons with Waterford Utd included an FAI Cup win in 1980 when, at the age of 37, he captained them to their first Cup success in 43 years. As a result, Finucane became

the second player to skipper two clubs to success in the competition as he captained Limerick to their 1971 Cup win over Drogheda. Finucane added a third FAI Cup medal in 1982.

Finucane was always struck by the die-hard nature of the team's support during his playing days.

He said: "For soccer fans it

was brilliant, no matter how badly the team was doing and it wasn't doing great during my early years playing, you still had a very good crowd at the Markets Field. There was nothing else to do on a Sunday afternoon, nowhere else to go. The banter and the craic that was there was just unbelievable. When I broke into the side the likes of Des McNamara, Joe Casey and Dick O'Connor, to mention just three, were the established names in the side. Maybe a year or two before me Kevin Fitzpatrick and Mick Doyle were getting established.

"It was always great to play against Shamrock Rovers and Waterford. They were the two main teams that I played against. It was so long ago now that I played against teams a lot of people have never heard of. In the League of Ireland at the time you have Transport,

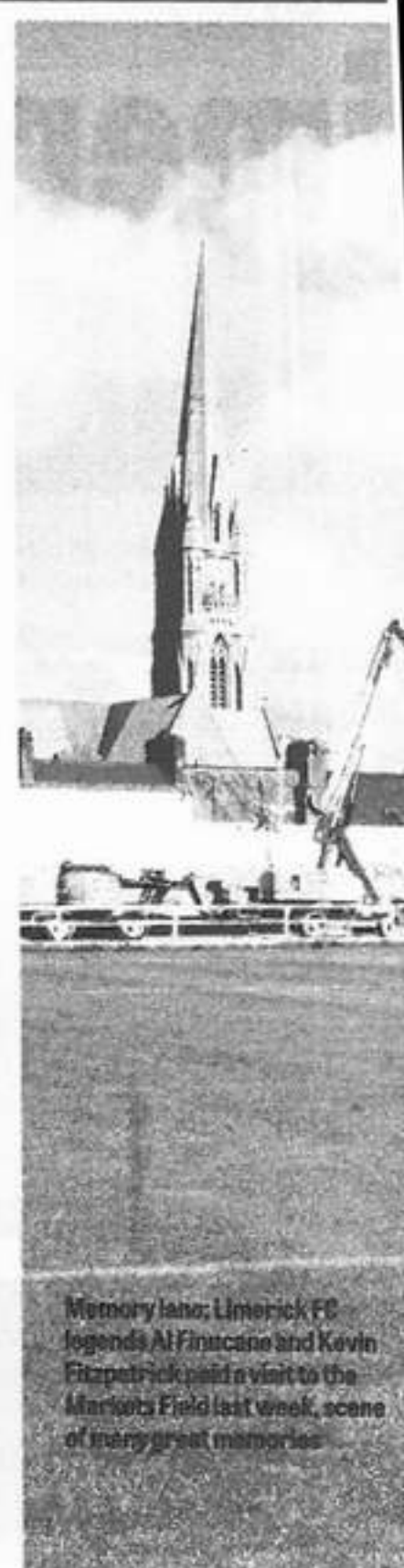
Drumcondra, Cork Athletic. They are all gone now."

Finucane, from Quins Cottages, in Rosbrien, moved to Waterford United in the 1973-'74 season where he remained until the start of the 1981-'82 season when he returned to Limerick Utd.

The Limerick supporters always reserved a 'special' welcome for Finucane when he returned to the Markets Field.

Finucane said: "I used to get some terrible slagging, especially from the poplar side, when I came back with Waterford.

"You would always hear the quips from the crowd, especially on the poplar side of the Markets Field. They were only the dog track separating you from the crowd. They were always very vociferous on that side of the pitch. When you went to take a throw-in, you were only 10 feet from them.



Memory lane: Limerick FC legends Al Finucane and Kevin Fitzpatrick paid a visit to the Markets Field last week, scene of many great memories



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Glory days: Al Finucane (above) with the FAI Cup in 1982; below - Kevin Fitzpatrick with Real Madrid's Miguel Angel after European Cup game in 1980



The banter was unbelievable, not always complementary mind you."

Two-time FAI Cup winner Kevin Fitzpatrick also has fond memories of the Limerick support back in the halcyon days of the Markets Field.

He said: "We had a fantastic support. The supporters were very funny as well as enthusiastic. They were always getting onto you if you weren't doing well, but in a good way, not in a bad way."

"When we weren't going well, we had bad crowds. I played in five FAI Cup finals, 1965, 1966, 1971, 1977 and 1982. We won two of them and lost three."

"It is great to see the Markets Field back again. To me it is the home of Limerick soccer. I think it will unite people to come back and watch the team play. There is a young team up there now. It is going

to take a while for them to get together. If the support get behind them it will help them out as well."

Al Finucane added: "The Markets Field really was the Mecca. Every second Sunday you went to the Markets Field to watch Limerick play. It didn't matter who they were playing. It was a pilgrimage."

"People would go for a few pints, then leave the pub and head up to the Markets Field. That was the norm."

"It's great the team is going home. I know they are bottom of the League, but I really think the move back to the Markets Field will give them a fillip. I would expect them to go from strength to strength."

"I would expect them to anyway. I was up there last week. It is a great venue now. The fact that the place is going to be so modern now, it is bound to rub off on the players."



Squad members of Limerick AFC training at the Markets Field in 1960. Back row, from left, Eric Costelloe, PJ Meagher, Kevin Fitzpatrick, Mick Doyle. Front row, Denis Linane, Paddy Hackett, Gerry McCarthy, Tony Brosnihan, Dick O'Connor, Des McNamara, Joe Casey and Noel Murphy who was trainer of the side. In the background are Paddy Noonan and Christy Holman. Limerick had won the League of Ireland the previous season and had been drawn against Young Boys of Berne in the first round of the European Cup at Thomond Park in September of that year.

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LIMERICK FC RETURN TO MARKETS FIELD

New-look Markets Field developed at a cost of €4.5million

Colm Kinsella reports on the work behind the scenes that has transformed the Markets Field

THE new-look Markets Field, redeveloped at a cost of €4.5 million, is a Category 2 UEFA stadium with a capacity to cater for 3,075 spectators.

The stadium provides seating for 1,350 spectators in the main stand and an additional 350 seats for away supporters in a demountable stand.

The remaining fans attending fixtures at the Markets Field will be standing around the ground.

Construction work on the venue began in earnest around Christmas time.

The playing surface at the venue was laid 18 months ago and there are six-and-a-half kilometres of drains gone in underneath it.

The venue, owned by the Limerick Enterprise Development Partnership (LEDP), has hosted various sporting events since the mid-1880s when the Limerick Cycling Club held races there.

George Lee, of the LEDP, who is project leader on the Markets Field redevelopment, said: "Our building programme has been bang on target. There were expectations and dates put forward. I think when people

look around here on Friday night and they look around the place, they will say yes we were right not to go with the March deadline. I think the result in waiting will be spectacular. I would hope Limerick people will feel the same way.

"The cost of this project will be of the order of between €4 million and €4.5 million. That includes the purchase price which LEDP were put in funds by the McManus Charitable Foundation. That was about €1.6million to €1.7million. The LEDP themselves have put upwards of €500,000 into the place. Government funding came in the shape of about €1.5 million. The rest was made up through other donations from the McManus Foundation and other sources.

"It is fully paid for. One of the beauties about this is that we are opening the Markets Field debt free. That allows us the luxury of being able to establish the ground and put in place a business plan without having the pressure of ensuring the mortgage is paid every month. That means we can take a much longer term strategic view.

"This ground is for the peo-

ple of Limerick, it is not just for soccer, but for every sport and other activities as well.

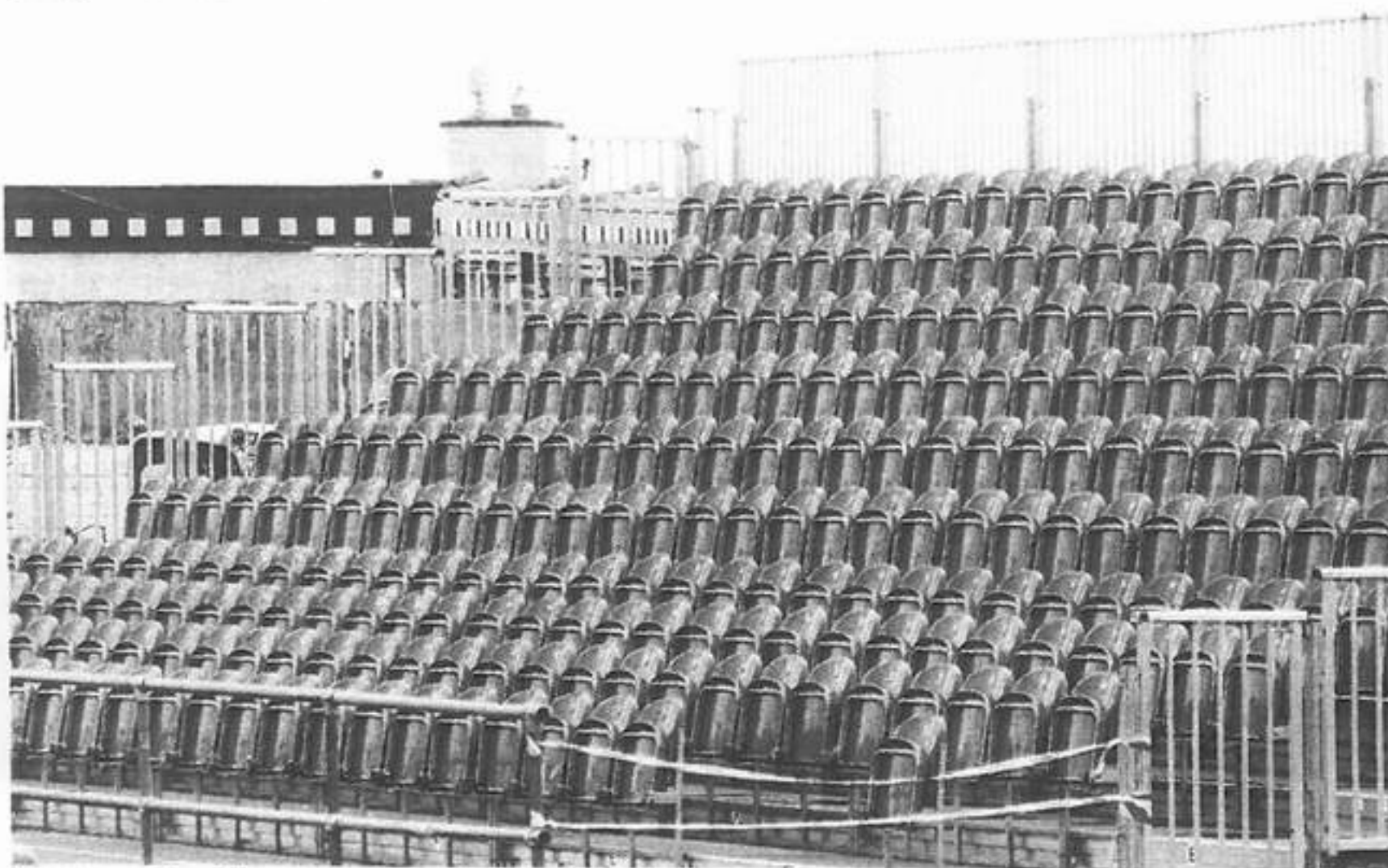
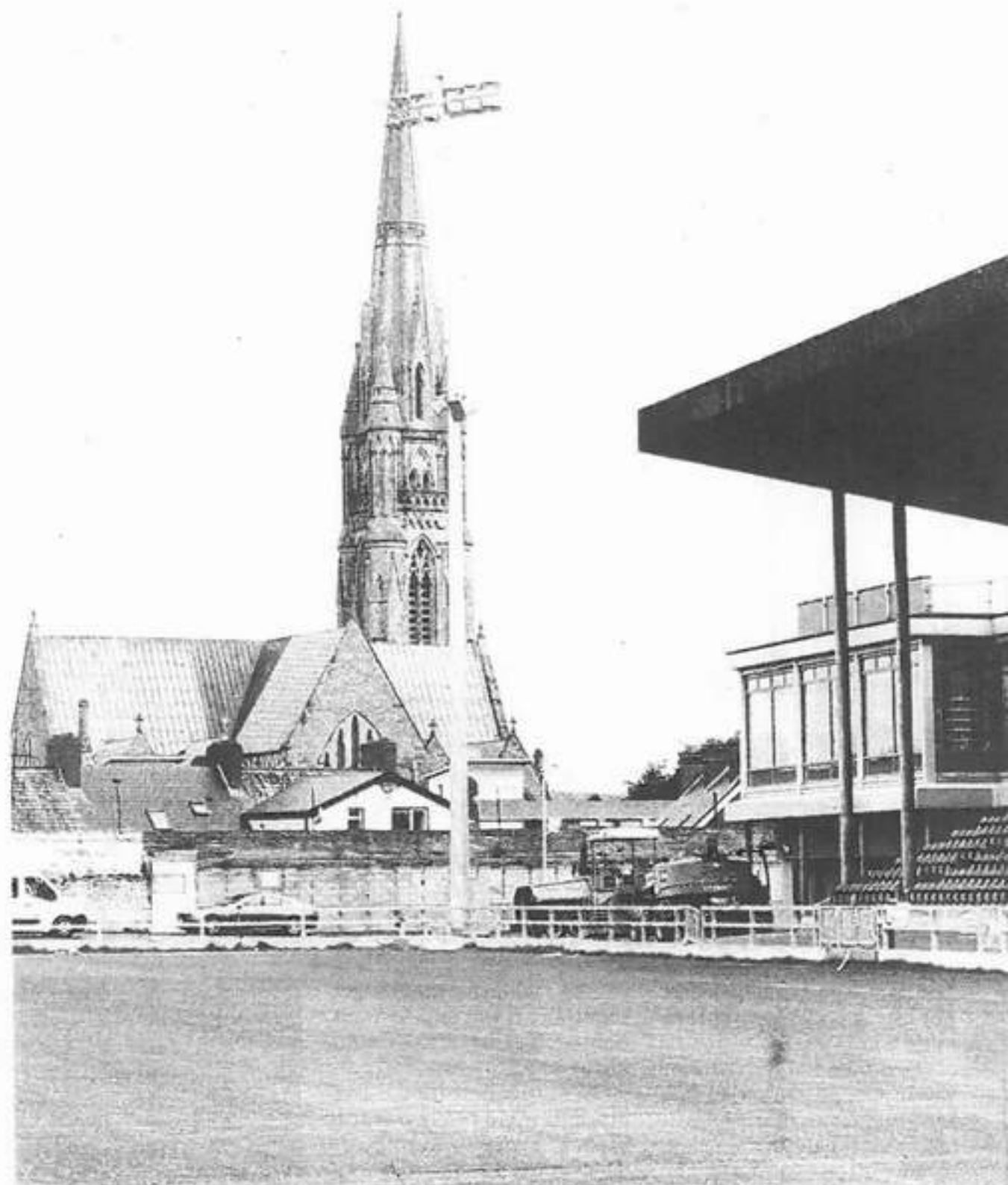
"Obviously, we have licensing criteria and we have to be careful of the pitch.

"Friday's match is selling very well, I believe.

"I would guess we will have a full house for the opening fixture. It would be fantastic, I think.

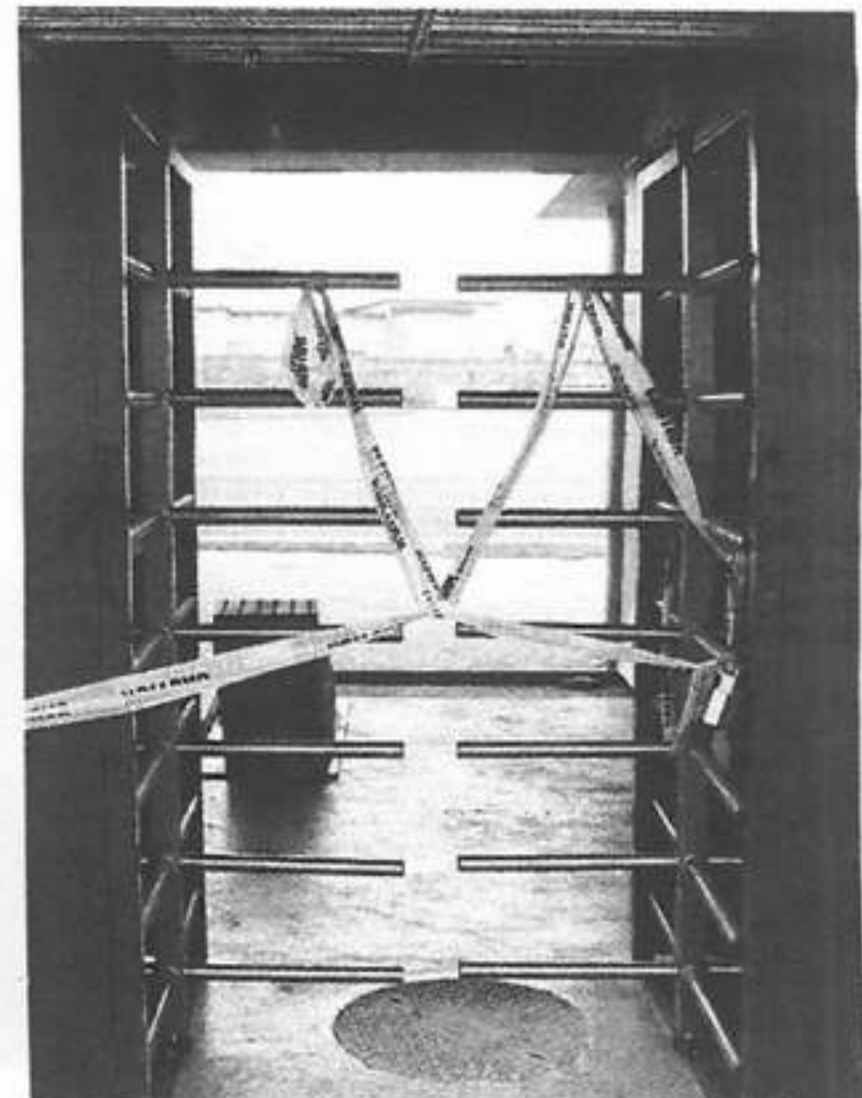
"Talking to Martin Russell, the Limerick FC manager, over the past couple of days, he really, really wants to get a result here on Friday night. It would be a fantastic homecoming if we could get the first three points in the bag.

"To be so close now to the first fixture is just amazing. I have alternated between desperate terror and sheer elation. Professionally, it is the culmination of something for me, but on a personal level it is really almost like a homecoming in my own head. I know it is that way for so many people across Limerick, but to have been here and have seen it in the days when it was myself and a little bit of rag worth growing on the bank and now to look around and see 80 guys putting the finishing touches here today to what is going to be an iconic Limerick stadium, it is hugely exciting."



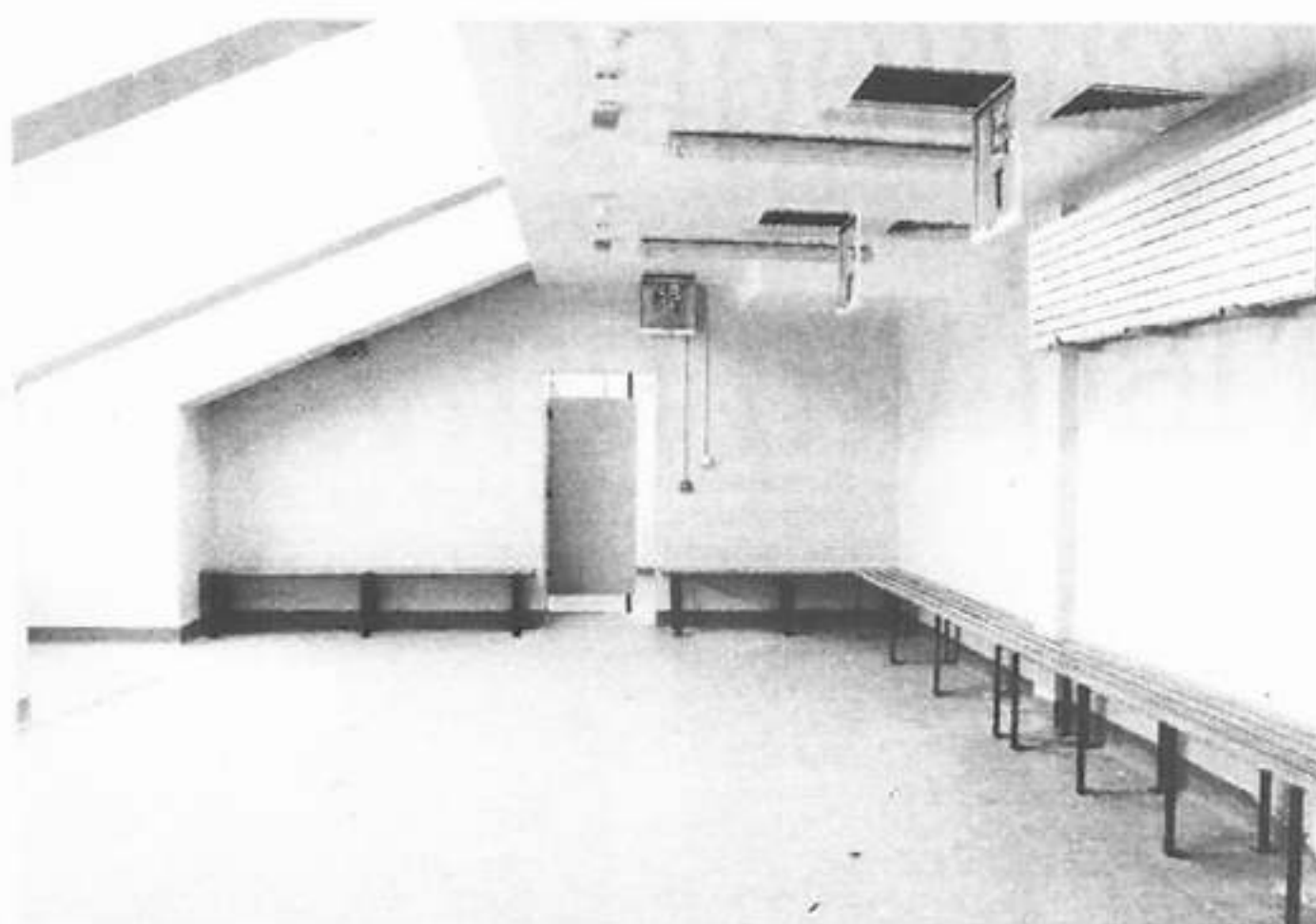
The away supporters will be seated in a demountable stand at the Geraldines Villa end of the ground and will have capacity for 350 supporters. A roof for that stand is currently being installed

Pictures: Mike Cowhey

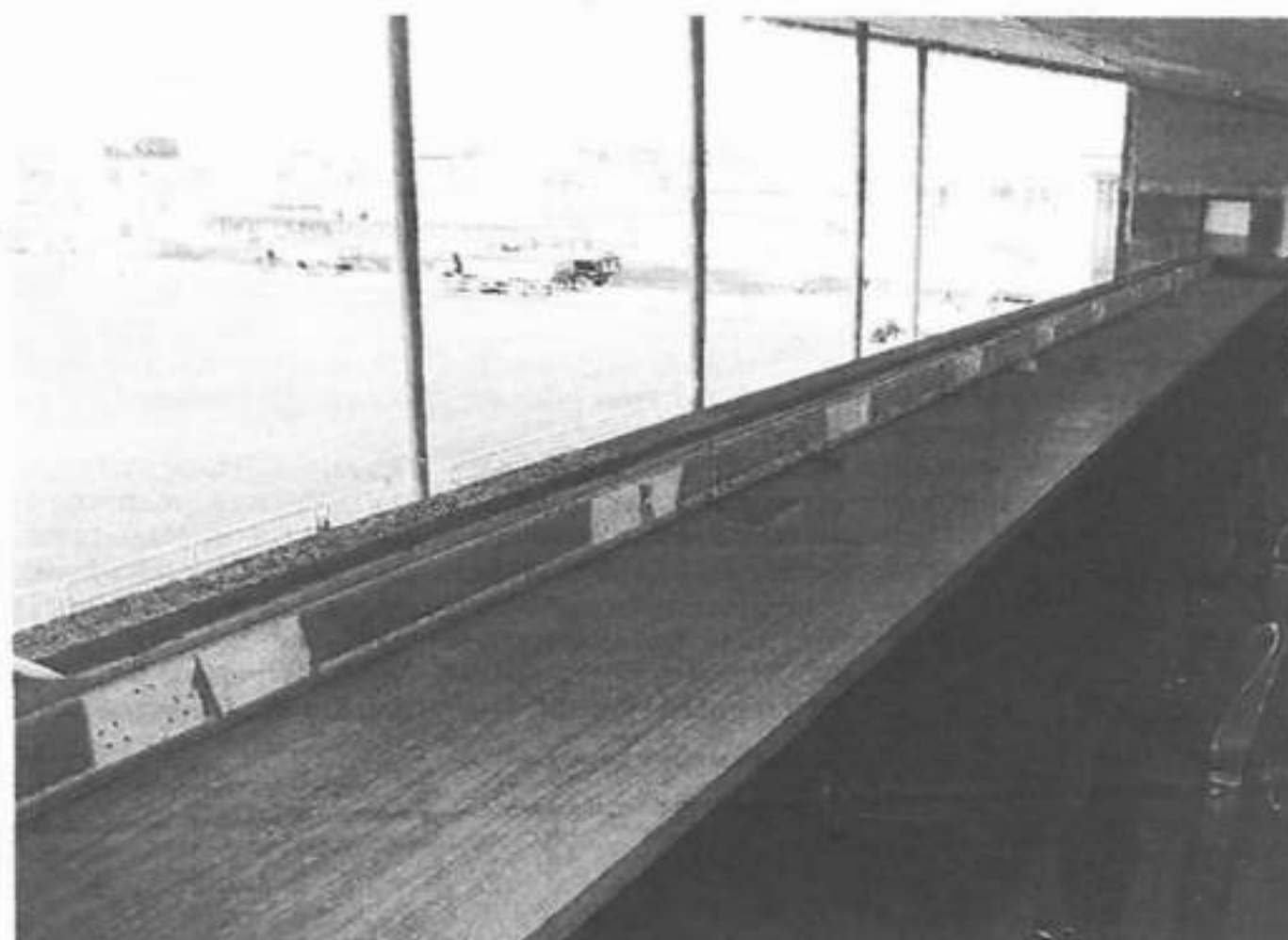


New turnstiles have also been installed at the ground

LIMERICK FC RETURN TO MARKETS FIELD



Heart of the action: the home dressing room (above) at the Markets Field; below - the Press Box in the stand



Apart from Limerick FC, what else will be played at the Markets Field?

THE dimensions of the newly laid pitch at the redeveloped Markets Field stadium would allow it accommodate rugby union games, but it is not long enough for full-sized GAA fixtures.

George Lee, of the LEDP, who is project leader on the Markets Field redevelopment said: "The pitch is slightly too short for full-blown GAA games. I think it is about 20 yards shorter than the Gaelic Grounds. You could play underage GAA on it."

"You could also play the Go Games across the pitch."

"The dimensions are ideal for rugby, both for

union and league. They are obviously ideal for soccer."

"Really it is up to people's imagination after that. Come to us and have a chat and see if we can help you. This ground is for the people of Limerick. This ground is not just for soccer, but for every sport and for other activities as well."

"But we are open to organisations and people who will come to us and if we can make it work under licensing criteria, then we certainly will."

"We have deliberately not taken any bookings for any events so far - we want to get this right first."

Talk of a sellout for opening night as Limerick look to win the crowds back

HOPES are high that Friday night's return to Markets Field for Limerick FC will attract a sell-out attendance of just over 3,000.

The SSE Airtricity League Premier Division tie with Drogheda United has a 7.45pm kick-off. Limerick FC's opening fixture at Thomond Park on their return to the Premier Division in March 2013 attracted a bumper attendance of more than 3,500.

Tickets for the game are priced at €15 for the main stand, €12 for the terrace. Student tickets, for second level and third level students, as well as U-12s are also available for the game.

Match tickets can be bought in advance through a link on the Limerick FC website, www.limerickfc.ie.

The venue is a Category 2 UEFA stadium with a capacity of 3,075. The main stand has a seating capacity for 1,340. That area is designed for home supporters as is the terracing on what was known as the poplar side and across at the Cathedral/Rossa Avenue end.

Away fans will be facilitated on a demountable stand on the Geraldine Villas end of the ground, accessing the ground through the Geraldine Villas gate.

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LIMERICK FC RETURN TO MARKETS FIELD

Privileged to be playing my part

George Lee of the Limerick Enterprise Development Partnership, and project manager of the Markets Field, on his special relationship with the famous old venue

I suppose it was the smell of Jeyes Fluid that first alerted me to the fact that the Markets Field was something out of the ordinary.

As an altar boy in St John's the rota meant that you had to be there for 8 O'Clock mass sometimes, and that meant passing the "Dog Track" with my mother in tow and that unmistakeable smell. Growing up "Under the Tower" is a unique experience, quintessentially Limerick.

I was immensely proud of my roots, but also very conscious that there were many features which made it unique - a jail, a graveyard, a cathedral, a mental hospital and a sports stadium all on our doorstep.

At different times they meant different things but in my early teenage years the predominant local influence was every second Sunday in The Markets Field.

When it began for me it

didn't mean much. I guess it was a case that my father and brother dragged me along. I remember being wet, cold and disinterested but one 90 minutes on the 'Popular' side changed a young teen's view on the world. What seemed like impossibly old men in monotone 'Crombies', with quick wit and banter, slightly mad characters and those that reeked of cigarettes and alcohol introduced me to a Limerick that helped form my character.

"That fella played for Ireland ...once," my Dad would say. Or "he played with Perryville in the 40s and all his people worked in the Loco". It was true 'Limerick' and even though my Dad and most of his contemporaries are not here to see the rebirth, there is nowhere in Limerick that defines the true Limerick character more than The Markets Field.

We won a league title that year, Young Munster won the senior cup the same weekend and a whole generation of young Limerick lads came of age.

Fast forward over 30 years, a boy grows to a man and does what he needs to do to earn a living. And then an opportunity to be involved in something so close to home presents itself. The history of how this chapter of the ground came



Walking the walk: Republic of Ireland manager Martin O'Neill in conversation with George Lee, project manager of the Limerick Enterprise Development Partnership, during a visit to the Markets Field Project in February 2014

about is still to be written.

It involves a man who got his start in the Markets Field and never forgot his roots, a charitable trust company established on the closure of another of Limerick's traditional businesses, Krups, and the op-

portunity presented by a political and municipal will, all equally important, in effect, an alignment of the stars.

Through the JP McManus Charitable Foundation, LEDP was put in funds to purchase the stadium. Another great coincidence is that Gerry Boland, whose roots are also

ligott sought the counsel of the board and through Gerry Boland, Keith Wood, offered his assistance as an advisor to the project and another circle was closed. Keith's father Gordon would have played in the Markets Field many years ago. The Council through its Office of Regeneration and Depart-

ments of the Environment and Finance through local Ministers Michael Noonan and Jan O'Sullivan provided much needed funds to enable the works and open tendering on design and construction commenced.

So now we sit on the cusp of another era, the black and white memories of another time are replaced by a new floodlit high definition future. A stadium is reborn and an opportunity exists for a future role in the pantheon of great Limerick sporting moments.

I took a moment last week, alone in a nearly completed stadium late in the evening to stop at a spot on the 'Popular' side and remember a young boy and his dad that represented so many other young boys and girls and dads and moms over nearly 130 years that called the Markets Field 'our sporting home'.

I thanked whatever higher power oversees stadium reconstructions that I was lucky enough to have a small part in making a difference to a ground that means so much to me and a myriad of others in Limerick.

I thought of all of the coincidences and talents of everyone from philanthropists to tradesmen that have brought about the rebirth of this iconic Limerick stadium and I realised that whatever codes play on the newly laid surface that we all have a common goal -



Serious business: Jan O'Sullivan (TD and formerly Minister of State, Department of Environment, Community and Local Government with special responsibility for Housing and Planning) pictured at the Markets Field with from left: Liam McElligott (CEO, LEDP), Brian Geaney (senior executive, Limerick Regeneration), Gerry Boland (Director, LEDP), Michael Tiernan (Chairman, LEDP) and George Lee (LEDP)


"At different times they meant different things but in my early teenage years the predominant local influence was every second Sunday in The Markets Field"

very much 'Under the Tower' negotiated the deal that purchased the stadium and he sits as a founder director with Michael Tiernan on the board of LEDP the company that now oversees the stadium.

In the spirit of partnership which defines the work of LEDP, CEO Liam McEl-



On the dotted line: Signing contracts for Markets Field reconstruction were Liam McElligott (CEO, LEDP), Gerry Boland (Director, LEDP) and Paul Henry (Pinnacle Construction)



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LIMERICK FC RETURN TO MARKETS FIELD



Changing home: Limerick FC manager Martin Russell is looking forward to his side playing their home games in the redeveloped Markets Field

Return to 'Markets' is 'big step forward'

COLM KINSELLA
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LIMERICK FC manager Martin Russell says Friday night's return to the Markets Field as a 'big step forward' for the club.

Russell is hoping the redeveloped stadium can become the kind of fortress which will make it difficult for visiting teams to come and earn a result.

Russell said: "I think it is a very big step forward for the club that it is able to get back into the Markets Field and hopefully it is something the club can build on and it is something to be proud of in terms of the playing surface."

"At the moment it is as good as there is in the country, so things like that are very positive and it is a step in the right direction, very much so."

"Listen, if we go and play the way we have done, we have every chance (of getting a win) on Friday."

"You can't guarantee anything, people don't mean to miss chances, but we are going into the Markets Field looking forward to the game with a belief that if we play well enough we can start to make the venue the kind of fortress that people are going to find it hard to come and get a result from it."

"Any help we can get from the supporters coming in to encourage the lads, we will appreciate it."

Russell says its vital the team 'work through the tough times' which has seen the Blues fall to bottom place in the SSE Airtricity League Premier Division table.

Struggling Limerick, still searching for their first win in the Premier Division this season after 14 games, exited the FAI Cup at the hands of Bray Wanderers at the Carlisle Grounds on Friday night last.

Russell said: "It has been a tough season and it will continue to be. It is a real, real challenge for everybody, both the playing staff and the staff

off the field. We are all in it together in terms of everyone having a providing a brighter future for Limerick FC. You have to work through tough times. Other clubs have done it and come out the other end. Some clubs who have had good days have now fallen by the way side. It does not stop. You have to keep working at it. Moving back into the Markets Field is a very big step forward for the club."

"Now that we are back in the Markets Field, the facilities there will continue to develop, I would imagine. As it is as the moment, it is a good place to go and watch a game. The surface for playing a football game is top class. We will, on the football end of things, try and produce an attacking side that entertain and hopefully wins games."

"It was important to get back into the Markets Field and now that we are, it is important that we continue to develop the venue and the team. There is a time frame in

that. It won't happen immediately. Everyone working can help towards a better future."

"When I came down after getting the job, I felt whatever resources I was given, I would compete at that level. At the time when I came in we had a 50% win ratio on the previous budget. At the end of the season we finished just off a European spot."

"That budget hasn't been there this season. It has been difficult. We have had to try and put younger players in and develop those players. They will get better from the experience."

"They know the demands now. But they need help to compete against the top sides. All I can do as a manager is try and help the club to move forward in the best way possible. We have had to maybe take a step back in terms of our playing resources. It does take things like people helping the club, coming to the games, it takes sponsors getting involved."

Blues seek instant reward from Markets Field return

**SSE AIRTRICITY LEAGUE
PREMIER DIVISION
Limerick FC**

v Drogheda Utd

Date: Friday, June 6

Venue: Markets Field

Kickoff: 7.45pm

COLM KINSELLA

Email: ckinsella@limerickleader.ie

Twitter: @ckSportLeader

LIMERICK FC will desperately hope that their return to the Markets Field for the first time in 31 years kick-starts an upturn in their onfield fortunes.

Martin Russell's side remain rooted to the foot of the SSE Airtricity League Premier Division table ahead of Friday night's visit of Drogheda Utd.

Basement side Limerick trail Bray Wanderers by six points in the table, while the Shannonsiders are seven points adrift of third-from-bottom placed Sligo Rovers.

Limerick FC are still looking for their first win of the season this Friday night.

Manager Russell agrees that the next 4-6 weeks will be key in their bid for survival in the Premier Division.

Russell said: "The reason why these games are big is because if we want to have a chance of going into the final games of doing the best we can - I am not even talking about staying up - the boys that are getting their chance as well are all players who want to achieve individual stuff as well."

"Coming to Limerick for some of them has been a platform that they can use and for the young people coming in to the side it has given them the attention that people are now looking at them. For them their futures is the immediate thing, the club may be longer term."

"I said this middle phase will be critical, especially with the games at home. I still believe this is the case and that by the end of the middle phase we will be in a better position."

Limerick FC are set to be boosted by the return of both Ali Abass and Prince Agyemang in the coming weeks. Both players played with Limerick FC last season after joining from the Right to Dream Academy in Ghana. They are expected to return to the playing in early July.

HOW THEY STAND

Premier Division	P	W	D	L	Pts
Dundalk	14	12	2	0	38
Cork City	15	9	5	1	32
Shamrock Rovers	14	7	7	0	28
Bohemians	14	7	4	3	25
St Pat's	14	6	4	4	22
Longford Town	14	4	4	6	16
Galway Utd	14	5	0	9	15
Derry City	14	3	5	6	14
Drogheda	15	4	2	9	14
Sligo Rovers	14	2	6	6	12
Bray Wanderers	14	3	2	9	11
Limerick FC	14	0	5	9	5

FIXTURES

Saturday, June 6 - Shamrock Rovers v Sligo Rovers; Limerick FC v Drogheda Utd; Dundalk v Bohemians; Galway Utd v Cork City; Derry City v St Pat's; Bray Wanderers v Longford Town

No cup respite for Limerick FC as winless run continues

**Bray Wanderers
Limerick FC**

**3
1**

Limerick FC's poor season continued on Friday night when they went down 3-1 to Bray Wanderers in FAI Cup in the Carlisle Grounds.

Without a win in 14 games in the league, Limerick turned to the main competition for some respite but went down to their second defeat of the season at the seaside venue.

David Cassidy gave Bray the lead after just seven minutes but Limerick responded well and were back on level terms when Dean Clarke hit the net on the quarter-hour mark.

It remained 1-1 until the break

but Bray secured the win with two goals in three minutes in the second half, both strikes coming from Chris Lyons.

Limerick now turn their attention back to their relegation battle in the SSE Premier Division and their return to the Markets Field next Friday night when they entertain Drogheda Utd.

LIMERICK FC: Tommy Holland; Paudie O'Connor, Shane Tracey, Tony Whitehead, Robbie Williams; Sean Russell, Paul O'Connor, Shane Duggan, Ian Turner; Kieran Hanlon, Dean Clarke
BRAY WANDERERS: Stephen McGuinness; Adam Mitchell, Alan McNally, Hugh Douglas, Michael Barker; Peter McGlynn, Ryan McEvoy, Graham Kelly, Luke Gallagher, David Cassidy; Chris

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LIMERICK FC RETURN TO MARKETS FIELD

Markets Field - home to greyhound racing for 77 memorable years

It's only five years since Bord na gCon moved out of the Markets Field. **Jerome O'Connell** looks back on its time as the city's greyhound stadium

IN July 2010 the traps closed for the final time at the Mulgrave Street stadium to end 77 years of greyhound racing at the Limerick facility.

It was the 1930's when greyhound racing first appeared in the Markets Field venue.

For decades, racing attracted the masses to the Limerick Greyhound Stadium with racing at varying times across Monday, Thursday, Friday and Saturday nights.

Former racing manager Gus Ryan, spent most of his 43 working years at Markets Field.

Having started off in the accounts department of the track, he spent 24 years as assistant manager, and then 14 years of his career as racing manager in Limerick.

"I have fantastic memories, no doubt about it. For me there was no where and I mean no where to match the Markets Field," outlined Gus Ryan this Wednesday.

For many of his years, greyhound racing and soccer worked hand-in-hand.

"I remember we would

have racing on a Monday night and there might be a big game on Sunday and all I would be worried about was that the supporters wouldn't get onto the track after the game or we wouldn't be able to race on the Monday night," he recalled.

"For soccer in those days the Markets Field was the place to be at 3.00 on Sunday - they had 6,00 to 7,00 people in there and it really was the in-place."

Of the now departed sand based greyhound track the memories are just as vivid.

"I can remember watching the crowds come up William Street or out through the jail boren. I would come down from my office and go down under the stand and I could tell you where each person would sit or stand. These are the people that would be there morning, noon and night. We had 200 to 300 of a core that would be there regardless. Then for a big night you could put another 1,000 on that or for the big Leger nights another 2,500," explained Ryan.

While the Irish St Leger is

the centre piece of the Limerick greyhound calendar there were other highlights aplenty.

One was an invitational race in 1968 that involved high profile English Derby winner, Yellow Printer.

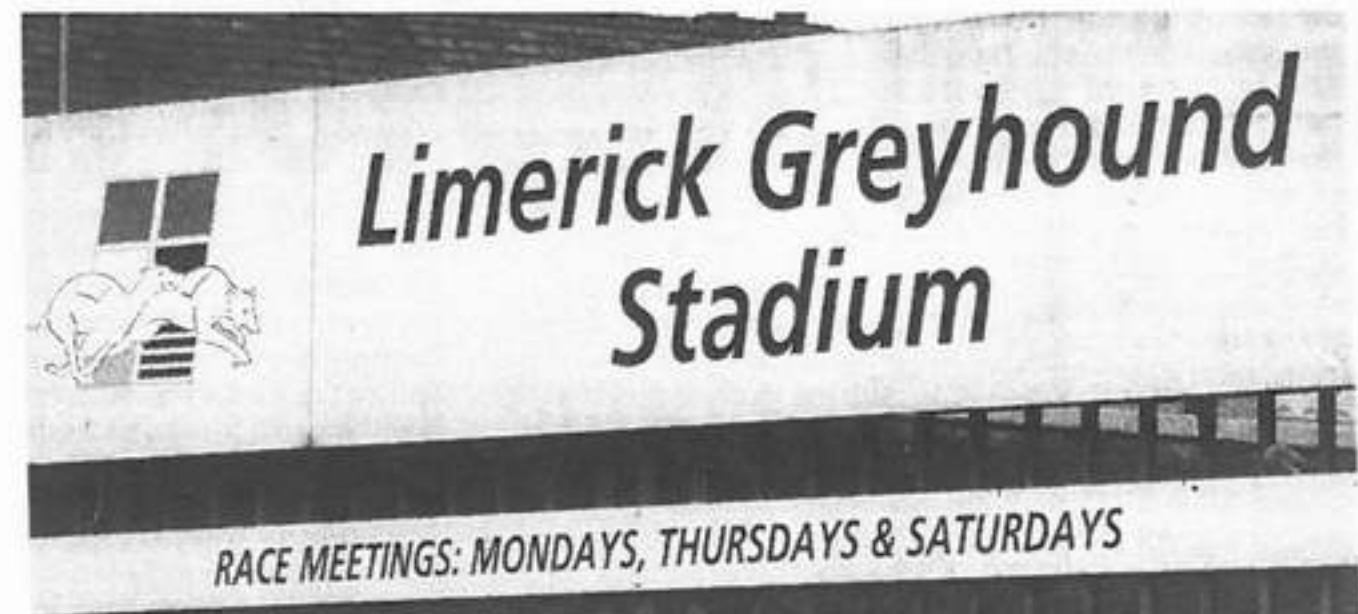
"That was probably the best night I remember, it was an invitational race here in 1968. Yellow Printer ran against Flaming King and four more very good dogs. "They flew Yellow Printer over [from England] on a Tuesday for a trial, which was unheard of. He landed in Shannon, came in had a trial and broke the track record and they flew him back home that evening. "Then they flew him back in again on Saturday and himself and his connections were given a civic reception below in town hall. Then he had the race that evening and he got beaten by Flaming King. He was probably jet lagged, the poor dog!" joked Ryan.

In the coming weeks Ryan will return to the stadium.

"I sincerely hope that everything works out. If Limerick soccer can get back what it had the Markets Field before I've no doubt that it will be successful," recalled Ryan, mentioning the visit of Southampton as one of his soccer highlights.



Queuing up: Greyhound trials (above) resume at the Markets Field after a 12 week lay-off due to the threat of foot-and-mouth disease in the 1970s; below - the sign outside the ground advertising their race meetings every Monday, Thursday and Saturday



Back in the day: an image from the greyhound stadium from the 1955 (right)

Final fling: John Shine (left) with "Emmas Crackers" pictured saying goodbye at Market Field's Greyhound Stadium in July 2010



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LIMERICK FC RETURN TO MARKETS FIELD



"They're big dressing rooms and there is a lovely surface; you can't ask for anymore," says Limerick FC captain Shane Duggan

Limerick captain Duggan recalls his old man's piece of history

Limerick FC Media Officer **Keith Wallace** spoke to Super Blues captain Shane Duggan as he follows in his father's footsteps

"Hopefully, we can build success there". The words of Limerick FC captain Shane Duggan, whose father Ger was part of the club's glory years where he collected League and Cup winners' medals in the early 1980s.

Indeed, Ger can also claim a small piece of history by being the last player to score a league goal for the Shannonsiders at the Markets Field. This weekend, 31 years on, Shane is bidding to begin a new era for the club with one of his own.

Ger's goal had come against Saint Patrick's Athletic on a Sunday afternoon in March 1984, as they twice struck late in a thrilling 3-2 victory at the famous Garryowen venue. At the time, it kept alive their hopes of securing European qualification. These days, the fight is a very different one as Limerick struggle to gather points in the race for Premier Division survival. Duggan junior – born five years after the club left their 'spiritual home' – hopes that returning to the Markets Field can revive their fortunes.

"I'm delighted to be going back to

the Markets Field," Shane, 26, said. "In the last couple of weeks there has been a big buzz about going back in there. We trained there last week and the pitch is fantastic. It's probably going to be one of the best pitches in the league.

"We can't wait to go there and play ball. This Friday night, there will be a good crowd we hope and there should be a good atmosphere there. We were finished in the Markets Field when I was growing up so I didn't see any games there or anything. I'm just looking forward to Friday night.

"There has been a big build-up to it and it's finally coming around the corner now. My father always spoke about the games they had there and the success they had throughout the years. They had great crowds and great support. Hopefully, we can build success there. It's a great honour being captain in the first game back, being a local boy as well. My father was the last player to score a league goal for Limerick there before they moved on, so it would be nice to get a goal on Friday night. Hopefully, we can do well and get our first win of the season.

"We have been around in the last couple of years. We were in Jackman Park this season. The pitch probably wasn't the best down there but the facilities in the Markets Field are top-notch.

"They're big dressing-rooms and there is a lovely surface; you can't ask for anymore. I'm sure there will be no excuses come Friday night. All the players are buzzing for it and it's great to be back. I think it's a must-win.

"There are still a lot of points to be played for but we need to start picking up wins now. We can't let the teams above us pull away any further. We have to start getting wins and try to catch them. We don't want the gap getting too big, where it gets too hard to claw back.

"It's a very winnable game on Friday. I was suspended for the first game against Drogheda up there but they went down to ten men and we were in the lead, so we probably should have seen that game out. But we've trained hard this week and we know what Drogheda are about.

"It's our first game back; hopefully there's a good atmosphere and the crowd come out, support us and get behind us.

"We're capable of beating the teams around us. We could have easily been 2-1 up (against Bray Wanderers in the FAI Cup) last Friday and it might have been a different game.

"We've had a few games like that. If we start taking our chances and get ourselves into a winning position we should be eager to see games out then."

Talking Limerick FC

ANDREW CUNNEEN

Limerick won't just have a home, they should now have an advantage too

Though unintentional, soccer is typically the starting point of most conversations that I'm awkwardly forced into with people.

This very quickly turns to Irish soccer, then Limerick soccer, then Limerick Football Club. I can give almost any view on current events, any view on specific players, performances, team selections, and all the way down to the font used for the squad numbers. One thing, however, has always evaded me. On Friday, June 5th, that will no longer be an issue.

Taxis, saunas, pubs and queues for your communion service at Christmas are but some of the places I've found myself being asked about Limerick, before the conversation turns to the Markets Field and the glory days. I can give a sense of what I think it will mean to people and I can give a sense of what I believe it will do for the players, but until I step inside the place on a match night, I'm afraid I'm in the dark, or at least, half-blind.

I've had commitments ranging between half promises to paternal-fuelled oaths that these people who have, at one stage or another, had a huge connection to Limerick soccer in a supporter's capacity, will return to following senior soccer in this city once the Garryowen venue opens its gates. I'm not quite sure whether or not these are sincere, but the proof will be in the pudding, and the extent of those promises will be put to the most extreme test, given the league form, on Friday.

For me personally, it's a chance to connect to, and embrace the old sentiment my father and uncles have told me about while I was growing up. Apparently, I'll "have never seen anything like the popular side" nor will I have heard anything like "the roar of the North Bank". These are men who are reasonably disconnected from English football, so to hear them speak with such enthusiasm must come with some sort of merit.

For the Club, it's been displaced for so long, even in the most habitable of homes. The glamorous Thomond Park couldn't even land a blow with the public in terms of showcasing their senior soccer side and when the glamour fails, there can only re-

ally be one feasible answer, and that's to return to the formula that worked so well with the public so many years ago. You may be preaching to the choir with a particular generation, but the aim is ignite the interest of the generation below and to test that classic romance with a new breed of soccer enthusiast. If it works on that count, it's truly a magical venue.

I wrote about identity last month. If a football club wins a league title, or even achieves reasonable success, their home form is usually a big part of why and how. That's every bit trickier when you're not playing at your own home. If this squad embraces the place like they should, they should get out of trouble. If the crowd around them embrace it like they should as well, they will get out of trouble. For the first time in a long time, teams will be coming to the home of Limerick Football Club, not just to Limerick for a fixture that's away from home for both sides. All there was to tackle previously was a slight familiarity disadvantage regarding the

"It takes the best parts of some of the grounds that have hosted Limerick in the past."

surface and a tedious bus journey. Now, with the Garryowen venue – the scene of so many Limerick triumphs and memories, the opposing teams will be facing a side with identity. It's no longer a seemingly neutral venue. It takes

the best parts of some grounds that have hosted Limerick in the past and adds a legacy. Thomond's quality pitch, Jackman's inner-city location and Hogan Park's tightly knit atmosphere should all combine to create a fortress and somewhere nobody likes going – not just the Limerick public.

Shane Duggan will aim to emulate his father Ger, Paudie O'Connor will stand where Al Finucane once stood and Martin Russell is tasked with winning the hearts of the Limerick public as fellow Dub Eoin Hand did all those years ago.

If all these things fall right, not only will Limerick soccer have a home, it will have an advantage and finally not feel like it's trying its best to go uphill in a near impossible terrain. If things fall the way they should, I'll be able to turn to those people at Christmas mass, in awkwardly undersized smoking areas and various forms of public transport and say that I finally understand what they meant.

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Aidan Corr

My Memories —OF THE MARKETS FIELD—

My personal memories of the Markets Field are very close to my heart

STANDING on the highest vantage point of the Markets Field stand last week, the memories of almost five decades of senior soccer at this historic local sporting venue flooded back.

The players; those who managed and financed the club over 47 years; the old wooden dressing room with a holy water font nailed to the inside jamb of the door; the lone open air cold water tap affixed to the wall where players and match officials waited in line and battled in vain to remove the thick mud from boots and body. The agonies far outweighed the ecstasies during those decades but successes in the Shield, Dublin City Cup, two League titles, two FAI Cup victories and European clashes with Young Boys of Berne, CSKA of Sofia, Torino, Southampton and AZ65 Alkmaar (the latter two played in the Markets Field) more than compensated those who had followed the Blues through thick and thin for their enduring perseverance.

I rattled off the Shield team of 1953. It contained ten locals: Sean 'Geeser' O'Dwyer, John Neilan, Willie O'Grady; Willie Ahern, Batey Neilan, Gerry O'Grady, Paddy 'Beaver' Cronin, Patsy Collopy, Sean Cusack and Mick Hayes. Centre forward Peter Bradley and Dubliner Georgie Lynam were the only outsiders.

The late 1950s continued to capture the imagination and the support of city and county with players such as Donie Wallace, Frankie Johnson, Willie Clinton and Harry McCue reaching household name status. The Dublin City Cup was won in 1958/9, the nucleus was in place for a League of

Packed in: A section of the crowd in the Markets Field for the 1981 FAI Cup game against Thurles



Ireland win in 1960 and the resultant prize of European Cup participation.

A glance at the goalposts on my left reminded me of the two second half goals scored by Gerry McCarthy against Dundalk in the penultimate game of that glorious 1960 league campaign and again the names skipped off my tongue as if it was yesterday: Skelly, Casey, Crawford, Clinton, McCarthy, McCue, McNamara, O'Connor, Dillon, O'Brien, O'Reilly, Murphy, Lynam, Moloney and Wallace.

European status resulted in a more adventurous attitude within the club. Winner of an FA Cup medal with Blackpool (the Matthews final of 1953) saw Ewan Fenton arrive in a city where he was to make

his home. The Scot played in the two European Cup games against Young Boys of Berne and he was a major influence both as a player and coach on a young squad of players that was emerging from the Jack Tuohy trained Reds United.

Limerick B and C were formed and two successive FAI Cup finals, 1965 and 1966, both lost to Shamrock Rovers, made us wonder if the Cup was ever going to arrive by Shannonside.

Coaches came and went over the decades from Willie 'Blarney' Keane to Jimmy Docherty; Amby Fogarty right through to Ewan Fenton, Eoin Hand and Kevin Fitzpatrick and between 1971 and their departure from the Markets Field in 1984 the Blues enjoyed

a purple patch, winning two FAI Cups and a second league title.

Founded as the world shuddered on the brink of a second world war, Limerick's transition to senior soccer in 1937 was almost inevitable. The city had bred a highly skilled crop of top class players through the junior ranks under the governance of the LDMC and there was palpable excitement on August 22, 1937, in Dalymount Park when the newly-registered Limerick AFC beat mighty Shamrock Rovers 1-0 in their opening competitive game.

Once described as "an ungainly coliseum of gladiatorial combat where little dogs ran in circles during the week but where visiting teams and

the occasional referee lived in terror on Sundays when the Blues were in full flight", soccer at the Markets Field has a special place in the heart of Limerick sport. Laid to rest in 1984, it has resurrected itself to a standard undreamt of by those of us whose pleasure and honour it was to know it in its infancy. We were eye-witnesses to Limerick's emerging soccer history and my personal memories of the Markets Field are very close to my heart.

No doubt, most supporters of that era would have a considered opinion on their best Limerick eleven of all time during the last Markets Field era. My choice would be: goalkeeper Kevin Fitzpatrick; back four, John

Neilan, Joe O'Mahony, Gerry McCarthy, Al Finucane; midfield, Tim 'Togsy' Cunneen, Andy McEvoy, Sean Cusack and Johnny Gavin and a front two of Des Kennedy (whose achievement of scoring European goals against Real Madrid home and away is unlikely to be matched in League of Ireland soccer) and Davy Barrett.

A number of Irish rugby internationals pulled on the blue shirt of Limerick AFC and experienced Markets Field action such as Grand Slam winner of 1949 Paddy Reid of Garryowen, Tom Clifford and Jimmy Tydings of Young Munster and Garryowen's Tony Ward while Cork Constitution and Ireland back-row Noel 'Noisy' Murphy helped to train the Blues when he worked in the city in the 1960s.

Soon it was time for me to park my stroll down memory lane and join stadium manager George Lee on a tour of the facilities at this new-look Markets Field. I was impressed. It is state of the art stuff from the new fencing that offers proximity to the action around the entire perimeter of the field, the new stand behind the goals for visiting supporters, magnificent dressing rooms, press facilities, top of the range floodlights and security systems, a hospitality area and a playing surface that would do justice to any of its kind on these islands.

"I would not mind playing on a ground like that," Sean Byrnes, one of the heroes of Limerick's first FAI Cup victory in 1971 told me as we admired the lush surface last week.

"The entire project is mind-blowing and a far cry from the Markets Field that we played on in our day. Hopefully now it will be well supported."


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