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COMMUNITY

Knight Commander Niall hasn't forgotten his Limerick city roots

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NIALL FitzGerald, Honorary Knight Commander of the Order of the British Empire, jetted into Limerick last weekend on a double mission.

The first was to cheer Munster to victory over Edinburgh in the Heineken Cup.

The second was to set in a train the publication of a history of his beloved Riverside AFC, a schoolboy soccer club he formed in Thomondgate in the early 1960s.

FitzGerald, a highly respected world business figure, has never forgotten his Limerick roots, and among his proudest achievements was, as a teenager, managing Riverside to glory in cups and leagues, taking on the more established clubs in the city.

Some weeks ago, he made contact with Gerry O'Loughlin, one of the many he introduced to underage football in Limerick, and asked him not just to set up a reunion of those associated with Riverside, but also to carry out research for a club history.

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He was still a student at St Munchin's College when he launched Riverside under 13s

GERRY O'LOUGHLIN

Said Gerry, whose family is steeped in Shannon rugby: "Despite Niall's many commitments, Riverside and Thomondgate remain close to his heart. He was still a student at St Munchin's College when he launched Riverside under 13s, and the club became a powerhouse up to 16 levels. He was our Alex Ferguson.

"We were all new to competitive



Niall FitzGerald, KBE

football, and a number, more notably the late Tony Meaney and Joe Bourke, both of whom went on to represent Limerick AFC, established themselves with other clubs in later years.

"Practically all our games were played at Caledonian Park, and Niall would lead us there on bikes from Thomondgate. Without him, Riverside would never have happened, and, unfortunately, when he left for Dublin to pursue his studies, there was nobody to take up the challenge".

Gerry O'Loughlin, armed with a brief to fill in all the missing pieces in Riverside's short history, took a first step in organising a coming together some weeks ago. "We had a magnificent turnout and it was great to recapture all those marvellous memories".

Born in Sligo but raised in Thomondgate, Niall spent over 30 years of his career with the gigantic Anglo-Dutch consumer-goods conglomerate Unilever, reaching the position of chairman, the youngest and first non-English person to be appointed to the role.

In 2003, he joined the board of Reuters as a non-executive director, and became chairman of Reuters in October 2004. In 2006, he was appointed chairman of the Board of Trustees of the British Museum.

In April 2008, he became the Deputy co-chairman of Thomson Reuters following the creation of the new company.

A brilliant economist, he was advisor to former British Prime Minister John Major and his Chancellor of the Exchequer, Nigel Lawson.

He was created a KBE in 2002, and holds a number of Honorary Doctorates from British, American and Irish Universities.

More recently, Munster Rugby invited him to become chairman of the Commercial Board, of which Gerry O'Loughlin is independent chair of the Management Committee.

Niall was married to Limerick woman Monica Cusack, who died some years ago. They had three children.

He has one child from his second marriage.

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