

Geraldines AFC begin their 75th year in existence this year - club PRO Turlough McNamara looks back on their eventful history

IT'S the start of a new year and the current football season of 2011-12 is well past the half way mark for all teams. For all the Geraldinites 2012 is a pivotal mile-stone in the Clubs long history as this year the Club are now celebrating 75 years in football since its formation way back in 1937.

In all those years there has been many families who have given so much of their time to put the Dines on the footballing map.

When the Club was first formed way back in 1937 it was inspired by the upsurge of the interest in soccer and sensing a need for such an outlet, three young men of the day, Ger Tracey, Johnny Callaghan and Ollie McMahon who met daily to discuss the code and its development, decided that they too wanted to be part of the growing phenomenon. Professional soccer was in its infancy in the city and the support it attracted spawned the birth of several clubs, many of which have gone, but one Geraldines AFC continues to thrive.

The founding fathers gathered most evenings to discuss the sporting happenings of the day with particular emphasis on local soccer.

Their meeting point was outside the City Tannery offices in Lower Gerald Griffin Street and on an April evening no different from the rest really the lads came up with the notion of forming their own football club and Geraldines AFC was born.

With all the members well under the age of majority, a juvenile team was the first logical step for a group of lads most of whom were still in school.

The Club became part of the footballing structure in the city and with their opening game looming they set about the task of building their club. The matter of fund-raising was tackled immediately and with enthusiasm. Door to door collection were mounted with the weekly contribution being in the order of two (old) pence per week from members. A new football was immediately purchased.

Geraldines in their first game were pitted against St Brigids in Pa Healy's field just one week after their inception. Training in the preceding week was intensive and took place near the old cemetery behind Keane Street in Killalee. The bunch of hopefuls preparing for the event knew little of the rules of soccer but several adults in the neighbourhood having some knowledge of the code gave of their time and imparted what wisdom they possessed, with GAA and rugby so strong in the area it was continually stressed to the players not to handle the ball.

Football boots and jerseys were very scarce and a great deal of improvisation was required. People loaned their personal jerseys including Jack McGrath who offered his inter-provincial rugby jersey for use on the day. Some players had to borrow football boots while more attached studs to their shoes or boots. The great day dawned and the first Geraldines team and their entourage headed off for Pa Healy's.

Their opponents were physically strong and more experience and it was with much trepidation that the newly formed Club faced into their first engagement. However, Geraldines had brought with them a huge volume of support and this helped in no small way to ease the nervousness of the new boys.

Against all the odds the visitors won the game by a goal to nil follow-



ing a determined committed showing. Sean Carroll had the distinction of scoring the goal, their first in football.

The Geraldine panel included - Joe (Pigeon) Daly, John McNamara, Paul Hart, Sean Penny, Donal Hobbs, Dave Barry (RIP), Eddie Purcell (RIP), Sean Carroll, Mick Mulcahy, Brian Flynn and Tom Sheehan.

Later on in the founding year of 1937 interest in the new club was reaching such heights that by September of the same year Geraldines were represented in all grades of football including minor and junior leagues.

The enlargement of the club incorporated the neighbouring streets, St Johns Square, Cathedral Place and environs and with this came the offer of an old cellar in the "Square" as a head-quarters. This offer was naturally accepted by the intrepid founders.

The year of 1938, was the pinnacle of Geraldines achievement in the pre-War era with the clouds of war hanging over Europe, the solid fabric that had been established began to slowly fray with the onset of the 1939-'45 world conflict. The club was still strong in 1939 but gradually its lifeblood began to drain away. The call to arms in that year was answered by many young men of time. On the playing front Geraldines did reach the semi final of the City Shield but lost out to Wanderers on a penalty shoot out. Some Geraldines players were Jimmy O'Shaughnessy, Twaite Madigan, Joe Purcell, Tom Sheehan, Paddy (Shocker).

Entering the 1940s the club was still in existence but massive emigration to the UK, USA, Canada and Australia decimated the club. With unemployment rampant at the time scores of people were left with little option but to leave the country, many never to return to their native shore.

The funds grew rapidly as did the support and the revival was at hand. Later on, the course chosen was to continue the Geraldine club and similarly to the founding, a football was purchased from Kevin Hartigan for the princely sum of 30/-. The fund-raising was concentrated in the Cathedral Place, St Johns Square and Brennans Row areas initially but ex-

panded gradually as the momentum increased.

The football purchased was a Gaelic one but that mattered little. Many local businesses were financially supportive of the venture and among those who contributed were Cross's, Griffins, Corcoran's butchers and Matt Boland, the local grocer. Again, most of the organisers were still in school and numbered among their ranks Gerry Vaughan, Eddie Lynch, the Ryan and Hayes families, Pat Nash and the Cross family to name a few, though it must be stressed that the workload was well spread among helpers. Training took place in the old Claughan field where Granville/Lynwood housing estates stands

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today and great care was taken in ensuring that the prominent GAA officials of the neighbourhood were absent when the soccer training was taking place. Other training haunts used later was the Meadow in Garryowen and the Nun's Field near the Canal Bank.

The Cellar again became the hub of activities and within weeks the numbers interested grew apace and some of the new and old recruits included Jimmy O'Shaughnessy, Bob Constable, Ger Tracey, Jimmy McManus, Josie Fitzgerald, Mick Kelly, Taylor Lynch, Sonnie Coughlan, Pat Leahy, Josie Butler, Dominic Kelly, Micheal O'Sullivan (Donald), Liam O'Sullivan, Paddy Murphy and J Bourke. The fire-damaged cellar was again renovated and also used for the essential fund-raising. Within a matter of weeks as many as 70 boys were attached to the club and two more footballs were purchased. The group had not sought any form of affiliation to date but interest was steadily growing. No club as such had yet been set up and the selec-

tion of a name was only under consideration. A house committee was elected to run affairs. What followed the original idea of just gathering money to buy a football had not been envisaged at the out-set.

Within weeks the notion had snowballed and had developed beyond expectations of those participating. The support built up during that period never dwindled and has remained an abiding aspect of the club ever since.

The off the field activities of the club remained very strong. This important feature of any organisation has indeed been the hallmark of the Geraldines club to the present day. Huge raffles were successfully organised, buster competitions were run on a weekly basis with prize money of £2, £1 and 10/ (50p). A weekly non stop draw yielded a weekly profit of £5 in a period when it cost in the region of £100 per annum to keep the club going. Cleaning gear etc was done on a voluntary basis and the Dines had the reputation of the best turned out team in town.

The entire kit was supplied to the players. Revenue was also generated by weekly dances in St Johns Pavilion and the club also ran joint ventures with St Patricks and Richmond RFC. They lucrative fund raising ventures were the envy of many and one famous occasion they clashed with the local clergy. Their solid fiscal backing allowed them the luxury of travelling to games in style. Indeed as Sonny Coughlan said later "the social aspect of the club kept it together during those early years"

Their first A.G.M. of the revival was held in the summer of 1948 and a report of the meet in the local papers went as follows "At a largely attended meeting of the above club held recently at the Scout Hall, St Johns Square, (lent for the occasion), it was decided to enter a junior team for the coming season.

Officers elected: President, J O'Shaughnessy; vice-president, Sean Healy; hon. sec., S Coughlan; treasurer S O Carroll. Committee, Messrs. P.Considine, C. Fitzgerald, P. Healy, J. Walsh, P. Moloney. Selection committee, Messrs. P Considine, J. Purcell and Ger Tracy. Captain J Walsh; vice-capt, B. Daly. Team sec.,

J.O'Callaghan; asst. team sec., M. Barry.

Entering the 1949/50 season and twelve years since their initial founding Geraldines were about to make the first of many great impressions on the local scene in a season that saw the return to the fray of Trojans and Shelbourne to the local league following a lapse of several years.

Geraldines had much the same panel as the previous season and few could have envisaged the degree of disappointment and elation that was subsequently to dominate their season. A rather patchy league showing belied the talent in the side but the local cup competitions brought out the best in the lads and they chalked up some memorable victories.

Their best was undoubtedly reserved for both the North Munster Cup and the Cromer Cup of the 49/50 season. These competitions produced a great eleven game sequence for the Club, culminating in the annexation of the famed Cromer Cup and a final berth in the North Munster.

The might of Caledonians stood in their way on May 28th, as they took the field before a huge crowd in the Markets Field. The game was tight and evenly contested and ended in a scoreless draw. The only incident worthy of mention in the local paper the weekend after the referee, Mr Hackett incurring an injury a pulled muscle during the course of the game. Following treatment he was able to carry on but without his boots which he gave to a Geraldine's player who had played up to then with just one.

Geraldine's preparation for the replay was a one nil win over Star in a challenge game. June 11th 1950 a day that will do down as the first milestone in the Geraldine catalogue of success dawned. It was raining, the pitch would be heavy. Would it suit us or Caledonians? Opinions were offered, odds were given, Geraldines didn't have a chance. Caledonians, according to some not so wise punters, had the title sewn up.

Kevin Cronin gave Cals an early lead, cancelled out by a Storan penalty. Playing conditions were bad and Cals dominated the first half. The trend continued in the second moiety but the overworked Geraldines rearguard held firm. Extra time was called for and with a second replay looking likely Geraldines Paddy Hughes burst up the wing and crossed to Josie Butler who headed the winner with just seconds left.

The scenes of joy in the ground were unrestrained as the Dines contingent gave vent to their feelings. That history making side was N Graney, Paddy Allen, S O'Dwyer, C Daly, P Butler, E Donnelly, T Power, J Butler, F Collopy capt, P Hughes, J Storan. Others to help the club that season were Billy Daly, Bannon, Donegan, Browne, Hanrahan and Loughlin.

Geraldines had arrived and had deservedly taken their place in the honours list. In the decades following there are so many stories to tell about activities on and off the pitch as life long friendships have being formed many trophies at Junior, Minor and Schoolboy have found a home Under the Tower and for all those who have played their part they too have their own tale to tell.

To mark this milestone in the Club's history we will be organising some social activities to celebrate 75 years of football. Details to follow in the coming weeks.

>>> The picture above shows the Geraldines committee in 1987 celebrating their 50th anniversary - Dominic Kelly, Joe Fitzgerald, Eddie McInnery, Pat Tobin, Tom Tuite, Mike Ryan, John Kelly, Joe Quigley, Willie O'Neill, Jimmy McCarthy, Tommy Lowe, Joe O'Sullivan (Secretary), Sean O'Donovan (Chairman), Tommy Quigley (Treasurer) and Turlough McNamara (PRO)