

**SPECIAL REPORT**

LIMERICK FC

# Super Blues back

WHEN Limerick FC were relegated from the Premier Division in 1994, few could have expected their return. After years of financial turmoil and concerns over the club's future, the Super Blues are back. **Liam Togher** profiles the club as the kick-off to the new season.

## The 19-year-itch

1994 is not a year that Limerick sporting enthusiasts will remember fondly. The hurlers let a seemingly nailed-on All-Ireland title slip from their grasp after a late collapse against Offaly while Limerick FC lost their Premier Division status.

Relegation was only the beginning of a tumultuous period in this proud club's history. Where once they rubbed shoulders in the European Cup with Real Madrid, they began the 21st century requiring the help of Pike Rovers for a place to play.

It was a far cry from the days when the Market's Field was packed to the rafters and hundreds made the pilgrimage to Athlone to see their heroes crowned champions of Ireland in 1980. Hogan Park in Rathbane just didn't have the same appeal to the fans and, with the meteoric rise of Munster Rugby and the continued strong interest in GAA, soccer and Limerick no longer seemed synonymous.

Just six years ago the club was on its knees. Limerick FC had been refused a First Division licence and the club was disenfranchised. FAI chief executive John Delaney opened the door to other parties to apply for a licence, while at the same time slamming the door shut on Limerick FC's appeal for the renewal of their league licence.

A local consortium named Soccer Limerick made an application for a club licence and senior football would still be played on Shannonside in the guise of Limerick 37. Paul McGee was installed as manager but he didn't last long before being replaced by Mike Kerley, who restored some overdue respectability to

the club.

2009 would prove to be a landmark year in the club's heaven-and-hell history. The Limerick FC name was restored and local businessman Pat O'Sullivan injected the club with much-needed funding as he became chairman. He later took ownership of Limerick FC, who were building slowly under Pat Scully.

After narrowly missing out on the promotion play-offs in 2011, the Super Blues had one clear aim as last year's First Division kicked off. A sure sign of the club's progress was the arranging of a friendly against English champions Manchester City in August. Thomond Park rocked to the noise of 20,000 fans and, at long last, Limerick FC were looking up.

All the while, Scully and his players kept their eye on the promotion ball and, on October 5, defeat for rivals Waterford United meant that the champagne could be popped. The club waved goodbye to their temporary Jackman Park home by lifting the First Division trophy amid a party atmosphere.

It had been hoped that Limerick FC would make an emotional return to the Market's Field in 2013, but with the venue not ready, they would need to look elsewhere for a home ground. Thomond Park was ready and waiting. A premier stadium for Premier Division football.

When Limerick FC kick off against Cork City on Sunday evening, they will also kick off on a new reality for the club. The period of purgatory is over. Limerick FC are on the way back to heaven.



## The thoughts of St

SCOTLAND has produced its share of renowned football managers – Matt Busby, Jock Stein, Bill Shankly, Sir Alex Ferguson and David Moyes to name but a few – and Limerick FC fans will hope that they have unearthed another gem from the land of the thistle.

Stuart Taylor assumed the managerial reins in January and the 38-year-old is already making his mark on the club within a few weeks of taking the job.

The challenge of moving to a new city, and indeed country, can be a difficult one, but Taylor says that the people around him have eased the transition.

"I'm settling in well. We've made a fantastic start and the people in the club have made my job much easier. They've been very helpful and the application from the players has been superb."

The Super Blues have had a mixed bag of results in pre-season, but a four-day tour to Scotland proved highly beneficial and a friendly win over a Dundee United XI has boosted confidence.

Taylor was very pleased with what he has seen of his players so far, both on and off the field of play.

"The players have shown great professionalism and they're a good group to work with. They've done what they've been asked and they've got their fitness levels up."

"We had a good win against Wexford Youths and a great win against Dundee United but pre-season is about getting fitness levels up and getting the players to believe in what we want to achieve."

"We're building a very good mentality and the players have shown a great work ethic, commitment, hunger and desire. They're getting better with every game."

Several new players have signed for Limerick FC in recent weeks and Taylor has praised the existing squad members for helping the newcomers to instantly feel at home.

"The new players are integrating well and this is a good dressing room to walk into. There are no cliques here and everyone is pulling in the same direction."

"We all have the same goals and when I first came I was checking to see how happy the players were and looking at their behaviour towards new

**THE FIXTURES**

Mar 10	5:15 p.m.	Limerick FC	v	Cork City	Thomond Park
Mar 15	7:45 p.m.	Drogheda United	v	Limerick FC	Hunky Dorys Park
Mar 19	7:45 p.m.	Limerick FC	v	U.C.D	Thomond Park
Mar 23	7:45 p.m.	Sligo Rovers	v	Limerick FC	The Showgrounds
Mar 30	7:45 p.m.	Limerick FC	v	St. Patrick's Ath	Thomond Park
Apr 02	7:45 p.m.	Limerick FC	v	Shamrock Rovers	Thomond Park
Apr 05	7:45 p.m.	Dundalk	v	Limerick FC	Oriel Park
Apr 16	7:45 p.m.	Limerick FC	v	Bohemians	Thomond Park
Apr 19	7:45 p.m.	Bray Wanderers	v	Limerick FC	Carlisle Grounds
Apr 26	7:45 p.m.	Limerick FC	v	Shelbourne	Thomond Park
May 03	7:45 p.m.	Derry City	v	Limerick FC	The Brandywell
May 06	3:30 p.m.	Cork City	v	Limerick FC	Turners Cross
May 10	7:45 p.m.	Limerick FC	v	Drogheda United	Thomond Park
May 17	7:45 p.m.	U.C.D	v	Limerick FC	The UCD Bowl
May 24	7:45 p.m.	Limerick FC	v	Sligo Rovers	Thomond Park
Jun 08	5:00 p.m.	St. Patrick's Ath	v	Limerick FC	Richmond Park
Jun 14	8:00 p.m.	Shamrock Rovers	v	Limerick FC	Tallaght Stadium
Jun 28	7:45 p.m.	Limerick FC	v	Dundalk	Thomond Park
Jul 05	7:45 p.m.	Bohemians	v	Limerick FC	Dalymount Park
Jul 13	TBC	Limerick FC	v	Bray Wanderers	Thomond Park
Jul 19	8 p.m.	Shelbourne	v	Limerick FC	Tolka Park
Jul 26	7:45 p.m.	Limerick FC	v	Derry City	Thomond Park
Aug 02	7:45 p.m.	Limerick FC	v	Cork City	Thomond Park
Aug 09	7:45 p.m.	Drogheda United	v	Limerick FC	Hunky Dorys Park
Aug 16	7:45 p.m.	Limerick FC	v	U.C.D	Thomond Park
Aug 31	7:45 p.m.	Sligo Rovers	v	Limerick FC	The Showgrounds
Sep 07	7:45 p.m.	Limerick FC	v	St. Patrick's Ath	Thomond Park
Sep 20	7:45 p.m.	Limerick FC	v	Shamrock Rovers	Thomond Park
Sep 27	7:45 p.m.	Dundalk	v	Limerick FC	Oriel Park
Oct 04	7:45 p.m.	Limerick FC	v	Bohemians	Thomond Park
Oct 13	3:00 p.m.	Bray Wanderers	v	Limerick FC	Carlisle Grounds
Oct 18	7:45 p.m.	Limerick FC	v	Shelbourne	Thomond Park
Oct 25	7:45 p.m.	Derry City	v	Limerick FC	The Brandywell

# Back in the big time

... envisaged that it would take nearly two decades for the club to return to the top flight. ... are finally back in the big time and an exciting season at Thomond Park is set to begin. ... to the new League of Ireland season approaches.



## Stuart Taylor

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**We're building a very good mentality and the players have shown a great work ethic, commitment, hunger and desire.**

STUART TAYLOR  
LIMERICK FC MANAGER

Taylor has kept faith in the bulk of the side that won promotion to the Premier Division under Pat Scully last season. The new manager feels that the players responsible have earned a crack at the top level.

"It doesn't matter what division it's in; winning a league is one of the hardest things to achieve in football. The players deserve the right to play in the Premier Division for the way they played last year.

"They've deserved their new contracts and they'll want to prove themselves at this level. The new players we've brought in will bring a different dimension to the side too."

Taylor has eased any possible pressure on him and his players by refusing to openly declare a target for the 2013 season.

"We've set our targets within the dressing room and we'll keep it in-house. We want to go and play attacking, attractive football and to work as hard as possible.

"I know that these players will play to the best of their capabilities and give 100 per cent in every game. We hope the supporters will get behind us and I know that they will."

... players.  
"They've been really accommodating and they've played their part in making the new lads feel welcome."  
While there are quite a few new faces in the squad,

## SUPER BLUES IN PROFILE

### ■ Shane Cusack

The young goalkeeper from Clare had a spell with Colchester United before joining Limerick. Played against Manchester City in last year's friendly.

### ■ Barry Ryan

Experienced goalkeeper who has played with Shamrock Rovers, Galway United and St Patrick's Athletic. His brother Dave was also a keeper with Limerick FC.

### ■ Stephen Folan

Former Republic of Ireland youth international who was once on Newcastle United's books. The 21-year-old is a native of Galway and has played for Mervue United and Salthill Devon.

### ■ Shaun Kelly

The former Hearts, Dundalk and Galway United defender has played in the qualifying rounds of the Europa League.

### ■ Brian O'Callaghan

The Limerick-born defender joined from Cork City in 2009, having also played with Barnsley and Notts County, as well as Icelandic club Keflavik.

### ■ Pat Purcell

Long-serving centre-back who captained the Super Blues to promotion last year. Won an FAI Junior Cup with Fairview Rangers.

### ■ Jonathan Tiffoney

The 21-year-old right-back signed for Limerick FC at the end of February. He has played for Scotland's under 21 side.

### ■ Shane Tracy

Local idol and set piece specialist. The left-back's goal tally hit double figures in last season's glorious campaign. Can also play left midfield.

### ■ Robbie Williams

Yorkshire-born defender who signed for Limerick FC last month, sparking numerous music-related puns. He has played more than 200 games in the Football League in England.

### ■ Stephen Bradley

The midfielder was once on Arsenal's books and has a league medal from his time at Shamrock Rovers in 2010.

### ■ Danny Galbraith

Scottish winger who played in an FA Youth Cup final with Manchester United in 2007. Signed for Limerick FC last month.

### ■ Joe Gamble

The twice-capped Republic of Ireland

international had a spell in England with Hartlepool United. A league winner with Cork City in 2005.

### ■ Jeffrey Judge

The midfielder first played for Limerick in 2008, returning to the club last year after a spell with Pike Rovers. He turns 24 next Wednesday.

### ■ Stephen McGann

Midfielder who graduated from the Limerick FC under 19s. Scored his first senior goal in 2010 against Athlone Town a week before his 16th birthday.

### ■ James McGrath

The teenage midfielder broke into Limerick's senior side last season, making 10 appearances in the promotion campaign.

### ■ Dave O'Leary

Midfielder who has captained Republic of Ireland at under 17 level. An FAI Cup quarter-finalist with Tralee Dynamos.

### ■ Axel Bossekota

The 23-year-old striker from Belgium joined Limerick FC last month after a successful trial period.

### ■ Cian Collins

The 19-year-old striker featured for Granville Rangers before signing for Limerick FC in 2011.

### ■ Garbhan Coughlan

Forward who joined Limerick FC at the age of 15. Can operate either as a striker or on the wing.

### ■ Craig Curran

The 23-year-old striker signed for Limerick on loan in February from Rochdale. Began his career with Tranmere Rovers.

### ■ Dominic Foley

The much-travelled Republic of Ireland international joined Limerick FC from Belgian club Cercle Brugge. Has also played with Bohemians, Gent, Wolves and Watford.

### ■ Rory Gaffney

The Galway-born forward was named PFAI First Division Player of the Year in 2012 for his exploits with Limerick FC. Also an A Championship winner with former club Mervue United.

### ■ Barry Sheedy

Young striker who made his Limerick FC debut two years ago. He has been courted by English clubs but opted to stay Shannonside for the time being.