

An early history of Limerick A.F.C.

-Taken from 1944 Programme

In recent months I have been asked on several occasions to trace the origins of Limerick A.F.C. Now, thanks to a well-known local soccer enthusiast, I have been saved a most demanding task.

I have been presented with a copy of Limerick's first souvenir programme, published on the occasion of Shamrock Rovers' visit to the Markets Field for a first round F.A.I. Cup game on January 2, 1944 and included in an article titled "The origins of Limerick Seniors".

The article makes for most interesting reading and I am sure you will take pleasure in reading Limerick A.F.C.'s history. It is worth your while to follow the path which the soccer ball has travelled since its introduction to the Limerick arena of sport would unquestionably involve probing into the annals of the junior code in the city. Without doubt it was the junior administration which sowed the seed which brought forth the root whence the fruition of the professional team sprung.

However, demand on space has decreed that to pen the rise of the Limerick seniors I must curtail my prefatory comments so much of the elementary work undertaken by the juniors in popularising the game is reluctantly placed in obscurity.

First visit of professional team

It was in the early days of 1934, at Rosboro' Road, that Limerick adherents of the code witnessed the next best thing to premier football. The reigning Munster Senior League champions, Waterford, donned in their famed blue jersey, came along to beat a Limerick junior selection 4-0.

It was on Sunday, March 4, in the same year, that the first professional side played before a Limerick assembly. It fell to the lot of Bray Unknowns to create an epoch in history. The weather clerk frowned on the Markets Field that day, but it did not deter the harry annuals from braving the elements, and so there was a fair sized crowd present to see the seiders' take on Leinster Sel., which was looked upon as the Limerick representative eleven.

Promoting the game

The match was arranged by the Limerick District Management Committee, with the object of promoting the game. Four locals appeared on the Leinster side, namely C. Sheehan (Trojans), now deceased; Willie Keane (Trojans); Brian McGweeney (Crusaders) and Sam Greenwood (Dalcassians).

The teams, with the exception of the city quartette, travelled from Dublin by bus and were received on arrival at the Gwentworth Hotel, their headquarters, by Mr. A. W. Simmonds, chairman of the L.D.M.C. and Algerman M. J. Brouder.

When the teams took the field at 3.30 they were accorded a very hearty reception. The members were introduced to the then Mayor, Ch. P. F. Quinlan, who attended by special invitation. Prior to the kick-off, the Boherbuoy Brass and Reed Band played the National Anthem, and the result of the game, which was more of an exhibition than a competitive character, was a 3-3 draw. The scorers were: Bray (Jordan 2, Hunt 1); Leinster Sel. (Morris, Bohs, 2, and Menton, do., 1). The Leinster side sported the colours of the Edward Street team, Corinthians, and the line-out was:

Leinster—Power, Dolphin; G. Lennox, do.; C. Sheehan, Trojans; W. Keane, do.; E. McGweeney, Crusaders; Sam Greenwood, Dalcassians; T. Morris, Bohs; Menton, do.; Ledwidge, Dolphin; Tucker, do.; Rogers, do.

Bray Unknowns—Diften, Hyland, Righty Byrne, Neary, Pettigrew, Bellaw, Hunt, Jordan, Buchanan and Rudd.

Later in the year, the month of May, to be exact, the local club, Trojans, now defunct, played like "trojans" to draw (0-0) with Bray at the Crescent Grounds.

Keen interest

Council in attendance. He outlined the prospects for the starting of a F.S. League team, the Bohemians (Limerick), stated that real financial stability was the necessary factor to overcome the preliminary adversities, and naturally, he said, they should be well prepared for the venture.

Thus, with the Limerick officials applying the old adage "look before you leap," the possibility of senior football was still shelved until April 11, 1937, when a really big push was put into operation on the local soccer front.

It was on the occasion of the meeting between the two oldest clubs in the country—Bohemians and Shelbourne—which opposed each other at the Markets Field for the newly inaugurated Limerick City Challenge Cup.

Ald. Dan Bourke, T.D., in his capacity of Mayor, greeted the eleven. The match ended in a division of four goals, but the trophy went to Shelbourne on "corners," and by the way, it still adorns the Kingsend club-room, where it rests in peace. The scorers were Doyle and Slater for "Reds"; F. Fullen and Willie Maguire for the amateurs.

The aftermath

After the game there was a "round table conference" at Cruises Hotel, the purpose of which was again to analyse Limerick's prospects with a view to initiating a premier side. Mr. T. F. Brazile (Dromondra), President, and also present were Messrs. J. L. Brennan (Hon. Sec.), P. J. Casey (Hon. Treas.), D. Guilfoyle (Shelbourne), and E. J. Dowling (Dolphin), officials of the Free State League, and Messrs. H. Mitchell (Bohemians), T. Hutchinson (do.), T. Linton (Shelbourne), B. Healy (do.), T. Cullen (do.), Mr. Carrick (do.), and J. Taylor (do.). The Limerick representatives were Messrs. A. Simmonds, W. Shute, P. McCarthy (R.I.P.), P. O'Neill, E. Jones, G. Ryan, D. Shields, and Mr. M. J. Brouder. Messrs. M. Roche and J. Clancy were present on behalf of the Markets Field syndicate.

Laying the foundation stone

This was really the vital meeting which swayed the Limerick officials to give the possibility of a team serious consideration. Ways and means of taking the initiative were expressed, but wiser counsels prevailed and it was agreed to defer the final decision until a meeting of the local committee was held.

In the interim, a Dublin City Cup game was listed for the Markets Field, the contestants being Drumcondra and Cork, which the former won on corner kicks. It is interesting to recall that Paddy Cronin, now of Limerick fame, and Tom Byrse (c.f.), now with Belfast Celtic, figured on the Cork side. The match was staged with the purpose of keeping interest in the ascendancy.

Then on the 10th May, 1937, the Limerick Committee met at the Mechanics' Institute and the outcome was that Limerick would plunge into professional ranks. On Friday, the 11th June of the same year, they were elected to membership of the League of Ireland on retirement of Dolphin.

Messrs. Eadly McCarthy (R.I.P.) and M. Dolan represented Limerick. Then followed in subsequent weeks the floating of a Limited Liability Company, styled the Limerick Association Football and Sports Company Limited, which controlled the upkeep of the team. Subsequent meetings were held at 92 O'Connell St. and 17 Upr. Cecil St. regarding putting the "house" in order and team building. It was at the latter that the cardinal red and white colours were decided on for the team's rig and at the same meeting a proposition that the jersey would be black and amber was defeated.

Playing activities

With the spadework now completed and the Limerick team in training from Tuesday, 10th August, 1937, the scene was set for the roll of the ball. Donned in their stripes, the first Limerick professional eleven ever trooped on to the Crescent Grounds on Tuesday, August 17, led by Jim McCann.

They engaged Trojans, an outstanding junior combination, in a 1-1 draw.



The First Line-out, 1937—This photograph is historic in that it was the first Limerick team. Back row: Barr, Jones, O'Brien, Gormley, Noonan and Nash. Front row: O'Neill, Douglas, McCann, Smith and Curran. Mascot: Billy Turner.



Dalcassians A.F.C. (1935)—There were few teams in the province to compare with Dalcassians in the 'thirties and 'forties. They gave the game a brand new image and produced outstanding players. The late Sammy Greenwood assisted Limerick in their early years. Back row: Jim McMahon, Tommy O'Rourke, Danny Farrell, Paddy Ryan (R.I.P.), Paddy Honan, Pat O'Shea. Front row: Tom Creamer (R.I.P.), "Saddlers" Carroll, Sammy Greenwood (R.I.P.), Ger Ryan, Pat McInerney. Sitting: Dan O'Shea and Mick Clancy (R.I.P.).



was: Gormley; E. Noonan and Nash; Jones, McCann and Cummins; O'Neill, Douglas, Smith, R. Noonan and Kelly. In their first season, the team did remarkably well without gaining any laurels. They showed Bohemians the exit in the F.A.I. Cup by the odd goal of three. Davis and Smith got the goals. In the second round it took St. James Gate a second time to dispose of the Shannonsiders challenge, and the "Gate" went on to lift the trophy.

Since Limerick's inception to senior ranks, they have only once got their name inscribed amongst prizewinners. They won the Munster Senior Cup. But now the years left behind have been intermixed with mirth and distress. Distress in as much that often the life of the team was endangered through empty coffers.

Captains

Over and over again they have been replenished. Professional teams have disbanded; hundreds of players have come to the Treaty City since the club was rocked in the cradle. Captains like Jimmy McCann, Billy Nash, Maurice Cummins, Billy Powell, Billy Harrington, Jimmy O'Mahony and Joe McAleer have led the respective Limerick teams in difficult times.

Despite all the vicissitudes of war and financial trouble, the "babes" of the League have grown up. They are stronger now in this season of 1943-44 and under the leadership of the salisman, Mick McKenna, they are capable of holding an honourable place in the forefront of Eire football.

"Hotspur." Twenty-seven seasons have passed since the above article was penned. To bring the record books up to date Limerick have won the following major trophies: 1953-54—Shield. 1958-59—Dublin City Cup. 1958-59—League Cup. 1969-70—Dublin City Cup. 1970-71—F.A.I. Cup. They were runners-up in the League in seasons 1953-54, 1944-45, and were placed second in the Shield in 1945-46 and again in 1952-53. Limerick were beaten Cup finalists in 1955 and 1966.



Prospect A.F.C., 1944—the distinction of winning the first professional football in Limerick. Gerry Mason, Tom Wilkerson, Casey and Con Ward. Back row: Stubbins, Mick McMahon and John.

