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CITY'S OXFORD EDUCATION

By ALAN ENGLISH

Limerick City 1
Oxford United 2

ALTHOUGH Limerick City's recent and remarkable pre-season unbeaten run was narrowly terminated by Oxford United at Rathbane yesterday, they at least had the satisfaction of demonstrating to the home fans that something could indeed be stirring in the City.

If football can be funny old game when the season is in swing, the big build-up is a comic farce from start to finish. Optimism is everywhere, friendlies are "useful workouts" and results are unreliable. This was a mildly entertaining duel in the afternoon sun between two clubs in greater need of optimism than most.

City's sole success last season was their merciful avoidance of relegation, a fate deservedly bestowed upon Oxford United. In case you hadn't noticed, City are celebrating five years of football at Rathbane. The home venue is in need of several new fixtures; a trophy cabinet isn't one of them.

1988-89 should reveal much about the club's future. Extinction is on the agenda, Billy Hamilton is on his last chance to draw the punters to a successful side. On yesterday's evidence, his optimism is hardly ill-founded. To borrow the fabled comment on Arsenal, Limerick City are probably two players away from a successful side.

City struck first and early, Behan raiding down the right wing and crossing low for Declan Hyde who beat reserve keeper Kee easily enough. The only indication at this stage that we were in the presence of second-class English aristocrats was the expensive Oxford sustans.

The second pointer came when the pace of Dean Saunders left the City defence for dead and his short cross was volleyed low to the corner of the net by Gary Shelton. Immediately after that, an injured James Coll gave way to City's new signing from Athlone Town, Derek Carroll. After 25 minutes, City sustained a second injury loss when McGonagle limped off. His replacement, local boy Barry Ryan, looked the better of the two substitutes.

Architect

Better still looked Dean Saunders, constantly at the end of every Oxford attack of significance and the sole architect of their winner eight minutes from half-time when he ran 40 yards with the ball and beat Henderson with impressive assurance. Saunders is supposedly worth £750,000 (around



Declan Daly in action for City.



Billy Hamilton tries to find a way through the Oxford defence.

(£749,000) more than yesterday's gate) and his contribution apart, the somewhat under-strength Oxford offered the home fans little else in the way of cultured football. English opposition in Limerick just hasn't been the same since a God-like Glenn Hoddle fired four past Kevin Fitzpatrick in 1981.



Johnny Walsh sets up an attack.

Failure

One source of this frustration has been the failure of the Limerick public to embrace Rathbane as a venue for Sunday afternoon entertainment. As anybody knows, the Limerick soccer public is resolutely unwilling to watch anything other than a winning side. It's a simple equation and an achievable target, given the less than intimidating company City should find themselves in this season.

To the credit of his employers, Billy Hamilton has been given time, if not money, to build an effective unit. It makes sense that the purse-strings should be loosened wide enough for him to complete the job. Joe Hanrahan may not come cheap, but as Hamilton knows more than anyone, a player of his quality is a necessary addition to the side. In the meantime, it's August, the first league game is weeks away and optimism reigns.

Limerick City: Henderson (sub. Barriscale 88 mins), Coyle, Mullane, Cowper, Coll (sub. Carroll 11 mins), Daly, Behan, Hyde (sub. Tuite 71), Hamilton, Walsh, McGonagle (sub. Ryan 25).

Oxford United: Kee, Bardsley, Smart, Shelton (sub. Reck 58), Hill, Greenall, Heath, Byrne (sub. Nogan 58), Saunders (sub. Foyle 79), Mustoe, Purdie (sub. Rhoades-Brown 58).

Referee: Kevin O'Driscoll (Limerick).



Francis Brosnahan, Janesboro, tackles Ger Cussen.

'Boro spot on in shock win over off-key Newcastle

Janesboro' Utd. 2
Newcastle West 2
Janesboro' won 4-3 on penalties, after extra time.

THE KIND of result that every League of Ireland club manager fears — defeat by a non-League side.

Kevin Fitzpatrick showed his frustration more than once at a well-filled Pearse Stadium on Sunday, when his experienced selection failed to deliver the goods against Janesboro', recording their first win in the Munster Senior Cup.

The former goalkeeper paced up and down the sideline, and at the end of it all must have wondered at their participation in the competition.

Twelve months ago it was Limerick City's turn to suffer embarrassment, at the hands of Pike Rovers. And a year earlier, Newcastle, then managed by Johnny Matthews, surrendered to Star Rovers, in Shanagolden.

The West Limerick outfit were bolstered on Sunday by new signings Ger Duggan and Paul Hogan.

But these acquisitions made little difference to their cause, and, on the evidence of this display, they will again struggle in the First Division.

Janesboro', in on the strength of their Munster Junior Cup final appearance last season, relied on their tried and trusted formula — first-time tactics and a fair degree of skill. Managed by former Limerick and Galway United winger George Quinlivan, they twice came from behind, came near to sorting out the issue in extra-time, when Francis Brosnahan, surely Limerick's most versatile sportsman, twice came near the target with well directed shots, and then emerged victorious in the penalty showdown.

Newcastle West can only have been disappointed at the final outcome. They are just a few days away from the League-Cup, and a good result at Pearse Stadium would have boosted their ego. Al Finucane, who announced his retirement last April, was tagged out as if ready once again for action, but for all their problems, Newcastle did not call him in.

The reward for Janesboro' is a possible confrontation with Limerick City, who meet Mungret on this Tuesday. And who is to say they won't do to City-if they advance-what they did to the West?

Disappointed

Newcastle are capable of much better than this, and maybe they will learn from the experience.

In my preview at the weekend I indicated that this first round game would go to extra-time.

Janesboro', playing with dash and enthusiasm, were by no means dismayed when John Gaynor shot the visitors in front. They kept calm and their response was positive, in the shape of a well-drilled free from Christy Reddan.

The second half was lively and interesting, with plenty of goalmouth action.

Paul Hogan, recently recruited from Star Rovers, showed good promise for the LOI side, and gave keeper Paul Divinney a few testing shots, one of which was on target. Again, 'Boro failed to yield and with time ticking away, gave their supporters something to cheer about when Tony Clarke beat Denis Keehan from another dead ball situation.

And so into extra-time. Newcastle West tired as the game progressed and the winners were the more adventurous. Donal Mulvihill, Joe Roche and Francis Brosnahan were prominent and won their battles against Ger Cussen, Des Kennedy and Billy Daly.

Brosnahan, who played for Cloughaun in the football championship the previous evening, created most of the chances.

When referee Tony Meagher signalled for a penalty shoot-out, it was thought that Newcastle would survive the pressure most.

But that wasn't the way things turned out. The sides were deadlocked after three penalties each, and Divinney proved the hero when he stopped Cussen's effort. Janesboro' went ahead with the next kick, and when Newcastle missed again it was all over.

George Quinlivan, in his second season in management, was elated; Fitzpatrick could only offer his congratulations.

Newcastle are capable of much better than this, and maybe they will learn from the experience.

Janesboro': Divinney; Clarke, Upton, Maguire, Mulvihill, Roche, Reddan (P), Reddan (C), Brosnahan, Ryan, Quinlivan. Subs: Sheehan for Reddan (P), McDonnell for Quinlivan.

Newcastle West: Keehan, O'Connell, Daly, Ryan, Cussen, Gaynor, Duggan, Earls, Kavanagh, Kennedy, Hogan.

Referee T. Meagher. As part of their preparation, Janesboro' played John Herrick's Galway United in midweek, and lost only 2-1.

—John O'Shaughnessy