

The men with white hair bring back fond memories

By TRISH O'DEA

FATHERS explained to their sons, and grandfathers to their grandsons, why they were to cheer for the men with the white hair, as the Eoin Hand testimonial match began at Limerick's glory soccer venue.

"It's great to be back in the Market's Field", Eoin Hand told the packed venue, following the match played in his honour.

He said: "I must pay tribute to all the 'lads' of my era - without their efforts nothing would have happened."

As the Eoin Hand selection took on a Limerick FC panel, it was obvious that the vast majority of the spectators weren't there to see the young talent on offer.

An extremely partisan crowd shouted 'penalty' every time one of the Hand players was touched - no matter where they were on the field of play!

The biggest cheer of the

afternoon came when Hand kicked off to start the game.

The final tally of 3-0 in favour of Limerick FC, was not a crowd-pleaser, and many of the punters were screaming at the youngsters to give their elders and betters a chance before the final whistle blew.

It was a very nostalgic occasion for those both on the field and off, and conversations in the crowd turned to the good old days when, as one not-too-young fan pointed out: "That old team in their day, were every bit as good as the Irish team last night."

The good humour among the impressive attendance, of around 2,000, began from the off - with one fan shouting 'Come On Limerick' as Hand kicked to start.

"Fitzie would get his place today," someone said, as Kevin Fitzpatrick pulled off another, of many, impressive saves in the Hand selection's goal-mouth.

He left the field at half-time, but was definitely the star of the afternoon.

But they were all stars on the day, arguably the greatest we ever produced in Limerick, and the crowd

rose to the too scarce glimpses back in time from such heroes as Al Finucane and Joe O'Mahony.

"Someone should have told they young fellas it was only a bit of fun," shouted one particularly aggrieved punter.

Shouts of 'Come on, Knuckles' and 'Kick it, Jaws', rose up as the fans tried to urge on the waning senior players.

But the youngsters got the better of them, much to the disgruntlement of the fans, numerous of whom were disappointed that they

didn't have one goal to cheer about from the Eoin Hand selection - and cheer they would have.

Musical entertainment was provided throughout - even for parts of the match - by Beautiful South, and there was a relaxed, family atmosphere about the whole day.

As the crowds made their way out of the venue, maybe for the last time, one Civil Defence worker quipped unkindly: "I thought the old lads were great - mind you, the ambulance was on standby, and so was the Regional."



Eoin Hand with the two teams before his testimonial.

At the Eoin Hand Testimonial at the Markets Field



Mick Bourke, Eoin Hand, Warren Hand, Mick Crowe, Ray McDarby and sons Jamie and Brian, at the Testimonial.



Joe O'Mahony exchanges greetings with Garrett Ryan, with Eoin Hand in the centre.