

DISTRICT SCHOOLBOYS LEAGUE AWARDS

A history of the LDSL awards

Gerry McCormack

THE Limerick District Schoolboy-Girl League Annual Awards (2008-09) took place at a well-attended Janesboro FC Pavilion on Thursday night last with 22 awards presented to the various winners from the under-11 to the under-16 grade - three contributions to schoolboy football awards were also presented on the night.

This ceremony was closely followed on Sunday afternoon with the presentation of the non-competitive small-sided games awards. A total of 106 young players from the under-7 to the under-10 grade received their individual awards.

Between the two presentations a total of 128 awards were presented, a far cry from when the awards were first introduced.

The awards were first introduced in the 1962-63 season on a small scale with just six awards being presented on the night. At the time the main object of presenting the awards to the outstanding players was to help improve the profile of the league, but more importantly the standard of local underage football.

At the time the league consisted of ten clubs with just four grades of football (under-13, under-14, under-15 & under-16) in operation and just one league in each grade.

Although the annual awards commenced in the 1962-63 season to the best of my knowledge the first schoolboy player to be recognised as a Sports Star of the week was Henry Bouchier of Prospect FC on November 7, 1959. At the time Henry played under-14 and under-15 - he was very much part of very successful Prospect teams.

Writing in the Limerick Leader (January 16, 1960) Cormac Liddy, who was a member of the Schoolboy League Committee at that time and covered schoolboy football for the Limerick Leader, was asked to nominate the best schoolboy player for 1959.

Quoting from an article in the Limerick Leader on January 16, 1960 Cormac had no hesitation in selecting Benny Fitzgerald of Reds United. At that time Benny was an outstanding player and his outstanding performance in the semi-final of the Evans Cup against Bolton Athletic was seen as a stepping stone to gaining an international cap.

The Limerick league representatives at the game and the management team of Reds United were assured that Fitzgerald's outstanding performance did not go unnoticed by the Irish selectors present at the game. However, when Benny was overlooked by the Irish selectors it came as a major bombshell to both the local league and Reds United.

For the next few years schoolboy football had to do with the sport star of the week award until the 1962-63 season when the first of the annual awards were introduced.

At that time League of Ireland clubs and local business people became associated with the awards.

The first winners of the awards were: Under-13 Bohemians AFC Trophy - Tony Meaney (Riverside), Under-14 Tommy Hamilton Trophy - Michael Enright (Pike Rovers), Under-15 Dromcondra AFC Trophy - Patrick King (Geraldines), Under-16 John O'Shaughnessy Trophy - Joe O'Mahony (Prospect), Outstanding Under-13/14 Player of the Year - Limerick Leader Trophy - Joseph Moran (Dominic Savio), Under-15/16 Player of the Year - Gerry McCormack (Weston



Recipients of LDSL Under-9 Small-Sided Games Awards pictured in the Greenhills Hotel on Sunday afternoon (from left): Jamie Banahan (Coonagh United), Rachel Considine (Caherdavin Celtic), Alan Normoyle (Coonagh United), Cian Hamilton-Keogh (Shelbourne) and Sean Balfry (Newport). Also pictured are Gerry McCormack (LDSL secretary) and Jonathan Griffin (LDSL) Dave Gaynor

Villa). On the night ex-Irish senior international player Gerry Mackey and the late Ewan Fenton, then manager of Limerick FC, presented the winners with their trophies in the Cecil Hotel.

Now up and running the big break for the annual schoolboy awards came with an announcement in the Limerick Leader in 1964.

A headline on the Limerick Leader announced big news for schoolboy soccer followers. This article referred to some of the top football clubs in England becoming associated with Limerick Schoolboy Football.

Clubs such as Tottenham Hotspur, Manchester United, Blackpool, Sunderland, Coventry City, Arsenal and Liverpool undertook to present perpetual cups to the various award winners thus making it one of the big events of its kind in Irish schoolboy football.

With the top clubs in England now involved with local schoolboy football this seemed to have a very positive affect on the game. According to press reports at that time attendances at games reached an all time high. The other major development in the awards came when Janesboro FC put forward a trophy for the most loyal referee of the season.

At that time the local Schoolboy League Committee had no hand, act or part to play in selecting the award winners. In fact it was a number of years before the local Schoolboy League Committee took charge of selecting the award winners.

In the early years the task of selecting the eventual winners was left in the capable hands of two people namely John O'Shaughnessy and the late Danny Howard both of whom were very involved in underage football at that time. In fact it is recognised that John O'Shaughnessy was solely responsible for persuading the top English, and later on European clubs, to become associated with the Annual Schoolboy Awards.

With the trophies dominated by the League of Ireland clubs and local business people in the inaugural year of the awards available and with the English clubs also donating trophies the number of trophies to be presented outweighed the number of award winners.

This problem was overcome when it was agreed that two sets of awards winners would be selected for the 1963-64 season. One set of award winners would receive the perpetual trophies presented by the English clubs while the other set of award winners would receive the other trophies.

For the record the winners of the awards for season 1963-64 were published in the Limerick Leader on August 26, 1964: Under-13 Blackpool FC Trophy - Joseph Keogh (Hyde Rovers), Under-14 Sunderland Trophy - Graham Cashell (Wembley Rovers), Under-15 Manchester United Trophy - Timothy Donnelly (Revington Rovers), Under-16 Tottenham Hotspur Trophy - Thomas Hickey (Janesboro), Best Clubman/Sportsman Award, Arsenal FC Trophy - Daniel Foley

(Dominic Savio), Most Loyal Referee of the Season, Janesboro Trophy - Sean Dean.

The other set of sports star award winners for the 1963-64 season were: Ray Collins (Prospect), Denis Vereker (Geraldines), Henry Gavin (Ballynanty Rovers), Barry Cantrell (Pike Rovers), Martin Jackson (Weston Villa) and Derry Tracey.

The winners were presented with their awards at Cruises Hotel on Friday, September 4 and the presentations were recorded by Telefis Eireann to be shown at a later date.

On the night of the presentations the Under-14 Sunderland Trophy winner Graham Cashell (Wembley Rovers) was unavailable to attend however young Pat Whelan, who was playing underage football with Wembley Rovers at the time, stepped in to collect the trophy for his friend Graham Cashell. Yes, the same Pat Whelan that went on to achieve greater things in the oval ball game at both local and international level.

Although some of award winners were allowed to keep the trophy they received on the night the trophies presented by the English clubs had to be returned each year.

However Liverpool FC supplied miniatures which each award winner could retain for good.

The other positive side of this association was that the English clubs were anxious that photographs of the

presentations should be forwarded to them for inclusion in their match day programme.

Having reached the dizzy heights of becoming associated with top English clubs local schoolboy football received another major boost in 1965. Top European clubs such as Real Madrid, Eindhoven and Bordeaux expressed their wish to become associated with Limerick schoolboy football. Great credit must go to the league committee members at the time and most importantly to the individuals that had the foresight to get these clubs involved with underage football in Limerick.

The winners of the awards for season 1964-65 were announced in the Limerick Leader on August 21 1965: Under-13 Blackpool FC Trophy - Patrick (junior) Sheehan (Hyde Rovers), Under-14 Sunderland Trophy - Gerard O'Loughlin (Wembley Rovers), Under-15 Manchester United Trophy - Joe Burke (Ballynanty Rovers), Under-16 Tottenham Hotspur Trophy - Brendan O'Regan (Revington Rovers), Under-13/14 Best Clubman/Sportsman Award, Real Madrid Trophy - Martin Kearney (Janesboro), Under-15/16 Best Clubman/Sportsman award, Bordeaux Trophy - Denis Sheehan (Pike Rovers), Most Loyal Referee of the Season, Janesboro Trophy - William O'Brien.

The winners received their awards at the Shannon Arms Hotel on Thursday, September 15, 1965. The miniatures that the players were allowed to keep were presented by Eindhoven FC. The winners of the awards for season 1965-66 were: Under-13 Blackpool Trophy - John O'Grady, Under-14 Sunderland Trophy - Maurice Irwin, Under-15 Manchester United Trophy - Peter Keane, Under-16 Tottenham Hotspur Trophy - William Ryan, U-13-14 Best Clubman/Sportsman Award, Arsenal Trophy - Peter Clarke, Under-15/16 Best Clubman/Sportsman Award, Eindhoven Trophy - Noel Brennan, Most Loyal Referee, Janesboro Trophy - Christy Barry.

The winners were presented with their awards at the Savoy Banqueting Hall on Wednesday, September 14, 1966.

Also in attendance on the night were Cllr Patrick Kiely, deputy mayor of Limerick, Mr. Harry Gibson Steel, President of the League of Ireland, while LDSL committee members in attendance included: Danny Howard (secretary), Paddy Brennan (treasurer), Joe Mullane (chairman), George Mitchell (vice-chairman) and Ned Whelan.

For the next number of years both the clubs and players especially looked forward to the Annual Schoolboy Awards and mainly thanks to the tremendous commitment of a few dedicated individuals it became one of the highlights of the Limerick sporting calendar.

Unfortunately, all good things come to an end and the Schoolboy Awards were no exception.

For some unknown reason the perpetual trophies presented by the English clubs gradually faded away in the early part of the seventies. However, when a baton is dropped someone comes along, picks it up and it continues on its journey.

The Limerick District Schoolboy-Girl League Annual Schoolboy Awards, thanks to the commitment of the Limerick Leader/Chronicle, is now in its 47th year, just three away from its 50th anniversary, and is still one of the highlights of the Limerick sporting calendar.

Long may it continue.