



Man in charge: Limerick FC boss Martin Russell

Blues on the double as Limerick FC face into huge weekend

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LIMERICK FC is set for a crucial weekend on the playing pitch as the club's senior and U-19s sides face two critical fixtures.

Limerick FC's struggling senior side face will be desperate to record their first win of the SSE Airtricity League Premier Division season when locking horns with fellow strugglers Galway United at Eamonn Deacy Park on Friday night, 7.45pm.

Then, on Sunday, Tommy Barrett's in-form U-19 side will be looking to aim a place in the Under-19 Champions Knockout Phase final when locking horns with St Patrick's Athletic in their semi-final clash at Hogan Park on Sunday at 3pm.

Martin Russell's Limerick senior side have been boosted by the resigning of midfielder Shane Tracy ahead of their trip to Galway.

Limerick dropped to bottom place in the Premier Division table on the back of a disappointing 4-0 defeat to Bray Wanderers at the Carlisle Grounds on Saturday.

The Blues have taken just three points from their opening seven league fixtures, the same number as Friday's opponents Galway. However, Lims are rock bottom as a result of their inferior goal difference.

While Russell's side has scored just five goals in their opening seven league fixtures,

they have conceded a whopping 18 goals.

Friday night's trip to Galway is the first of two crunch games for the Shannonsiders in the space of 72 hours.

Mid-table Derry City visit Jackman Park for another crucial Premier Division clash on Monday night next, 7.45pm.

Former Arsenal youngster Shane Tracy says he is "happy to be back" at his hometown club having returned to Limerick on Wednesday afternoon, after enduring his longest period of uncertainty in the game.

Tracy had been with Limerick since joining on a permanent deal during the 2009 season, and made 52 competitive appearances - scoring ten goals - over the last two years since their return to the Premier Division.

Due to an injury in the middle of last season, Tracy played limited time under his new boss Martin Russell in the closing stages of the campaign, his last outing coming with a start in the final-day trip to Shamrock Rovers.

But the 26-year-old versatile midfielder has now agreed a deal to rejoin the club and, after putting pen to paper, he turned his attention to Friday's important match with his former club Galway United.

"I'm delighted to be back," Tracy, who joined up with the squad for training on Tuesday, said.

"I'm looking forward to it now. I've missed the last couple of months and I picked up an injury last year, so I'm looking forward to getting back in,

hopefully starting on Friday night.

"I'm working in a gym so I have easy access to keep myself fit. I've been involved in it for the last 10-15 years so I've kept myself ticking over and made sure to keep fit just in case a deal did materialise."

Meanwhile, substitute Shane Lowth struck a last-gasp equaliser in extra-time to salvage a 2-2 draw for ten-man Limerick FC against Shelbourne and they went on to win in a penalty shootout, in an epic U-19 Champions Knockout Phase quarter-final at Hogan Park on Sunday.

Southern Elite U-19 League winners Limerick were rewarded for their dramatic success with a home semi-final clash with St Pat's.

Limerick U-19 manager Tommy Barrett said: "It was great to get the win against Shels, coming from behind twice, the lads showed a lot of character. That's what this squad has. They have got a lot of belief in themselves and they keep going to the end."

SSE AIRTRICITY PREMIER DIVISION Galway Utd v Limerick FC

Date: Saturday, April 18
Venue: Eamonn Deacy Park
Kickoff: 7pm

FAI ELITE U-19 CUP SEMI-FINAL Limerick FC v St Pat's

Date: Sunday, April 19
Venue: Hogan Park
Kickoff: 3pm

BOXING - WBO MIDDLEWEIGHT FIGHT

Lee still standing

Jerome O'Connell looks back on a thrilling fight in New York - even if the world title wasn't on the line after Peter Quillin failed to make weight

ANDY Lee showed all the qualities that made him champion of the world when he battled back from two knockdowns to secure a draw in his middleweight contest with Peter Quillin in the early hours of Sunday morning in New York.

The Limerick man was on the canvas twice in the opening three rounds but recovered brilliantly to secure a deserved draw after 12 rounds of absorbing fair, watched by 12,300 in the Barclays Center in Brooklyn and a television audience of millions.

One judge scored the contest 113-112 in favour of Lee, another 113-112 in favour of Quillin and the third had it 113-113 each leaving referee Steve Willis to declare a draw.

"It was a hard contest to score. He had the knockdowns but I boxed consistently, especially down the stretch, said Andy Lee after what was the first time in his 37 professional fights that the former St Francis Box Club Olympian went the full 12 rounds of championship boxing.

It was an enthralling contest, tentative at times but mixed with explosive punches from both. Statistics have shown the Lee threw 299 punches, while Quillin had 267 with 113 connecting for Lee and 103 for Quillin.

The fight was to be Lee's first title defence of his WBO title but in a dramatic weight-in on Friday morning in New York, Quillin failed to make the 116lbs and therefore the belt was not fought for.

After a 10-week training camp in Monaco with trainer Adam Booth, Lee weighed in at 159.6 but Quillin was initially only 161.4. The American was given two hours to make the weight but could only lose six ounces.

Therefore Jose Izquierdo, general secretary of the WBO confirmed that Lee's title would no longer be on offer in the New York fight.

Even if it were, Lee would have continued as champion with the draw.

Quillin was the hot 2/5 favourite and showed why in the opening round when he

had Lee on the canvas. With less than 30-seconds to the bell, Lee was caught with a right hook and sent down by the former WBO champion, who had ended nine of his unbeaten 31 fights with first round KOs.

But the Limerick man was straight back to his feet and made it safely to the bell and his blue corner.

In an mostly tentative opening both struggled to find any opening and the highlight of the second round was a flurry of punches from both in the final 30-seconds. It left Lee with a cut over his left eye, which needed constant attention between the remaining rounds by David Coldwell.

But Lee was to be down again in the third round.

The 30 year old Castleconnell southpaw had started the better but was again on the canvas when Quillin found another big right, albeit it appears he has standing on Lee's foot and not for the first or last time in the contest.

Down twice in three rounds all did not look good for the champion.

A chorus of Ole, Ole, Ole, greeted the fighters for the fourth round as Lee looked to settle.

And, settle he did. Lee showed all the qualities of a champion to pull this contest back from the brink.

With his left jab doing some fine work, Lee edged his way into the contest and won rounds six to nine.

With some better foot work around the ring, Lee began to find a way to open up Quillin.

Round seven saw Lee send Quillin tumbling when he connected with a right but again it was the left that led the way.

Lee turned away with arm raised - he knew he had fought his way back into the contest.

It looked as though Lee could need a KO finish but he continued to win round by round. Three times in the ninth he round punches to hurt Quillin but the American stood strong.

But clearly the judges felt that Lee was doing enough as the rounds progressed.

As Quillin tired, Lee continued to throw the vast majority of the punches into the 11th and 12th rounds.

Entering the final round, trainer Adam Booth could be heard in the corner urging Lee 'we need this one, we need this on'.

Lee responded with another assured round with neither getting the TKO to claim victory.

Then came the wait for the three judges. To most observers there were five clear rounds for boxers with two tight calls.

In the end that's what prevailed with the three judges undecided.