

Soccer supremo Ewan looks back

By AIDAN CORR

SINCE arriving in Limerick from Wrexham FC in 1960, Ewan Fenton has become used to local people not turning up at the appointed time.

Unfortunately, I was no exception... breezing in the door of his driving instructor's office, ten minutes late, but no less eager to discover the circumstances that had brought the great Scottish footballer from Dundee to settle in a city that he had barely heard of when he won an FA Cup medal with Blackpool in 1953.

"I was not long in Limerick when I discovered that you had little sense of punctuality here," said Ewan, cigarette in hand and sipping what he admitted was not his first cup of coffee on this cold and wet March day.

"I had been reared on punctuality but when I arranged a training session for 2 p.m. prior to our game with Young Boys of Berne in the European Cup, the outcome was a complete culture shock. By three o'clock only half of the team had turned up, so I had to put my foot down and make sure that, in future, when I said 2 p.m. I meant it."

It was a form of regimentation completely alien to local senior soccer at that time and did little to boost the newcomer's popularity amongst some of the more established locals. The former Blackpool star knew, however, that without discipline and a businesslike approach to football, his marriage with Limerick soccer would be short-lived.

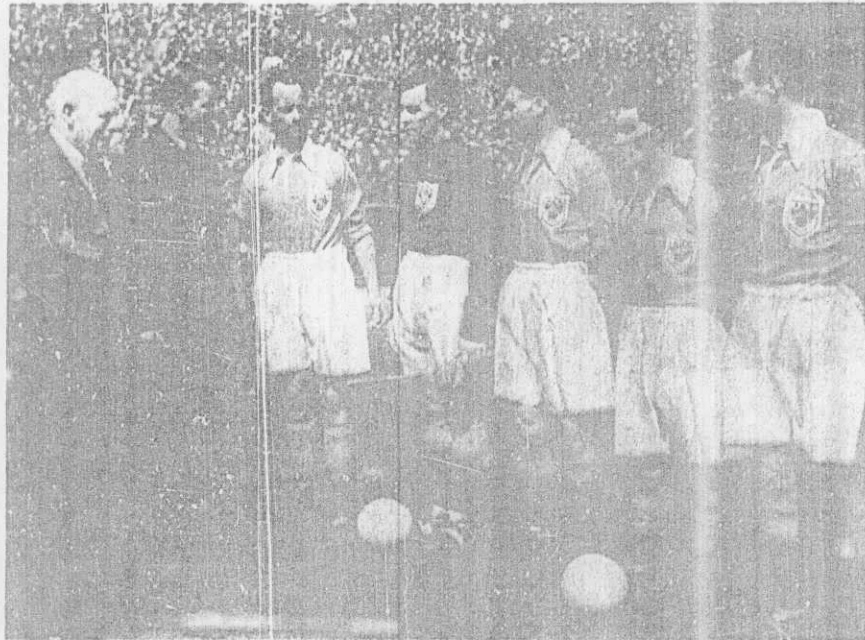
Twenty-four years later, Ewan Fenton was still associated with the city's senior representatives having taken them to their first cup finals in 1965 and '66 as a player and managing the side that won the trophy for the first time in 1971. In the interim he had moved north and led Linfield to IFA Cup success in 1970 completing a unique treble of FA, FAI and IFA cup victories in different capacities.

On all matters football, Ewan Fenton loves to engage you in conversation and his office in Upper Cecil Street is adorned with team pictures of successful Blackpool and Limerick teams and a mounted plaque that reminded us that he was awarded the Talbot Manager of the Year in 1983.

"My memories of Limerick soccer are good ones. From the beginning I tried to introduce some control into their play and teach them that there was more to football than kicking the ball aimlessly upfield. There were some excellent young players coming through and I immediately saw the potential of Al Finucane, Kevin Fitzpatrick and Michael Doyle who was, in my opinion, the player with the brightest future in the panel at that time. Unfortunately, he wasn't great for turning up for training and it took a couple of months before I succeeded in getting him into a proper routine. If he had not broken his leg in the '65 cup final he would have had a great future. He had two good feet, was a good header of the ball, was brave and had excellent vision. A lot of the lads have now gone out of the English game; natural vision is being stifled by the managers who insist that their players play as they want to and while there is still some terrific talent in the present game, it lacks individuality."

Born in Dundee in Scotland, Ewan, an only son with two sisters, played his first schoolboy game at the age of nine. An uncle of his played professional football in Canada, but it was his dad who had the greatest influence on his career.

Ever-inventive at home, Ewan's father was a tinkerer. My dad was a tinkerer, too, and I can remember hearing my



Being introduced to the Duke of Kent before the FA Cup Final in Wembley against Bolton Wanderers in 1953: Blackpool players, from left, captain Harry Johnston, George Farm, Ewan Fenton, Ernie Taylor and Stanley Matthews.

hands by holding his lighted pipe at Saturday games when I was a nipper. Although small for my age, I got into the first team when I went to secondary school. At sixteen years of age I got my place on the local junior side, which would be equivalent to the League of Ireland at the time. The 1940s was a time of repatriation for the troops after the war and you had some of the best players in Britain playing in those leagues. It gave me great experience and was really an early introduction to professional football."

The young half back was soon to attract the attention of the soccer scouts and his first senior game saw him turn out in the colours of Scottish league side, St Johnstone.

"My dad was very supportive, but left the decisions to me, which is something I always appreciated. Matt Busby contacted me to join United and I also had approaches from Newcastle United, Charlton Athletic and Glasgow Celtic but in the end I opted for Blackpool when I reached seventeen."

"They had players there that I really admired, such as Matthews and Mortenson and a terrific goalkeeper called Jack Wallace. It was a time of change in Bloomfield Road, with some of the older players on the way out of top-class football and I was soon to win my place in the first team at the age of eighteen."

Blackpool, then in the top division, were soon to realise his potential and Ewan recalled the day he was called up for first team duty.

"I was working during the day time as an apprentice carpenter in Madame Tussaud's waxworks in Blackpool and they sent word that I was to play right half that Monday evening in a league game against Derby County. I scored my first goal in the English League against Newcastle United in 1951 with a left-footed shot from 20 yards and when I look at matches on the telly now from St James' Park it brings back memories of that goal."

"Every home game in Blackpool was booked out before the beginning of the season in those days. The ground had a capacity for 38,000 and we would have 13,000 at a mid-week reserve game."

Ewan took the transition from Dundee to Blackpool in his stride, although it did have its moments of inconvenience.

"I tried to get home at least once every two months, but it was very difficult. I had to get a train from Blackpool to Preston, then one to Wigan and then another to Perth and then on to Dundee. I really missed not getting home for the New Year because we always seemed to have a busy game schedule at that time. The Blackpool players were never out after 11 o'clock when we had a game the next day. There was terrific competition for places and you knew that if you did not show, total com-

mitment, then you were out."

It was not long before Ewan found the love of his life in the seaside pearl of West Lancashire and a few years later he married local girl, Vera Cairns, who today continues to play an important role in helping to run their driving tuition business.

"I think being married to a Blackpool girl helped give me a base there and allowed me to concentrate more on my football. The club were dead keen to win the cup in 1953. They had lost to Man United 4-2 in 1948 and again in 1951 when they went down to Newcastle. I was the captain of the British Army side in those days and when I did not go into the panel for the final, I played against Austria and we beat them 5-1, which was a good achievement. We had a star-studded side, including John Charles, who later played with Juventus, and Tommy Taylor, one of the Busby Babes who died tragically

have since died. I was not invited to Stanley's Matthew's recent 80th birthday celebrations, but not to worry," said the man who pushed the ball to Ernie Taylor to set Matthews up for the cross that led to his historic cup medal.

Ewan's wife, Vera, has also happy memories of Blackpool's finest footballing era. "Everybody in the town knew the players and they had particular admiration for Stan Mortenson. He was quite a character and was always up to funny pranks. He would invite the girls to smell the flower that he always had in the button hole of his jacket and then sneak a kiss on their cheek."

"The wives of the players had a reserved row of seats at the back of the stand in Bloomfield Road and we all sat there each Saturday, with our kids running around and taking little notice of the game. They were innocent days but very happy ones and it is sad to

the club appointed a new manager and it was around that time that I got a phone call from the late Michael Twomey in Limerick asking me if I would be interested in coming over and taking charge of the team. Limerick had just won the league for the first time and had played Lincoln City in a pre-season friendly. They had made enquiries from me if there was anybody suitable available and they had seemingly recommended me."

Initially, Ewan and his wife Vera intended staying in Limerick for three seasons and during that time the player/manager set about developing an attractive playing pattern, built around an established defence which included Paddy Skelly in goal; Willie Clinton, Fergie Crawford and Joe Casey alternating the full back spots with Des McNamara and the impressive Gerry McCarthy automatic selections in the half-back line. Local soccer supporters still regard the Fenton-era as the most progressive time in its chequered history. Through the tireless efforts of the late Jack Tuohy, B and C teams were formed successfully and at last local talent was being channelled through to the senior panel in a professional manner. Limerick became a team to fear in the League of Ireland, but they could seldom match the mighty Shamrock Rovers who beat them in the '65 and '66 cup finals and put paid to determined efforts to win a second league title during that decade.

"Rovers were as good a side as any in the English League at that time," recalled Ewan, "and we always found them difficult. We could mark outside right Frank O'Neill out of the game, but if we did, then we were leaving Tommy Hamilton loose, or Eddie Bailliam was getting too much room, or Paddy Ambrose was causing us problems. They had too many good players and no matter what we did, they always seemed to have the answer. It was particularly disappointing to lose consecutive cup finals to them, but the 1971 success provided consolation."

During our conversation there is only one deviation from the topic of football as Ewan expresses a personal view on the lack of legislation in this country for driving instruction. "I am a qualified RAC instructor," he said, "but there is no registration system here for those who want to open up a driving school. Literally anybody can do it and it is about time that the department introduced similar legislation to other EC countries."

It is funny the way the path of life can lead you. Vera and I came to Ireland in 1959 just to get experience with the intention of returning to England and continue football coaching. We enjoyed our spell in Blackpool very much and if this trouble had not broken out in 1969, then we would probably have remained there. But here we are, still in Limerick and

enjoying it very much. Our son, Ewan, works in Shannon; Vera helps me with the business and assists with the Villiers widows' home on a voluntary basis."

My query as to whether a lifetime in football proved to be a lucrative one, was greeted with good-humoured laughter by both Ewan and Vera:

"I made lots of friends, but certainly not lots of money," smiled Ewan.

The closeness and happiness of the couple is apparent. The leisurely Limerick lifestyle has suited them but there is still work to be done and the sound of a car horn quickly reminds us that a student has arrived for his 4 p.m. driving lesson.

"And on time too," said Ewan which made us think that maybe some of us, at least, have a sense of punctuality.



Declan Conside Limerick in action against Waterford at Rathbane.

(C1)

CLUB GOLF

ADARE MANDOR

ON St. Patrick's Night we had a great get-together with plenty of music, song and dance. The large crowd that turned up really enjoyed themselves.

It was good to see golf back in full swing over the weekend. On St. Patrick's Day a mixed foursomes competition was held. Tom Hickey and Mary Hourigan played excellent golf to win in a closely fought contest.

The results are as follows: 1 T. P. Hickey and Mary Hourigan; 2 Billy and Mary O'Sullivan; 3 Tom Kelly and Kathleen O'Brien.

On Saturday and Sunday a 13 hole fourball took place. T. P. Healy (14) and Larry Tuohy (15) played very well to score an impressive 38 pts. T. P. had a birdie on the 13th while Larry had a birdie on the 16th. Between them they had par every other hole bar one when they bogeyed the 1st.

Gould Geary and Michael Ryan (Pallas) gave the winners a good run for their money, coming in 2nd on 37 pts. Michael birdied the 1st, 13th and 16th, while Gould had a par at every hole that was asked of him. The only bogey was on the 11th.

An Easter lamb scotch foursomes will be held on March 25 and 26. Put your name in now with a timesheet in operation.

KILLELINE

THE long weekend brought some old familiar faces out to play, and all were delighted to be back in the swing. Conditions were remarkably good, considering the very wet spring that we have had to date.

Highlight of the weekend was a hole in one at the 7th by Kevin Barrett, which was a remarkable achievement of the winter mists.

There will be a 15 hole fourball stableford competition next weekend with a timesheet in operation.

The ladies are now running their 9 hole singles stableford competition each Monday.

The juniors have also recommenced their Saturday morning competitions and the spring league will also commence shortly. Once again Killeline golf club are glad to provide their facilities for a benefit dance on Saturday night next, March 25th. Proceeds in aid of Newcastle West & District Gung Strong Club.

CHARLEVILLE

FIXTURES: Saturday and Sunday, March, cup, 18 holes singles stableford, choose.

LADIES: 9 holes stableford: 1 Bernie Birmingham (18), 19 pts.; gross, Eimer Binky (17), 10 pts.

Sunday, 9 holes stableford: 1 Linda Maher (8) 20 pts.; 2 Sheila Clifford (21) 19 pts.; gross, Geraldine Condon (14), 11 pts.

Fixtures: Thursday, March 23, 9 holes singles stableford: 1 Frances Howe's prize, 19 and 10 a.m. and 2.15 p.m.

LIMERICK COUNTY

DESPITE the atrocious weather conditions the course remained open for our holiday competitions. It was the launch of our golfing year and we look forward to seeing all our members enjoy the wonderful facilities during the coming months.

Results: March 17 v. Bar: 1 Liam Lawlor (Limerick Co.), 2 Walter Shanahan (do.).

March 18, open 18 hole fourball: 1 Ray Clancy (Limerick Co.), 2 Donal Hawley (Castletroy); 2 Joe Lee (Limerick), 3 Padraig Hehir (Limerick Co.).

March 19, 18 holes singles: 1 Robert O'Grady (NCW), 2 Eamon Grimes (Limerick), 3 Padraig Hehir (Limerick Co.).

Fixtures: On Saturday next, March 25, at 1.15 p.m. we have our captains' drive in. Members are asked to attend and take this opportunity of wishing Ann and Walter a thoroughly enjoyable and successful year. This will be followed by a novel fourball competition between the outgoing captains and the incoming captains.

Sunday: championship of course fourball, sponsored by Guinness. Sixteen pairs to qualify. Timesheet in operation.

EAST CLARE

THE results of the 18 hole singles stableford which took place on Sunday, March 19, were: 1 Raymond Walsh, 2 Dave Condon, 3 John Anglin.

On Sunday, March 26, an 18 hole singles v. par will take place.

Members are reminded that entries for the 18 hole stroke sponsored by Camlin Treacy, the closing date is on Sunday, March 26.

TIPPERARY

SCOTCH foursomes. Two newcomers made their mark last weekend when M. P. Ryan (18) and Con Hourigan (18) combined to return 47 points and win the scotch open foursomes competition. Congrats to both and hope it is the first of many.

James A. Ryan (10) and Joe Myers (11) showed some fine early season form to finish with 48 pts. also but had to settle for second.

John Long, keeping an eye on Pierce Purcell form, must be impressed with Noel Horgan (13) and Tim Walsh (15) who came 3rd on 41 pts.

On Saturday and Sunday we have the Conian cup with 16 to qualify. Paddy Mahony is encouraging all members to keep the week-end of April 1 and 2 free as he has organised a special semi-open 3-man team event. The fee is £21 per team. He would especially like to see newer members participating. Pick your own team and timesheet in operation.

Nice to see Bridie Daly back in winning form after a quiet spell at the club. 1st Bridie Daly, and B. Moloney, runners-up B. Daly and B. Doherty. C. Ryan and T. O'Ryan.

The men, on which people are running a table

NEWCASTLE WEST

LADIES: At the a.m. the following officers and committee were elected: captain Angela Sheehan; vice capt. Ann Long; president Margaret King; vice president, Peggy Healy; hon. sec., Madeline Crowley; treasurer Doreen Nash; comp. sec., Margaret Barry; handicapper sec., Nita Burke; PRO Phil Rottle; Committee members: Ita Devine (ex-officio), Betty Sheehan, Helen Roche, Mary Roche, Tina Hartnett, Josephine Mulhally.

Details concerning the intermediate, junior and minor leagues are now posted on the noticeboard. It is expected that with the large membership we now have there will be more than usual competition for team places. Though conditions were very poor up to now the grass cutting machines are busily working at the moment so the course is expected to be in great condition during the week. So ladies, start practising.

The captain and committee wish to extend a vote of sympathy to Mrs. Chris O'Connor on the recent death of her mother, Mrs. Elizabeth Mulqueen, R.I.P.

LAHINCH

FRIDAY, March 17, men's fourball stableford, Old Course, members only: 1 Ron Smart (14) Lahinch, and John Snelling (13), Lahinch 27.

Saturday, March 18, men's singles stableford, Old Course: 1 Ron Smart (14), Lahinch, 32 pts.; 2 Eamon Mellett (11), Lahinch, 31 pts.; 3 Pat Nugent (16), Nenagh, 29 pts.; best gross, Paul O'Brien (Lahinch), 21 pts.

Sunday, March 19, men's fourball stableford, Old Course, members only: 1 Christy (16) and John McCaw (16), Lahinch, 39 pts.; 2 John Keane (13), Lahinch, and Kevin Glynn (6), Lahinch, 32 pts.

Fixtures: Sunday, March 26, captain's charity fourball, Old Course. A timesheet will be in operation.

Due to cancellation, Eamon Allen Trophy will now be run on Good Friday (April 14), Old Course. A timesheet will be in operation.

THE seniors had their first outing for some time with an 11 hole stableford on Thursday last. For a long time Mick Meehan seemed the winner with a commendable 27 pts., until the redoubtable Peter Doyle came in with the same score, winning on the last shot. Phil Hayden kept up his good form with 26 pts. for third.

Fixtures: seniors, Thursday, March 23, 11.15. Juniors, Saturday, March 25, 10.30.

Sunday, March medal, singles. Members are reminded that the last date for receipt of annual subscription is Friday, March 31.

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