



Des Kennedy: a soccer legend in Limerick city. With over 300 games for Limerick FC he remains, with 137 goals to his name, the highest scoring Limerick player in the League of Ireland.

Picture: Keith Wiseman

Des Kennedy, legend of Limerick soccer

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FORMER soccer hero, Des Kennedy is the only Limerick player to have scored a goal in a competitive game for Limerick against Real Madrid.

And he not only scored at Real Madrid's palatial headquarters but also scored when they came to Dublin to play Limerick in the European Cup.

Kennedy is a legend of the game in this country and he has the distinction of being the highest scoring Limerick player ever in the League of Ireland.

A son of Tom and Phyllis, Des has had a most colourful sporting career.

"I was educated at St Patrick's National school and spent one and a half terms at St Munchin's College," he said explaining that the short stay at secondary level arose when he quit to help his father build up the hugely successful auto electrics business at Garryowen which Des runs to the present day.

"At St Patrick's I played hurling and football and we won a couple of things, but nothing major. Amongst my team mates were Frank Flynn, who later played rugby for Richmond, Tommy Laffan, Darragh Counihan and John Flood" he said.

Des also played a bit of rugby at St Munchin's as fullback or outhalf and also assisted Richmond and later on Shannon with whom he won a number of trophies.

It was a humble soccer beginning for the man who went on to achieve great things. "My father started street leagues and my first club was Wembley Rovers, under Tony Hayden, with whom I played from under-10 grade onwards. Then I moved to Janesboro for a huge transfer fee which consisted of five large bottles of orange from Tony Murphy who was involved with the 'Boro at the time," he remarked.

"I was a centre forward but nowadays I would be described as a striker or the 'lone ranger'. With Janesboro I helped win the National Evans Cup and amongst those I played with were Dermot Waters, Tommy Purtill, Noel Hackett and Noel Harty," he said.

Des played for Ireland Schoolboys and the Youths under-18 sides as his career took off at a hectic pace.

Such was the ability of Des that he was offered a trial by Southampton. "I stayed there under manager, Ted Bates, for five months but then became homesick and came back home in the very early 1970s. I signed for Limerick then and joined the likes of Richie Hall, Joe O'Mahoney, Al Finucane, Tony Meaney, Joe Burke,

Eamonn Heffernan, Sean Byrnes and Kevin Fitzpatrick. Johnny Walsh, Andy McEvoy had just retired," he said.

Limerick had very good teams in those days and Des helped the club to win the League championship,

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the FAI Cup, the League Cup and the Munster Senior Cup.

"We had great managers in Eoin Hand and Ewan Fenton, too," remarked Des who in his career scored more goals for Limerick than any oth-

er player. His record of 137 still stands to the present day.

"The best match I played in was when Limerick met Real Madrid in the European Cup at Lansdowne Road. We lost 2-1 but I scored our goal. The goal that sticks out in my mind was the one I managed at the Barnabeau, when we lost 5-1," he said.

Des played more than 300 games for Limerick and was only sent off once. "That was during a game against Bohemians but I won the fight and deserved to be sent off," he said.

Asked who was the best Limerick player he teamed up with, Des had no hesitation in naming Johnny Walsh, who played for the Republic Of Ireland. "Johnny had then what Ronaldo has now—he had everything," he said.

A career highlight for Des was when a full strength Tottenham Hotspur came to Thomond Park as part of a pre-season tour. "They beat us 6-2 but I scored our two goals. Their side included Glenn Hoddle and many other famous players," he said.

In 1986 Des travelled to play in Baghdad. "I got a phone call on a Thursday asking if I was doing anything for the week-end. I said I was free and was told that I would be paid 200 US dollars but would not be going to America but to Iraq. I was delighted because my brother worked

there for some years and we had a great trip," he concluded.

Two other members of the Limerick team who won the League title, Tommy Lynch and Tommy Gaynor, also made the trip to Iraq. "We flew to Rome with the other players whom we linked up with in Dublin.

We had to overnight in Rome as you were not allowed to fly into Iraq at night. We had a superb time," he recalled.

Another chance trip that Des really enjoyed was when he travelled to America with the Sligo Rovers squad who won the League.

He also played for the League Of Ireland side and a particular memory was a 1-0 win against the North Of Ireland.

The all-round sportsman also enjoys golf. "I am a member of Limerick and currently my handicap is 18.1. I play occasionally with Pat Nolan, who was also one of Limerick's best ever players," he said.

Des continues to take a keen interest in all sports and was one of few former players to attend the launch of the new Limerick 37 club a few months ago to give his best wishes to those involved with the club.

Des has five brothers, Tony, Dermot, Richard, Michael and Francis, and one sister, Tricia.