

LIMERICK FC

League win and Real Madrid highlighted Nolan's stellar career

by **Adrian Finnis**
sport@limerickpost.ie

FORTY years has passed since Limerick Utd's sensational league win passed and Sporting Limerick sat down with star player Pat Nolan to talk about the success and his own career. It was a period which would produce great success which has never been achieved by the Treaty City since.

The 1980 League win and 1982 FAI Cup win along with several European ties over a three-year period was superb for football in the locality.

Pat actually began his playing career in goal and didn't make the switch to outfield until 16 which may surprise many and credits a quality Wembley team for that.

While many people will focus on Pat's service to Limerick in the 1980's, he had joined in six years before the league win and was a virtual ever-present from there on in and times were not as glamorous for the club at that time as they would soon become.

The arrival of future Ireland manager Eoin Hand was a major factor in turning the team's fortunes and mentality around. He credits Hand and Dave Mahedy for bringing a deep sense of professionalism to the club.

"Eoin Hand and Dave Mahedy brought a great professionalism. It was a great stroke by the late Michael Webb to get him here because I know Eoin had his doubts about coming, but once he was here for over two weeks, he was happy to take it on.

"I don't think any of us at that stage had any ambitions to win a league or a cup. If you had asked us, I would have said we could consolidate, climb the table, and build from there. I don't think we were ever expecting to win a league in the first season."

At the end of that first season in 1980, Limerick secured the league title thanks to a 1-1 draw against Athlone Town at St. Mel's Park. The late Tony Meaney grabbed the equaliser from the penalty spot after the team fell behind in the first half. Nolan has great memories of the day and the supporters.

"They had finished third in the league that season and went on to win the league the following season. We had to work hard to win the league. We didn't play particularly well in the first half, but we got it together in the second half.

"Eoin didn't panic at half time and there



was no throwing of cups or raising of voices. Thankfully, at the end of the game, we had got the result we needed."

With winning the league came the chance to compete in Europe. However, nobody could have envisaged receiving a glamour tie with Real Madrid over two legs.

"The first leg was moved to Lansdowne Road and Limerick very nearly caused a great upset after Des Kennedy gave them the lead. However, two second half goals gave Madrid the win. The Spanish giants had an easier time of things in the second leg, winning 5-1. Again Kennedy hit the target for Eoin Hand's men.

"I don't think we realised how big it was

until later on in life. When you look back and think about the club that we were playing and the quality and the money that was behind them. They had nine or 10 internationals playing.

"We gave a good account of ourselves (in Madrid) and were eventually beaten 5-1 because we ran out of steam. That was the difference between part-timers and full-time.

"Full-time will get you in the end. It's a fantastic achievement to say you played against Real Madrid who were European kingpins and won it seven or eight times."

In 1982, Limerick won the FAI Cup on a wet and miserable day against Bohemians thanks to a solitary Brendan Storan goal

at Dalymount Park.

Nolan said the odds were against Limerick playing a cup final against a team on their own turf but the team showed great character and deserved the victory.

It is clear that Pat was delighted to represent his city and county at every opportunity. Times were also tough financially for the club in those times, but with a team full of locals, it showed that pride could get you a long. Nolan hopes that the current problems can be sorted in the near future.

"It was an honour to play for the county. You come out of junior or minor and you wanted to play for your city. I think that

helped us too and I am very proud of being from Limerick.

"I would love to have played in the Markets Field the way it is now. In our time, the Markets Field was one of the poorer pitches in the League of Ireland.

"When you look at it now, it is a great facility. I don't know where we are going to go from here. It might be a blessing to take a year out and see what happens.

"I think it has to go back to all locals, you have to stand by them and suffer the results until it starts to come around. It takes a while and it is not going to happen overnight. It is a terrible indictment on Limerick and I would always consider Limerick the sporting capital of Ireland."

Discipline needed for our beloved sporting action to return

by **Tom Savage**
sport@limerickpost.ie

COVID-19 has changed the world in some ways that are obvious and in ways that we haven't even imagined. It struck me today as I was walking along a road in the middle of nowhere near my house.

At a certain point, I became aware that I was probably nearing the 2km radius mandated by the health guidelines so, for the craic, I whipped out my phone and checked 2kmfromhome.com.

That site showed me that, sure enough, around 100 metres up the road ahead of

me was an invisible barrier that was outside the 2km radius allowed. If I followed the road as I had planned to complete my "loop" back to the house, I'd be breaking the 2km guideline.

I turned around and walked back the way I'd come. Why? No one would have known if I'd gone outside the radius for the 10 minutes max it would have taken to get back on my loop but I didn't. All it takes is enough people cutting a small corner here and there to suit themselves before the whole thing comes crashing down.

When you see people having a house

party in your estate, they didn't just decide to jump to that stage. It came with small breaks along the way.

Maybe they thought because they met a friend in a park outside the radius and they didn't die that it was OK. Maybe they visited their elderly parents on the sly and nothing bad happened in the week since.

If I walked past that invisible line who could it hurt? Everyone. Because it would be a break of the individual discipline we all need to beat this virus.

Walking 100 metres up a road might not directly condemn someone to die alone with tubes down their throat as they look

at medical staff they don't know through a window, but the concept of breaking guidelines because it would be convenient for me keeps the virus alive on our island for longer.

If enough people make those small, selfish decisions, we collectively edge closer to overwhelmed hospitals, mass graves and a world that would be so bad, we'd dream of going back to what we have today.

When I think about what professional rugby will look like after the grand re-ordering of what we took for granted at Christmas, it really does pale into

comparison to the battle we're currently fighting.

Rugby doesn't matter in the current battle but, if we're to get through this pandemic, we have to fight every day to get back to the normality that we love.

For me, a big piece of that normality is professional rugby. So every time I wash my hands even though they are red and sore, every time I disinfect my shopping for 20 minutes, every time I cross the road to avoid someone, every time I get lonely, every time I miss the world before, I look at it as a necessary pain that I have to endure to get my normality back sooner.