

OBITUARY - LESLIE WALTERS

Farewell Leslie Walters - a Northside sporting great

The recent sad passing of Leslie Walters gives rise for us to recall a very popular Northside sporting personality, a proud Soda Cake and a True Blue.

Born in to a large family in St Munchin's parish, Leslie showed very early sporting promise while attending CBS Hassetts Cross under the tutelage of Brother Casey. He excelled in both GAA codes winning school medals in The OLO and Tayto Cups. He was one of the many young lads who was showing great promise in what was basically a new school in the parish, drawing their pupils from Ballynanty Beg, Farranshone, Kileely, Mayorstone, Shelbourne, Thomondgate and even further afield. A lot of these boys would become lifelong friends of Leslie.

However in the early 1960s the vision of a local youth Niall Fitzgerald (Now Sir Niall CEO Munster Rugby), he founded Riverside which was run from the basement of his home which stood opposite St Munchin's Church. Activities included Darts, Rings, Table Tennis and Table Soccer. His decision to enter the local schoolboy leagues was the catalyst for these kids to show their true worth and Leslie was very much one of the real talents of this group.

This group included the late Tony Meany and Joe Bourke, also his lifelong friends Noel O'Donnell, Ray O'Halloran and especially Andy Crowe. They would go on to sweep all before them in the coming years, but first up was the U-13 League title won in 1962 in a play-off with Pike Rovers at the Markets Field. Leslie of course was the hero scoring both goals in a 2-1 win.

This group first with Riverside and (when Niall moved to college) with Ballynanty Rovers they dominated schoolboy and youth football, culminating in winning the Munster Minor Cup in 1967, having lost the previous years final.

Leslie or "Wah-Wah" as he was affectionately known, had developed into a free-scoring winger who was fast, had tremendous ability and an abundance of flair. His deadball skills with both feet were a major feature of his game. Leslie secretly believed



The Ballynanty Rovers team that travelled to Germany in 1974. Leslie Walters is in the back row, third from the left. Below is the Thomond RFC team with trophies in Shelbourne Park. Leslie is sitting in the front row beside the cups; below - Leslie in more recent times

that a video of his technique was recorded and it was this video that David Beckham used to improve his own skills. In the 1967 area final (MMC) he scored both goals, one direct from a corner with his right foot, the second a free with his left foot.

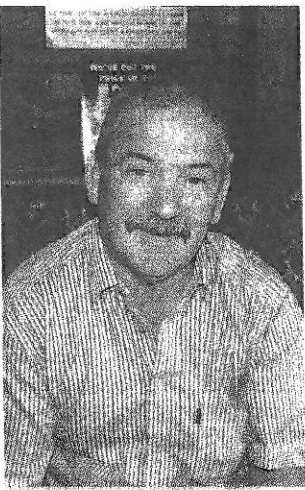
Limerick AFC under Ewan Fenton came a calling and while his teammates Tony Meany and Joe Bourke would sign on the dotted line and enjoy a very long and successful careers with Limerick, Leslie declined. There was a school of thought that Les did not buy into, the strict training regime, but he denied this.

By this time also he was showing great promise as a rugby player with Thomond RFC. His great speed, allied to great hands, also to kick with both feet made him a very valuable member of a side which would land Thomond their first Munster Junior Cup success under coach Sean Mac in 1970-71. They beat Garryowen 5-3 in the final and it took a try saving effort by Leslie in the last minute to secure victory. His teammates on that day included Peter O'Halloran (RIP), Doc Proctor (RIP), Mick O'Donnell (RIP), Noel Morgan and his pal Noel O'Donnell. He again drew the attention of the senior clubs,

Shannon, Bohemians and Young Munster, again he declined. Even a visit to the Walters home by none other than the famous Tom Clifford could entice him.

Leslie was very much a free spirit when it came to playing sport, it was played on his terms whether it was soccer (his first love), rugby and also GAA. What was important to Leslie was donning the 'Blue Jersey' representing his parish.

The 1970s was a very busy time for Ballynanty Rovers who had put together a very youthful side, who became known as The Tayto Gang. Travelling to play in Germany in an International Tournament with matches against three national sides, Leslie won goal of the tour-



nament with a stunning left foot strike against Switzerland. Wah-Wah as he was now more commonly known reckons he should have been

awarded three caps.

In 1976 this side would contest the FAI Junior Cup Final against Whitehall Rangers in what became known as the famous 'Burst Ball' final. A great goal by Tommy Meehan was disallowed by the referee when he deemed the ball had burst in flight. This side included the O'Donnell brothers Micko (RIP), Noel, Phonsie, Joe Bourke (RIP) and another great pal the late Riggy Rice and managed by the legendary Larry Fitzgerald (RIP).

During these years Balla purchased an all white playing strip similar to Real Madrid, Leslie was having none of that. All white was also worn by his favourite team Leeds United and in particular the Number 7 shirt worn

by his hero Peter Lorimer. The fact Lorimer later wore the red of the other United could not take from his hero. But you could slag him on this.

Leslie's interest in playing sport started to wane in the late 70s. He maintained that tactics were inhibiting the flair players, systems were not for Wah-Wah. He eased back on playing and became your typical armchair pundit. Of course this time also coincided with his marriage to childhood sweetheart Elsie Sheehan in April 1977.

Now having more time on his hands he became an expert in all sports. His regular testing of friends with questions and at times not giving the answers was a regular feature of after match get togethers. He was a great supporter and could be seen at matches involving the north-side 'Blue'.

He also developed an interest in the horses, odds and such were never important, the names of the horses had to have some meaning to Les and indeed it proved successful on many an occasion.

In the past 12 months Leslie and his boyhood friends with Riverside enjoyed a 50-year reunion with Sir Niall Fitzgerald. He also had the opportunity to support his beloved Balla in the FAI Junior Cup Final, alas more disappointment. Over the last 40 years Leslie was a regular visitor to Elland Road to watch his club Leeds. His final visit was a short few weeks before his passing, a major shock to friends and in particular his family.

Sporting personalities can be measured by their success over many years. It would be nice to remember Leslie "Wah-Wah" Walters as a shining light who played his sport with sheer abandon and an abundance of flair. He was a True Blue.

To his wife Elsie, daughters Lynsey, Jessica, grandchildren, sons-in-law and the Walters family, we extend our deepest sympathies.

-Obituary penned by Ray O'Halloran

