



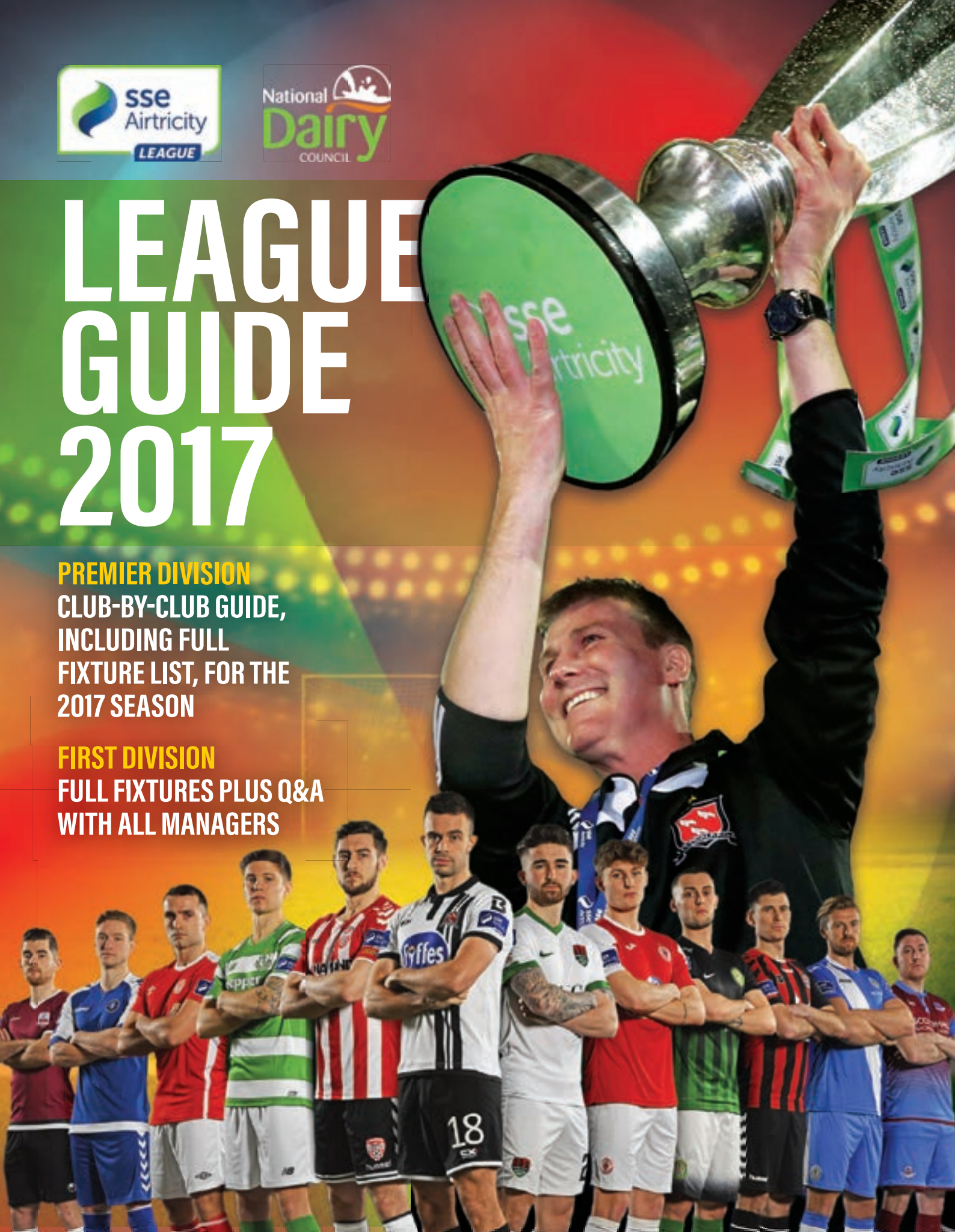
LEAGUE GUIDE 2017

PREMIER DIVISION

CLUB-BY-CLUB GUIDE,
INCLUDING FULL
FIXTURE LIST, FOR THE
2017 SEASON

FIRST DIVISION

FULL FIXTURES PLUS Q&A
WITH ALL MANAGERS



Irish Daily Mail

SSE Airtricity League 2017

Where the next generation of legends are born



WELCOME TO THE NEW SEASON



The wait is nearly over and we are ready to kick-off the 2017 SSE Airtricity League season with another exciting year expected following a fantastic 2016.

Last year, we saw Stephen Kenny's Dundalk lift the SSE Airtricity League Premier Division trophy for an incredible third time in a row and perform excellently in the UEFA Champions League and the UEFA Europa League. Their exploits on the

continent gave us something the league can be proud of and shows that Irish domestic football is well and truly on the up.

However, they were denied the league and cup double by John Caulfield's Cork City who waited until the final minute of the 2016 season to seal the Irish Daily Mail FAI Cup through Sean Maguire's late goal. A fantastic occasion and I'm sure they'll be looking to build on that success in the coming season. It is going to be a thrilling race in both divisions this year in both the promotion and relegation battles, with three teams to go down from the Premier Division as we establish a two-tier 10-team structure.

Also, an exciting new agreement will see Sligo Rovers and Bray Wanderers compete in the Scottish Challenge Cup from this season onwards. The competition also features teams from the NIFL Premiership and the Welsh Premier League, and gives the 5th and 6th-placed teams in our league a great opportunity to test themselves against different opponents.

It's also important to recognise the efforts of all coaches, staff and volunteers working with our SSE Airtricity League U19 and U17 sides. We've seen fantastic progression in these leagues over the last few years which was showcased when Cork City U19s became the first Irish club to feature in the UEFA Youth League.

It's been great to see more clubs progress their young and local talent, and see an increase in the amount of our home-grown players represent the country at under-age level.

Lastly, I want to thank the media for their continuing support of the SSE Airtricity League and I sincerely hope you enjoy the 2017 season.

EAMON NAUGHTON

Chairman
National League Executive Committee



On behalf of SSE Airtricity, I am delighted to welcome you to the start of the 2017 SSE Airtricity League.

At SSE Airtricity, we're proud to be involved in grass roots football by sponsoring the league for the eighth year running. We are also delighted to continue as the Official Energy Partner to the FAI and its international teams.

With another SSE Airtricity League campaign upon us, we wanted to take our creative approach in a new direction. The league is where our Irish heroes are born so we wanted to create a concept that was completely different from what we had done previously, thereby creating 'The Next Generation of Legends'.

We want to highlight the talent and success that this league has created throughout the years. As seen at Euro 2016 and beyond, the SSE Airtricity League was where many of our current international stars made their name and honed their craft. We want to make sure everyone is reminded to come and see the next generation of Irish talent in action, right on your doorstep.

In 2016, we were delighted to see Limerick FC and Dundalk FC win the First Division and Premier Division titles. 2017 promises to be another rollercoaster year and we are also very much looking forward to seeing the U15s national league kick off in August, alongside the U19s and U17s.

Each year the SSE Airtricity League continues to reach a new level of talent and we're very proud to be making a difference in Irish football.

I would like to wish all our players and the management of each of our SSE Airtricity League clubs every success on the pitch.

To all the fans, including everyone in the sporting press, I wish you a season full of excitement and top-class action.

Have a great season.

STEPHEN WHEELER

Managing Director
Airtricity



David Sneyd

THIRTY YEARS AFTER THE FABLED SHAMROCK ROVERS TEAMS OF THE 1980S COMPLETED THEIR FOUR-IN-A-ROW OF LEAGUE OF IRELAND TITLES, THE ANNIVERSARY COULD BE MARKED BY THIS GENERATION'S FINEST MATCHING THAT ACHIEVEMENT.

History often has a way of throwing up these fitting quirks and 2017 is no different. Stephen Kenny's Dundalk have already set themselves apart because of their Europa League group stage exploits last year, but the upcoming season offers them a chance to establish their names in lore alongside the historic Hoops.

While Jim McLaughlin, so entrenched in the storied glories of both clubs, led Rovers to a trio of league crowns from '84-'86 (having arrived in Dublin on the back of delivering three championships in seven seasons to Oriel Park) before Dermot Keely (another with a foot in both camps) continued the dominance in '87, one man has been at the forefront of Dundalk's dominance in recent years.

Kenny took a club in the doldrums and helped them to achieve their wildest dreams – but they continue to chase silverware. That quest will never end and there will always be challenges to overcome.

'We're setting our standards in terms of what we did last year. We want to do it again,' defender Sean Gannon insists. 'The players that Stephen's brought in, they're young and hungry and want to do well. They don't want to be seen as coming into a period of transition or anything like that.'

'From what I've seen so far, they've settled in straight away. They'll be looking to do what we did before. What we did last year was probably an incentive for them to come, anyway. So they'll be looking to help us do again what we did last year. That's not getting away from the fact that what we did last year was very tough. And it will be tough to do it again. But it's something we're looking to do.'

Daryl Horgan, Andy Boyle and Ronan Finn are three regulars from the starting XI who have departed. Reinforcements have been brought in and their rivals will be hoping this opens the door for them to close the gap. Cork City have been the only realistic challengers and John Caulfield's 'Rebel Army' are primed once more for a prolonged assault – especially as the most potent threat from their attacking arsenal, Sean Maguire, has remained at Turners Cross.

Derry City will provide more northern soul after a stirring 2016 resulted

in a shot at Europa League qualifying, while current Rovers boss Stephen Bradley is aiming to awaken the beast in Tallaght. Bray Wanderers didn't mess about with their business over the winter as Harry Kenny plots a season of adventure by the seaside, and Limerick have returned to the top flight after a year of dominance in the second tier.

The pressure will be even greater for clubs to make sure they don't drop down, especially after confirmation came that re-structuring plans mean three teams will be relegated this term. There will be some established names checking over their shoulders as a result, but for Dundalk they won't have to look back to know that history beckons.

PREDICTIONS

Champions: Dundalk.
Runners-up: Cork City.
Irish Daily Mail FAI Cup: Derry City.
EA Sports Cup: Bray Wanderers.
Relegated: Finn Harps,
 Drogheda United,
 Bohemians.

AND THREE STORYLINES FROM THE FIRST DIVISION...

Waterford's Power Surge:

Former Ireland U21 international Lee Power has provided the investment required to help bring an end to the south-east club's decade of despair in the First Division. Time and again they have fallen short but with director of football Pat Fenlon working alongside manager Alan Reynolds, expectations are at an all-time high at the RSC.

Class in session for UCD:

Manager Collie O'Neill will have an all-scholarship squad this term after a decision was made to work solely within the confines of campus. The students have continually produced top quality players who have gone on to have fine careers so it will be interesting to see who stands out from the Class of '17.

Keeping the faith:

There is no getting away from the fact that should anyone manage a repeat of Limerick's dominance last season, the second tier could quickly become a wilderness of despair as a result of the restructuring decision which has taken away the promotion/relegation play-off. What's needed is at least three teams mounting a title challenge.



POWERED BY DAIRY

Fact Not Fad

8 TOP TIPS FOR PEAK PERFORMANCE

3

FOOD FUEL

Fuel up 2-3 hours before training/match e.g. pasta or rice with tomato-based sauce and chicken; baked potato with beans and cheese; or cereal with milk/yogurt. If needed, top up energy with a carbohydrate-based snack 60 mins before sport e.g. cereal bar or fruit smoothie.

4

PROTEIN POWER

Protein foods (milk, lean meat, eggs, beans, lentils, cheese, fish, yogurt) should be included at each meal time. Consuming protein (20-25g) following an intense session is particularly useful to assist muscle growth and repair.

5

DRINK UP!

Ensure adequate hydration when beginning a sports session by drinking fluid throughout the day. Rehydrate after sport to replace fluid lost; water or skimmed milk are good options.

6

DURING SPORT

There is generally no need for an energy top-up during sport if the session duration is less than 60 mins, but continue to hydrate with water at breaks of activity.

2

COMMON SENSE

There are no shortcuts - effective training and sensible eating are key. If needed, a sports dietitian can tailor food, fluid and supplement advice to specific needs and goals. Remember, sports supplements are not recommended for those under 18 years of age.

7

RECOVER WELL TO PLAY WELL

Effective recovery is essential to perform your best in the next session. If your next meal is some time away, aim to start refuelling within 30-60 mins after sport e.g. sandwich with chicken/tuna/cheese; low-fat/ skimmed milk with banana; flavoured milk; or yogurt with granola.

1

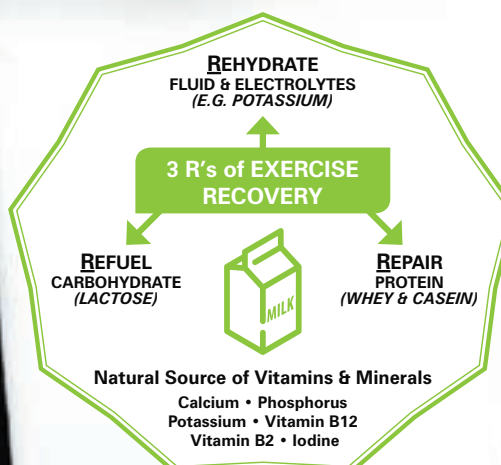
KEEP YOUR BALANCE

Energy and nutrient needs vary depending on gender, age, body size and activity levels. A healthy, balanced diet is essential to all sports enthusiasts for meeting nutritional demands.

8

MILK IT!

Exciting research indicates a beneficial role for milk in post-exercise recovery.





BOHEMIANS

ROLL OF HONOUR

Premier Division titles: 11
FAI Cups: 7
League Cup: 3

AT A GLANCE

Last season: 8th
Home ground: Dalymount Park

BOHEMIANS MAY BE IN THE BOTTOM THREE OF THE PREMIER DIVISION WHEN IT COMES TO BUDGETS, BUT KEITH LONG IS REFUSING TO LET THAT DAMPEN EXPECTATIONS AROUND DALYMOUNT PARK.

'We have a good balance of young, hungry players who want to make a name for themselves and make a career in the game and, at the same time, we have older lads who have been around the block and know the league inside out,' the Gypsies boss insists.

'It's a good balance and we've had a good, long run in with the players to implement our ideas and what we want them to do.'

With 11 new players having arrived in Phibsborough on the back of last year's inconsistent season, a solid pre-season was needed. And there have been some high-profile departures, too. Not least fans' player of the year Keith Buckley, who has swapped his bike (he used to cycle to home games from his home on Pearse Street) for a Leap card as he prepares for 2017 with Bray Wanderers as part of the Harry Kenny revolution in Wicklow.

Midfield partner Roberto Lopes has also left the club and, in doing so, committed a cardinal sin around this part of north Dublin. He signed for bitter rivals Shamrock Rovers and won't have to wait long to face his old side – the fiercest derby in the country set for the second week of the season at Tallaght Stadium. And, judging by the way in which Luke Byrne was treated for his act of supposed treachery a couple of years ago,

the Bohs faithful won't be shy in making their feelings known. Expect fireworks and pig heads for that one.

'It hasn't been ideal, the number of changes that have been made,' Long (below) admits.

'But that's the reality for a lot of clubs. We're part-time, we pay part-time wages and at this moment we can't offer what others can.

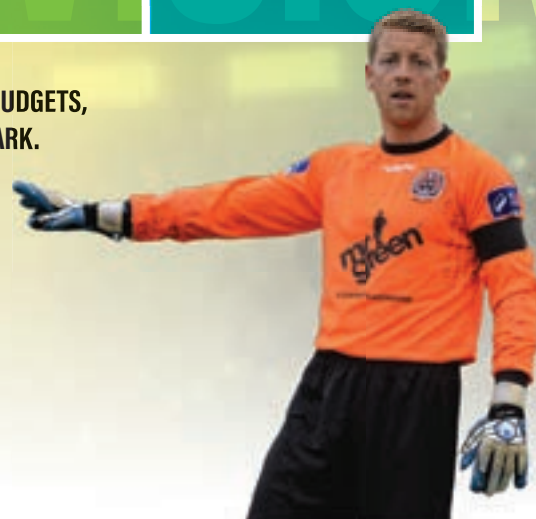
'But we'll get on with it and from what I've seen in pre-season I'm happy with the application of the players and their attitude. When it comes to the crunch against Derry in the first game, that's when we'll see where we're at.'

Among some of the new arrivals at Dalymount are Keith Ward, Rob Cornwall, and the returning Dinny Corcoran, who will be hoping to rediscover his best form up front after frustrating spells with Sligo Rovers and St Patrick's Athletic. 'The profile of the squad last year was older but it hasn't been deliberate to bring that down,' Long adds. 'We also have Ian Morris who is also working as our academy director and he has had his first proper pre-season with us for a couple of years. We're hoping that will be a big boost for him because he's a quality midfielder.'

Full backs Derek Pender and Lorcan Fitzgerald have also remained at the club, along with winger Paddy Kavanagh and the versatile Dano Byrne, who is comfortable at either centre back or centre midfield.

Much will also be expected of Eoin Wearen, a classy midfielder who has the ability to control games but has yet to really tap into that potential. One of Long's best additions won't even kick a ball in anger this season, though.

The arrival of Trevor Croly as first team coach was a major coup for Bohs and the two former



MAIN MAN: SHANE SUPPLE

The Bohs goalkeeper just about pips striker Ismahil Akinade in the importance stakes. The Nigerian born frontman failed to hit the same heights last season as he did in the 2015 while the arrival of Supple was a real coup for Keith Long. Keeping him at the club was an even bigger achievement considering he was a man in demand. The former Ipswich Town stopper is top class and will need to be at his very best this term.

teammates go way back. It's why Long had no qualms at all about bringing him in. Others might have had reservations about making such an appointment, especially as Croly's last role was as Shamrock Rovers boss, but he is adamant it was necessary.

'I didn't do it to make my job easier, I did it because he's a top-class person and coach. He's exactly what we needed and will be a huge help to have him.'

Bohs will need as much as possible.

FIXTURE LIST

FEBRUARY

24: Derry City (h)

MARCH

3: Shamrock Rovers (a)

10: Bray Wanderers (h)

13: Limerick (a)

17: Galway United (h)

25: Drogheda United (a)

31: St Patrick's Athletic (h)

APRIL

8: Sligo Rovers (a)

14: Cork City (h)

21: Dundalk (a)

28: Finn Harps (h)

MAY

7: Derry City

12: Shamrock Rovers

19: Bray Wanderers

23: Limerick

26: Galway United

JUNE

2: Drogheda United (h)

16: St Patrick's Athletic (a)

23: Sligo Rovers (h)

30: Cork City (a)

JULY

7: Dundalk (h)

14: Finn Harps (a)

21: Derry City (h)

28: Shamrock Rovers (a)

AUGUST

4: Bray Wanderers (h)

19: Limerick (a)

SEPTEMBER

1: Galway United (h)

15: Drogheda United (a)

22: St Pat's (h)

OCTOBER

7: Sligo Rovers (a)

13: Cork City (h)

20: Dundalk (a)

27: Finn Harps (h)

VERDICT

With Trevor Croly by Keith Long's side, there is no doubt that Bohs will be well drilled and expertly coached. They are going to have to be in order to make sure they are competitive. They struggled badly for goals last season and never managed to string a decent run of results together, so it is imperative they don't give points away cheaply. They've lost Roberto Lopes and Keith Buckley from the heart of midfield and this season will be a slog.

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Alex Meile
Little Deli
University of Ulster
www.littledeli.com



BRAY WANDERERS

ROLL OF HONOUR

FAI Cups: 2

First Division titles: 3

AT A GLANCE

Last season: 6th

Home ground: Carlisle Grounds

BRAY WANDERERS WON ONE OF THEIR MOST IMPORTANT BATTLES BEFORE A BALL WAS EVEN KICKED THIS YEAR.

Star man Dylan Connolly was a man in demand over Christmas, champions Dundalk keen to bring him to Oriel Park following the departure of Daryl Horgan to Preston North End. It was the closest thing the League of Ireland had to a transfer saga as the two clubs remained locked in talks over the winter with neither willing to lose face. Dundalk were informed that the player, a tricky winger who can also play through the middle and test defences with blistering pace and skill, was out of contract and up for grabs. Only that wasn't the case. The 21-year-old still had a year to run on his deal at the Carlisle Grounds, which meant Bray were able to dig their heels in.

The Lilywhites offered €20,000, a sizeable sum, for Connolly's services but the Seagulls' hierarchy were adamant that they would not consider anything below the €100,000 mark. Dundalk balked at such a figure and turned their attentions elsewhere as Connolly signed fresh terms at a club who are striving to make a real impact at the top end of the table.

'It was a big statement to keep Dylan,' head coach Harry Kenny (below) says. 'That was a real sign of intent to show that we mean business this term. It is by no means a certainty that we will

definitely push on from last season – they finished sixth – but there is no doubt that we want to be challenging at the right end of the table.'

Kenny was certainly busy over the past couple of months, adding players he believes can help Bray to the next level. Gary McCabe arrived from Shamrock Rovers and will bring experience, craft and know-how to the centre of the park.

Keith Buckley has come from Bohemians, an all-action, gutsy midfielder who will cover all the ground that's needed. Aaron Greene opted to leave Limerick behind and pitch up at the Carlisle Grounds while Derek Foran has returned to League of Ireland football following a year-long spell with Sacramento Republic.

But it is the return of Anto 'Bisto' Flood, after four years in Australia, which is most intriguing of all. Kenny worked with the gangly, nuisance of a striker at St Patrick's Athletic when the Saints won the Premier Division title in 2013.

Bisto was instrumental in the run-in, scoring a number of vital goals, but has been off the radar ever since. He went travelling before settling in Australia, where he was able to tick over with part-time football.

But, as Kenny says, Bray mean business this season and are targeting Europe. There can be no passengers on this journey. 'I suppose there has been a stigma attached to Bray at this time of the season,' the head coach believes. 'Usually people would be looking at Bray and thinking to themselves that we're one of the favourites for relegation.'

'That's how it has been for some time but the job now is to change those expectations that people have.'

While there is a renewed focus and a greater sense of needing to break into that top echelon



MAIN MAN: DYLAN CONNOLLY

Dundalk were keen to sign him during the winter and the champions thought they would get their man. Bray stood strong, though, safe in the knowledge he was still under contract and in the end the dynamic winger-cum-striker agreed fresh terms at the Carlisle Grounds. Has the potential to become a real force in the Premier Division and should the 21-year-old build on what he did in 2016, he'll be looking at making his mark further afield than the League of Ireland. In Harry Kenny, he has the perfect mentor.

considering the outlay, Kenny still allowed for some down time on an overnight stay in Waterford during pre-season.

'We did a lot of hard work down there during the day and I felt it was important to give the players a bit of a break, too. They were allowed to go out and enjoy themselves, they had a bit of craic, and did it at the right time.'

Now it's time for Bray to deliver.



FIXTURE LIST

FEBRUARY

24: St Patrick's Athletic (a)

MARCH

3: Finn Harps (h)

10: Bohemians (a)

13: Drogheda United (h)

18: Sligo Rovers (a)

25: Limerick (h)

APRIL

2: Derry City (a)

7: Galway United (h)

14: Dundalk (a)

21: Shamrock Rovers (h)

28: Cork City (a)

MAY

5: St Patrick's Athletic (h)

12: Finn Harps (a)

19: Bohemians (h)

22/23: Drogheda United (a)

26: Sligo Rovers (h)

JUNE

2: Limerick (a)

16: Derry City (h)

23: Galway United (a)

30: Dundalk (h)

JULY

7: Shamrock Rovers (a)

14: Cork City (h)

21: St Patrick's Athletic (a)

28: Finn Harps (h)

AUGUST

4: Bohemians (a)

18: Drogheda United (h)

SEPTEMBER

2: Sligo Rovers (a)

15: Limerick (h)

24: Derry City (a)

OCTOBER

7: Galway United (h)

13: Dundalk (a)

20: Shamrock Rovers (h)

27: Cork City (a)

VERDICT

Harry Kenny has assembled a terrific mixture of guile and old-fashioned guts in his bid to challenge at the top end of the table. The spine of the team is strong, there is strength in depth and in attack they have pace, power and a sprinkling of brute force. How it all comes together will be one of the most interesting aspects of the season – a top four place is in their sights and within their capabilities.



CORK CITY

ROLL OF HONOUR

Premier Division titles: 2
FAI Cups: 3
League Cup: 3
First Division titles: 1

AT A GLANCE

Last season: 2nd
Home ground: Turner's Cross

ONCE THE OPEN TOP BUS PARADES GROUND TO A HALT, THE ALL-NIGHT PARTIES CAME TO AN END AND THE GENERAL GIDDINESS LEVELS AROUND CORK HAD TAPERED OFF FOLLOWING THEIR IRISH DAILY MAIL FAI CUP VICTORY LAST NOVEMBER, CITY MANAGER JOHN CAULFIELD SAT DOWN WITH STAR STRIKER SEAN MAGUIRE TO DISCUSS HIS FUTURE.

The 22-year-old was a man in demand. With 29 goals in all competitions for club and country, the Republic of Ireland U21 international had the opportunity to return to England after a two-year spell with West Ham United came to an end in 2015.

Having just netted the injury time winner against Dundalk in the Cup final at Aviva Stadium, his stock was high, so Caulfield set about convincing Maguire why it was best for all concerned that he remain at Turners Cross for at least one more year.

'I have a good relationship with Seanie and I have to say he was very mature about looking at the bigger picture,' Caulfield says. 'He has been away before and come back here, so he is aware of the pitfalls, he knows the grass isn't always greener and that life isn't always rosy over there.'

'He was in a good place here, he was enjoying his football and enjoying life and I felt that was important. The last thing you'd like to see is a player of his calibre want to just run out the door for a club in League One or League Two. You're

not going to get a shot at playing in Europe there and I think he can go on and be one of the role models for this league, a source of inspiration to others that they can rebuild their careers here if things don't work out abroad the first time around.

'He's better than League One and League Two and if he can have another season like last year, and keep on working as he has been, he will have Championship clubs or maybe even higher looking at him.

The chat worked, and almost a month to the day after they lifted the FAI Cup, Cork announced Maguire had signed a new one-year contract. 'I owe it to Cork City and John (Caulfield) for what they did for me this time last season,' Maguire said at the time.

'John took a gamble on me coming down here and, after the season I have had, I owe Cork City another season at least. We want to have another crack at the league, because that is what this club deserves.'

The Leesiders, of course, have finished runners up to Dundalk in each of the last three seasons with the 2014 title race the closest run contest. The Lilywhites triumphed thanks a last-day duel with their Munster rivals at Oriel Park and their rivalry has continued ever since.

This year, though, Caulfield reckons another couple of clubs will have a bigger say in proceedings. 'Shamrock Rovers will be a serious bet, Bray have invested very wisely and keeping a hold of Dylan Connolly was very important for them. Harry Kenny has done a great job there and then you have Derry, who I think will be just



MAIN MAN: SEAN MAGUIRE

The top scorer in the country last season, his winning goal in the Cup final saw him reach the 29 mark in all competitions. Again, ensuring Maguire stayed at Cork and spurned the advances of English clubs was inspired. And required. The Waterford native is a natural finisher who relies on his speed of thought and clever movement. He will be the difference to Cork having a good or great season.

as strong as they were last season.' Ahead of the start of this new season, the club mourned the passing of one of its greatest ever servants. A true gladiator in spirit who gave their all for the cause, a ball was never kicked in anger by this Cork hero. Although she certainly splashed enough City players with Holy Water before each game.

Noelle Feeney will be missed at Turners Cross but such is the relentlessness of life everyone must try and move on. Caulfield's Cork can do her proud.

FIXTURE LIST

FEBRUARY

24: Finn Harps (a)

MARCH

3: Galway United (h)
10: Drogheda United (a)
13: Sligo Rovers (h)
17: Shamrock Rovers (a)
25: Dundalk (h)

APRIL

1: Limerick (a)
7: Derry City (h)
14: Bohemians (a)
21: St Patrick's Athletic (a)
28: Bray Wanderers (h)

MAY

5: Finn Harps (h)
12: Galway United (a)
19: Drogheda United (h)
22/23: Sligo Rovers (a)
26: Shamrock Rovers (h)

JUNE

2: Dundalk (a)
16: Limerick (h)
23: Derry City (a)
30: Bohemians (h)

JULY

7: St Patrick's Athletic (h)
14: Bray Wanderers (a)

21: Finn Harps (a)

28: Galway United (h)

AUGUST

4: Drogheda United (a)
18: Sligo Rovers (h)

SEPTEMBER

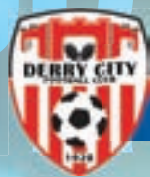
1: Shamrock Rovers (a)
15: Dundalk (h)
23: Limerick (a)

OCTOBER

7: Derry City (h)
13: Bohemians (a)
20: St Patrick's Athletic (a)
27: Bray Wanderers (h)

VERDICT

They've been knocking on the door for the past three seasons and each year they have been turned away by Dundalk. John Caulfield's side picked up that crucial first piece of meaningful silverware when they lifted the Irish Daily Mail FAI Cup last November and now they must take that next step in the league. It will be fascinating to see how the latest chapter in the Cork-Dundalk rivalry plays out. The Rebels look to have the more settled squad and that could prove crucial.



DERRY CITY

ROLL OF HONOUR

Premier Division titles: 2
FAI Cups: 5
League Cups: 10

AT A GLANCE

Last season: 3rd
Home ground: The Brandywell (This season they will play most home fixtures at Maginn Park in Buncrana while redevelopment work takes place)

EUROPEAN FOOTBALL BECKONS FOR DERRY CITY AND WHILE KENNY SHIELS ADMITS THE PROSPECT OF MORE FAMOUS NIGHTS HAS BROUGHT ADDED EXCITEMENT AHEAD OF THE NEW SEASON, HE IS ADAMANT THE EXTRA CASH WILL NOT BE FRITTERED AWAY.

With the Brandywell currently undergoing a much-needed facelift, Derry will have to play most of their home games this season across the border in Donegal at Maginn Park in Buncrana, and Shiels has also seen a considerable drain on his playing resources. Despite a guaranteed €215,000 for their appearance in the first qualifying round of the Europa League and the potential to earn a further €225,000 with progress to the second round, the Derry manager says it would have been wrong to use that money on player wages considering the regular turnover in League of Ireland squads. 'It's an exciting time for us, and to help the club get some more money in the coffers is very important,' he feels. 'We won't get carried away. I might be wrong in this but it seems that most teams in this country, when they do get into Europe they overspend because they know they have that money coming in. 'We don't want to do that, we want to put

the money into facilities and developing our structures here, not players' wages. That's the way we have to do it because, you know, before you know it the players will be gone and leave for other clubs.'

That has certainly been the case ahead of the new season for Derry. Seven first team squad members have departed – including defender Niclas Vemmelund and midfielder Conor McCormack who joined Dundalk and Cork City respectively.

Those were the sides that finished above the Candystripes in third last term and while Shiels was able to bring winger Mark Timlin back to the club following a year with St Patrick's Athletic as well as take midfielder Nicky Low on loan from Dundee, he reckons a similar return in 2017 is beyond them.

'Dundalk, Cork and Shamrock Rovers are all better than us, Limerick are a big fish again and then you have Bray around too. Sligo are there and they are all chasing Europe. We got to Europe by being clever with our budget and not by trying to buy success. I'd love for us to be the first team that doesn't buy the league, we want to develop our programme in the right way so our players can get better.

'The players we have here are definitely with us and playing for the love of the game, I genuinely believe that because there are players in our team who could go and play for any team in this country, all the top teams,' Shiels (left) continues. 'Barry McNamee could play for any of the top teams, Ger Doherty, Rory Patterson, Ryan McBride, they could easily leave and double or even treble their wages elsewhere. We've got 12 players in our squad from the city of Derry itself



MAIN MAN: BARRY MCNAMEE

Rory Patterson proved he still had it last time out but what was clear is that diminutive playmaker Barry McNamee is the one who makes this team tick. He was prominent in all that was good about Derry in 2016 and didn't drift in and out of form like he has done previously. Expect big things from the 25-year-old who is coming into the peak of his powers.

and that's a tremendous achievement.

'No other club can say they have a squad like that where they're all from close by. We can't attract players from the Irish League because they have families to feed and mortgages to pay, they need their two wage packets from a day job and also the money they get from the likes of a Linfield or a Glenavon.'

Derry also face the disruption of being temporarily housed in Maginn Park. 'We'll use that as a challenge and so long as we approach it head on with positivity and conviction it will not be a problem for us,' Shiels adds.



FIXTURE LIST

FEBRUARY

24: Bohemians (a)

MARCH

5: Limerick (h)

10: Shamrock Rovers (a)

13: Dundalk (h)

17: Drogheda United (h)

25: Galway United (a)

APRIL

2: Bray Wanderers (h)

7: Cork City (a)

14: Finn Harps (h)

22: Sligo Rovers (a)

28: St Patrick's Athletic (h)

MAY

7: Bohemians (h)

13: Limerick (a)

19: Shamrock Rovers (h)

23: Dundalk (a)

26: Drogheda United (a)

JUNE

2: Galway United (h)

16: Bray Wanderers (a)

23: Cork City (h)

30: Finn Harps (a)

JULY

9: Sligo Rovers (h)

14: St Patrick's Athletic (a)

21: Bohemians (a)

30: Limerick (h)

AUGUST

4: Shamrock Rovers (a)

20: Dundalk (h)

SEPTEMBER

3: Drogheda United (h)

15: Galway United (a)

24: Bray Wanderers (h)

OCTOBER

7: Cork City (a)

15: Finn Harps (h)

21: Sligo Rovers (a)

27: St Patrick's Athletic (h)

VERDICT

They were the surprise package of 2016, finishing third and qualifying for the Europa League. It will be interesting to see how they deal with their change of scenery by having to play most of their home games at Maginn Park in Buncrana, but one thing is for certain, the enigmatic Kenny Shiels will not allow standards to slip. More than capable of maintaining their place in the top four.

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DROGHEDA UNITED

ROLL OF HONOUR

Premier Division titles: 1
FAI Cups: 1
League Cups: 4
First Division titles: 4

AT A GLANCE

Last season: Promoted from
First Division through play-off.
Home ground: United Park.

PETE MAHON KNOWS EXACTLY WHAT HE'S LETTING HIMSELF IN FOR. 'I'VE GOT A CHALLENGING DRESSING ROOM,' THE DROGHEDA UNITED MANAGER SAYS WITH A LAUGH.

'But that's what I wanted. I wanted to bring in strong characters with big personalities who aren't afraid to speak up at the right times. As long as it's constructive I have no problem at all with players having their say.'

There will be no danger of shyness crippling Drogheda this season. The arrival of Brennan brothers Killian and Gavin, joining younger sibling Sean who is long established at their hometown club, will add plenty of colour to their campaign. Throw in Sean Thornton and forward Marc Griffin, and natural talent abounds. Former Republic of Ireland striker Stephen Elliott has also been convinced to link up at United Park, meaning there will be bags of experience for the newly-promoted Louth outfit to call on during a challenging year in which three teams will suffer relegation.

The veteran boss will celebrate his 70th birthday during the course of the season so is well able to handle himself at this stage. In assistant John Gill, first-team coach Mark Kinsella and strength and conditioning coach Gerry Kelly, Mahon has established a strong support network.

'It's about being able to delegate and having trust in the people around you,' the Dubliner (below) explains. 'One thing you never lose, or at least I

haven't, is that passion for the game and buzz of excitement.'

Drogheda are one of the part-time operations in the division but that doesn't mean they have taken a lazy approach to their training facilities. Mahon wouldn't stand for it for one thing, and there are established pros who certainly wouldn't.

They have based themselves out of Ashbourne Rugby Club for pre-season, making the most of top class facilities including an astro turf pitch under lights, a state of the art weight room and also the use of swimming pools in both Drogheda and Bettystown. The company Stat Sports have come on board to provide analysis and GPS stats. 'It helps us to monitor how each player is doing, who might need a rest or who isn't quite up to speed,' Mahon explains. There can be no substitute for hard work. 'We've got to be organised, the players have got to understand the way we want to play and what their jobs are. You have to be as clear as possible and be able to get your instructions across so everyone is clear on what they must do on the pitch.'

Ten years ago, Drogheda lifted the Premier Division title while two years previous to that triumph the FAI Cup was also held aloft following a 2-0 win over Cork City at Lansdowne Road. 'This club has had success in the past but it was largely built on sand,' Mahon believes. 'Once the big bad wolf came calling and the results started to drop off the money went and everything fell apart. That's not how it's going to be here. I have a two-year contract and I intend on putting structures in place to make sure this club can be on a strong footing again.'



MAIN MAN: KILLIAN BRENNAN

At 33, this is not quite a swan song with his hometown club for one of the most gifted players of his generation. Brennan's time at Shamrock Rovers ended on a sour note – his contract cancelled with a year to run – and the Drogheda faithful will be hoping that has helped to relight the fire of desire within him. It will be a different kind of year for the left-footer, who's used to fighting for titles and not battling relegation, and there will be plenty of intrigue too.

'It's going to be tough this season but we're not just aiming to finish fourth from bottom to stay up. We're looking higher than that but of course it could well be the case that we end up there.' The signing of Killian Brennan took many by surprise but Mahon added: 'I'm shocked he signed for us, I really am, but he wanted to come back and play for his hometown club. He had other offers and could have made much more money elsewhere but he was the one keen to come back.'

If Brennan can make Drogheda tick it will be a very happy homecoming indeed.



FIXTURE LIST

FEBRUARY

24: Galway United (a)

MARCH

3: St Patrick's Athletic (h)

10: Cork City (h)

13: Bray Wanderers (a)

17: Derry City (a)

25: Bohemians (h)

31: Dundalk (a)

APRIL

7: Shamrock Rovers (h)

15: Limerick (a)

21: Finn Harps (a)

28: Sligo Rovers (h)

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26: Derry City (h)

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18: Bray Wanderers (a)

SEPTEMBER

3: Derry City (a)

15: Bohemians (h)

22: Dundalk (a)

OCTOBER

7: Shamrock Rovers (h)

14: Limerick (a)

20: Finn Harps (a)

27: Sligo Rovers (h)

VERDICT

It is going to be a struggle and the fact that three sides will drop into the First Division ahead of the planned-restructuring of the League of Ireland will make it even more difficult for Drogheda to survive. Pete Mahon has been shrewd in the winter and added quality but it may not be enough to prevent the Boynesiders heading straight back down. In Marc Griffin they have a player of tremendous ability who has yet to realise his full potential. If Mahon can help him tap into that well of talent, Griffin could be a real hit.



DUNDALK

ROLL OF HONOUR

Premier Division titles: 12
FAI Cups: 10
League Cups: 4
First Division titles: 2

AT A GLANCE

Last season: 1st
Home ground: Oriel Park

AFTER ALL DUNDALK'S ADVENTURES IN EUROPE DURING 2016, THE LAST THING YOU WOULD EXPECT IS FOR THEM TO WANT TO JET OFF ONCE AGAIN DURING PRE-SEASON.

Having just gotten over the jet lag from trips to Iceland, Belarus, Poland, The Netherlands, Russia and Israel during their Champions League and historic Europa League campaigns, they didn't have to wait long to rack up even more air miles. Thanks to the company Sporting Referrals, run by former Cork City and Manchester United star Brian Carey, a week-long training camp to Salou was arranged following a similarly successful arrangement last summer.

With six players brought in and as many leaving, it was the ideal opportunity to forge new relationships. As well as two friendly games – one of which came against Espanyol's B team and ended in a 2-0 defeat – the timing of the trip couldn't have been better.

Barcelona were hosting Athletic Bilbao at the Nou Camp and the League of Ireland champions were only too happy to take advantage of the opportunity to watch Lionel Messi, Luis Suarez and Neymar up close.

Well, from the nose bleed seats on the very top tier of the 90,000 seater-stadium. 'The trip was

great,' manager Stephen Kenny says. 'We've had a very, very short pre-season, not a lot of time to work together as a group, but make no mistake by the time the first game of the season comes around we will be ready.'

That first game? At home to Shamrock Rovers on Oriel Park's brand spanking new 4G astro turf pitch. It means three former Lilywhites will return to Louth after heading to the Dublin club. Ronan Finn, Michael O'Connor and Darren Meenan all linked up at Tallaght Stadium, but it is the loss of Daryl Horgan and Andy Boyle, who departed for Preston North End in the English Championship, which will have the greatest impact.

'The perception out there is that we've lost lot of good players and are somewhat vulnerable because of that,' Kenny accepts. 'But I'm certainly happy with what we've got. We've a lot of talent here. The players we've brought in are still to fulfil their potential and while I can understand why people might think that we are vulnerable, we've had this succession of players who have always stepped up when it's been needed.'

'The likes of Robbie Benson and Patrick McEleney, they are going to feel the benefits of what we achieved last season and they will improve again.' Kenny was also a busy man ensuring exciting fresh blood was brought into the dressing room. Michael Duffy (22) arrived from Celtic and will take Horgan's No. 7 jersey. 'He can play anywhere across the front, on the left, the right or through the middle. He's got really excellent movement and is a quality finisher. He gives us a goal threat.' Steven Kinsella (18) has signed a season-long loan deal from Everton after a spell with St Pat's last season, with Jamie McGrath (20) also leaving Richmond Park along with centre back Sean



MAIN MAN: PATRICK MCELENEY

The mercurial playmaker will have plenty more responsibility on his shoulders following the loss of Daryl Horgan and Ronan Finn. They're certainly broad enough to cope with the expectations. The Derry native, still only 24 but with seven years' experience of the League of Ireland, grew into himself in his first year with the club and became more influential as the months went by. The challenge now will be to perform consistently for a full campaign.

Hoare (22) who must help fill the void left by Boyle.

The Danish defender Niclas Vemmelund has ended his association with Derry City and there is also excitement surrounding Conor Clifford, the 25-year-old midfielder who lifted the FA Youth Cup with Chelsea but last pitched up with non-league side Boreham Wood just outside London. 'We've signed players who are natural, off the cuff footballers, free spirited players who are yet to fulfil their potential. It's a case of getting them used to each other, they won't all come in at once, it will be on a gradual basis because you need a reasonable degree of continuity.'

With Kenny the man at the helm that seems most important of all as they attempt to make it four titles in a row.



FIXTURE LIST

FEBRUARY

24: Shamrock Rovers (h)

MARCH

4: Sligo Rovers (a)

10: Limerick (h)

13: Derry City (a)

17: St Patrick's Athletic (h)

25: Cork City (a)

31: Drogheda United (h)

APRIL

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SEPTEMBER

1: St Patrick's Athletic (h)

15: Cork City (a)

22: Drogheda United (h)

OCTOBER

7: Finn Harps (a)

13: Bray Wanderers (h)

20: Bohemians (h)

27: Galway United (a)

VERDICT

The champions are the team to beat. If that is not already stating the blindingly obvious let's just add that they are also seen as vulnerable following more changes in personnel than Stephen Kenny would have been happy with over the winter. The loss of Andy Boyle and Daryl Horgan (both departed for Preston North End) as well as Ronan Finn, who headed back to Shamrock Rovers, is huge. Replacements have been brought in – Sean Hoare and Michael Duffy respectively – but it remains to be seen how they cope. Still, Dundalk have risen to every challenge so far and the prospect of doing the four-in-a-row is a tantalising one.



FINN HARPS

ROLL OF HONOUR

FAI Cups: 1
First Division titles: 1

AT A GLANCE

Last season: 10th
Home ground: Finn Park

COMPLETE WITH BLUE AND WHITE SCARF, DANIEL O'DONNELL WAS RECENTLY PHOTOGRAPHED PLEDGING HIS SUPPORT TO FINN HARPS THIS SEASON.

Having the celebrity crooner in their corner is fine and dandy but Harps could do with someone who can deliver a hit in front of goal - that would be sweet music indeed.

For so many years, Kevin McHugh filled that role of goal-getter, netting 186 times in 438 appearances for Donegal's League of Ireland flag-bearers.

But McHugh has now retired while the loss of Ryan Curran to Ballinamallard last month has robbed Harps of their leading 2016 striker, who chipped in with seven vital goals.

To compound matters, experienced 'keeper Richard Brush also signed for the Irish League outfit as the trickle of exits from Navenny Street threatened to match the gurgling flow of the River Finn in full spate.

Manager Ollie Horgan (below) has also waved adieu to Tony McNamee, Adam Hanlon and Dave Scully in the close season, which has further diluted the playing resources at his disposal. At least, long-serving Michael Funston is on board and set to add to his 321 appearances for the club while Horgan likes the attitude of Dylan

McGroary from the U19s.

'We've got a few players in but we've lost just as many, which isn't ideal,' acknowledged Horgan. 'If we'd kept everyone from last year I'd be hopeful of building on last year's 10th place. With the departures, realistically, it will be a challenge for everyone at the club.'

Horgan has been manager of Harps since November 2013, during which time he has steered the club to the FAI Cup semi-finals, to promotion and then consolidation in the top flight.

Last year, Harps chalked up seven wins on home turf and had enough of a competitive edge about them to keep Wexford Youths and Longford Town comfortably at bay.

'Our home form kept us up and we will need to be as resilient this time as we were last year,' said Horgan.

The difficulty for Horgan is the shift in the Premier Division goal-posts which sees the bottom three clubs relegated this year.

Even the potential safety-net of a play-off has been whipped away after the big clubs pushed a new-look structure through in place for the 2018 season.

'We're not kidding ourselves. If there was only one team to go down, most people would have us as the favourites for the drop. With three to go, we're on everyone's list and we know that. 'It's going to be three times as difficult for us to stay up now,' he said.

Horgan's fear for Harps is the fate which befell Longford last season.

'They had a poor run of results early on, became cut adrift at the foot of the battle and seemed to become disheartened.



MAIN MAN: JONNY BONNER

The midfielder has returned to the north-west for a second time after a stint with Wexford Youths and will pull the strings for Harps. The creativity skills of the Buncrana native will be vital to his team as they seek to establish a foothold in the division. 'Harps have always been strong at home and if we stick together there is no reason why we can't come through and surprise everyone,' said Bonner. Staying up will be a surprise.

'We must do all we can to ensure we avoid falling into that trap. We have to be competitive from the first game, at home to Cork, and stay competitive.'

Somehow, Horgan must conjure up a team capable of trading blows with the likes of Drogheda United, Galway United, Sligo Rovers and maybe Bray Wanderers and Bohs too, and standing firm.

So much has to go right and Horgan is entitled to tread warily.

FIXTURE LIST

FEBRUARY

24: Cork City (h)

MARCH

3: Bray Wanderers (a)
10: Galway United (h)
13: St Patrick's Athletic (a)
18: Limerick (a)
25: Sligo Rovers (h)
31: Shamrock Rovers (a)

APRIL

7: Dundalk (h)
14: Derry City (a)
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28: Bohemians (h)

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OCTOBER

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20: Drogheda United (h)
27: Bohemians (a)

VERDICT

Ollie Horgan is struggling to spy a silver lining in the clouds above the Finn Valley. He has lost a clutch of key players from last year and finding replacements on modest resources has proved tricky - a Daniel O'Donnell fund-raiser would help. With three clubs to go down, it will represent Horgan's finest feat in league management if Harps avoid the quick-sands.

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Read more about it

BACK HOME WITH A POINT TO PROVE

CONOR CLIFFORD (DUNDALK):

At 25, the centre midfielder is by no means a wet-behind-the-ears novice. After initially signing with Chelsea as a teen and captaining them to success in the FA Youth Cup, the Dubliner toiled in the lower leagues before eventually ending up with Boreham Wood. Has spoken about needing to be rejuvenated to rediscover his love of the game. He's at the right club with the ideal manager to do just that.

PAUL CORRY (SHAMROCK ROVERS):

The UCD graduate had some rotten luck with injury and after being let go by Sheffield Wednesday he attempted to rebuild his career with Northampton Town. That is where he was dealt the huge blow of suffering a cruciate ligament injury. A composed presence in the middle of the park with a wide range of passing, the 25-year-old is also one to watch with a shot from distance. It will be a challenge to regain the sort of form which earned him a move to Hillsborough, but this is a fresh start for Corry at a club which has big plans.

MICHAEL DUFFY (DUNDALK):

Already has plenty of League of Ireland experience with hometown club Derry City. His style of play – direct and dangerous with a cutting edge from the left wing – earned a move to Celtic in 2015 but things didn't work out in Glasgow. The champions have lured him to Oriel Park to fill the void left by Daryl Horgan. He's different to the Galway man in that he's a left-footer who won't cut inside as much, but Duffy's pace and eagerness to continually test the full back means defenders won't get a minute's peace.

RONAN MURRAY (GALWAY UNITED):

After nine years in England, during which time he worked under managers such as Roy Keane, Paul Jewell, Mick McCarthy (all Ipswich Town) and Paolo Di Canio (Swindon Town) the boy from Ballina has found his way back out west after Shane Keegan got the forward on board for 2017. Keane saw enough promise in Murray to hand him his Ipswich debut at the age of just 18 in 2010. Once the Cork man was sacked in January 2011, though, he was unable to establish himself at a club. He'll hope to change that now.

ALEX O'HANLON (ST PATRICK'S ATHLETIC):

Joined Liverpool at the age of 15 and despite making positive strides through the academy, the midfielder was allowed leave the club by Jurgen Klopp last summer. Huddersfield Town were interested, along with Sheffield Wednesday and Birmingham but the 20-year-old returned home and now faces the challenge of adapting to first team football and the demands it brings. There have been a number of changes at St Patrick's Athletic but the arrival of O'Hanlon is certainly one of the more interesting developments. The Dubliner is young but plenty is expected of him.

LEGEND'S VIEW - PAUL DOOLIN

LEAGUE WINNER WITH SHAMROCK ROVERS, DERRY CITY AND SHELBOURNE AS A PLAYER, AND ALSO WITH DROGHEDA UNITED (2007) AS MANAGER, THE DUBLINER SPENT ALMOST 30 YEARS AT THE COAL-FACE OF THE DOMESTIC GAME, WINNING 19 MAJOR TROPHIES IN IRISH CLUB FOOTBALL BEFORE TAKING CHARGE OF THE IRISH U19S.

Dundalk have set the standard once again ahead of the 2017 season. They have lost some terrific players – Daryl Horgan, Andy Boyle and Ronan Finn, for example – but Stephen Kenny has moved quickly to replace them.

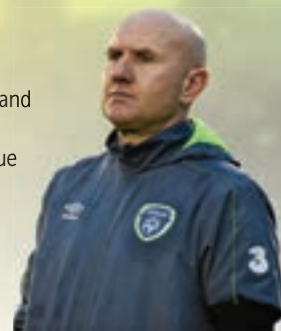
Conor Clifford has plenty of experience in England; Niclas Vemmelund was outstanding in defence for Derry last year while Jamie McGrath, who I know from the U19s, is a very fine player, who will do well for Dundalk.

To stay at the top, you need to freshen things up and I think Dundalk have a blend of players who've been around for a few years, and new signings who will be eager to achieve success.

Cork City's FAI Cup triumph can act as a spur for them. When we won the FAI Cup with Drogheda, we kicked on and won the league two years later. John Caulfield has made some smart signings and Cork will feel they can put it up to Dundalk.

Of the others, I expect Derry City, Shamrock Rovers and St Pat's to have decent seasons and there will be a fierce scramble in the lower half for teams striving to avoid the drop.

The news that three clubs were going down seemed to come out of the blue. There will be so much at stake at both ends of the table. It's going to be an exciting season.



KEY DATES

IRISH DAILY MAIL FAI CUP

FIRST ROUND: AUGUST 11-13

SECOND ROUND: AUGUST 25-27

QUARTER-FINALS:

SEPTEMBER 8-10

SEMI-FINALS: SEPTEMBER 29-1

OCTOBER

FINAL: NOVEMBER 5,

AVIVA STADIUM

EA SPORTS CUP

FIRST ROUND: MARCH 20-21

SECOND ROUND: APRIL 17

QUARTER-FINALS: MAY 1

SEMI-FINALS: AUGUST 7

FINAL: SEPTEMBER 16

CHAMPIONS LEAGUE QUALIFYING

(DUNDALK)

DRAW DATE: JUNE 19

SECOND ROUND

FIRST LEG: JULY 11-12

SECOND LEG: JULY 18-19

EUROPA LEAGUE QUALIFYING

(CORK CITY, DERRY CITY, SHAMROCK ROVERS).

DRAW DATE: JUNE 19

FIRST ROUND

FIRST LEG: JUNE 29

SECOND LEG: JULY 6

MID-SEASON BREAK: JUNE 3-15










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GALWAY UNITED

ROLL OF HONOUR

FAI Cups: 1
League Cups: 2
First Division titles: 1

AT A GLANCE

Last season: 9th
Home ground: Eamonn Deacy Park

THE WEST'S AWAKE, BRIGHT AND EARLY TOO, AS GALWAY UNITED PLAYERS WERE CLOCKING IN FOR PRE-SEASON TRAINING BEFORE THE SCHOOLS WERE OPEN.

'We were in at 8.30 three mornings a week for gym sessions, technical drills and ball work,' explained Shane Keegan, who is braced for his first season at the Galway helm after arriving from Wexford Youths.

Thorough and eager, Keegan (below) oversees a strong set-up, on and off the park, as the club has appointed '91 FAI Cup winner Johnny Glynn as head of football development and former rugby international Johnny O'Connor as strength and fitness coach.

Another Galway stalwart, Alan Murphy, who scored 73 goals for the club, is manning the trenches at U17 level.

On the playing side, Keegan feels there is strength in depth which compares favourably to last year when Galway totted up 10 wins and finished ninth.

'We've lost Ryan Connolly to Shamrock Rovers which is a blow, while John Sullivan went back

to Bray last season which unbalanced things but we've brought in Dave Cawley, Gavin Holohan and Ronan Murray to strengthen across the middle. If we can keep Ronan fit, he will be a huge asset.

'Lee Grace came with me from Wexford and will be a big addition, and we've Ciaran Nugent to challenge Conor Winn in goal.'

With the likes of Vinny Faherty, fresh from 12 goals last season, Player of the Year Kevin Devaney, Paul Sinnott, Stephen Folan and captain Colm Horgan, brother of winger Daryl, in the fold, Galway are geared up to leave a lasting imprint on the 2017 campaign.

Horgan is only 22 but has six years' service in the league and will wear the armband after Keegan overheard him giving a team talk against Wexford last year.

'It was only for a few seconds but Colm impressed me, in what he said and the way he said it. He has a touch of the Roy Keane grumpiness about him but he's a leader.' So what would be a good season for Galway? 'If we improved two or three places that would be great,' said Keegan.

'From ninth to sixth would represent progress but we know it will be tough as the league looks more competitive than last year.

'For starters, Limerick have come up and could challenge for a top four place, which would be unusual for a promoted team.'

Keegan isn't expecting to wave a magic wand across Eamonn Deacy Park but he has in mind a project which, if successful, would revive echoes of the late '80s and '90s when Galway were a serious force in the league.

'We had success at Wexford but it wasn't



MAIN MAN: RONAN MURRAY

At Ipswich, the striker was once hailed by Roy Keane as 'probably the most natural goal-scorer we've got' while Paolo di Canio saluted Murray's speed at Swindon. Should Mayo native Murray deliver on his League of Ireland bow, he could ease the scoring burden on Vinny Faherty. Keegan has liked what he has seen in pre-season and 25-year-old Murray could become the talk of Galway.

overnight; instead we built step by step and it took a few years.

'At the end of three years here, I'd like to think European football is attainable.'

In 2016, Galway racked up 44 goals, the fifth highest in the division, but they were leaky at the back – they conceded 24 goals in their final seven games.

Galway managed to keep above the water-line of trouble last year but ninth place won't be as comfortable this time around, not with three clubs to go down.

FIXTURE LIST

FEBRUARY

24: Drogheda United (h)

MARCH

3: Cork City (a)

10: Finn Harps (a)

13: Shamrock Rovers (h)

17: Bohemians (a)

25: Derry City (h)

31: Sligo Rovers (h)

APRIL

7: Bray Wanderers (a)

14: St Patrick's Athletic (h)

22: Limerick (a)

28: Dundalk (h)

MAY

5: Drogheda United (a)

12: Cork City (h)

19: Finn Harps (h)

22/23: Shamrock Rovers (a)

26: Bohemians (h)

JUNE

2: Derry City (a)

17: Sligo Rovers (a)

23: Bray Wanderers (h)

30: St Patrick's Athletic (a)

JULY

7: Limerick (h)

14: Dundalk (a)

21: Drogheda United (h)

28: Cork City (a)

AUGUST

4: Finn Harps (a)

18: Shamrock Rovers (h)

SEPTEMBER

1: Bohemians (a)

15: Derry City (h)

22: Sligo Rovers (h)

OCTOBER

7: Bray Wanderers (a)

13: St Patrick's Athletic (h)

21: Limerick (a)

27: Dundalk (h)

VERDICT

Shane Keegan is targeting an improvement of three places on last year's ninth for Galway who have strengthened, on and off the park, despite losing Ryan Connolly. They will need to up their game as everything points to a more competitive division. Keegan is bright, enthusiastic and has a thirst for knowledge. His body of work at Wexford, where he was given time to find his feet, was impressive. At Galway, he must land running.

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LIMERICK

ROLL OF HONOUR

Premier Division titles: 2
FAI Cups: 2
League Cups: 3
First Division titles: 4

AT A GLANCE

Last season: First Division champions
Home ground: Market's Field

MOST PROMOTED CLUBS HAVE A TWIRL IN THE PREMIER DIVISION SPOTLIGHT BEFORE SHUFFLING OFF INTO THE SHADOWS, LEAVING THE MAIN PLAYERS TO FIGHT FOR THE STAGE.

Occasionally, a new arrival provides a story-line with a twist, like Sporting Fingal who finished a close fourth in 2010.

This year, the grapevine is buzzing with talk of Limerick FC under Martin Russell.

Not one manager reckons they will struggle while many are tipping them for a top six finish or perhaps better. The respect is easy to understand.

For starters, Limerick blitzed the First Division last year, like no other club before, winning 24 games out of 28 and losing only once.

Secondly, instead of resting on their laurels and putting trust in the players who secured promotion, they have bulked up their squad. Russell (below), appointed in July 2014, doesn't do hype and is pragmatic about his ambition for 2017. 'We're aiming for the top half of the table,' he said.

Solid league stalwarts such as Brendan Clarke, from St Pat's, and Dave O'Connor and Dean Clarke, both with Shamrock Rovers last term, have signed up for duty.

The exciting former Cork City teenager Chiedozie Ogbene will offer pace and an X-factor in attack, French midfielder Bastien Hery has

arrived from Accrington Stanley, while Russell has secured a Brazilian forward who could be anything, Rodrigo Tosi.

The contact came through Joe Gamble, who knew of Tosi from his time in Brunei, just one of many ports of call for the veteran centre-forward. In 14 years, Tosi has signed for 14 different clubs, from Greece and Switzerland to Iran and Indonesia, from Brunei to Brazil. Along the way he's scored a goal every other game.

He could be brilliant, or he could bomb out, but Russell, in fairness, doesn't sign players with exotic CVs.

'Rodrigo is a big strong lad, very good in the air, and hugely experienced. He's not a typical Brazilian,' said Russell.

At 34, Tosi is no nipper but neither is John O'Flynn, also 34, who will help share the duties in attack. 'Every time John played last year, his ability was obvious. He remains a quality player.'

Under owner Pat O'Sullivan, the Limerick FC project has gradually gathered speed. The club have returned to their spiritual home of the Market's Field where 'grandparents are bringing their grandkids and telling them they used to watch Limerick here,' said Russell.

'It's a massive lift for the club to be back playing there again.'

In the '60s, Limerick were a force in Irish club football, while Eoin Hand took them further with League (1981) and FAI Cup (1982) glory.

There is a huge appetite for a successful football team in the Treaty City, for all that rugby, gaelic games, boxing and rowing exert their emotional pull.

This is the city of Kevin Fitzpatrick, Al Finucane and Steve Finnan, a city crying out for a new



MAIN MAN: SHANE DUGGAN

The surname Duggan carries clout in Limerick football circles as Ger Duggan was a mainstay of the team which won the League and FAI Cup under Eoin Hand. These days, it is Shane Duggan who symbolises the heart and soul of the team. Now entering his fourth year at the club, Duggan has been promoted twice and relegated. In that time, he has been a constant rallying presence.

generation of football heroes, and Russell may give them something to shout about.

'Dundalk set the standard and anyone who finishes above them can think about winning the league. For us, a top half finish would represent success while European football would be the three-year aim,' he said.

'Nothing is easy in this league and this could be the most competitive 12-team league I can remember. We've had a good pre-season and there is a strong focus within the group.'

Two years ago, when they last figured in the Premier Division tale, Limerick didn't win any of their first 21 games and were virtually relegated by the mid-season break.

That won't happen this time. They are here to stay.



FIXTURE LIST

FEBRUARY

25: Sligo Rovers (h)

MARCH

5: Derry City (a)

10: Dundalk (a)

13: Bohemians (h)

18: Finn Harps (h)

25: Bray Wanderers (a)

APRIL

1: Cork City (h)

7: St Patrick's Athletic (a)

15: Drogheda United (h)

22: Galway United (a)

28: Shamrock Rovers (a)

MAY

6: Sligo Rovers (a)

13: Derry City (h)

20: Dundalk (h)

23: Bohemians (a)

26: Finn Harps (a)

JUNE

2: Bray Wanderers (h)

16: Cork City (a)

24: St Patrick's Athletic (h)

30: Drogheda United (a)

JULY

7: Galway United (a)

15: Shamrock Rovers (h)

22: Sligo Rovers (h)

30: Derry City (a)

AUGUST

4: Dundalk (a)

19: Bohemians (h)

SEPTEMBER

2: Finn Harps (h)

15: Bray Wanderers (a)

23: Cork City (h)

OCTOBER

7: St Patrick's Athletic (a)

14: Drogheda United (h)

21: Galway United (h)

27: Shamrock Rovers (a)

VERDICT

When Martin Russell led Limerick to the top flight two years ago, they never got out of first gear and were relegated almost before the mid-season break. This time, it's different. Russell has most of the props he wanted in place and is targeting a top six finish. For all of the optimism sweeping across the Treaty City, consolidation would represent progress for a club that has come a long way quite quickly.



SHAMROCK ROVERS

PREMIER DIVISION

SEASON 2017

ROLL OF HONOUR

Premier Division titles: 17
FAI Cups: 24
League Cups: 2
First Division titles: 1

AT A GLANCE

Last season: 4th
Home ground: Tallaght Stadium

AS HIS CLUB'S FIFTH MANAGER IN FIVE YEARS, STEPHEN BRADLEY IS AWARE OF THE BOLD PRINT IN THE JOB SPEC AT SHAMROCK ROVERS, AS WELL AS THE CONSEQUENCES IF TARGETS ARE MISSED, BUT IT DOESN'T FAZE HIM IN THE SLIGHTEST.

'You would only fear it if you weren't doing your job properly,' he said.

'It's about preparation and about being ready, which I feel we are. Our aim is to close the gap on the three teams who finished above us last season. If we do that, it's progress.

'Dundalk are the strongest team. Take them out, and there is not much between everyone else.' As it happens, Rovers play the three amigos, Dundalk, Derry City and Cork City, as well as city rivals Bohemians, in their first five games. But Bradley doesn't see that as a burden.

'The way we look at it, it's as much about those teams having big games against us, as we do against them,' he said.

To some, that remark may smack of self-importance but it's a reminder that Rovers, the most decorated club team in Irish football, have always aimed high.

Bradley knows what it's like to taste success in the famed green and white hooped jersey, having played under Michael O'Neill in 2009 and in 2010 when the title was reclaimed.

On his return to Tallaght, initially as coach under Pat Fenlon, then caretaker manager before his formal appointment as head coach, Bradley assessed what was required for the Hoops to

reclaim the high ground.

'I felt it was time to change the squad, and also the dynamic within it,' he said.

Bradley didn't hang about, as he gathered up a raft of new signings, including three players from champions Dundalk: Ronan Finn (below), Darren Meenan and Michael O'Connor.

Of those, the signing of Finn was the headline-grabber as the northsider returns to the club where he scored 33 goals in 174 games. And now he's captain.

'Ronan's game has matured in the past three years to the point where he's now the best midfielder in the League. He continues to scores goals and has a bit of everything now in his game. He can be a leader in our team,' said Bradley.

Meenan is a busy winger who thrived for Dundalk while O'Connor is a highly-rated Irish U19 forward whose opportunities were limited at Oriel Park.

'I've watched Michael playing under-age for Ireland and have spoken to people who regard him as a top player. When I heard he was available, it was a no-brainer to sign him.'

In addition, Ryan Connolly has arrived from Galway United, David McAllister has returned from England where he was most recently with Stevenage, while Danny Devine, Paul Corry and Roberto Lopes are also new to the Rovers fold. There are two new keepers on the block, Israeli-born Canadian Tomer Chencinski and Kevin Horgan, brother of Daryl (Preston) and Colm (Galway).

With defender Luke Byrne back after a long-term knee injury, the first Rovers XI on February 24 at Oriel Park may bear little resemblance to the XI



MAIN MAN: STEPHEN BRADLEY

In many ways it's all about the head coach. He was given half a term to assess what was in front of him and delivered European qualification, before overseeing a close season overhaul as players were let go, and others came in. With so many new faces, it will require master alchemy by Bradley to concoct the winning formula.

which finished the 2016 season.

A strong pre-season indicated that the new faces have started to become familiar with one another. 'I played with or against a lot of the lads I've brought in. I know their ability, and their character,' said Bradley.

As befits a former creative schemer, Bradley's philosophy is 'to get the ball down and play', which will evoke memories of Rovers' traditional passing game.

'Success won't happen overnight but our intention is to produce strong performances and pull the crowds back to Tallaght on Friday nights. Our number one objective is to win games.'

FIXTURE LIST

FEBRUARY

24: Dundalk (a)

MARCH

3: Bohemians (h)

10: Derry City (h)

13: Galway United (a)

17: Cork City (h)

25: St Patrick's Athletic (a)

31: Finn Harps (h)

APRIL

7: Drogheda United (a)

14: Sligo Rovers (h)

21: Bray Wanderers (a)

28: Limerick (h)

MAY

5: Dundalk (h)

12: Bohemians (a)

19: Derry City (a)

22/23: Galway United (h)

26: Cork City (a)

JUNE

2: St Patrick's Athletic (h)

16: Finn Harps (a)

23: Drogheda United (h)

JULY

1: Sligo Rovers (a)

7: Bray Wanderers (h)

15: Limerick (a)

21: Dundalk (a)

28: Bohemians (h)

AUGUST

4: Derry City (h)

18: Galway United (a)

SEPTEMBER

1: Cork City (h)

15: St Patrick's Athletic (a)

22: Finn Harps (h)

OCTOBER

7: Drogheda United (a)

13: Sligo Rovers (h)

20: Bray Wanderers (a)

27: Limerick (h)

VERDICT

Since their last league championship in 2011, the Tallaght air has been heavy with anticipation, perhaps too heavy. Rovers have had gaps between titles before, notably 1964 to 1984 and 1994 to 2010 so five years is nothing new for fans of a certain vintage. Ronan Finn is a fine capture and will lead by example as skipper for a team capable of improving on last year's fourth place.



SLIGO ROVERS

ROLL OF HONOUR

Premier Division titles: 3
FAI Cups: 5
League Cups: 2
First Division titles: 2

AT A GLANCE

Last season: 5th
Home ground:
The Showgrounds

AS THE MAJOR HONOURS WERE CARVED UP LAST YEAR, AND THE EUROPEAN SLOTS CONFIRMED, A REMARKABLE ACCOMPLISHMENT ALMOST SLIPPED BY UNNOTICED.

It was achieved by Sligo Rovers, the only team to inflict defeats on the top three – Dundalk, Cork City and Derry City. And away from home, too. That Sligo weren't rewarded with a UEFA passport for such feats was explained by a sluggish start and a nagging capacity to lose on the road to teams below them, including Bray (twice), Bohemians (twice) and Finn Harps, as well as drawing at lowly Longford. Should manager Dave Robertson (below) iron out those inconsistencies there is no reason why the Bit O' Red can't rattle a few more cages this season, and push for Europe.

'We finished with 49 points last year and the aim is to get to 50 as soon as possible, and see where that leaves us,' said Robertson, ahead of his second season in charge.

With an opening run of four games against Limerick, Dundalk, St Pat's and Cork, Robertson is aware of the need to land running.

'Pre-season has gone well and the fitness levels of the players were ahead of last year, which is a plus. We know we will have to be at our maximum from the very first game.

'Two of the first four games are at The Showgrounds where we only lost twice in 17 games last year and we hope to make things

uncomfortable for visiting teams again.'

To fine-tune his players for the challenges ahead, Robertson brought over a specialist skills coach, Lee Johnson, for the final two weeks of pre-season.

For many, the League of Ireland is no place for young men, at least not in attack. But Sligo will place their trust in a pair of 19-year-old close season signings, Matt Stevens and Jonah Ayunga, to bring an extra dimension to their firepower.

'I believe Matt and Jonah will make an impact and will add to our 10-goal players of last year, Raff Cretaro and Kieran Sadlier. We've also got Danny Kearns who scored freely in pre-season and we hope he carries that form on into the League.'

Cretaro has made 471 appearances for Sligo and 530 overall in an enduring League career.

At 35, the Tubbercurry Tornado remains an integral part of Robertson's first team squad. 'Raff has 16 years' experience in the league, which is invaluable, both inside and out the dressing room,' Robertson said.

Many Sligo managers have used the club as a springboard for managerial advancement across the Irish Sea but Robertson, aware that 12 managers lost their jobs in England in January alone, is contentedly bedded down under Ben Bulben.

'I took on a project at Sligo and I'm under contract until the end of the season. I'm really enjoying it here and I'd love to continue after that,' he said.

'There is a strong football feel to the town, the support for the team is fantastic and the facilities are excellent.'



MAIN MAN: RAFFAELE CRETARO

The Tubbercurry Tornado has been around Sligo almost as long as Ben Bulben and his enthusiasm shows no sign of waning as he heads into his mid-30s. As Cretaro may get less game time than he'd like, there could be greater responsibility thrust on John Russell, an industrious, skilful, midfielder who knows the league, and Sligo, inside out.

As Sligo gear up for the season, a familiar figure is missing in the heart of defence, Gavin Peers. For a decade, embracing 346 appearances, Peers was an immovable force in the Sligo rearguard, as the club won the title, three FAI Cups, League Cup and Setanta Cup.

His departure to St Pat's leaves a void. 'Gavin was a leader for us and will be a huge loss,' acknowledged Robertson.

How Sligo will cope without Peers remains to be seen but should they pick up where they left off in 2016 under former Royal Marine Robertson, the road ahead may rise up to meet them.



FIXTURE LIST

FEBRUARY

25: Limerick (a)

MARCH

4: Dundalk (h)

10: St Patrick's Athletic (h)

13: Cork City (a)

18: Bray Wanderers (h)

25: Finn Harps (a)

31: Galway United (a)

APRIL

8: Bohemians (h)

14: Shamrock Rovers (a)

22: Derry City (h)

28: Drogheda United (a)

MAY

6: Limerick (h)

12: Dundalk (a)

19: St Patrick's Athletic (a)

22/23: Cork City (h)

26: Bray Wanderers (h)

JUNE

2: Finn Harps (h)

17: Galway United (h)

23: Bohemians (a)

JULY

1: Shamrock Rovers (h)

9: Derry City (a)

15: Drogheda United (h)

22: Limerick (a)

29: Dundalk (h)

AUGUST

5: St Patrick's Athletic (h)

18: Cork City (a)

SEPTEMBER

2: Bray Wanderers (h)

15: Finn Harps (a)

22: Galway United (a)

OCTOBER

7: Bohemians (h)

13: Shamrock Rovers (a)

21: Derry City (h)

27: Drogheda United (a)

VERDICT

For a managerial first-timer in the league, Dave Robertson did an excellent job last term as he ensured Sligo were not only competitive but capable of giving the top three a bloody nose. It will demand much of the former Royal Marine to break into the top four, which is his aim, but strong home form should ensure Sligo avoid any pot-holes.

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ST PATRICK'S ATHLETIC

ROLL OF HONOUR

Premier Division titles: 8
FAI Cups: 3
League Cups: 4

AT A GLANCE

Last season: 7th
Home ground: Richmond Park

WHEN YOU'VE DELIVERED AN SSE AIRTRICITY LEAGUE TITLE, THE FAI CUP FOR THE FIRST TIME IN 53 YEARS AND A COUPLE OF LEAGUE CUPS, YOU CAN EXPECT TO BE CUT SOME SLACK FOR ONE SEASON OF INDIFFERENT FORM.

But Liam Buckley knows the tolerance levels around Inchicore will start flashing red should St Pat's stumble to a repeat of last year's seventh place.

'It was hugely disappointing season from my end, for the players and for the supporters. It's gone, it's finished. We start again and we are looking forward, not back,' he said.

Missing out in Europe for the first time on Buckley's second watch as manager, which began in November 2011, hit the Saints in the pocket as the absence of a UEFA dividend affected his budget.

While others found extra to spend on players, Buckley had less financial muscle than he'd have liked in the close season horse-trading. Even so, he snapped up a few proven colts, including Gavin Peers, Kurtis Byrne, Patrick Cregg and Barry Murphy.

'Gavin should add a lot to the group. He's a very competitive footballer, a good talker, and a winner,' observed Buckley (below).

As a plus, Buckley also persuaded Alex O'Hanlon to rock up at 'Richer' after his stint at Liverpool. Highly rated at under age level, O'Hanlon will find out pretty sharpish how the thrust and parry of the League of Ireland works. If he takes flight, the

Saints could soar.

Goals shouldn't be an issue for the Saints as Christy Fagan, a proven poacher, can hardly do worse than last year's 10, which was the number Byrne bagged at Bohs, while Conan Byrne's return from the wide position continues to stagger – he needs one more goal to join the League's 'Centurions Club'.

With the Dennehy brothers, Darren and Billy, Ian Bermingham and Ger O'Brien, newly-appointed as first team coach, Buckley has plenty of League old salts to lean on.

Yet, there are uncertainties about the chemistry within the Saints' lab. Sean Hoare, Jamie McGrath and Stephen Kinsella all left for Dundalk, while the engine room lacks the presence of a Gormley or Osam of old, or a Russell or Bolger of more recent times.

Buckley has never been afraid to give youth its fling and the likes of U19 grads, JJ Lunny, Sam Verdon, Jack Bayly and Daragh Markey can expect to have greater responsibility thrust upon them.

Buckley first graced the League with Shelbourne in the late '70s and knows a cut-throat scene when he sees one. By his estimation, this could be 'the most competitive league for many years.'

'Dundalk, Cork City, Shamrock Rovers will all look to improve on what they had last year, the likes of Galway and Sligo have gotten stronger, while Limerick are a lot more advanced than most teams that come up from the First Division.

'We'd love to make the top three and qualify for Europe or fourth, which could also get you there, depending on who wins the (FAI) Cup.

'It will be difficult for all teams as there will be an intense battle at both ends of the table. With three going down, there will be an edge to every game,



MAIN MAN: CHRISTY FAGAN

Goals pay the rent and Fagan does more than his share with 82 in 180 appearances, in all competitions. Should the artful dodger of the penalty box break the 'ton' this year, the Saints will be safe. Just like Mark Ennis and Trevor Molloy in Pat's teams of the past, keeping Fagan fit is vital lest the 'Richer' faithful start to fret.

which will be good for the League.'

Buckley isn't looking beyond the opening game of the season, at home to Bray Wanderers.

'For us it's about playing Bray. We met in the Leinster Senior Cup in pre-season, which we won and I was impressed with our attitude and application, but I wouldn't read too much into that result. The League is what matters.'

Home form is massive for the Saints who contrived to lose seven times at 'Richer' last season, and leaked 23 goals.

A win and a clean sheet on opening night could point to better things. Buckley will certainly hope so.



FIXTURE LIST

FEBRUARY

24: Bray Wanderers (h)

MARCH

3: Drogheda United (a)

10: Sligo Rovers (a)

13: Finn Harps (h)

17: Dundalk (a)

25: Shamrock Rovers (h)

31: Bohemians (a)

APRIL

7: Limerick (h)

14: Galway United (a)

21: Cork City (h)

28: Derry City (a)

MAY

5: Bray Wanderers (a)

12: Drogheda United (h)

19: Sligo Rovers (h)

22/23: Finn Harps (a)

26: Dundalk (h)

JUNE

2: Shamrock Rovers (a)

16: Bohemians (h)

24: Limerick (a)

30: Galway United (h)

JULY

7: Cork City (a)

14: Derry City (h)

21: Bray Wanderers (h)

28: Drogheda United (a)

AUGUST

5: Sligo Rovers (a)

18: Finn Harps (h)

SEPTEMBER

1: Dundalk (a)

15: Shamrock Rovers (h)

22: Bohemians (a)

OCTOBER

7: Limerick (h)

13: Galway United (a)

20: Cork City (h)

27: Derry City (a)

VERDICT

It's hard to know what to make of the Saints after last year's struggles. On the one hand, they have made some shrewd signings, notably Gavin Peers and Alex O'Hanlon, but there is an absence of street-craft in the midfield trenches, which may count against them when the bullets are whizzing about. Not being in Europe affected Liam Buckley's budget which will thrust more responsibility on the U19 graduates.



ATHLONE TOWN

IT'S ALL ABOUT CONSOLIDATION FOR MANAGER COLIN FORTUNE AFTER ONE OF THE MOST DIFFICULT YEARS IN EXISTENCE FOR THE LEAGUE OF IRELAND'S OLDEST CLUB. THERE MAY ALSO BE INTERESTING TIMES AHEAD AT LISSYWOLLEN WITH THE PROSPECT OF INVESTMENT FROM PORTUGAL.

HOW IS YOUR SQUAD SHAPING UP?

'We've had a good, tough pre-season schedule and I've been happy with how it's gone. We've a very young squad to which we'd hope to add some experience.'

EMERGING TALENT?

'Sean McGrane, who's a 19-year-old left winger from Athlone.

'He's come through the underage academy at the club, having joined us at 15. He made his debut last year and scored. We've high hopes for him.'

WHAT ARE YOUR EXPECTATIONS?

'We want to consolidate and bring stability to the club this season.

'We'll give the young players another year's experience in the league as we build foundations for the future, bringing the club forward over a period of time.'

MAIN CONTENDERS FOR PROMOTION?

'It's very hard to see past Waterford and Longford.'

DOES THE FIRST DIVISION LOOK MORE COMPETITIVE THIS YEAR?

'It definitely does. Even Cabinteely and ourselves will hope to be more competitive than we were last year.'

FIXTURE LIST

FEB 24 v Waterford (H)	MAY 5 v Cobh Ramblers (H)	JULY 14 v Cabinteely (H)
MAR 3 v Wexford (A)	MAY 12 v Shelbourne (A)	JULY 21 v UCD (A)
MAR 10 v Longford Town (H)	MAY 19 v Cabinteely (A)	JULY 28 v Waterford (A)
MAR 18 v Cobh Ramblers (A)	MAY 26 v UCD (H)	AUG 4 v Wexford (H)
MAR 25 v Shelbourne (H)	JUNE 2 v Waterford (H)	AUG 19 v Longford Town (A)
MAR 31 v Cabinteely (H)	JUNE 3-15 MID-SEASON BREAK	SEPT 1 v Cobh Ramblers (H)
APR 7 v UCD (A)	JUNE 16 v Wexford (A)	SEPT 15 v Shelbourne (A)
APR 14 v Waterford (A)	JUNE 23 v Longford Town (H)	SEPT 22 v Cabinteely (A)
APR 21 v Wexford (H)	JULY 1 v Cobh Ramblers (A)	OCT 7 v UCD (H)
APR 29 v Longford Town (A)	JULY 7 v Shelbourne (H)	

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Carbohydrate-based foods (e.g. bread, cereals, pasta) are important energy providers for exercise and sport.

MILK IT!

As part of a balanced diet, three servings from the 'milk, yogurt and cheese' food group are recommended each day, increasing to five daily servings between the ages of 9-18 years.

DAIRY-LICIOUS!

Milk, yogurt and cheese are rich in protein. A glass of milk, a smoothie or a yogurt drink can easily be enjoyed pre- or post-exercise.

DRINK UP

Drink plenty of fluids throughout the day to ensure you are adequately hydrated when you start your sports session; and rehydrate afterwards to replace fluid lost.

ASK THE EXPERT

If you play sport at an intense or competitive level, ensure you follow the guidance of a sports dietitian who can tailor dietary advice to your individual needs.

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SEASON 2017

FIRST DIVISION



CABINTEELY

HAVING FINISHED BOTTOM AND THEN SEVENTH IN THEIR FIRST TWO SEASONS IN THE LEAGUE, THE SENSE AT STADBROOK, WITH THREE-TIME FIRST DIVISION WINNER PAT DEVLIN IN AS BOSS COUPLED WITH GOING SEMI-PROFESSIONAL, IS THAT CABO COULD WELL MOUNT A CHALLENGE THIS YEAR.

HOW IS YOUR SQUAD SHAPING UP?

'I must say we'd be pleased with what we've got. We're trying to restructure the place and be a bit more professional right across the board with everything. The future looks a little brighter in that sense.'

AN EMERGING TALENT TO LOOK OUT FOR?

'We've quite a few good young players. Stephen Ball; Paul Fox, a talented striker who was there last year. We then got two good young defenders in Andrew McGovern and Adam Maher and we've young Joe Doyle, who did well last year.'

WHAT ARE YOUR EXPECTATIONS?

'I've never gone into a club not expecting to challenge. I wouldn't go to a club at any level and say we're not going to give this a go. We've a tough start against UCD and Waterford, but we'll give it our best shot.'

WHO DO YOU SEE AS BEING THE MAIN CONTENDERS FOR PROMOTION?

'The teams coming down are usually strong, so that puts Longford up there as they've retained most of their players.
'I think UCD will be strong as they've a talented squad while Waterford are trying to do what Limerick did last year and buy their way out of the league, and will probably succeed in doing so.'

FIXTURE LIST

FEB 24 v UCD (H)
MAR 3 v Waterford (A)
MAR 10 v Wexford Youths (H)
MAR 18 v Longford Town (A)
MAR 25 v Cobh Ramblers (H)
MAR 31 v Athlone Town (A)
APR 7 v Shelbourne (H)
APR 14 v UCD (A)
APR 21 v Waterford (H)
APR 28 v Wexford Youths (A)
MAY 5 v Longford Town (H)
MAY 13 v Cobh Ramblers (A)
MAY 19 v Athlone Town (H)
MAY 26 v Shelbourne (A)
JUNE 2 v UCD (H)
JUNE 3-15 MID-SEASON BREAK
JUNE 16 v Waterford (A)
JUNE 23 v Wexford Youths (H)
JULY 1 v Longford Town (A)
JULY 7 v Cobh Ramblers (H)
JULY 14 v Athlone Town (A)
JULY 21 v Shelbourne (H)
JULY 28 v UCD (A)
AUG 4 v Waterford (H)
AUG 18 v Wexford Youths (A)
SEPT 1 v Longford Town (H)
SEPT 16 v Cobh Ramblers (A)
SEPT 22 v Athlone Town (H)
OCT 7 v Shelbourne (A)

Manager:
Pat Devlin

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FOOD & FOOTBALL - EAT TO WIN!

Nutrition is an essential component in optimal performance and the enjoyment of sports and exercise. After genetic factors and training, nutrition is the next biggest factor in determining optimal performance for football players. Red meat is a very valuable component to the athlete's diet for a number of reasons.

Protein

Lean red meat (such as beef, lamb and pork) is an excellent source of protein which is an essential ingredient for building muscle and strength. Protein also has an important role to play in recovery after a sporting event. Post training snacks rich in carbohydrate and protein can help to enhance the recovery of energy reserves and should be planned after all training sessions.

Iron

The mineral iron is involved in the transport of oxygen around the body. An adequate iron intake is essential for athletes, as intense training can lead to increased iron losses. Females, vegetarians and people on weight reducing diets are especially vulnerable to iron deficiency. Signs of iron deficiency anaemia can be fatigue, shortness of breath and weakness. Red meat is an excellent source of iron and in addition, the actual meat protein helps to improve the absorption of iron from cereals and vegetables eaten at the same time as meat. Therefore to boost your iron intake, try to include lean red meat in your diet at least 3 or 4 times per week.

Other benefits of meat

Lean red meat is also low in fat but a great source of many vitamins and minerals which are essential in maintaining a healthy active body. These include: selenium, zinc vitamin D, vitamin A as well as the B group vitamins B1, B2, niacin, B6 and B12. It also contains several other less well known substances that have an essential role to play in the body's day to day function. In conclusion, lean red meat has an important role to play in a healthy diet. It provides a wide range of nutrients and because of its leanness, does so without contributing excess fat to the diet. For further information on diet and sports or to find a specialist sports dietitian, go to www.indi.ie

Written by consultant dietitian
on behalf of **Bord Bia**

SEASON 2017

FIRST DIVISION



COBH RAMBLERS

LAST YEAR, STEPHEN HENDERSON'S SIDE LIVED UP TO THEIR PRE-SEASON BILLING AS DARK HORSES BY MAKING THE PLAY-OFFS. FOLLOWING THE LOSS OF KEY PLAYERS, EXPECTATIONS ARE MORE CONSERVATIVE FOR 2017.

HOW IS YOUR SQUAD SHAPING UP FOR THE NEW SEASON?

'We've lost some good players. Shane O'Connor and Gary Comerford have gone to Waterford while Kevin Mulcahy has taken a break. We've managed to keep the rest and added to it.'

AN EMERGING TALENT TO LOOK OUT FOR?

'We've signed Ryan Hogan, a 22-year-old centre-half, who's back from America. I've high hopes for all my players because they are all very young.'

WHAT ARE YOUR REALISTIC EXPECTATIONS?

'What we want to do is win more than we lose. We got 50 points last year. Can we beat that?'



Ian Mylod

FIXTURE LIST

FEB 24 v Longford Town (H)
MAR 3 v UCD (A)
MAR 11 v Cobh Ramblers (A)
MAR 17 v Waterford (H)
MAR 25 v Athlone Town (A)
MAR 31 v Wexford (H)
APR 7 v Cabinteely (A)
APR 15 v Longford Town (A)
APR 21 v UCD (H)
APR 28 v Cobh Ramblers (H)
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AUG 4 v UCD (H)
AUG 18 v Cobh Ramblers (H)
SEPT 1 v Waterford (A)
SEPT 15 v Athlone Town (H)
SEPT 22 v Wexford (A)
OCT 7 v Cabinteely (H)



LONGFORD TOWN

ALAN MATHEWS HAS KEPT THE BACKBONE OF LAST YEAR'S SQUAD AND THEY RIGHTFULLY GO INTO THE SEASON AS ONE OF THE FAVOURITES TO TAKE THE PROMOTION PLACE.

HOW IS YOUR SQUAD SHAPING UP FOR THE NEW SEASON?

'We've a lot of new players and it's just about gelling that into place before the start. I'm happy with the squad I've got.'

HAVE YOU AN EMERGING TALENT THAT WE SHOULD LOOK OUT FOR?

'We've young Dan Beya, who's just 17, and is very good. Tristan Noack-Hofman is still only 18, Karl Chambers is 19. We've a lot of good young lads who'll have a part to play in our season.'

WHAT ARE YOUR REALISTIC EXPECTATIONS?

'Look, we've got to try to get back to the Premier Division. And there is only one way back and everybody know what that is.'

NO QUALMS ABOUT BEING ONE OF THE FAVOURITES?

'That's fine. I've no problem with people putting that tag on us. It's up to us to live up to that when we play.'

FIXTURE LIST

FEB 24 v Shelbourne (A)
MAR 4 v Cobh Ramblers (H)
MAR 10 v Athlone Town (A)
MAR 18 v Cabinteely (H)
MAR 25 v UCD (A)
APR 1 v Waterford (H)
APR 7 v Wexford Youths (A)
APR 15 v Shelbourne (H)
APR 22 v Cobh Ramblers (A)
APR 29 v Athlone Town (H)
MAY 5 v Cabinteely (A)
MAY 13 v UCD (H)
MAY 19 v Waterford (A)
MAY 27 v Wexford Youths (H)
JUNE 2 v Shelbourne (A)
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JUNE 17 v Cobh Ramblers (H)
JUNE 23 v Athlone Town (A)
JULY 1 v Cabinteely (H)
JULY 7 v UCD (A)
JULY 15 v Waterford (H)
JULY 21 v Wexford Youths (A)
JULY 29 v Shelbourne (H)
AUG 5 v Cobh Ramblers (A)
AUG 19 v Athlone Town (H)
SEPT 1 v Cabinteely (A)
SEPT 16 v UCD (H)
SEPT 22 v Waterford (A)
OCT 7 v Wexford Youths (H)

HAVING SURPRISINGLY STRUGGLED TO MOUNT A CHALLENGE AS THEY FINISHED SIXTH LAST SEASON, SHELBOURNE, IN OWEN HEARY'S FIRST FULL SEASON AT THE HELM, LOOK BETTER PLACED TO BE IN THE MIX THIS YEAR WITH A MORE EXPERIENCED, STRONGER LOOKING SQUAD.

HOW IS YOUR SQUAD SHAPING UP?

'Though pre-season has gone well with wins over Bohemians and St Pat's, it's all about fitness and shape. We've a good blend of youth and experienced players.'

AN EMERGING TALENT TO LOOK OUT FOR?

'Dylan Grimes has come on. Dayle Rooney is also one to watch. He reminds me a bit of (Chris) Forrester and Weso (Wes Hoolahan). He has ability and a good left foot. He can play on the left or in the number 10 role.'

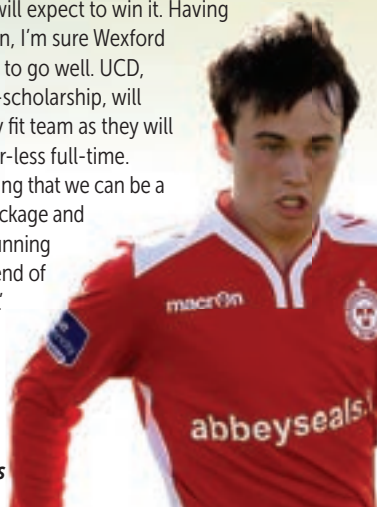
WHAT ARE YOUR REALISTIC EXPECTATIONS?

'The only way you can get promotion this season is by winning the league. We have to be realistic and say that's our aim.'

MAIN CONTENDERS FOR PROMOTION?

'Waterford have the money. I would see them and Longford as the two favourites that everyone will expect to win it. Having come down, I'm sure Wexford will expect to go well. UCD, though all-scholarship, will have a very fit team as they will be more-or-less full-time. 'We're hoping that we can be a surprise package and be in the running come the end of the season.'

Dylan Grimes



FIXTURE LIST

FEB 24 v Longford Town (H)
MAR 3 v UCD (A)
MAR 11 v Cobh Ramblers (A)
MAR 17 v Waterford (H)
MAR 25 v Athlone Town (A)
MAR 31 v Wexford (H)
APR 7 v Cabinteely (A)
APR 15 v Longford Town (A)
APR 21 v UCD (H)
APR 28 v Cobh Ramblers (H)
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AUG 4 v UCD (H)
AUG 18 v Cobh Ramblers (H)
SEPT 1 v Waterford (A)
SEPT 15 v Athlone Town (H)
SEPT 22 v Wexford (A)
OCT 7 v Cabinteely (H)

UCD HAVE GONE BACK TO BASICS WITH AN ALL-SCHOLARSHIP SQUAD THIS YEAR AND, WHILE THAT MEANS THE PRESSURE MAY BE OFF MANAGER COLLIE O'NEILL, A CHALLENGE MAY NOT BE SO UNEXPECTED.

HOW IS YOUR SQUAD SHAPING UP?

'Our oldest player will be 22. The plus side of being all-scholarship is that I will have them almost on a full-time basis. When the college is closed for Easter and summer holidays, we'll be able to have daytime training sessions. As is, because they are all on campus anyway, I have them in early morning doing extra gym sessions.'

AN EMERGING TALENT TO LOOK OUT FOR?

'I'd have to say that applies to the whole squad.'

I couldn't really single out anyone in particular who is going to be fantastic in the next year or so. They all have potential. 'I do think we've the best young players in the country.'

WHAT ARE YOUR EXPECTATIONS?

'I don't think we'll be competing to win it. Especially so, given only one team goes up. 'I think we'll lack experience in the bigger games when we play the likes of Waterford, Longford and Shels.'

MAIN CONTENDERS FOR PROMOTION?

'Waterford will probably be the clear favourites while Longford will be there or thereabouts. 'I think Cobh will build on what they did last year and Owen Heary will have Shels well organised.'

Collie O'Neill



FIXTURE LIST

FEB 24 v Cabinteely (A)
MAR 3 v Shelbourne (H)
MAR 10 v Waterford (H)
MAR 17 v Wexford Youths (A)
MAR 25 v Longford Town (H)
APR 1 v Cobh Ramblers (A)
APR 7 v Athlone Town (H)
APR 14 v Cabinteely (H)
APR 21 v Shelbourne (A)
APR 28 v Waterford (A)
MAY 5 v Wexford Youths (H)
MAY 13 v Longford Town (A)
MAY 19 v Cobh Ramblers (H)
MAY 26 v Athlone Town (A)
JUNE 2 v Cabinteely (A)
JUNE 3-15 MID-SEASON BREAK
JUNE 16 v Shelbourne (H)
JUNE 23 v Waterford (H)
JUNE 30 v Wexford Youths (A)
JULY 7 v Longford Town (H)
JULY 15 v Cobh Ramblers (A)
JULY 21 v Athlone Town (H)
JULY 28 v Cabinteely (H)
AUG 4 v Shelbourne (A)
AUG 18 v Waterford (A)
SEPT 1 v Wexford Youths (H)
SEPT 16 v Longford Town (A)
SEPT 22 v Cobh Ramblers (H)
OCT 7 v Athlone Town (A)



WATERFORD FC

THE INVESTMENT FROM LEE POWER AND A CLUB RESTRUCTURING HAS THE BUZZ BACK AT THE RSC. ALAN REYNOLDS HAS RETURNED AS FIRST TEAM COACH WITH THE VAST EXPERIENCE OF PAT FENLON AS DIRECTOR OF FOOTBALL BEHIND HIM. BLUES ARE FIRM FAVOURITES TO END THEIR TEN-YEAR HIBERNATION IN THE FIRST DIVISION.

HOW IS YOUR SQUAD SHAPING UP?

'We're shaping up all right. We'd only two from last year, so we've had to start again. We must try to keep expectations not too high, though, as it might take time for the team to gel.'

AN EMERGING TALENT TO LOOK OUT FOR?

'Dean Walsh, a centre forward who was with the club last year, and defender Robin Dempsey, a relative of Gary Dempsey, are two good young lads to keep an eye on.'

YOU'RE SEEN AS THE FAVOURITES. WHAT ARE YOUR REALISTIC EXPECTATIONS?

'It's hard to call it because it's such a new squad of players. But we would be looking to be top three and see how we are in July. If we gel we'll do all right.'

MAIN CHALLENGERS FOR PROMOTION?

'The usual suspects – Longford, UCD, Shelbourne. Cobh had a good year last year. Cabinteely and Wexford... you couldn't write off anyone.'

DOES THE FIRST DIVISION LOOK MORE COMPETITIVE THIS YEAR?

'Five or six teams will fancy their chances. I certainly can't see anyone running away with it like Limerick did last season. You don't want Longford running away with it. Though I wouldn't mind if we did!'

Dean O'Halloran



FIXTURE LIST

FEB 24 v Athlone Town (A)
MAR 3 v Cabinteely (H)
MAR 10 v UCD (A)
MAR 17 v Shelbourne (A)
MAR 25 v Wexford Youths (H)
APR 1 v Longford Town (A)
APR 7 v Cobh Ramblers (H)
APR 14 v Athlone Town (H)
APR 21 v Cabinteely (A)
APR 28 v UCD (H)
MAY 5 v Shelbourne (H)
MAY 12 v Wexford Youths (A)
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JULY 15 v Longford Town (A)
JULY 21 v Cobh Ramblers (H)
JULY 28 v Athlone Town (H)
AUG 4 v Cabinteely (A)
AUG 18 v UCD (H)
SEPT 1 v Shelbourne (H)
SEPT 15 v Wexford Youths (A)
SEPT 22 v Longford Town (H)
OCT 7 v Cobh Ramblers (A)



WEXFORD FC

LOSING MANAGER SHANE KEEGAN AND THEIR PREMIER DIVISION STATUS VIA THE PLAY-OFFS IN THE SPACE OF DAYS BROUGHT WEXFORD'S DEBUT SEASON IN THE TOP FLIGHT LAST YEAR TO A TRAUMATIC END. AT 29, DAMIAN LOCKE COMES IN AS THE YOUNGEST BOSS IN THE LEAGUE AT THE REVAMPED, RENAMED CLUB.

HOW IS YOUR SQUAD SHAPING UP?

'When I got the job, there had been a mass exodus. But I've looked at 25 players and we're looking a lot better than I thought we might. I've managed to bring in the likes of Lee Duffy and Adam Hanlon who could quite easily be playing in the Premier Division.'

AN EMERGING TALENT TO LOOK OUT FOR?

'I've signed five of our U19s for the first team. We've Owen McCormack,

John McKeown

a centre-half, Craig Hayes and Eoin Porter, two centre-forwards.'

WHAT ARE YOUR EXPECTATIONS?

'Initially it looked like a stabilising job, given the players we'd lost. But with the way it's turned out, and the players we've got in, we'll definitely cause a few upsets.'

MAIN CONTENDERS FOR PROMOTION?

'You'd imagine the pressure is certainly on Waterford and Longford to deliver, more so than the likes of ourselves, Cobh or UCD. Shelbourne could have a bigger say this year.'

DOES THE FIRST DIVISION LOOK MORE COMPETITIVE THIS YEAR?

'A team winning it by 23 points (as Limerick did last year) certainly won't be happening.'

FIXTURE LIST

FEB 25 v Cobh Ramblers (A)
MAR 3 v Athlone Town (H)
MAR 10 v Cabinteely (A)
MAR 17 v UCD (H)
MAR 25 v Waterford (A)
MAR 31 v Shelbourne (A)
APR 7 v Longford Town (H)
APR 14 v Cobh Ramblers (H)
APR 21 v Athlone Town (A)
APR 28 v Cabinteely (H)
MAY 5 v UCD (A)
MAY 12 v Waterford (H)
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AUG 4 v Athlone Town (A)
AUG 18 v Cabinteely (H)
SEPT 1 v UCD (A)
SEPT 15 v Waterford (H)
SEPT 22 v Shelbourne (H)
OCT 7 v Longford Town (A)

“When I first got the prosthetic ‘blade’, I was like a kid with a new toy and it was a very emotional time for me. None of what I have achieved would have been possible without great people around me.”

***Simon Baker,
Chairman, IAFA***

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