

## Fifty Years of Soccer in Mervue

In the mid 1950's, the corporation began to build houses on what had been a green field site in Mervue. The first families moved into Pearse Avenue in 1955, and within a few years, the housing project we now know as 'Old Mervue' was completed, and many more young families had moved in. The playgrounds used by the children were the open spaces in front of Plunkett Avenue and also between McDonagh and Clarke Avenues. All kinds of games were played here, but there seemed to be an emphasis on soccer.

Some parents began to think of the idea of forming a soccer club to channel and focus the energies of their children, and so, in June 1960, a group of local men gathered in number 11, McDonagh Avenue, the house of Hyacinth Darcy, and Mervue AFC was formed. Some time later they added 'United' to their name.

Those who attended included Willie Kilkelly, Frank Kelly, Jimmy O'Connor, Joe Flaherty, Pat Sullivan, Paddy Flanagan, Tom and 'Hycie' Darcy. Jackie Keane and Declan McDonnell were there representing the juveniles. Others who were involved from the beginning were Colie Smyth, Andy Cullinane, Bernard O'Sullivan, Paddy Beatty, John Murphy and Terry O'Sullivan.

The first training games were played on the Redemptorist pitch, where Tara Grove is today. Two ideally situated trees formed the goal posts. There were no nets. Another area used for training was in front of McHugh Avenue, close to where the GAA pitches are located today. Their first 'home' pitch was in a field close to the present day Mervue GAA clubhouse. Crown Control later built a factory on this site. From the beginning, the club were on the lookout for a more suitable pitch, and with the help of Fr. Jack O'Connor and Galway Corporation, a site was secured on Monivea Road, a site which is occupied by Crown Development today. Juveniles had to tog out on the side of the pitch in all kinds of weather. If it was raining, they put all of their clothes into a plastic bag which also served as a gear bag. Initially, they played in borrowed jerseys.

Their first official game was an under-13 match played in the Sportsground in August, 1960. They were now up and running. Colie Smyth decided on claret and blue as the club colours. Their first trophy, the under-13 Murphy Cup, was won in 1965, and it was followed by a great many others. In 1971, they won their first provincial trophy when the under-15 team beat Castlebar Celtic in the Connacht Cup. During the 1970's and 1980's, Mervue grew into one of the most powerful clubs in the west of Ireland, building up a terrific record in championships at all levels.

They

have continued to make progress, to make history, to break records. Their list of achievement is such that it would need a large book to tell the story properly. This is exactly what has been done by Willie Henry with the publication of a new book entitled *The History of Mervue United AFC*. This volume is a celebration of the first 50 years of this remarkable club, but it is more than that, it is a social history, a story of a growing community who took enormous pride in their club and in their area, a story of commitment and dedication of individuals, of teams, of backroom teams, of the women who washed the jerseys, of a community and their support that kept the fledgling club going when they had little financial backing. This support continues today, so that the club can field 26 teams and be a major source of local pride.

The

book documents the history of those 50 years with lots of match reports, of profiles of people too numerous to mention here. It is profusely illustrated. It will be launched in the Clayton Hotel this evening, and is available in good bookshops for 30 euro.

Many of

those quoted in the book, talk of the fun they had learning the skills and playing the game. Billy Carr used to tell them of how he once played for Boys Club and they were 1 &ndash; 0 down with one minute to go when they got a corner. Billy took the corner himself, hit the upright deliberately with the result that the ball split in two. He volleyed the first half of the ball into the back of the net to tie the game, and then he dived and headed the other half of the ball into the left hand corner to win the match.

With

determination and imagination like that, it is little wonder Mervue United has become the extraordinary success it is today.

Our

photographs are

A. A Mervue team from the 1960's.

Front Row, from the left; Jimmy O'Sullivan , Mickey O'Sullivan ; Joe Duffy , Michael Boyle , P.J. Dobbyn , Jackie Keane , ----- , Declan McDonnell.

In the back row are Bernard Sullivan , ----- , Michael Brennan , Peadar Kelly , Paul Kelly , Colie Faherty , Tom Shaughnessy , ----- , Máirtín Scanlon.

B. Hyacinth Darcy, the first president of the club. He was a bus conductor with CIE. This photograph was taken on the day he retired.

C. Mervue United, the winners of the Fr. Duignan Memorial Cup, 1978-79 at the Claddagh Festival.

Front row, left to right; Eamonn Ryan , Ray Durnin , Noel Gallagher , Ray McDonnell , Gerry Lynskey , Frank Fallon . Back row; Mike McDonnell , Pío Long , Mike O’Connor , Mike Long , Billy Duffy , Bernard Concar and Cyril Rugel.