

Killarney Athletic 1969 – 1975



There is no doubt that the Harrington era was a unique time in the formation and history of the club and after Dan's departure from Killarney in 1969 the club found it difficult to replace him immediately.

Much to the credit of Jim O'Sullivan, Sean O'Donoghue and Donagh Gleeson they filled what were to become the club's first officer positions as chairman, secretary and treasurer respectively. Fulfilling the team manager's role proved more difficult as Brian Gilhooley RIP who was the most natural successor in the role to Dan was more keenly interested in coaching with the Franciscan youth club teams. So the club ended up with different players managing the team as they continued to play in the Desmond league.

However, the commitment and ultimately the cost of competing in the Desmond League, where teams had to travel to various parts of West Limerick proved to be difficult to sustain for the club. Thus the club did not re-enter the league for the 1970–71 season although two of the club's more talented players Brian McCarthy and Tom 'Sossy' Mullins did feature with Tralee Dynamos as they finished 3rd in the Desmond League table of that season. Big Jim was also to emigrate to Australia in 1971.

Events in 1970 and 1971 proved to have very significant and positive effects on the game of soccer in Ireland for two very contrasting reasons.

‘Mexico ‘70

The 1970 World Cup finals lit up the world’s sporting stage and it was the style and flamboyancy of the tournament winners Brazil that captured everyone’s attention. Pele was to win his third World Cup medal as the tournament was broadcasted in colour for the first time to an unprecedented world audience. Soccer had become “the beautiful game” and its impact was felt by the growth of popularity in the game in Ireland.

‘The lifting of the Ban’

What was to have an even greater effect on people’s participation of soccer in this country was the decision by the GAA grassroots clubs to remove the infamous ‘Ban’ under Rule 27 from its rule book thus allowing players the freedom to play Gaelic football and hurling as well as soccer and rugby. This heralded a maturity in Ireland to remove old politically held views from sport.

The Formation of the Kerry District League (KDL)

Although the club did not compete in any competitive league in the 1970–71 season, the players continued to enjoy participation in the sport by playing friendly matches in the Half Moon. The venue also hosted an inter-firm 7-a-side competition in 1971 with many of the participating teams also travelling to a 7-a-side tournament in Tralee that year. There were numerous teams from Killarney competing in this competition. One in particular was the Killarney Bartenders team which was comprised of many players that were later to feature with the club as it reformed to become a founding member of the Kerry District League in 1972.

In that team were Donagh Gleeson, Tom ‘Sossy’ Mullins and Greg Collins who all played for the club in the Desmond League and also included in the team were Denis Hayes, Mike ‘Smiler’ Moloney and Richard Clifford who suffered a nasty knee injury in the Tralee final replay that was played in the old ‘Basin’ pitch (that still exists today).

Brian Gilhooley and the Franciscan Youth Club Teams

As previously mentioned in the Harrington article, Brian Gilhooley RIP who also hailed from Cork City and was an ardent Cork ‘Hibs’ supporter came to live in Countess Road in 1963 through his work with the Ranks Flour company. Brian was to forge a close friendship with Fr. Vivian Molloy, a Franciscan friar with similar keen interest in soccer and a loyal Arsenal supporter. Together they encouraged and organised the Youth Club soccer teams and it was from these teams that many of the club’s finest and most dedicated members were to emerge as players and future administrators of the club. These included the late James Gleeson and Peter Gilhooley as well as Donal ‘Pro’ Casey, Kevin O’Malley, Ger Galbraith, Ritchie O’Connor, Sean O’Connor, Pdraig ‘Poggs’ Looney and Mike ‘Smiler’ Moloney (apologies for any exclusion of names).

The Áras Phádraig Pitch

The ‘Áras Pitch’ provided an idyllic training ground in the heart of the town for these young players and whereas there was still a certain amount of resentment towards the promotion of soccer in Kerry at the time, the opening of “the Áras” by the Franciscan community to the local youngsters in the late 60s was also another important statement of acceptance of the game in the town.

Some local politicians were also attracted to the venue but not for sporting reasons, believing instead that the site would serve as an ideal location for homes for the elderly. Fortunately for the youth of Killarney, Fr. Vivian strongly opposed the proposal and his voice was respected and listened to, and so the proposal failed to gather support.

However the formally known Killarney UDC did get their hands on the ‘Áras Pitch’ in 1999 and have since turned it into a bus and car park. The sale of the ground marked a sad end for all who had the pleasure of its use as a soccer pitch over four decades. The memories of the novice friars, altar boys, youth club and Killarney Athletic teams as well as the multitude of 7-a-side players and supporters who gathered there every summer will never be forgotten, nor should the contribution it made to the promotion and development of soccer and particularly the Club.

Kick Off of the KDL in 1972



Due to the enthusiasm and interest in soccer in the county, the Kerry District League officially kicked off in February 1972 and Killarney Athletic were proudly involved and represented by a talented side that included some of the old guard from the 60s team joined by the aforementioned new generation of young players.

Once again Donagh Gleeson was to the fore and along with the experience of Brian McCarthy they steered the team in the opening part of the season. Joe Grant took over management of the team for the 1972–73 season with the side winning the Munster Junior area final before narrowly losing out to a good Riverside team from Cork in the quarter-final of the competition.

Athletic won their first KDL trophy with an easy win over a Scartaglen side in the Anchor Shield final in the '73–'74 season. Unfortunately the side were to lose the following 3 finals (2 after extra time) to the Park from Tralee who had the iconic Kerry football star Mike Sheehy 'bagging' goals for them.

Great credit is due to Joe Grant who played a key role in the club during this period as a team manager and an outstanding administrator of the club and the KDL. Joe was described by league officials as 'a man before his time'.

It should be mentioned that Liebherr also entered the KDL when it was formed in '72 and its impressive pitch donated by 'the Germans' to the local community hosted some great local derbies as both sides displayed the excellent soccer talent that existed in Killarney at the time.

Sean O'Connor took over the manager's role from Joe while also serving as an administrator with club and league. Sean had an outstanding goalkeeping talent that he brought with him from his youth club days - Sean emigrated to Australia for a new life there in 1975.