

Bryan Murphy – My Killarney Athletic A.F.C. Story

I owe a huge amount to Killarney Athletic AFC, I have met some fantastic people, made lifelong friendships, played a game I love with a great club and was fortunate enough to get opportunities to play soccer internationally.

It was the early 1990's and as a young lad growing up in Beaufort there were two sports I loved to play, Gaelic Football and Soccer. The only problem was that despite having a fantastic club to play GAA with (Beaufort), I did not know anyone in the soccer clubs and was reluctant to enquire myself. My Dad did make enquiries with Fossa F.C. who were the closest club to home and a number of my secondary school friends had joined them. I remember attending one of their games watching a few of my friends and I was hoping their manager would ask me to join them but the request never materialised!

Then one day during a second year class at the Intermediate School, Killorglin, I was sitting beside a certain Brian 'James' O'Shea of Minish, who is now Killarney's style icon! Naturally, sport and particularly soccer was a very popular topic of conversation! Suffice to say we hit it off and strategically ensured we were sitting in close proximity for class! It was during one of our less exhilarating classes that the conversation led to playing for 'Athletic', the rest as they say is history...so thank you Brian!

Ironically, my first ever game for Killarney Athletic A.F.C was against Fossa F. C. and we won! We were managed by club legend Vince Casey and the spine of my first 'Athletic' team included some really interesting nicknames, some examples included; BooBoo, Minnie, Spud and Melon. Of course, others had to settle for their first name or surname for identification, Al (Hardman O'Connor), Liam (Heagerty), Bowler (Colm), Micko, Edmond, Shane and the main man of the team Toirdealbhach (O'Lionaird). I was christened 'Murph', a name that stuck and funnily enough it was it was commented by one of my team mates early on..."what is your first name anyway?"

I played in an era where we the likes of The Park and Tralee Dynamos dominated the underage ranks in the county. However, we did win the U15 Cup in 1991/1992 defeating both Tralee clubs en route to victory. We also did very well versus our cross town rivals, Celtic...although they might have got the odd draw out of us (which was a victory for them!) The superbly organised annual 7 A-Side tournament by Athletic was the scene of some very memorable victories including an U16 title in 1991/1992 and the now infamous Torc Travel Trail Blazers 'Reserve Cup' victory in 1997...characterised by a certain Marcus Twomey's transition from spectator to taker of the match winning penalty in the semi final and Brian O'Shea's spectacular thirty yard pile driver into the top corner in the final! A feat that led him to be bottom of a celebration pile consisting of myself, the Twomey brothers (Simon and Will), John Bowler and Marcus Twomey among others!

As I moved up the underage ranks in Killarney Athletic, I was fortunate to play under some fantastic managers and hugely dedicated people. Men like; Mikey O'Sullivan, Vince Casey, Donie Murphy, Dinny Hayes, Bill Davidson and Brian 'Mac' McCarthy contributed a huge

amount to my development as a young goalkeeper. Under these managers, I was fortunate to play with more legendary names such as; Mop, Muggsy, Mike Guerin, Kev, Micko, Nash, Tom O'Connor, Sean O'Donoghue (my agent!), JoJo (Fleming), Alan Brad, the late Martin Beckett (RIP), Vince Cooper and our Irish International star Mike Moloney. There are plenty more guys I could mention, but they just didn't pay me enough!

Success with Killarney Athletic led to representative honours with Kerry Schoolboys, playing in the U14 Kennedy Cup in 1990/1991 season. I played with my club teammate and good friend Toirdealbhach again on the Kerry U16 team, historically defeating the Welsh U15 National Team in the 1992/1993 season. We came within seconds of winning the U18 Inter Youths All Ireland Final in 1993/1994 season, agonisingly losing in a penalty shootout versus the favourites, Leinster Senior League. Trials at Mick McCarthy's Millwall F. C. followed in 1993. However, an injury picked up on the training ground didn't help my cause, but the experience gained as a sixteen year old stood me in good stead for future soccer and GAA trials.

After my Leaving Cert and All Ireland Minor success with Kerry GAA in 1994; I took a chance and decided against going straight to university and took the less known route attending Colaiste Ide Senior College in Dublin for a one year course, but eyeing a full scholarship in the USA. This was a risky move, ill advised by friends, coaches and teachers! Luckily, I was and still am quite stubborn! I was determined to do something completely different which involved soccer. Thankfully, the risk worked out, we won 3 Leinster Cups and one U18 All Ireland with the college in the 1994/95 season with the college side and attracted the attention of numerous scouts.

League of a Ireland clubs came knocking and while a top Premier Division club would have ensured more victories, I again went the road less travelled and signed in January 1995 for First Division side, Kilkenny City A.F.C. Suffice to say, the soccer team did not enjoy the success of the county's hurlers. I was busy, maybe the busiest Goalkeeper Europe! As a seventeen year old, I was light physically but tall and agile. I did fairly well in games, but we struggled as a team...seriously underfunded versus teams who were at the very least semi-professional. Most days were defeats, some quite heavy but despite the massive disadvantage there were some good days including the most unlikely of 0-0 results when league champions elect and professional outfit, Drogheda United F.C. came to town and were held by our team of amateur teenagers! Ratings of 10/10 and national media recognition led to massive exposure and a number of enquiries including one from the USA, Boston University!

A full four year scholarship was offered and gratefully accepted. I traveled to Boston, USA in August 1995. I completed a physically demanding pre season and made my collegiate debut in Las Vegas, Nevada in front of thousands of University of Las Vegas fans, where we went on to win their tournament. We were the number one ranked college team in the USA

during that time, a very difficult ranking to achieve. There I spent four fantastic years, travelling to universities across the country including San Diego, Indiana, Virginia, New York and Las Vegas of course!

During my time at Boston University, we won three America East Conference Championships in 1995, 1996 and 1997; qualifying for the prestigious NCAA tournament in each of those seasons. Team and individual accolades followed but the biggest honour was when I was selected for the Irish National Team to compete in the 1997 World Student Games.

Killarney Athletic A.F.C. were again superb to me, as funding had to be raised for the team to travel to Sicily. Vince Casey, Torc Travel, Beaufort Golf Club and John Bowler to name a few, all supported me financially enabling me to represent my country. A good performance and victory versus Holland to secure a top eight finish was my tournament highlight.

I graduated Boston University with a BSc in Management and Marketing in 1999 to conclude a memorable four years stateside. A career in the business sector awaited me in Dublin following graduation. As I was now trying to utilise my education and make an impact in the corporate world, playing League of Ireland soccer again was just not practical. I did have two brief spells with First Division sides St. Francis F.C in 2000/2001 and a return to Kilkenny City A.F.C. in 2003. These short spells in the League of Ireland were sandwiched in between a four year period when I was part of the Dublin Senior Football squad, winning two Leinster titles in 2002 and 2005. How dose a Kerryman end up playing for Dublin GAA, well that's another story!

I also played Leinster Senior League with Belgrove F.C. and more recently for my local team Templeogue UTD, winning the Polikoff Cup in the 2008/2009 season. Since then, I returned to the Dublin GAA scene, this time in a coaching capacity joining up with Dessie Farrell's management team 2010-Present. We won two Leinster Minor titles, one All Ireland Minor Title, Two Leinster U21 titles and one All Ireland U21 title. Now that the best of my playing days are behind me, I still enjoy a game of soccer or GAA. Nowadays, to keep fit I do a bit of running and took part in the Dublin and New York marathons in recent years with a PB of 3:09:16. Also, I recently qualified as an official FAI referee, so look out strikers...no more soft penalties!

So, that's pretty much it! To say a few people made all this possible would be an understatement. Special thanks to my wife Elaine, daughter Maya, parents Tommy and Mary, sister Lora, brother Sean, extended family, friends, Boston University, Beaufort GAA and of course the greatest soccer club in Kerry (sorry Celtic!)...Killarney Athletic A.F.C.

Thank you.

Bryan Murphy