



BEAUTIFUL MEMORIES: Republic of Ireland's Shane Long, centre, scores against Germany during the European Championship Qualifying match at the Aviva Stadium, Dublin in October 2015

PICTURE: PA/Brian Lawless

Sport, at its best, allows children to dream and adults to escape

A COUPLE of years ago, I wrote a short book on the story of a school football team's triumph in the Northern Ireland Schools' Cup of 1954. The men I interviewed when telling that story were approaching four score years on this planet, but they could still vividly remember with smiles the many happy times playing the game they adored as children on cinder pitches and in the narrow streets of post-war Belfast.

The teacher responsible for setting up and training the Holy Cross school teams in the 1950s, Gerry Maguire, kept a ledger for several years in which he meticulously entered match reports of every game played by the up to five teams he ran in the school simultaneously, including the full list of players' names for each contest. I never met him as he passed away prior to me undertaking the project, but I could tell he loved the game with all his heart and, most importantly, he cherished how it allowed young boys to live their dreams, experience triumph and heartbreak, perhaps knowing that this provided a lesson for what life would later deliver.

Just over eight years ago, I took my then five year old son to the old Windsor Park for his first experience of live football. It was the League Cup final. He proved to be a bit of a lucky charm as Cliftonville stormed to a 4-0 victory in a north Belfast derby game with Crusaders, a win which marked the beginning of a golden age for a club far from accustomed to experiencing the joys of sporting conquests.

Since then, we've also made the regular journey to Lansdowne Road with my brother tagging along for home fixtures to endure the shared experience of being avid Republic of Ireland fans. Many dismal nights have since followed, yet the memory of the moment Shane Long sank the Germans with a goal scored not 30 yards directly in front of us will never fade and ensure hope continues to flicker even when there is



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Sport has long been a business, and in the rush to condemn the European Super League, many did not take time to acknowledge that its development was but the logical conclusion of the wholesale commercialisation of the game which brought finance into the sport in unprecedented amounts in the 1990s, leading to the creation of a Premier League in England and a Champions League which continues to be remodelled to make it easier for the rich to get richer and make the dream that little bit more distant for the rest.

On that note, it is also worth considering money's impact on the game much closer to home, in Scotland. With a population amongst

whom the median age is 42 years, it is almost certain to be the case that in a handful of years more than half of all Scots will not have been alive the last time the Scottish League was won by any team other than Celtic or Rangers, a thoroughly unhealthy situation.

In the middle of the furor surrounding the Super League, the BBC broadcast a short documentary telling the story of the rebirth of Derry City in the 1980s. The contrast between the romance of that club's resurrection and the ugly reality of the cold financial logic underpinning an invitation-only league for Europe's financially elite clubs could not have been greater. There is an added value to sport when it is personal and local. Triumphant over adversity delivered the sweetest taste of victory for Derry City's players and fans alike.

That is not true in football. A contemporary of Gerry Maguire, Ernie Davis, is fondly remembered as being the only teacher to coach a non-grammar school (Boys' Model) to an Ulster Schools' Cup win in rugby a half-century ago.

The moment that followed George Hamilton uttering those fateful words 'The nation holds its breath' will never leave me, though I was only a teenager hundreds of miles from Genoa jumping up and down with my brother in the living room.

I may not have yet visited the windy city of Chicago, but the night my favourite baseball team finally broke a century long curse to win the World Series was unparalleled in sporting significance because of a childhood spent living amongst Chicago natives far from their home who kept faith with the team, passing the torch on to a younger generation, just as fans of sporting teams do across the world.

Money and indeed corruption have always been a part, but at its best sport allows children to dream, provides an escape for adults and helps us experience the full spectrum of life's emotions, often during a single sporting contest.

Long live the beautiful games.

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ON THIS DAY

APRIL 26 1921

Belfast Atrocities

BELFAST has just had another grisly weekend – a night of terror and atrocities. Two members of the Auxiliary force were assailed by armed men in the centre of the city at 9.10 p.m. on Saturday night in the presence of huge crowds. One was shot dead, the other wounded and two civilians – one a woman, injured in the course of the melee. The wounded Cadet died in the Royal Victoria Hospital last night. Afterwards, armed men burst into the house of Mr Henry Duffin, Clonard Gardens in the centre of West Belfast, and shot his two sons dead, retreating afterwards – apparently unobserved.

The dead are: Auxiliary-Cadet E Bolan, RIC; Auxiliary-Cadet John Bales, RIC; Patrick Duffin (28), Clonard Gardens; Daniel Duffin (24), Clonard Gardens.

The Clonard tragedy took place a short time before midnight and involved the death of two brothers. The [police] patrol motor passed and there was a violent knocking at the hall door. The other members of the family heard a loud command – "Put up your hands." Simultaneously shots were heard. The party, so far as could be seen, numbered three men who wore trench coats.

After the party had left, a dog which had entered the house with them was observed in the hall whining to get out and yesterday morning a District Inspector called and took it away. Patrick (28) was a National teacher and Daniel (24) was a clerk.

Dublin Execution

THOMAS Traynor, Dublin, the father of ten children, was executed at Mountjoy Prison yesterday morning. He was sentenced by courtmartial to death in connection with the ambush of Auxiliary police at Great Brunswick Street last month.

Acquittal in Gilford Murder Trial

THE trial by courtmartial concluded in Victoria Barracks yesterday of five men charged with the murder of William McDowell of Gilford on the 3rd September last. In the case of William McConville, a wages clerk at the firm of Dunbar McMaster and Co, evidence of character was given by a former manager of the firm.

He said the accused had handled large sums of money for years and was always an honest, hard-working man. On the murder charge McConville had pleaded not guilty and was found not guilty and honourably acquitted. (The IRA killing of two Auxiliaries in the city centre triggered an immediate reprisal response from the RIC and Specials in West Belfast. From Glenravel, Co Antrim, the Duffin family were immersed in Gaelic culture while Dan was a member of the local IRA. The IRA blamed District Inspector Ferris (recently arrived from Cork) for the murders and seriously wounded him at St Paul's Church a few weeks later.)

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