

By Mark Gallagher



THE Barnet promotion party continued well into this week, but Dean Brennan was back at work in his North London office on Tuesday, already planning for next season. Not that he didn't enjoy the occasion. Family and friends came over from Dublin for their final home game and were treated to a thumping 4-0 win over Aldershot.

'I couldn't have scripted it better. To win 4-0 and have everyone there,' said the smiling Dubliner on Wednesday afternoon. 'There was a great crew over. We had a barbecue in the house on Sunday with my coaching staff, too, that might have spilled over to Monday. But we are elated. It has been an amazing season for us.'

Brennan has led Barnet back to the Football League after an absence of seven years, with the London club becoming the first team to win England's fifth tier four times. They did so in wonderful fashion too, going through the whole season unbeaten at home. And if they win in Fylde tomorrow, who are already relegated, they will end up with 102 points, which was a target set for the team by Brennan and his assistant Connor Smith, a bright young coach from Blanchardstown, having come out of a brainstorming session after being shocked by Solihull Moors in last year's National League play-offs.

'When we lost in the play-offs, Connor came over to my house and we locked ourselves away for three or four days and we plotted and planned for this season, what we needed to do to get promotion,' said Brennan. 'And one of the things was getting to 100 points, because we felt that if we did that, we would win the league.'

It's a tad ironic that Barnet cut a swathe through the National League playing entertaining front-foot football when early in the season, Brennan had become an internet viral sensation after an interview where he rounded on the club's supporters. Following a 2-1 home win over Altrincham, he criticised those fans who were hurling abuse when the side were a goal down.

'I don't like the moans and groans from supporters beside me, screaming rubbish at me when we're 1-0 down,' began Brennan's outburst that lasted almost five minutes and where he referred to his club's own fans as a 'miserable, moany lot' before adding: 'I want us to get behind our lads, not moan at them. I want us to be a proper football club. All I ever hear is moaning. Moaning about the chairman, the beer's not good enough, this is not good enough, that's not good enough.'

During the remarkable monologue, Brennan also implored the club's press officer not to edit the interview, saying: 'I want this to go out, it's very important.'

Within a couple of days, the clip was shared thousands and thousands of times on social media and this unheralded Dubliner managing a non-league club was getting a level of attention he never encountered before. Global media outlets were ringing the club, requesting an interview.

'Yeah, there were requests from CNN, ESPN, BBC, loads of others from all over the world. The club were on to me to do a few of them too, because they thought it would be great publicity. But I

'You can have all the money in the world and if you don't get your recruitment right, your team is always going to be struggling'

Barnet boss Dean Brennan is enjoying promotion but already planning for next season's League Two campaign

didn't want to, because I didn't want to be seen as a joke or a laughing-stock, I want to be seen as a serious football manager and we want to be seen as a serious football club. The funny thing was we went on a run where we won the next five games, so I suppose you could say it worked. If we had lost the next couple of games, it might have been a different story.'

Brennan concedes he's the type of character

who doesn't know how to pull his punches, but that's probably been ingrained in him from a young age. He grew up in the Liberties area of the south inner-city, with his mother raising Dean and his sister in a single-parent family.

'I love Dublin 8, go home as much as I can and it is still very much where my heart is.

The area's great now,

Dublin City Council have done a great job in developing the whole area, but it was a tough place to grow up in the late 1980s and early 1990s, there was a lot of stuff going on, and we were blessed to have my Ma, an absolute rock.'

He was also a talented midfielder for Lourdes Celtic, under the guidance of the late John 'Bower' Bradley and Eddie Roche. Brennan was getting spotted by English clubs by his mid-teens and at 16, he went over to Sheffield Wednesday's academy with two more young Dubliners in Alan Quinn and Derek Geary, who's now the Sheffield United academy manager.

'Wednesday were a great

club, they were in the Premiership at the time. But to be honest, the first six months or even a year at the club, I didn't think I would stick it out. I was pretty homesick, it was a challenging time and I use that experience now in my man-management of younger players, especially in Barnet where we have a lot of players who come from the inner city in London.'

Released by the Owls after three years, Brennan arrived back in Dublin and was signed by Roddy Collins at Bohemians. But he only played two games for the Gypsies before he received a phone call from Ricky Hill, who was his academy coach at Wednesday. 'Ricky had just taken over at Luton and he wanted me over and in fairness to Roddy, he didn't stand in my way or look for compensation, just wished me the best of luck. I came over to Luton and I have stayed in and around the Bedfordshire area ever since. I never thought I would have, always thought I would have went home. But life just takes over.'

DREAM TEAM: Barnet's head of logistics Kirk Rayment, manager Dean Brennan and assistant manager Connor Smith



DIFFERENT LEAGUE: Barnet's Dublin manager Dean Brennan



BUZZING: 'The Bees' are heading back to the Football League

Luton gave Brennan his only experience of the Football League in a career that took him on a tour of non-league football in England. Among the 15 clubs he played for was Hemel Hempstead Town, where he got his first taste of management when he became caretaker while club captain at just 29. A couple of years later, after a spell as player-coach with Dunstable Town, he returned to Hemel Hempstead as manager and remained in charge for six years, leading them to promotion to National League South, effectively the sixth tier.

His managerial star was rising in non-league circles and he eventually ended up at Wealdstone, via stints at Billericay Town and Kingstonian. That didn't end well, with a big falling-out with the chairman and his assistant manager leading to Brennan feeling disenchanted and decided he had enough of the game. In his mid-20s, realising that the one-year contracts in non-league football weren't very secure, he began to make moves as a businessman and he and his wife owned residential care homes. So, Brennan reckoned he didn't need the hassle – until Barnet came calling.

IRISH MANAGERS FLYING THE FLAG IN EFL

Alan Sheehan Swansea City

THE Athlone native and former Ireland under-21 international was recently appointed full-time head coach on a three-year deal after guiding the Swans to Championship safety during his caretaker spell in charge. Already on the coaching staff with the Welsh club, he was promoted from within at Swansea when they needed a steady hand after Luke Williams was sacked in mid-February after a return of just one win in his last 10 games. Sheehan had form as he previously had a seven-game spell as caretaker manager with the same club, from December 2023 to January 2024. He immediately won fans over with a 3-0 thumping of Blackburn Rovers in his first game.

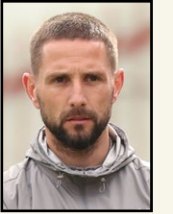


Noel Hunt Reading



HUNT had known what to expect when named Reading's new boss in December, replacing Ruben Selles, as he had previously been caretaker. He's also had stints as assistant manager at Swindon Town and Doncaster Rovers. He was promoted from under-21 manager on a two-and-half year deal and has steered the ship on the field, with the Royals facing Leyton Orient yesterday in the final game of season to see who will be in the League One play-off. Hunt has done all this while the club is in utter chaos off the field with regular fan protests directed at controversial owner Dai Yongge, who has been given until next week to sell the club.

Conor Hourihane Barnsley



THE Cork man is only in charge at Oakwell on a caretaker basis, with the former Ireland midfielder hanging up the boots in December to concentrate on a coaching role at Barnsley. He was given the job of interim boss a couple of months ago and has consolidated the club in midtable in League One, despite a massive injury crisis – Hourihane had to call on a fifth-choice keeper for a recent game. But he has done his prospects of getting the job full-time no harm.

tant part of the puzzle – you can have all the money in the world and if you don't get your recruitment right, your team is always going to be struggling – look at Manchester United. So recruitment is the most important thing and it is often about not signing the best players, but signing the best characters, someone whose personality will suit your football club.

'And that's what I have started at this time, looking to see who we can get for next season.'

He's also recruited well with his staff, which has an Irish tinge in Smith, a former Ireland under-21, and Liam O'Meara, a strength and conditioning coach from Donegal who previously worked at Cambridge and Crawley Town.

'Connor's only 32 but he is top class, a fantastic coach who won a few promotions as a player with Plymouth and Wimbledon. He has only known the good times as a coach – since he came in, we have only been at the top of the table. He doesn't know what it is like to

struggle at the wrong end of the table.'

The pair will be back in Ireland next month, as they are enrolled in the FAI's A Licence class, alongside the likes of St Pat's assistant manager Brian Gartland and Stephen Quinn, Wexford's women's manager. During that time in the class, Brennan can relate the fantastic story of how he lifted Barnet from the doldrums and brought them back to the Football League. His work has been spotted, as he has been linked with a couple of jobs in the EFL, such as Swindon. But he's determined to finish the job he's started in North London.

'Humility is the biggest thing for us. Everyone's just as important as I am. We're all as important as each other. How big a role you play or how small a role you play – it's so important. It's all of the same importance to me. Without togetherness, you can't have success, and we've created that here. This is just a little taste of success. We know how difficult it is going to be in the EFL. We aren't stupid, but we aren't gonna rest on our laurels here. We're gonna make sure we kick on. For everybody, it's just about enjoying it now.'

They have been doing that all week, and will do even more tomorrow if Barnet break that 100-point barrier.