

LEAGUE OF IRELAND ACE COULD JUST SNAP OUT OF IT

By **NEIL O'RIORDAN**
CHIEF SPORTS WRITER

THERE are few full-time footballers who feature in almost 90 per cent of top-flight matches over the previous three seasons who simply stop playing at 26.

There are fewer still who do so with no real regrets.

But, then, we had already been supplied with evidence which suggested Paddy Kirk was not your average player.

Five years ago, during the Covid-19 pandemic, Kirk posted a video of him playing a medley of dance tunes on the piano – a change from Joe Wicks and banana bread.

But lockdown also saw him, under the radar, pursue other interests and one which, ultimately, made hanging up his boots easier.

Kirk lives in Stoneybatter but, these days, the distance to Dalymount Park is more likely to be measured by a camera lens than a full-back's clearance.

And, ultimately, whether he left football or football left him does not really matter.

Perhaps, for once, 'by mutual consent' might be accurate.

Kirk's second spell at Bohemians was cut short at the end of last season in which he missed just three Premier Division matches, one through injury and a second via suspension.

Two years earlier, he had rejoined Bohs, largely for sentimental reasons, when Shelbourne, Derry City and St Pat's were keen.

But this time around was a little different.

He explained: "There wasn't a lot at all. Nothing from the Premier Division and very little then from the First Division.

"I was going into the off-season with an open mind about not playing for the sake of it. The lack of offers kind of made up my mind.

"Probably if it was five years ago a handful of clubs would have said, 'He's been around the league, he's played games, we'll take him'.

"I would have thought there might be something but I'm not in any way bitter or angry.

"I wanted to really take ownership of it and not shy away from that, to say, 'Oh, I was injured, I'm going to come back next year'.

"I've been open about it when people ask to say that there weren't any offers.

"I'm secure enough in what I'm doing rather than trying to come up with reasons as to why I haven't had a club."

There has been the odd time when he has felt like he is missing out, such as Bohs playing their opening league game against Shamrock Rovers in the Aviva Stadium or the club's release of the Fontaines shirt.

But the football itself? Not so much, especially as his

old side continues to flatter to deceive, with the Easter victories over Cork City and Shamrock Rovers their first back-to-back league wins in a year and then they made it three last night.

His biggest concern is trying to wrap his head around the fact it is OK for him to have a pint.

A shoot for him now is an honest day's work, not an instruction holstered from the stand by a fan fuming at a sideways pass.

The photographer specialises in men's fashion and independent coffee shops, and in conjunction with

Playing 100 games for Bohs is 100 more than I expected - that made it easier

KIRK HAD FOCUS WHEN FINISHING UP



CAPTAIN KIRK... Kirk led Bohs to the Dr Tony O'Neill perpetual trophy in 2017 as U-19 skipper



UP FOR THE CUP... Kirk celebrates with fans as Bohemians reach the 2023 FAI Cup final with a semi-final win over Galway



FAHION AN OPENING... Kirk owns a social media page focusing on menswear, which has thousands of followers



IT'S COFFEE TIME... the ex-Bohs ace also focuses on independent coffee shops with his work

obviously easy for me to say now with me not playing football. I don't want to throw anyone under the bus but it's such a talking point among players, as much as staff try, in team meetings, to disconnect from it.

"If you're going home and you're on your own and you don't have the lads...

"I always found after a match on Friday you'd be in the depths of it."

"You'd go in on a Saturday morning and even being with the lads, speaking about it among the players you realise, 'We are all finding this difficult, it's not just me'."

"This is something you'd speak about, even before training going through what the club is doing."

"The club's more focused on football than it's ever been, it's never been a better set-up for a footballer, that whole thing, 'Are they focused on football?'."

"That's kind of a trade-off for the lifestyle you're able to have."

But you're coming off some nights and you see the faces, you see who they're with, sometimes they could be standing next to your mates.

"It's so close, it's not a 50,000-seater stadium."

"Even from being at games, you get into a mindset, we're just fans, and fans shout at players."

"You make mental notes, 'I remember meeting him when I was out for a pint or a coffee but that's what he's like on a Friday'."

He knows that is not specific to Bohs but, unprompted, he addresses the charge – both from within and outside the fanbase – that not meeting expectations on the pitch is somehow linked to the club's involvement in social issues.

Kirk (left) said: "That would drive you mad, because you see the day to day. You never see anyone from that side of the club."

"It's not like we're on a Power-Point before training going through what the club is doing."

"The club's more focused on football than it's ever been, it's never been a better set-up for a footballer, that whole thing, 'Are they focused on football?'."

"I don't even like bringing it up

because it's such an irrelevance. It's not even an argument.

"What I miss is being able to stand over playing for Bohs and doing what they were doing, no matter how bad of a week we had."

"I had so many people who weren't that interested in football who I'd meet and they would not know where we were in the league."

"But they just thought it was amazing that I was playing for a club like Bohs and what they were doing. That's definitely part of what I miss."

Not to the extent that – despite encountering the same difficulty as everyone else in encountering tickets for League of Ireland games these days – he would be tempted, yet at least, to apply for a pitchside photographer's pass.

Kirk said: "Probably because I was so involved in it, I've never had the opportunity to shoot it."

"I would love to shoot a League of Ireland game and everything around it, rather than the game itself."

"I'll see, maybe it's a bit too soon to be on the sidelines taking photos of Rennie."



SHEEHAN... impressed

Sheehan gets nod at Swans

By **NEIL O'RIORDAN**

ALAN SHEEHAN is expected to be confirmed as Swansea City's manager on a full-time basis before the end of the season.

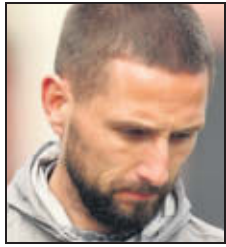
The Athlone man was put in charge on a temporary basis following the departure of Luke Williams in February.

An initial five-game stint was extended until the end of the campaign and the Championship side killed off their relegation worries by taking 23 points from his 11 games at the helm.

As it stands, he is due to be in charge for just two more games, away to Millwall today and at home to Oxford United next week.

But the Welsh club hope to announce a long-term deal with the 38-year-old in advance of their final league game.

He is the only Irishman in charge of a team in England's top two divisions, although former internationals Conor Hourihane and Noel Hunt are calling the shots at League One sides Barnsley and Reading respectively.



HOURIHANE... boss

The ex-Ireland Under-21 player had expressed his interest in taking the Swans job on a permanent basis if his and the club's future vision aligned.

Sheehan was hired as assistant head coach in 2023 by the club's then-sporting director Paul Watson, with whom he had previously worked at Luton Town.

He had followed Nathan Jones from Luton to Southampton but they lasted just three months there.

This is his second spell as Swansea's caretaker boss, having also fulfilled the role following the sacking of Michael Duff in December 2023, reverting to his previous role when Williams was appointed.

During his playing career, Sheehan clocked up 402 league appearances for Leicester City, Mansfield Town, Leeds United, Crewe Alexandra, Oldham Athletic, Swindon Town, Bradford City, Peterborough United, Notts County, Luton, Lincoln City and Northampton Town, hanging up his boots in January 2022.

