By **NEIL** O'RÍORDAN

CHIEF SPORTS WRITER

THERE are few full-time footballers who feature in 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.

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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.

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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.

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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. Stadium or the club's release of the

Fontaines shirt.
But the football itself?
much, especially as his old side continues to flatter to decive

tinues to flatter to deceive,
with the Easter
victories over
Cork City and
Shamrock Rovers
their first backto-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

it is OK for him
to have a pint.
A shoot for
him now is an
honest day's
work, not an
instruction hollared from the sta

lered from the stand by a fan fuming at a sideways pass. The photographer

specialises in men's fashion and indepen-dent coffee shops, and, in conjunction with



KIRK HAD FOCUS WHEN FINISHING UP

made it easier

LEAGUE OF IRELAND ACE COULD J

ing out a book on the latter in October.

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the menswear because everyone was shopping online.

"I was kind of growing that anonymously because of football. Now, more comes in from people having a face to put on stuff.

"My first paid gig was with Diffney Menswear.

"I was doing a bit of marketing." former team-mates.
Kirk (left) said: 'It's fair
enough because it's all
we've ever done and all
we've ever wanted to

do so it probably seems a bit mad to

step away. "But they always

ney Menswear.
"I was doing a bit of marketing work for them when coming out of

"But they always had an interest in what I was doing outside football.

"Obviously they were slating me for it in the dressing room but there was an interest."
What he was doing was establishing dubstreetwear which has more than 13,500 followers on Instagram, with

ers on Instagram, with its sidekick dubstreetcafe boasting more than 11,700.

He said: "I bought my really enjoying."

In tandem, his enjoyment from football was diminishing, having returned to Bohs after spending a year each with Longford Town and

Sligo Rovers. Last May, he told SunSport about seeing a sports psychologist in a bid to address performance anxiety.

At the time, things were — relatively speaking — going OK, including being handed the captain's armband for some games by new Gypsies boss Alan Reynolds.

But the season petered out with patience wearing thin among fans, who had seen results deteriorate rather than improve despite an increased playing budget and a that I'd be able to play the games that I did. I was playing bus ing for Raheny United until I was 16.

"I remember seeing all the lads like Conor Masterson, who was in my year, going away to Liverpool. That was a million miles from me.

"Playing 100 games for Bohs, if you'd asked me that six years ago, even when I was around the last, if I have said 'not a chance'.

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"That's something I can stand over whatever happens, it's 100 over, whatever happ

increased playing budget and a switch to full-time.

For Kirk, whose first Bohs contract saw him paid €50 a week as a part of a much-loved part-time team punching above its weight, it was tough to deal with.

He said: "It wasn't a case of, 'Oh why are they shouting at us?", because we weren't winning games. "My idea of coming back, what I would have wanted it to look like, was obviously very different to how it played out.

"Looking back, it's not really what I think of because I'm able to disconnect from that and say that I had an amazing time playing for Bohs, some great nights.

"I never, ever would have thought as witched to get was with the last game of the season, there was a moment where I thought, 'This is all I ever wanted', without trying to sound like I'm trying to get a headline.

"Even when I went to Longford, it was like, 'I have to get back to Bohs eventually'.

"But in the last game of the season, there was a moment where I thought, 'This is all I ever wanted', without trying to sound like I'm trying to get a headline.

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"But this waster.

such a talking point among players, as much try, in team to disconnect

and you're on your own and you don't have the lads... "I always found after a

"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 realize the players you realise,
'We are all finding this
difficult, it's not just me'.
"This is something
you'd speak about, even

Championship players, it's easier to disconnect that when you're on €20.000 a week "That's kind of a rade-off for the lifes-

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

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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 and they gust thought it 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 tick-ets 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 a League of Ireland game and everything around it, rather than the game

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

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.

league.
"But they just thought it was amazing that I was playing for a club like Bohs and what they were

around it, itself. rather than

aller, that whole thing, 'Are they coused on football?'.

"I don't even like bringing it up of Rennie."



Sheehan gets nod at Swans

By NEIL O'RIORDAN

ALAN SHEEHAN expected to be confirme 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 tempo-rary basis following the departure of Luke Wil-liams in February.

An initial five-game stin 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 holm. at the helm.

As it stands, he is due

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 any any and a long town.

to announce a long-term deal with the 38-year-old in advance of their fina

He is the only Irishma in charge of a team in England's top two divisions. although forme internationals Conor Hou ihane and Noel Hunt are calling the shots at League One sides Barnsley



HOURIHANE ... bos

The ex-Ireland Under-21 player had expressed his interest in taking the Swans job on a perm basis if his and the club 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 South-ampton but they lasted just three months there.

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

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, Brad Peterborough Bradford City Notts County, Luton, Lin-coln City and Northamp-ton Town, hanging up his