

Euro success for Irish team

Jack Gleeson

A TEAM of amateur Northside soccer players have succeeded where many top professionals have failed by picking up winning medals at an international tournament.

The Bohemian Foundation team was representing Ireland at Euro Football Norgervhaven, a unique 7-a-side tournament that took place at an open prison in the Dutch village of Veenhuizen.

The tournament was made up of teams from soccer foundations in Germany, Norway, UK, Belgium and the Netherlands, and the fans were mostly inmates of Norgervhaven Prison.

Many of the players taking part were former prisoners who use soccer as part of their rehabilitation, while some were from disadvantaged communities who had turned their lives around through sport.

Others were former internationalists, like Glenn Helder who played four times for Holland and was George Graham's last signing for

Arsenal before the arrival of Arsene Wenger.

What they had in common was a desire to give something back to sport, and collectively the teams had much to prove at Norgervhaven.

The Irish team had the smallest squad of the tournament, with only seven players available, but Bohemian Foundation President, Thomas Hynes, says what they lacked in numbers, they made up for in talent and confidence.

"They're Northside lads mostly from Ballymun who play together in the Leinster League," he told *Northside People*. "A lot of them would have grown up together and gone to the same schools."

"They play as the Bohemian Foundation team in all the tournaments and exhibition games we're involved in."

"I was worried about how we'd get on in the tournament but the lads were convinced from the start that they'd win."

The 12-team tournament involved two groups of six teams with the top two progressing to the semi-finals. The small Irish squad was supplemented by super

subs, 46-year-old coach, Kenneth Coakley, and Bohemian Foundation community director, Jeff Conway.

As the tournament progressed, other teams and the crowd began to sit up and take notice of the Bohemian Foundation team as win followed win.

They progressed through their group unbeaten, with 'keeper Graham Bedford pulling off a series of fantastic saves, and an impressive German side was disposed of in the semi final.

The Irish team then won the tournament in a tight final against a Norwegian side thanks to a late winner from Karl McMahon, who was the competition's top scorer.

"The standard of the games was really high and they were all really tight," said Hynes.

"When we got to the final everybody there was convinced we were going to be beaten. The place went silent when Karl scored. It was brilliant."

"It was very nice because we were presented with the Irish flag and the played Amhrán na bhFiann. It was a wonderful moment for the



■ The Bohemian Foundation team celebrate their victory. PHOTO: ANNEKE POELMA

team. I'm sure some of them never thought they'd be representing their country at an international tournament.

"The lads did really well and I think the authorities over there were impressed

with both the team and the work the Bohemian Foundation does.

"We've been invited back next year to defend the trophy."

Hynes says Irish represen-

tation at the tournament, which attracted attention from the Dutch media, is thanks to Mountjoy Prison, where the Foundation regularly brings over Boho players to coach inmates.

"We were greatly helped by the Governor of Mountjoy who gave us a generous donation that allowed us to bring the team over to Holland and we're very thankful for that," he said.

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