

Soccer stars bring 'Joy' to international tournament

A FIVE-YEAR relationship between the philanthropy arm of Bohemians FC and Mountjoy Prison will see a team of reformed prisoners representing Ireland at an international tournament this week.

The Bohemian Foundation has organised Irish participation in the 7-a-side competition that's taking place in the Dutch village of Veenhuizen.

The Foundation has been bringing Bohs' players to the 'Joy to coach prisoners

since 2012 and Community Director at the club, Tommy Hynes, explained how it all started.

"I was working with the Simon Community with St Pat's (Institution for young offenders, which has since

been amalgamated into the Mountjoy Prison Complex) in the area of alcohol and drug rehabilitation," the Bohemian Foundation co-founder said.

"They found out I was involved with Bohs and asked if the club could help out with bringing in players."

"It relieves a lot of tension around the place and it helps show there's light of the end of the tunnel for them when they get out.

"We don't just play football in the prison and leave it at that. We try to get them involved in local football when they are released - playing and coaching.

"We have nine guys travelling with us to the Netherlands - prisoners who have been released and who have not re-offended for a minimum of two years."

Deputy Governor of Mountjoy Prison and avid Cork City fan, Donnacha Walsh, met Tommy five years ago and is a keen supporter of the initiative.

"It has had a very positive effect," he said. "Lads have left here and taken up playing football when they leave and have reintegrated into the community.

"Most importantly, they haven't returned here. Anybody who doesn't return to Mountjoy is a job well done."

This season, it has been the turn of Bohemians first-team players Shane Supple and Oscar Brennan to volunteer their time on behalf of the Foundation.

They have conducted training sessions twice a week - on Tuesdays and Thursdays - for the past 3½ months.



■ Bohs' stars Oscar Brennan and Shane Supple put the prisoners through their paces.

"It's been good craic," Supple said. "We go in every week and just try to let the lads play.

"They see our games on the telly, they see us on Soccer Republic.

"Every time you come in on a Tuesday, they're either praising you or slagging you: 'Jaysus Shane, that was some save' or 'Oscar, what were you doing there?'"

"We all know these lads have done something bad. But maybe they've just made mistakes and want to rehabilitate themselves.

"The dynamic is interesting, there hasn't been a bad tackle!"

Brennan, in his first season at Dalymount Park, is studying sports and leisure management at UCD and was particularly keen to work with the prison.

"I was eager to go in, I wanted to see what it was like and see what way I could help and luckily enough I got the opportunity to do so," he said.

"When we went in first, a lot of the lads didn't know each other's names.

"From what I've seen, it's hard to go up when you're a prisoner and introduce yourself to other lads inside.

"It was a great way of breaking down barriers. Now you can see they're all socialising with each other. It's more of a community."

Last Saturday, the prisoners and the Bohemian Foundation team went head-to-head for the Conway Cup, a trophy donated by family of Bohemians members in honour of their father, Jimmy Conway Snr.

The Foundation team

edged the now-annual game 8-6 and Lord Mayor of Dublin, Mícheál Mac Donncha, presented the trophy and medals to both teams at the post-match reception.

Having enjoyed the Conway Cup in the Mountjoy training yard, the prisoners are now looking forward to going one step further - playing under lights at Dalymount Park for the Foundation Cup.

The Bohemian Foundation needs more funds to continue its work at Mountjoy and at Northside schools and community. Send a cheque, bank draft or postal order for €10 made payable to the Bohemian Foundation, Dalymount Park, Dublin 7, D07YX-WO. Remember to include an email address for updates on plans and progress.



■ Jeff Conway receives the Conway Cup from Lord Mayor of Dublin, Mícheál Mac Donncha.



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■ Bohemian Foundation co-founder, Tommy Hynes (left), with Deputy Governor of Mounjoy Prison, Donnacha Walsh.