

## **1895-1970 – Non league**

In 1895, the Catholic University Medical School Cecilia Street Football Club was founded, entering a team in the inaugural Leinster Junior League. The team's first match was against Bohemians B in October of 1895 and ended in a 2-0 defeat.

November 1895 also saw the first match against Trinity with a result of 2-0 to Catholic University.

1898 Catholic University qualified for the Leinster Senior Cup for the first time - and we reached the semi-final.

In 1908, the Catholic University merged with University College Dublin, and the team changed name with the merger. Things weren't quite settled yet, though, as we went through a series of grounds - in Sandymount, Cowper Road, Croydon Park, Fairview and Terenure before moving to Belfield Park in 1935 and now the UCD Bowl in 2008.

In the meantime, though, success had been regular. In 1914, we won the inaugural Collingwood Cup - the Irish collegiate championships. The next year, UCD won the IFA Intermediate Cup, beating Portadown 2-1 in a replay in Dalymount Park. The first match had seen UCD draw in Windsor Park on St Patrick's Day. The competition was the 'IFA' Cup because in those days before independence, the IFA governed football over the whole island, and the competition involved teams from the whole island. The Intermediate Cup was one step below the Senior Cup in importance, so it was certainly of some significance. UCD were also involved in the first ever FAI Senior Cup in 1921, when they took on a non-league side at the time, Shamrock Rovers, in Windy Arbour, losing 6-2.

Another trophy was to wing its way to Belfield in 1945 - the FAI Intermediate Cup, courtesy of a 4-2 win over Cobh Ramblers, again in Dalymount Park.

## **1970-1978 – Lol B years**

In 1970, UCD were elected to the League of Ireland B - just one step down from senior football.

It was around this time that Dr Tony O'Neill came to the club. In the 1970s and 1980s, the club toured many countries including Canada, China, India, Hong Kong, Thailand, Indonesia, Taiwan, the Phillippines, Singapore, Macao, Tonga, Sudan, Malaysia, Australia and Jordan, where we took on the national team in a challenge match. In 1974, Dublin won the All-Ireland football championship, beating Kerry in the final. How times have changed! Playing in the Dubs' team was one Kevin Moran, later to play 70 times for Ireland and win the FA Cup with Manchester United and the Premiership with Blackburn Rovers. At the time, he was playing soccer for UCD - playing GAA on the Saturday and soccer on the Sunday. In 1976, he helped us to another Collingwood Cup, before signing for Pegasus (Graduates weren't allowed to play for the team then, so Pegasus was founded as a team for the graduates). In 1977, Pegasus outdid UCD by qualifying for the FAI Cup. Such was Moran's contribution that he was promptly snapped up by Manchester United. In the 1978/79 season, our top scorer was Hugo McNeill with 46 goals. McNeill left UCD that where he concentrated more on his rugby, and was part of the 1985 Triple Crown-winning side and the 1987 World Cup team. Despite continuing rumours, however, Brazilian international Socrates did not play for the club at this time!

### **1979-1989 – League membership and the 80s**

July 1979 saw the day UCD enter the League of Ireland top division. Tony O'Neill was manager, Theo Dunne was coach and Keith Dignam was the first scholarship player. This was Dr. O'Neill's biggest contribution to the club and UCD's unique contribution to Irish football. Players offered a scholarship could sit for a degree while playing top-level football in Ireland. Practically everyone who has gone through the system has spoken highly of it, especially those who subsequently moved on to England. Kevin Moran, though technically never a scholarship recipient, has often said that delaying his move to England until after he completed his Commerce degree meant both that he was more mature when heading over, and also less worried about his future, as he had his degree.

The first season in the league, though, was tough going. In fact, we finished second last - ahead of Shelbourne - and had to apply for re-election.

A link-up with Vancouver Whitecaps (of the North American Soccer League) soon followed, which saw Dave Norman line out over 50 times for us over three seasons - he would go on to play for Canada in the 1986 World Cup. Vancouver were then managed by one John Giles, who sent his players to Ireland to maintain match fitness during the Canadian close season, and in 1981, he brought the team over for a friendly match to celebrate the opening of the Belfield Park dressing room area.

By the end of the 1982/83 season, though, it was apparent that the current system wasn't

working as we had to apply for re-election for the second time in only four seasons. Even the addition of on-loan players from the Vancouver Whitecaps , such as former Scottish international and Leeds United's record goalscorer Peter Lorimer signed, but played only three League games before re-joining Leeds United, was not enough to stop the slide. So UCD decided to abandon the student-only policy, allowing anyone to play for the College. This has been refined somewhat to-day - UCD generally only have students or graduates (an important distinction) in the team, with the occasional guest players, such as Derek Swan ( in the 2000/2001 campaign) , to help youngsters along. And of course, with the scholarship scheme, UCD can sign players from England and give them a college education, meaning that we aren't restricted to what comes through the CAO in early September. Scouts also check out the top schoolboy talent in the country and offer them scholarships on the condition that they obtain the relevant points requirement in the Leaving Cert. In 1983, those changes were rung rather dramatically. Another former international was Paddy Dunning, a centre-back with two senior Irish caps. Alan O'Neill was the most instrumental signing, while Dermot Keely was appointed manager but after eight games, he left for Shamrock Rovers. The policy worked, as at the end of the season, UCD finished sixth in the league - by far the highest position in UCD's short league history - and won the FAI Cup.

The 1984/85 season started off even better - we drew Everton in the European Cup Winners' Cup. A hammering was expected - the previous season, Drogheda United had played Spurs in the UEFA Cup and lost 14-0 on aggregate - but in front of a sell-out Tolka Park, we held the star-studded Toffees scoreless. Everton went on to win the home leg 1-0, but it could have been different as Ken O'Doherty skimmed the bar late on. To put that result in perspective, Everton's team contained the likes of Neville Southall, Irish international Kevin Sheedy, Andy Gray, Peter Reid, Derek Mountfield, Trevor Steven, Gary Stevens, Paul Bracewell and others. They went on to win the entire competition, as well as the league title and finish as runners-up in the FA Cup Final to Liverpool for good measure! Derek Mountfield and manager Howard Kendall were to look back at the UCD tie afterwards and reflect that it had been the toughest challenge along the way.

By Christmas of 1984, UCD were incredibly second in the league, but we ended up in fourth spot in the end. Unfortunately, financial problems hit, and the club were forced to release all semi-pro players. Manchester United signed Joe Hanrahan, then one of the most skilful players in the league. But with the side decimated, UCD picked up a mere eight points the next season and were relegated at the end of the 1985/86 season. The first team squad's average age was a mere 19 years! However, good news did befall the club as Dr. O'Neill was appointed as General Secretary of the FAI - he went on to hold many posts in football circles, travelling as an official to Italia '90 and being on the organising committee of Euro 2000 in the years leading up to the competition. It would certainly be fair to say, however, that UCD were always his first priority.

In 1987, UCD added a rather unusual trophy to the cabinet - it's still to be seen in the Sports Centre to this day, a big copper-rust coloured trophy with a keeper diving athletically to catch a ball. It is the World Collegiate trophy, which was won in New Mexico in April of that year, fending off opposition from American and Mexican colleges. And when you consider how seriously American colleges in particular take their sport, that is some achievement.

In 1988, UCD won promotion to the Premier, being relegated again the next year. The 1988 season was notable for us beating Shamrock Rovers in the FAI Cup Second Round - Rovers' first defeat in the competition since that 1984 replay!

### **1990-1999 – the 90s**

The 90s started with UCD back in the First Division. The club won the Collingwood Cup in 1993, but miss out on promotion on the last day. Liam Brady brought his Celtic team to Belfield Park, coming away with a 1-0 win. In 1995, though, all came spectacularly right as UCD went 18 games unbeaten, including ten consecutive wins, to walk the title by eight clear points. In his second season, Mick O'Byrne beat the UCD goalscoring record, beating Darren O'Brien's 1993/94 mark by one goal, with 14. At the end of the season, UCD were in Lansdowne Road twice - once to pick up the First Division trophy, and once to play a full-strength Liverpool in a centenary celebration. Terry Palmer equalised for us, but we ended up losing 3-1 in front of 22,616 fans; Jamie Redknapp and a Robbie Fowler brace did the damage for the Reds; David James, Phil Babb, Mark Kennedy, Steve McManaman and Nigel Clough all played.

Mick O'Byrne equalled that total the next season, playing alongside a new starlet by the name of Jason Sherlock. Sherlock emulated Kevin Moran's feat twenty years earlier in winning the All-Ireland for Dublin while playing soccer for UCD, attracting attention and trials from cross-channel. Trials with Bolton and Liverpool aren't followed with offers, though, and Sherlock left UCD in 1998 to sign for Shamrock Rovers. In the 1997/98 season, UCD end up tenth and face Limerick in a play-off. Three players are sent off as UCD win the home leg 3-1 to seal a 5-2 victory.

On the 3rd of October 1999, the club was rocked by the death after a short illness of the Dr. O'Neill. UCD's next two games were cancelled, and the Students returned to action in front of a packed Belfield Park where, after an impeccably observed minute's silence, UCD hammered Shamrock Rovers 3-0. Emotionally drained, UCD lost the next two games, but bounced back under new manager, Cup winner Martin Moran, to end the season fourth, qualifying for the InterToto Cup. With three games to go in the season, qualification was looking unlikely, but two consecutive weeks saw us win and the rest of the league draw, leaving us needing a 5-0 win away to Drogheda on the last day and Pat's to draw in Galway to qualify. We scored twice in the

last five minutes before Galway scored a winner in injury time for an incredible end to the season.

2000-2003 – Martin Moran and the Doolin years The InterToto Cup saw UCD take on Velbazhd Kyustendil of Bulgaria, with some Bulgarian internationals (right-back Ilian Stoianov played in Euro 2004). UCD had been training for a week and yet, in blisteringly hot conditions, played their part in a brilliant game, twice coming from behind to earn a 3-3 draw. In Bulgaria, a 0-0 draw was highly commendable, but saw us go out on away goals. A month later, UCD won the Super Cup (the warm-up tournament for the European qualifiers) on penalties against Bohs. But the season went downhill from there and, despite a first-ever League Cup final appearance, where we lost 5-3 on aggregate to St Pat's, UCD ended up needing a late burst of form to avoid automatic relegation. A play-off followed, and after another dramatic 3-3 draw (this time on aggregate after a 2-1 defeat in Athlone and a 2-1 win in Belfield), UCD stayed up on penalties. A massive pitch invasion follows!

The close season before the 2000/01 season saw Paul Doolin arrive as a player, being primed to take over the manager's role. Three games into the season, UCD lost 6-0 in Dalymount and Martin Moran quit. UCD ended the season in seventh place - only five points off Europe - with Robbie Martin named PFAI Young Player of the Year and away wins over Shels, Rovers, Longford, Cork and Pat's under the belt in a brilliant campaign. Next season saw the club at the bottom of the league for most of the season before a run of six consecutive clean sheets from Barry Ryan lifted the club to sixth. However, we outdid ourselves the following year, losing the first eight games of the 2002/03 season. After a 1-1 draw with Cork left UCD eight points adrift, just past the half-way point of the season, Doolin left for Drogheda. UCD acted quickly in appointing Pete Mahon - father of full-back Alan - as new manager. Had the league started when he took over, UCD would have finished fourth. As it was, UCD closed the gap on Derry to a single point by the last game. A 2-0 win over Longford, recently crowned FAI Cup champions, wasn't enough as Derry beat Waterford - their second away win of the season - to enter the play-off and end UCD's nine-year top flight status.

### **2004-present: the Pete Mahon years**

Mahon's UCD continued their fine form in the First Division, starting with a 2-0 away win against promotion rivals Bray and ending with 75 points – a club and, indeed, division record. Alas, on the final day, Finn Harps also beat that record and so, despite losing only two games all season, UCD finished runners-up.

There was some consolation though in a new goalscoring record – Willie Doyle with 15 – and a Cup quarter final against Drogheda United, where the Students were finally knocked out five

minutes from the end of extra time in a replay. Darren Quigley, Conor Kenna, Willie Doyle and Brian Gannon were just some of the players uncovered by a revitalised scholarship scheme.

2005 saw more Cup success – another FAI Cup quarter final, with two-time reigning champions Longford Town beaten on the way, while we also reached the League Cup semi. There, we faced league champions Shelbourne – with no fear, having held them 1-1 in Tolka on the opening day of the season. With the score 1-0 to Shels as the game entered injury time, all looked lost, but first Brian Gannon equalised and then Robbie Martin won the game in sensational manner. The final, against Derry City, was the first ever live TV game to be screened from Belfield Park; 2174 crammed into the ground to see Derry sneak the Cup 2-1.

Another Cup quarter followed in 2006 – Derry City doing the damage this time – but the Students ended the season sixth in the table, sealing a first top-half finish since InterToto qualification. At the season's end, UCD finish second in the FAI's IAG assessment process, securing a place in the following season's Premier Division.

Yet another Cup quarter final followed in 2007 – and this time, Pete Mahon broke his duck with a superb 1-0 win in Derry, a game which ranks as possibly his finest hour with the club. Heartbreak followed with a 1-0 loss at home to Longford in the semis, and a red card for Alan Mahon presaged a 3-0 loss in Derry in the League Cup semi-finals.

After all that, the Students' league form collapsed, and where safety had been all but assured eight games out, it needed an 87th minute open goal miss from Waterford in their game against Shamrock Rovers to see UCD avoid the play-offs.

With Irish internationals left right and center (Robbie Doyle, Conor Kenna, Darren Quigley, Shane McFaul, Ronan Finn, Gary Dicker, Darren Forsyth, Timmy Purcell, Conor Sammon and Ian Bermingham all picking up honours ranging from Ireland U-19 to Ireland B under Mahon's tutelage) the prospects looked bright. However that wasn't how things turned out at least in the short term.

The 2008 season saw UCD move into their new home at the UCD Bowl. And far from being a fortress the opposition felt more at home that the Students did with UCD losing 10 League games at their new home and winning only two. Away from home the picture was even bleaker

as UCD finished bottom of the table and were effectively down several weeks before the end of the campaign. One bright spark in an otherwise gloomy outlook was that the A Division team won the Championship.

During the close season Pete Mahon quit as manager and into the breach came Martin Russell who had been assisting Pete for the previous three seasons. He quickly moved to appoint former Longford Town manager Aaron Callaghan as coach and their first task in January 2009 was to completely rebuild the side. Matt Gregg went to Bohemians, Enda Stevens went to St. Patrick's Athletic, Ian Bermingham went to Shamrock Rovers, Conor Kenna, Brian King and Alan McNally left for Drogheda United, Alan Mahon retired and several other players left the club for pastures new including Shane McFaul who left for Sporting Fingal and Pat McWalter who left the game to take up GAA. Martin with a reduced budget did the only thing possible and promoted from within. Several of the 2008 A Championship winning squad were now the first team.

Used to winning they got off to the best possible start posting a 100% record early on and winning away to both Sporting Fingal and Shelbourne in the first round of fixtures. UCD maintained this form and recovered from a slight blip in results to take the First Division Championship for only the second time in club history, away to Athlone Town on the penultimate day of the season. UCD celebrated despite losing the final home game of the season to Waterford United on a night in they were crowned champions.

The 2010 season begins with UCD only having lost two regular first team members from 2009, John Reilly deciding to emigrate to Canada and Ronan Finn leaving for Sporting Fingal, who have placed him on a scholarship scheme of their own with DCU. They go into this campaign cautiously optimistic of staying in the top flight and the new arrivals in the first team squad will come in from the 2009 Under 20 League Championship winning side!