

The UCD Bowl this Friday sees the launch of a new League of Ireland book. One Night in Dudelage – Adventures in the UEFA Europa League is written by UCD fan Kevin Burke and published by Vision Sports Publishing. It'll be available in the club shop on Friday night – or, if you can't wait that long, it's available in the campus bookshop now.



We caught up with Kevin for a chat ahead of the launch.

So is this a UCD book?

Yes and no. The story is of UCD's 2015 Europa League run, when the newly-relegated Students qualified by the Fair Play award and went and beat F91 Dudelange – now competing in the group stage for the second year in a row – before really putting it up to a Slovan Bratislava side with three World Cup players in their squad, all while they had to keep working on their PhD projects or studying for their exams.

But the bigger story is of a European campaign in general, so it's an inside view of what goes on from start to finish during a campaign – what happens at the draw in Switzerland for example? How do you scout a team at such short notice? What problems are there in arranging away games? All that stuff that is absolutely essential, and often chaotic, but it doesn't get talked about at all.

So this book should be of interest to anyone who's been on a European trip with their own club, whichever one that is. It's a book which features UCD, but it's not a UCD book.

What sort of unusual details come out in the story?

Well, one of the things that caught my attention early on was our third round match against FC Krasnodar. We didn't reach the third round, of course, and realistically we were never going to. But the draw was made the day after our last-gasp 1-0 away defeat to Slovan, and if we beat them in the home leg, we would have had to be in Russia six days later. So the club had to arrange the whole tie – sort a new ground for the home leg, arrange visas and flights for the away game, everything. And the Russians were certain they were going to be playing Slovan, so they ignored the requests for info, while the Russian Embassy were telling the club a couple of players would be denied visas because their passports were about to expire. Add in making arrangements for Slovan hooligans and a major fundraising match against Liverpool, and you can get an idea how hectic a European campaign can be off the pitch.

And of course we never did go to Russia in the end, so all the work was for nothing. But if we hadn't planned it and had somehow gone through, the club would have found themselves on Friday needing to be in south-west Russia the following Wednesday. It wouldn't have been possible; we'd have had to scratch. You can't take that risk. But that's the kind of stuff that goes on all the time in the qualifying rounds of Europe.

Did it help that it was a team of college students in the story?

Absolutely. I think a similar story about, say, Rovers reaching the 2011 group stages wouldn't have been anywhere near as much fun to write. There was very much an innocence about the whole trip. They weren't naive – the preparation was top notch – but look at Mark Langtry and Robbie Benson heading into Tesco five hours before kick-off in Bratislava and having an encounter with a group of Slovan ultras for example. Or Tomás Boyle's parents framing the front page of the Luxembourg newspaper he was pictured on. You probably wouldn't see a Shamrock Rovers player doing that. You certainly wouldn't see Messi or Ronaldo doing it. But these guys are only students; it's much more of an adventure to them. And I think that comes out in the story. There's a real sense of a group of college students enjoying themselves on a summer holiday.

And I think you can associate easier with a team of students. Conor Cannon came on as a sub in two games; he was originally spotted at the Freshers' trials. Lots of students go for the UCD Freshers' trials. I went for them. Maccer cut me fairly quickly of course (possibly because I'm way too short to be a keeper!), but with a bit more luck/ability – call it what you want! – I could have gone down the same route as Cannon. But there's no way I could read about, say, Dundalk's European campaign and think that I could have been a part of that team.

How much inside info did you have in writing it?

Pretty much everyone who was anyone chatted for an hour or more for it. So you have the club secretary telling you how he was asking other clubs for help on licencing because the UEFA version had his head wrecked; you have the coaches telling you what they did to try scout the opposition and set the team up for the games; you have the players telling you what they were thinking when the first game kicked off; you have the manager putting you into that dressing room in Luxembourg when we had just conceded twice late in the half to be hanging on on away goals down to ten men, and now had 45 minutes to somehow hang on.

And I think where it differs from other books on the Lol in Europe is that instead of being a retrospective look back at a campaign or some famous games, I'm trying to put the reader down there on the pitch or in the dugout or the dressing room or the club offices; to make you feel like you're part of the games.

Finally, where is it available?

It'll be in the club shop on matchnights of course, starting with this Friday against Shamrock Rovers. It's in the campus bookshop, or you can buy it from the publishers at <https://shop.visionsp.co.uk/football/OneNightInDudelage>. I'm working on other outlets – it should be on amazon shortly for example – but if you want to pop into your local bookshop and ask for it, fire ahead. Anything that spreads the word!