

Alfie Hale: A Sporting Life



Alfie made his professional debut for the Blues in the 3-1 home win to Bohemians on Easter Sunday 1960

Waterford 1100 Talks

Alfie Hale entertained his fans old and new at the latest talk in the Waterford 1100 series earlier this month at the Medieval Museum.

He gave a great insight into his family, Waterford and the world of professional soccer.

Hale spoke about growing up in Dominic Place and Ard na Gréine, jumping over the wall into Walsh Park to play Gaelic and his great love of soccer.

The family had a long association with St. Joseph's soccer club, where he played as a juvenile. The young Hale spent his summer playing soccer in the morning, hurling in the afternoon and gaelic football in the evening at Walsh Park.

Sport was the Hale family love. Alfie came from a large family of nine kids, five boys and four girls. He grew up with hurling greats such as the Grimes and the Guinans.

Alfie told a great story of how Georgie, his older brother, defended him from a kicking Cork player when they played for the Blues and warned the offending player not to be kicking his young brother.

Alfie later scored a hat-trick in this his debut match in Cork. The same Cork man Cowey would later attend Georgie's funeral, a few decades later. Georgie became a great sax player in the showbands and loved a night out with the lads but died early of cancer.

Alfie's brother Dixie, who now lives in Swansea also played with Waterford

Alfie was such a star he was hot property and would eventually be signed for Aston Villa for a fee of £4,500 by the famous Joe Mercer who managed Manchester City to the first division league title in 1968.

Hale returned to Waterford and became a central figure in the Waterford team that dominated the league with five titles in six seasons.

Alfie was a home bird and did not like being away despite playing on the first team in division one at the tender age of only 18 years. After two years with Villa he signed for Doncaster Rovers in 1962 for a fee of £1,000. He married his girlfriend Cis, also from Waterford and settled down to life in the Yorkshire town.

He became a local hero there with his great heading ability and was known as the young Puskas, the famous Hungarian soccer player, who helped beat England 7-1 at Wembley.

Alfie went on to speak about many friends he made including George Graham, a good friend at Villa.

Other famous people he met include Alf Ramsey, Matt Busby, Alex Ferguson, Pele, Bobby Charlton, Johnny Haynes, Kevin Keegan and he remembered playing against Gordon Banks and getting rave reviews for his display for Villa in the 0-0 draw against the Spurs double winning team of 1963.

Another favourite friend is Johnny Giles, although he does not think much of Eamon Dunphy, whom he knew as a player but whom he feels contradicts himself on TV sometimes and is controversial on the panel

He spoke about how the taxman got him for old sporting earnings that amounted to three times the value of them, much to his regret.

He was asked many questions about the final against Rovers in 1972, which Waterford lost and how he differed with Shay Brennan.

He later left for Cork Celtic as a result and returned when Shay resigned.

He was then a player manager for Thurles, Kilkenny and Waterford.

Alfie's knowledge of his early days in Waterford in the fifties and sixties are tremendous during the soccer and showband era. He recalled good people like Frank Davis, Doc O' Driscoll, Mick Bolger, Don Kennedy, who got him a house in Rockfield Park when he came back. He also got a job selling Lyons tea in '68.

There were some excellent stories about John O'Neill who should have played for Ireland and other stories recalled occasions in Dublin in the company of John Giles, Peter Lorimer, Eddie Gray and Mick Bates.

There were some stand out games to look back on including the trip to Istanbul in front of a hostile crowd in the European Cup but the 1968 game against Manchester United in Landsdowne Road and the return leg at Old Trafford will forever remain very special.

Hale told the story of Al Casey's encounter with Tony Dunne in that second leg at Old Trafford.

Al Casey's

Manchester United and Republic of Ireland full-back Tony Dunne clattered into Al Casey. The gifted little Waterford player was lying on the ground in agony. "Get up, you are OK," said Dunne. "It's alright for you to say that," replied Al as Dunne stood over him. "I am on the 4 to 12 shift in the Paper Mills tomorrow while you will be out playing golf."

Alfie has great admiration for tough players like Jimmy McGeough and told another interesting story about a match against Limerick where eight players were sent off.

Alfie is sad that once again soccer has hit lean times and acknowledged there is a dire need for an increase in sponsorship but he has tremendous admiration for John Sullivan and his efforts to keep Waterford United afloat.

While he has great respect for the talent of Lionel Messi and Cristiano Ronaldo he feels young players in England are over paid with many of the millionaire at just 18 years.

Alfie brought great memories back for those present in what was an exceptional evening and proved himself an exceptional story teller.

At 75 years old he looks hale and hearty, the family name originates from the Southampton area of England, with the first Hale coming to Waterford in early 1900s. The Hales have relations across Waterford and are also related to another great Waterford sporting hero, Olympian Susan Smith.