

ISYL

IRISH SPORTS

YOUTH

LEAGUE OF

NEW ENGLAND

# ***IRISH SPORTS YOUTH LEAGUE***

## ***OF NEW ENGLAND***

Although the Irish Sports Youth League is only in its fifth year of operation, there is a great history of underage football in the Greater Boston area. As late as the mid-1980s, minor football flourished in Boston, as teams were extremely successful on the national level. Unfortunately, there was a variety of problems and the New England Minor Football Board was disbanded. Although there was no longer an official league, there remained great interest in minor football by many people. Eventually, action was taken to bring the great game of Irish Football back to the youth of Greater Boston.

In 1996, with the North American County Board Playoffs coming to Boston, many felt that there should be a representative from Boston in the Under-18 competition. With constant urging from parents, family members, and other concerned individuals, practices began in April to prepare a team for competition. There were ups and downs on the way, but the team took shape when two groups, one training in West Roxbury under Mickey Joe Hynes and one training on the South Shore under Martin Faherty, began training together. There was such a response by players of all ages that Boston ended up fielding teams in the Under-18, Under-14, and Under-12 competitions. While Boston fell to more experienced Chicago and San Francisco sides in the Under-18, they were able to capture the Under-12 and Under-14 titles over Philadelphia sides.

The following winter and spring, an actual board was formed and James Grealish took the chair of the brand new New England Minor Football Board. In the spring, the Board was treated to a visit by Pat Daly, Chairman of Games & Development for Croke Park. That visit helped shape the mission of the new board, to teach the game to children while stressing the fun aspects of it. In that summer of 1997, the Board enjoyed more competition with Philadelphia teams, focused on the Under-16, Under-14, and Under-12 age groups. And once again, Boston was represented in the NACB Playoffs by their Under-18 side. A very young and spirited team traveled to San Francisco, once again falling to Chicago and San Francisco, but gaining valuable experience. All in all, it was a year of tremendous growth for the Minor Board.

In 1998, the Board adopted the new name of the Irish Sports Youth League and set out to top the successes of the previous seasons. There was an increase in competition with Philadelphia, as midsummer games were held to bring the two leagues closer together. The number of underage players in Boston grew even further, topping 150 kids, most of them under the age of 12. These kids were able to enjoy competition with Philadelphia sides and with each other. The Under-18 team hosted a traveling team from Connemara which provided important game experience for the local team. That year, the Playoffs were held in Washington, DC, and the League made a huge impact on the weekend. Some younger players attending the games were able to participate in skills competitions with players from Philadelphia, Chicago, and San Francisco. And Boston's Under-18 team triumphed under manager PJ Gill, capturing the national title for the first time in the League's recent history. The Minors were extremely proud and honored to receive their championship medals from visiting All-Star Sean Og De Paor. Finally, the Minor team was catching up with the success of the younger teams, which were strengthening the League immeasurably.

The League continued its growth into 1999, as the underage programs began using the facilities of the Irish Cultural Centre in Canton to train. Many of the younger teams were split between sessions in Canton and West Roxbury, but that simply made it all the more exciting when the teams came together for competition. In the early summer, the Under-18 team played a New York side in New Haven, CT, and the Under-14, -12, -10, -8, and -6 teams enjoyed competition in Boston, New York and Philadelphia with sides from Philadelphia, Buffalo, and New York. The Under-18 team, in a rebuilding year, lost in the final to national champion San Francisco at the NACB Playoffs, but proved that Boston would be a contender for years to come.

This brings us into 2000, as the Youth League is flourishing with a roster of over 250 boys and girls, ranging from age 5 to age 18. The Under-18 team has been helped by increased competition with New York teams, and seems ready to take back its title at the NACB Playoffs in Boston. The League will be hosting teams from cities such as Buffalo, Chicago, Philadelphia, San Francisco, and Toronto at the Playoffs in divisions from Under-6 to Under-18. And, as anyone can witness on a Sunday afternoon in Canton, all of our kids seem more than ready to meet the challenge.

While competitions, victories and enrollment figures are certainly indicators of the health of the Youth League, the greatest measure of success is in the smiles on the faces of the children as they enjoy the great game of Irish Football. Our coaches and administrators have not strayed for the Leagues goal of simply bringing the game to as many children as possible and allowing them to enjoy it. No numbers can equal the happiness of a child as he plays a scrimmage on a Sunday afternoon or prepares for a trip to Philadelphia or New York for a fun-filled weekend. The League offers thanks to its sponsors for giving the children the opportunity to enjoy the game, and to its volunteers, parents, and coaches for devoting time and energy to the happiness of these kids. And most of all, we must thank the youth of Boston for making all of this possible. As long as the children remain happy with the game, the Irish Sports Youth League will remain strong and committed. There are no signs of the League slowing down at all; rather, it continues to grow in experience and enjoyment for the kids. And this is a great thing for the youth of Greater Boston and for the game of Irish Football.

Prepared by Edward O'Connor, Youth League supporter



L to R: Michael O'Connor, Sean Og DePaor - Galway All Star  
Ryan O'Malley - 1998 Minor All Star. Sean Lyons