

COLCHESTER UNITED FC **DIARY FROM LIMERICK UNIVERSITY**



On July 15th, Colchester United's 1st Team Squad flew to Limerick on the west coast of Ireland for their pre-season training camp organised by Esselle Sports Management. Below is an account of their stay in their own words!

15th July 2007

In the first of our player diaries direct from Limerick, Clive Platt gives us the lowdown on the journey from east to west and on arrival in Ireland.

"Wakey, wakey, rise and shine!"

"What a first day! I don't normally have a long lay-in on a Saturday morning but hearing the alarm go off at 4 o'clock in the morning isn't something I can remember happening very often before.

Luckily enough, I had packed everything I needed on Friday night and was pretty much ready to go once I'd managed to wake myself up properly, had a quick shower and dressed.

I had stayed overnight in Chelmsford so it was a short trip over to Stansted Airport with the other lads from the area, Pat Baldwin, Mark Cousins and Dean Gerken.

Mark and Pat had arranged the old valet parking for when we got to the airport but couldn't remember his car's registration number on Friday when they booked it, having to guess it and hope for the best this morning.

Easily done with a new car you might think, but I'm told Mark has had his car for over a year!

It turned out OK though and his car was duly driven off from the terminal, hopefully to a local car park and not to be rallied round Essex for the next few days.

With recent events, I was expecting it to be slow progress getting our bags checked in and getting through passport control, but it did seem a bit slower than even the more pessimistic amongst us thought it would be.

It wasn't until we got to the front of the queue that we found out there was a reason for the delay, none of the conveyor belts taking the luggage away from the check-in were working properly.

So, by the time we had checked in, got through passport control and had our hand luggage checked, there was no time for duty-free shopping, it was straight on the plane.

Minor turbulence on the short trip over but overall a good flight and it wasn't long before all our luggage was loaded on to the coach taking us to Limerick University, our base for the next few days.

We were divided up on arrival and there were six of us to each apartment but we weren't in them long before we took a walk to the restaurant for our lunch which was devoured pretty sharpish as most of us hadn't had time to eat breakfast at home or at the airport.

Some much needed shut-eye followed lunch before we went out into the pouring rain for an afternoon training session, our first session with new assistant manager Micky Adams present.

It was pretty short and sharp, the Gaffer probably thought the early morning start might have tired us out but we did get a good '10 v 8' session under our belts.

By the time we got back to our rooms, got out of our soaking kit and showered, it was time for dinner and I must admit the quality of food on offer was high, as it was at lunchtime.

It was a long day, but it was good to get out on a training ground in a different environment and we had some free time after dinner to have a look round the University before getting a good night's kip.

It seems like a good place to study with plenty of sporting facilities on offer and we went off to bed knowing that a lot of work will be done here in the next four days."

"U's seek high life"

There was no football training on Sunday for the U's squad in Limerick but they were still put through their paces at the Limerick University Activity Centre and those fearing heights were in for a bit of a shock.

With three exercises to complete on the climbing frames, it was a case of teamwork in the first two and a test of individual nerve on the last one, with a high wire walk fifty feet up to contend with.

Fitness coach Donough Holohan was the keenest to get back down to earth but he was closely followed by new signing Mark Yeates and first year pro' Tom Webb.

Causing most concern was the platform test as four people had to climb a pole and balance on a two foot square platform that was also about fifty feet up in the air before leaning back holding each other's hands.

These activities were followed by Dragon Boat racing on the lake, and it descended into chaos as a boat capsized halfway into the race and ten of the players were cold and wet as they were brought back to shore.

The management team won that race but new assistant manager Micky Adams' joy was shortlived as he was dumped unceremoniously in the drink as a 'welcome to Colchester United' present.



16th July 2007

“Up, up and away”

Saturday saw Clive Platt open the player diaries from Limerick and fellow new signing Luke Guttridge takes the baton to bring you the lowdown on what occurred on Sunday.

“Well, compared to yesterday, we all had a lie-in but meeting at 8.30 in the morning having been told to wear comfortable clothes that you don't mind

getting wet didn't lead to any of us thinking we were going to be taking it easy just because it was Sunday.

A half hour coach journey took us to the shores of the lake and the surroundings should have been enjoyed but the view was spoilt by the sight of high, and I mean **HIGH**, climbing frames with helmets and ropes at the bottom.

The staff at the Activity Centre did try and lull us into a friendly, but false, sense of security with tea and coffee before they explained what was in store for the morning.

Boat racing on the lake sounded fun but we had to get through all the climbing exercises first and there were some aching muscles once we had finished pulling and pushing each other up to the top.

We were separated into three teams, one team for each activity and after a safety briefing and a few laughs getting our helmets and harness on, it was time to face our fears. Not mine, but there were a few pale faces around.

A series of horizontal wooden poles awaited us for our first activity and the distance between the poles increased the higher we went, so it was a real effort to get up to the next pole once we got the first couple out of the way.

We went up in small groups, threes and fours, and it was a case of teamwork as the first person was helped up to the next level by the others. His job wasn't done once he was up though, he then had to help haul up the other two.

There was time limit for getting to the top and I was very impressed by everyone's willingness to get up to that top level by hook or by crook, even when people looked like they'd had enough and could have given up.

The next activity was an individual one but it did help having the other lads encouraging you from below if they saw you were having any moments of hesitation between sections.

This activity involved starting from ground level and walking up a diagonal pole to get you to a vertical pole with metal grips on, that you then had to climb to start the next section.

By now, we were about thirty feet off the ground and had to walk across a horizontal pole, which was quite daunting and was probably when encouraging shouts were most welcome.

I know we had safety ropes on us and if we thought about it, we knew we wouldn't fall far but at the time it was pretty scary and I could feel my heart beating a touch harder and faster than usual.

Up another pole to the final section of the activity, a tightrope walk with ropes to help you that were just out of reach making us stretch just too far to be comfortable when we grabbed for them.

It seemed higher but I suppose we were 'only' about fifty feet up at this stage, so it was a massive trust in the equipment as we made it across to the other side, a walk of about twenty metres.

The final activity looked easy as you climbed up a pole, using bits of wood to stand on and to hold onto as you went up. The hard bit was hauling yourself onto the platform at the top but once I got up on it, I thought, "that wasn't too bad". I thought too soon!

When I glanced down, the platform was about two feet square and looked like it was plenty big enough for me to stand on comfortably. The only trouble was there was going to be four of us on that little platform.

Holding onto someone who you can feel is shaking somehow gets you more nervous and with all four of us on the platform, it wasn't easy to get into the position we needed to be in to perform the final test.

We were meant to link arms and all lean backwards until we were just holding hands with fifty feet of fresh air beneath us. It was tough to do it but we gave it a good go before being lowered down to the ground.

At last, it was onto the boat racing and the first race saw a team of nine players, myself included, against the management and a couple of players who were put in their team to make up the numbers.

In our determination to beat the staff, we somehow managed to tip our boat up and all end up in the drink, which was shockingly cold watching the staff casually cross the finish line for victory. I'm sure we were in front before that freak wave took us out!

Having been rescued and brought back to shore, we had to suffer the humiliation of watching the staff paddle back with big grins on their faces even though they only won by default.

Purely for the team bonding and all of us 'being in it together' I had to make sure Micky Adams got as wet and cold as us. I noticed him stray far too near the edge of the jetty and grabbed him, launching us both into the water.

Our time was up at the Activity Centre, so those that needed it had a hot shower and changed clothes before getting back on the bus for the trip back to the campus for a, by then, much needed and deserved lunch.

We had the rest of the day free so I had a wander round before retiring back to my room for some R & R before making my way back to the restaurant for dinner, another meal well prepared by the University's catering staff.

A few of us then went off to Limerick to take in the latest Harry Potter movie at the cinema and it certainly lived up to the hype as a film for both kids and adults.

We were told that Monday will involve a double training session so it was an early night to rest up for whatever the Gaffer, Micky and Donough have in store for us."

"Don sets tough task"

On Monday morning, the U's squad had a tough session out on the pitch here at Limerick University but that didn't stop the U's fitness coach Donough Holohan putting the lads through their paces in the University gym after lunch.

Weight training is one of the aspects of the U's training that has moved up a level over the last eighteen months and the new signings have got used to the techniques required and are rapidly catching up with the work the rest of the squad do.

Explaining why the players do these weight sessions, Donough told CU-FC.com "There are two main reasons why this weight training helps the players, both in games and in training.

"Power injury prevention mean that players are naturally stronger on the ball and obviously miss less games than they would without doing the weights.

"The major injury prevention advantage with the type of training they're doing is that it allows us to overload the key muscles (hamstrings, glutes, calfs etc.) that they use in a game so those muscles aren't surprised at the intensity they have to work during the game.

"Pulls, strains and tears occur when a muscle is asked to do something it isn't used to doing," Donough concluded, "and these sessions make sure those key muscles are ready and waiting when the games kick off."

After the hour long session, the day's hard work was done but Donough finished the afternoon with a warm down and a stretch in the University's Olympic swimming pool.

17th July 2007

"Boss puts on first game"

Tuesday morning saw the U's session end with an 11 v 11 match on a full pitch and while heavy challenges weren't encouraged, the will to win was evident from both teams.



Manager Geraint Williams oversaw proceedings, with Micky Adams watching carefully from the sidelines, and saw two mixed teams work extremely hard in very hot and humid conditions here on the south west coast of Ireland.

The game came after an hour's functional work and there were a few tired bodies once the final whistle went, with the match being of two halves of twenty minutes each.

No obvious knocks were sustained and Tony Flynn and Donough Holohan were happy that all the players participated fully and none had to come off the field of play for treatment, not even for expected blisters with the ground being fairly firm underfoot.

While the physical performances are important at this stage in pre-season, technical sessions will be added as the squad build up to their first game, a trip to Heybridge Swifts on Saturday afternoon.

"Yeates yearns for his bed"

With the weekend out the way, it was a tough day for the U's players on Monday and new signing Mark Yeates brings you Day Three of the players' diaries from Limerick.

“At last, we were able to get up at a respectable hour after two morning wake-up calls at 4.00 a.m. and 7.30 a.m. We all knew it was going to be a hard day’s work but no-one could really complain about lack of sleep last night.

We arrived at the training pitch and there was a whisper that Teddy Sheringham was on his way and would be joining us this morning, but only if Brian Owen had gone to the right airport to pick him up!

We were just getting into our morning session which certainly got our heart rates up, when we saw Brian and Teddy walking over to meet us, so we all gave Teddy a bit of light hearted stick for not getting over sooner.



He took all the banter in good humour and it can only be good that a legend like Teddy is going to be at the U’s this season, with the experience he can bring and the help he can give the young lads.

The session we were doing involved ball work but it was a really physical work out, with us having to work at around 90% of our maximum heart rate for four minutes with a two minute rest.

We had to do eight sessions of four minutes and to be fair to the lads, they all got through it although I don’t think the eighth time round was quite as strong as the first few four minute spells.

We had lunch upstairs in the Sports Arena and as we ate, we watched some athletes out on the track doing their sprint training. I have seen some quick

footballers but these guys and girls were rapid and looked like powerful runners.

If Teddy thought he was missing out after watching our morning session, he was mistaken as the Gaffer and Micky took him on a dribble track, with him doing the same 'four minutes work, two minutes rest' intensity work that we had done earlier.

While Teddy was still outside doing his work, Donough the mad fitness coach had us doing our Olympic weights session with us being put with three other players of similar ability.

The idea is to build up our power as well as prevent injuries and fair play to Don, going by last season he has got the lads fit and strong with the work he has done with them in the gym at Layer Road.

I must mention that George Elokobi is a beast in the gym and if I ever needed a bodyguard I would be straight on the phone to him.

We did all our weights and with most of us feeling that our arms were falling off, George proceeded to do about twenty-five pull-ups no problem!

Keeping twenty odd players fed and watered can't be that easy but dinner was OK again, even though Kem moaned about it again. He is very fussy about his food mind!

If the management had any worries about us being out until all hours while we were over here, they have made sure they are working us hard enough to tire us out because I am only in the mood for bed and another early night.

Donough has already told us there will also be two training sessions tomorrow but I'm sure it won't be s hard as today.....well that's what I'm trying to tell myself over and over again!"

"New boy Teddy in town"

Teddy Sherringham has joined his new teammates in Limerick.

The former England international got an early flight on Monday morning and as soon as he arrived at Limerick University, he got on his U's training gear and met up with the squad on the main pitch at the Arena.

The squad were in the middle of a specific drill so Teddy warmed up on his own and was put through his paces later on by boss Geraint Williams and assistant manager Micky Adams.

He has got to know the squad over the past twenty-four hours or so, with the lads handing out some friendly banter on his arrival at training, and will obviously be starting to put names to faces as he spends more time with them.

18th July 2007

“Connolly comes to the diary room”

CU-FC.com and U's World are out in Ireland and Tuesday's player diary comes from Arsenal loanee defender Matthew Connolly.

“I have seen the last few diaries and I must admit those first two mornings were a bit extreme so it is nice to be back training at a normal hour, although yesterday's double session did take it out of us a bit.

The rumour amongst the lads that have been here at Colchester United for a while was that today was not going to be anywhere near as hard as Monday, but I must say it was still a tough day's training.

We met at the training pitch at 10.30 a.m. as we had on Monday but there was no intriguing sets of dribble sticks and disks placed around the pitch so I knew something different was planned.

Donough once again took our warm-up and then we were split up into two groups, forwards and defenders. Micky Adams kindly defined these two groups as the players and the shotputters.

Us defenders went with Joe Dunne and did about half an hour of defensive heading skills, which involved us trying to get distance on our clearances and then back tracking to make saving headers off the goal-line.

While we were working our socks off trying to prevent goals, the forwards up the other end of the pitch looked like they were doing a nice easy crossing and finishing session with Micky.

Not too bad a training session we were thinking, but then the Gaffer divided us up into two teams for what was to be our first full-sided game since we were back in pre-season training.

For the first time since we arrived in Ireland, it was hot and humid during training but that didn't stop the lads putting 100% into the practice match which was twenty minutes each way and very competitive.

The Gaffer made a point about being careful and while everyone wanted to win and wanted to get to every ball first, there was a respect for your teammates and it was a game played in the right manner.

I did manage to catch an accidental elbow in the face but that is part and parcel of the game for a centre-half and I hope our centre-forwards put themselves about this much and more once the Championship games start.

Then, with lunch out of the way, we were off to the swimming pool for the afternoon session but today it wasn't for a warm-down, it was a physical session taken once again by our popular fitness coach, Donough Holohan.

I overheard Johnnie Jackson giving an interview at lunchtime where he was saying George Elokobi wasn't the best swimmer and while big George wasn't Duncan Goodhew, Medy Elito took the prize of worst swimmer. And the prize for most girly scream when being splashed!

After dinner in the evening, a few of the lads went into town for a wander but the big news was the management team were having a pool competition and the Irish duo of Dunne and Holohan were blitzing the opposition.

While it was reported that the Gaffer and Tony Flynn were steady and unspectacular, the wooden spoon apparently went to the English pairing of well, they know who they were!

If today was meant to be an 'easier' day, I'd better get a good night's kip if tomorrow is going to get harder again."

"Limerick trip winds down"

Wednesday saw the last training session for the U's in Ireland.

The morning was once again spent on the University's main pitch surrounded by the running track and the session started with the rain coming down hard, but it wasn't long before the sun came out and it turned as hot as Tuesday.

A high heart rate was the aim and six sections of four minute sessions ensued, with Geraint Williams taking a short and sharp small-sided game and his assistant Micky Adams running a keep ball session.

Two lots of training a day over the past three days started to take their toll and frustration amongst the players was creeping in towards the end of the session as tiredness was causing a few passes to go astray.

Midfielder Kem Izzet held his hand up as one of the culprits, saying, "There were some tired legs out there and it was getting frustrating to have to chase after bad balls but we have to demand quality from each other if we are to improve both our technique and our fitness levels".

"It was another tough morning," Kem continued after Wednesday morning's workout, "but the lads got through it and we only have a weights session to do this afternoon. I say 'only' as if the weights are going to be easy, but trust me, they won't be!"

Wednesday afternoon's weights will be the final training the U's do in Limerick before flying back to England on Thursday, ready for their first pre-season game at Heybridge Swifts.

19th July 2007

"Danny on diary duty"

Each day the U's squad have been in Ireland, CU-FC.com has brought you the news from inside the camp and left-back Danny Granville will make the final entry before the squad return from the Emerald Isle.

"I knew this would happen. I have been keeping a check on who Greggors has been asking to do these diaries and funnily enough, all the new signings have been approached.

Yesterday saw us get up to bright sunshine and not a cloud in the sky but this morning was wet and clammy until we started training and the sun came out again. Who says the British weather is unpredictable?!

As we walked up to the training pitch, we all knew we were in for a tough morning because we knew Tuesday had been a little bit easier than Monday. That tends to be the routine, one tough day then one not so bad.

That said, the 11 v 11 yesterday took its toll and the quality wasn't quite up to the standard it should have been this morning, but looking around the squad, only tiredness could be to blame.

I haven't been here long but the work ethic and attitude of the players, both the young lads and the more experienced guys, are spot on and everyone did as much as they could.

Understandably, tired minds led to mistakes being made and that led to a bit of frustration coming out when someone made a run, wasn't found and had to get back and defend again.

One thing I've noticed already there isn't a player here who makes a mistake deliberately or because they aren't trying hard enough. We all make mistakes and you have to get over it and carry on, whether it's your mistake or someone else's.

Because it was a tougher session, we finished a bit earlier than yesterday and that gave us time for a couple of hours rest between lunch and what we all knew was going to be a monster weight circuit in the afternoon.

Donough didn't disappoint us in the gym and put us through the wringer, making us lift weights that Arnold Schwarzenegger would have been proud of. Donough explains exactly why we are doing them though and the injury record from last season speaks for itself.

Another thing Don and physio Tony Flynn drill into us is to make sure we are drinking enough and eating enough at the right times, especially straight after the training sessions.

We haven't had a session yet where there hasn't been bottles of water, Lucozade or milkshakes to had when we finish and fruit has always been available as well.

Our last dinner in Limerick was followed by a meeting explaining the agenda for tomorrow and the trip home and then we were allowed a free evening.

Once again, a few of the lads had a wander into Limerick and the rest stayed around the campus. There is a group of the youngsters who are playing a lot of football on the Playstation and from what I've heard, Medy and big George Elokobi are the hotshots.

While the travelling can get tedious, I'm looking forward to tomorrow and getting back to my own house and preparing for Saturday's match at Heybridge."