



Next generation of Saints are getting ready to shine

BY JOHN COLLINS

THERE'S a murmur going around Hayes these days, it's an old familiar sound, a hum that anyone who was around the place in the 1970s and 1980s will recognise all too well.

It's audible at the moment but not deafening, but it's the sort of buzz that you just know is going to get louder as time goes on.

The whisper in the wind is that St Clarets are back on track with their youth programme, a programme that down through the years has served this club so well.

Each landmark in the Hayes team's history, dating right back to the club's formation in the mid-1970s, has been marked by the presence of a sizeable contingent of London-born players, players developed through the club's youth ranks and then

slowly nurtured on to the senior team.

It's the way they've always done it in Hayes, and it's the way they hope to continue doing it for years to come.

In 1982 and again in 1989 the club competed in Intermediate Championship Finals, losing the first one and winning the second, and on each occasion, over half of the starting team were London-born.

In 1999, when they again won the Intermediate Championship, they had six home grown lads and in 2002, when they played in their first ever Senior Final, they had five on the starting 15.

This is a club who have a proud history of investing in young players and who then give them the opportunity to flourish.

And how some of them have flourished.

Denis McCarthy, son of one of the founding members of the club, won an All Ireland Junior Football Championship with London in 1986, while Steven Sherry and

three of the Lynott brothers have all played senior football for London.

And it's with the Lynotts that the next generation of footballers is starting to be developed.

Colm, a former London minor, under-21 and senior player, who had the honour of travelling to New York back in 1987 with the first London minor team to cross the Atlantic, is now the man providing the opportunities for others.

Having guided a quite brilliant under-14 team to Championship Shield glory last year, as well as success in the League and Conrad Ryan Cup, Colm, along with his fellow coach Mick Buckley, are now hoping to push on with that group of players for further success this year.

And as his focus becomes concentrated on that team, so he is joined by others willing to take responsibility for the other age groups and once again, a familiar

name is to the fore, with Denis McCarthy, that same Denis who went on to All Ireland glory, looking after the under-8s and under-10s, along with another former London senior footballer Martin Hession.

Meanwhile, the under-12s are in the capable hands of Steve McElroy.

For this club, the upcoming ABC Championships promises to be an occasion of great excitement.



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They'll certainly be looking for some glory in certain age groups, but as always, the focus will be on development and enjoyment, regardless of what the final outcomes might be.

Colm himself, whose own son, also Colm, is part of the club's under-14 side, is very much looking forward to the games and told The Irish Post: "It's a great concept and the guys who came up with the idea deserve an awful lot of credit.

"It's a massive undertaking and I can't image how much work must be involved in organising something like this.

"Hopefully most clubs in Britain will do all they can to get behind and support.

"Certainly that's what we'll be doing at St Clarets. We'll be trying to bring as many teams, and more importantly, as many players, to the event as possible.

"It's the first one and it's great to be part of it."

And club chairman John Kelly echoes the sentiments of Colm and is also quick to acknowledge the phenomenal work that has been carried out over the past few years within the youth section of the club.

"For us at present, the youth section is the most vibrant part of the club. We're doing alright within the adult section, but there really is a buzz about things around the kids, especially after last year's success.

"As a club we'll be trying to support these ABC Championships as much as possible. I'm sure it will provide some great memories for the young players."

When it comes to great memories for youth players in London, there are few clubs as good as St Clarets at providing them, and the way things sit at the moment, it's hard to see any reason why that should change any time soon.