

The Rise and Rise of Naomh Alee GAA Club, Riyadh

With change comes opportunity and the change in fortunes of the Naomh Alee Gaels from Riyadh in the last three years reflects an ability to adapt and develop to changing circumstance, coupled with that undeniable celtic capacity to persist, even in the face of the most challenging of environments.

In mid November, the Naomh Alee GAA club travelled to the Middle East Gaelic Games Championships in Manamah, Bahrian, looking to build on the championship winning performances from the Gulf Games in Dubai in March. Yet again the Riyadh squad travelled with more teams and more personnel than at any time in the past decade. On this occasion, four teams would represent Saudi Arabia, two men’s teams would challenge for Intermediate honours, while two ladies football teams would make the trip for the first time in the Riyadh club’s history, at Senior and Junior level respectively.

True to recent form, Naomh Alee were rewarded with a resilient club performance overall and some outstanding team displays which saw the club contest two championship finals and two more semi-finals before once again taking the Mens Middle East intermediate crown to add to the Gulf games Intermediate and Junior titles secured in Dubai earlier this year.



Banshees breakthrough

The Naomh Alee Banshees lined out with a much improved, multi-national panel of players, and accounted for Al Ain in their opening encounter of the Junior Championship.

The teams hunger and desire for victory was evident in their second round game where an impressive performance against Kuwait Harps returned a three point winning margin at the final whistle with the scoreboard showing Naomh Alee 1:06, Kuwait 1:03.

This victory ensured that the Banshees would book their spot in the Championship final of their first competition.



Again improved fitness and determination were evident in their following games against a very strong and skillful Abu Dhabi side and after two close and competitive encounters it was the Emirati ladies that would take the spoils in the Bowl Final 0.03 to 5.03

With outstanding improvement from this multi-national panel of players, including Australian, Canadian, Czech and British as well as Irish players, and led by their dedicated captain Sarah Hogan (Australia) there were exceptional efforts from Ashley St Martin (Canada), Lorna Traynor (Antrim), Catherine Buckley and Shauna Golligly (Monaghan). And with novice players like Katerina Holeckova, Fiona Loughlin and Naomi Dunne all adapting well, the Banshees can expect to improve even further in their next outing in Dubai, where championship silverware will beckon once again.



A good year for the Roses

Just as impressive were the Riyadh Roses in the Ladies Senior Shield competition. An opening encounter against a fancied Qatar team saw the Qatari Gaels edge the vital exchanges and emerge as victors over the Naomh Alee girls on a scoreline of 1:09 to 1:03. But, guided by coach Sile McIlroy, the Saudi Arabian girls upped their game in their next contests against Oman.

In a contest which witnessed impressive displays from Jennifer O’Sullivan (Kerry), Gerraine Poole (Wicklow),

Kirsty Hannon (Sligo), Polly Lyons (UK), Alicia O’Sullivan (Wexford) and Sandra McGrath (Galway), the Riyadh Roses controlled long passages of play and never looked threatened.

Squad captain Laura Buckley (Kerry), was central to the teams success as she fired over scores both from play and from free kicks. With the initiative firmly in their grasp and victory imminent, the Riyadh girls pulled away to record an impressive 11 point victory (2:06 to 0:01) which paved their way to the semi-finals of the competition.

Following their final group game against Dubai, which was won on a score-line of 2:09 to 2:01, the Roses faced the stiff challenge of the Kuwait Gaels in the semi-final.



Although this is where the Riyadh Roses would bow out, there was resilience in their performance and tenacity in their play that bodes well for Dubai in March.

The girls of Riyadh had etched their intentions loud and clear on the women’s Gaelic Games competition in the Arabian Gulf and now demand to be treated with respect.



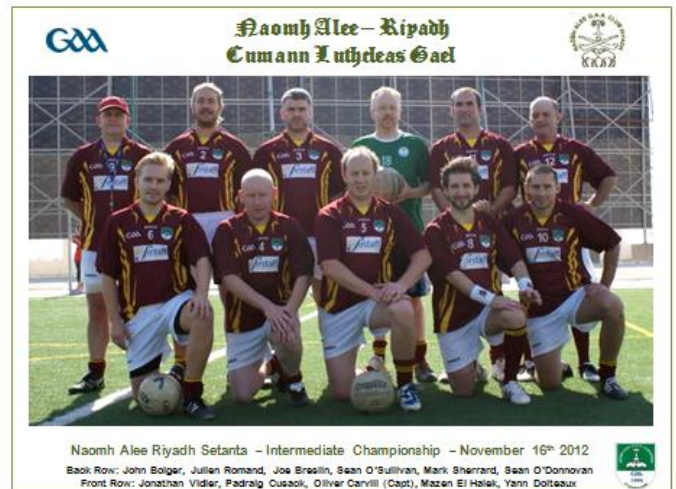
Setanta potential visible

Having won the Junior competition in Dubai, the Naomh Alee Setanta squad were promoted alongside their Eire Og colleagues, into the Intermediate championship.

And while the step up in quality proved just too much at this stage of the teams development, there was much on view to suggest that this is a team and a squad of

players that can make their mark on the football scene in the near future.

Featuring players from Britain, Germany and France as well as Ireland, the intensity and work rate of players like Sean O’Sullivan (Cork) in goal, Joe Breslin (Galway) and Yann Doiteaux (France), in defence Jonathan Vidler (England) at mid-field, the defensive qualities of Julien Romand (France), the pace of Mazen El Halek (Germany) in attack and all round ability of squad captain Oliver Carvill (Down), inspired their colleagues.



And while Setanta bowed out at semi-final stage against eventual Plate winners Qatar, they did so with a passion that reflected pride in the code and pride in their club, prompted by the support play of the experienced John Bolger (Wexford) and Sean O’Donovan (Cork) and ably assisted by Mark Sherrard (Down) and Padraig Cusack (Cavan). There is more to come from this group of players in the near future.



Eire Og cruise to 2012 Intermediate Double

The impressive performances of the Riyadh teams were accentuated by the imperious displays of the Riyadh Eire Og team in the Intermediate championship. Playing at the Ethiad Stadium, Eire Og opened their campaign with an impressive running game that saw them post 2.05 to 1.01 against Sharjah Gaels with goals coming from Killian Moynagh (Cavan) and Ronan Farrell (Meath) to continue their unbeaten run this year.

Marshalled by club captain and goalkeeper Richard O’Leary (Cork), the Riyadh men overcame a sub-par

performance against joint title favourites Qatar in the second group game before resuming their winning ways with a 13 point victory over Dubai in the last of the group games to ensure a semi-final encounter against the fast-running Kuwait Harps.

As the sun began to set, the Riyadh men began their championship semi-final with the objective of reaching the Middle East championship final for the third successive year, and when Sean Purcell (Kildare) claimed the throw-in and unleashed wing forward Garret Clery (Limerick) to convert the first of his three first half points, the onslaught began.

In the fourteen minutes that followed, Eire Og racked up 3.13 to 1.01, with a display of long range points from Sean Purcell, Conor Moynagh (Cavan) and Donal Kelly (Cork) while the defensive tenacity of Adrian O’Leary (Kerry), Killian Moynagh and Fiachra Sweeney (Cavan) coupled with unrelenting tackling of Conor Moynagh and David Hanlon (Dublin), they ensured that scores conceded were kept to a minimum.

Early points settled the team with Purcell and Hanlon running midfield and the ubiquitous Conor Moynagh linking play from defence to attack.

The mean defence continued, with O’Leary, Sweeney and Killian Moynagh giving up only one point in the final, while the wing forward play of Clery and Kelly ensured continuous pressure on the Sharjah defense. The fact that the final was won on a score-line of 1.04 to 0.00 pays tribute to the qualities of the Sharjah Gaels who coped better than any other team on the day against a very impressive Eire Og squad.



2012 - A year for the record books in Riyadh

So the Middle East Intermediate laurels go to the Eire Og mens team of Naomh Alee in Riyadh making 2012 the year of the Intermediate double for this resurgent club.

But the story is a wider one than that, because this championship event has marked the coming of age of the Riyadh Gaels in the new era. Competitive teams across the grades and four finals contested in the two championship competitions of 2012 augurs well for the future.

So, bígí linn agus ar aghaidh le chéile. A lot has been done, with more to do!!!!



Mr John Hartnett, Director at Jones Engineering
Team Sponsor: Naomh Alee Eire Og



Mr Paul Dooley, Managing Director at Firststaff
Team Sponsor: Naomh Alee Setanta



Ms Breda Lanigan, Recruitment Manager Healthcare at CCM Recruitment - Sponsor: Naomh Alee Banshees

And so to the Middle East Intermediate Championship Final, where Naomh Alee Eire Og would again face Sharjah Gaels (who accounted for Abu Dhabi in their Semi Final).

Once again, in an overpowering display played with an intensity that a valliant Sharjah team couldn’t match, the Riyadh men pushed forward. At centre forward, Farrell was almost unstoppable.

If you are based in Saudi Arabia, in Riyadh, Jeddah, Dammam or anywhere in between, and are interested in Gaelic Games, contact Patrick at 00 966 54 10 33 714 or eMail naleegaa@gmail.com

'Band of Brothers' – Naomh Alee Eire Og – Middle East Gaelic Games – Intermediate Champions 2012



Adrian O'Leary, Conor Moynagh, Ronan Farrell, David Hanlon, Sean Purcell, Garrett Clery, Fiachra Sweeney, Richard O'Leary, Donal Kelly, Killian Moynagh



2012-13 Club Captain Richard O'Leary with Founder Charlie Sullivan



2011-12 Club Captain Keith Croft with Ambassador Holohan



2012 Setanta Captain Oliver Carvill with Ambassador Holohan



2012 Player of the Year: Gerraine Poole with Felicity Holohan



Polly Lyons – 2012 Newcomer of the Year



Kevin Bates – 2012 Junior Player of the Year



Ronan Farrell – 2012 Senior Player of the Year