

BACK IN LOVE Republic of Ireland U21 and Dundalk star Darragh Leahy says moving back home helped him to enjoy football again

Owen Cowzer 9 Oct 2020, 7:00



DARRAGH LEAHY never thought moving home would lead to so many travelling possibilities.

Leahy, 22, will fly to Pisa with the Ireland Under-21s today ahead of Tuesday's Euro qualifier against Italy with a place in next year's finals within reach.



Leahy in training this week

To make them would involve an impressive Euro double for the left-back having last week helped Dundalk reach the Europa League group stages.

But to be in this position is something Leahy admits he never thought would be possible when he left Coventry in 2017.

Just 19 at the time, he was released by the Sky Blues and, like many footballers before him, returned home to join Bohemians demoralised and unsure if his big chance was lost.

He said: "Towards the end of my time in Coventry, I wasn't really playing. I just wanted to come home, start enjoying football again."

ENJOYING IT AGAIN

"Getting game time, luckily I did and I'm grateful to Bohs for giving me that opportunity.

"To get my feet on the ground again and enjoying my football.

"I had two really good years at Bohs and haven't really looked back since I've come home.

"It's just unbelievable to think of it. Especially since the break, the time we've had with Dundalk, different managers and stuff like that.

"To think that we are in the group stages now is kind of surreal."

UNLIKELY RUN

The Lilywhites' run has been remarkable as a loss to Cejle of Slovenia in the Champions League led to Vinny Perth's dismissal and the appointment of Filippo Giovagnoli.

The Italian gaffer has [guided the club to the Europa League group stages thanks to wins in Andorra, Moldova and then last week in the Aviva Stadium against KI of the Faroe Islands.](#)

And Leahy believes that his experiences of Europe, as well as his time with the Under-21s, can only help him.

He explained: "It's different and you are playing against different styles of play.

"No disrespect, but the quality of the opposition is a lot higher.

USEFUL EXPERIENCE

"But as I played last year in the 21s campaign, I'd like to think I got quite a good bit of experience.

"In the Toulon Tournament we played Brazil and China and stuff, so different styles of play.

"I'd like to think I've brought that experience with me into our games for Dundalk."

The Covid-19 shutdown means this is the first Ireland Under-21 game for 11 months.

SQUAD IN TRANSITION

And there have been plenty of changes in that period with Stephen Kenny moving on to take over the senior side from Mick McCarthy.

Kenny's old assistant Jim Crawford has come in to replace him and has put former Ireland and Manchester United defender John O'Shea in as his No 2.

The squad has also evolved with Caoimhín Kelleher, Jayson Molumby, Adam Idah and Aaron Connolly now part of the senior panel while Troy Parrott is currently injured.

But Leahy is confident that the squad's previous work together can help them gel quickly again now.

GONE WELL

He added: "We did have a training camp last month and that was good to get in again amongst each other and meet the new staff.

"I didn't realise it was 11 months since the last game but, yeah, that is a very long time.

"Usually in this international window we'd have two games whereas this time we only have one game.

"So that will benefit us because we've had a long time to gel again and get going with our style of play. It shouldn't be a bother.

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"We had a really good togetherness and even the new coaches now, they said themselves looking on from the outside that they could see how close knit we were.

"It's almost like a club, which is unusual for an international team.

"But it's why we're we were doing so well."

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