



FIRST CLASS: Dundee boss Tony Docherty, right, and assistant Stuart Taylor have praised the facilities on offer at their base in Ireland.

Dens boss hails value of pre-season getaway

GEORGE CRAN

Dundee will bring their Irish adventure to a close this afternoon as they take on Fleetwood Town in Waterford.

The opportunity for new boss Tony Docherty and his staff to take the team away is a “massive” one for the Dark Blues as they gear up for a return to top-flight football in the season ahead.

In fact, it was one of Docherty’s stipulations for taking on the job to replace Gary Bowyer earlier this summer.

That’s how important he feels it is, kicking off the season to come on the right footing.

“It’s been really good. I’m really pleased with the facilities, they’ve been excellent,” he said of their Johnstown Estate Hotel base.

“The hotel is really good, everything about it. The food and everything is looked after.

“The pitches are on-site which is great. I’m really pleased with the boys and the spirit they’ve shown.

“We want to build on that but I see there is a good group of boys. That will be so important this season. That’s why we do these trips.

“But they need to contribute to that and from what I’ve seen they are massively contributing.

“There is a really good atmosphere about the place.”

There’s been a lot crammed into just a few short days at the Johnstown Estate, around a 45-minute drive west of Dublin.

The base has been used by the Republic of Ireland national team as well as a number of SPFL clubs – Docherty had been there before with Aberdeen.

Pitches on-site – whether football, rugby or Gaelic football – as well as a gym and swimming pool, everything is on hand for visiting sports teams.

There was even a bored-looking horse next to the pitches, seemingly unimpressed with the efforts of the Dark Blues.

There has been some down time for the players – a trip to Cullentra House Stables to pick up some tips from triple Grand National-winning trainer Gordon Elliott got them away from the grind.

No night out was on the cards, however.

Courier Sport was there yesterday to see the first part of the double session while the players had even trained the morning of Wednesday’s game against Bray.

Having all that on hand as well as players spending so much time together is key, particularly when integrating new signings.

Docherty’s desire for a few days away with his team was echoed by assistant manager Stuart Taylor as he sat down with Courier Sport at the training centre.

But it’s not solely about team spirit.

“Trips are massive. People speak about camaraderie and team bonding, these trips are made for that,” the former Hamilton Accies boss said.

“But they are also for getting finer details into the players, getting that extra session.

“All the wee bits and pieces that make a difference, you have the opportunity to spend longer on the grass.

“These trips are huge, they are really good for a lot of different reasons. So we’re fortunate the club have been able to take us away to a nice hotel with good facilities.

“We’ve also got two good games on as well.”

The first of those at Bray Wanderers ended with a 5-1 victory but English League One side Fleetwood are expected to bring a sterner challenge in the second one.

It will be an early start

for the Dundee players with pre-match prep to be taken care of before the two-hour bus trip to the south-coast city of Waterford for a 12.30pm kick-off.

Having spent plenty of time in the English lower leagues, Taylor knows exactly what will face the Dark Blues when they take on Scott Brown’s side.

“Fleetwood will be very physical and a robust side. I’ve played against them a couple of times in my time down in England,” he added.

“I know they will be well-drilled. It’s obviously a different manager with Scott Brown now but that’s the English mentality.

“The robustness and resilience they have as a club because of the amount of games they play.

“There will be opportunities to defend balls into the box from different areas, different angles. It will be a good challenge.”

DOCHERTY WAITING TO DECIDE ON HIS KEEPER

The No 1 spot at Dundee is firmly up for grabs, says manager Tony Docherty.

The Dark Blues boss insists he has not made a decision yet on who will be his first-choice goalkeeper after adding a fresh option in Jon McCracken.

The 23-year-old joined on loan from Norwich City on Monday and got his first taste of action in Wednesday’s friendly victory over Bray Wanderers.

It was a quiet second half for the Scotland youth international with few saves to make but he showed composure with the ball at his feet on more than one occasion.

He replaced the experienced Adam Legzdins, who fought off the challenge of Harry Sharp and Ian Lawlor last season to become first choice under previous boss Gary Bowyer.

Legzdins also started last weekend’s win at Brechin City before Sharp took over in the second half.

The Dark Blues are in action once again today as they take on Fleetwood Town to finish off their pre-season trip to Ireland.

They will then face Arbroath and Cove Rangers in friendlies before kicking into action with the Viaplay Cup on July 18.

And Docherty says all three goalies will get a chance to impress with the position up for grabs.

“It’s competition for places, like other parts of the team,” said Docherty, speaking to Courier Sport in Ireland.

“They are all involved in a fight. Alan Combe does great work with them and on a matchday they will get their opportunities to show what they can do.

“Then it’s down to who wins that fight and who can take the No 1 jersey. I’m pleased with how that’s going though. I always like three goalkeepers.

We’re still in pre-season right now so we are still planning for the season.”