Dare to Dream

*My eyes have seen the glory of Espana ’82,*

*When little Northern Ireland showed the world what we could do,*

*Now Michael is our leader and we’re coming after you,*

*And that is why we sing – We’re not Brazil, we’re Northern Ireland...*

What a performance from Norn Iron against the Czech Republic on Monday night! Every player played their part in another solid home performance that takes our wee country to the brink of a play off for a place at the 2018 World Cup finals.

Undoubtedly, Michael O’Neill has done a remarkable job during his time as Northern Ireland manager. He has developed a system of playing that he believes in, and most importantly his players believe in his playing style too. From the outside the manager’s playing and coaching style appears to be simple, but Michael has found a way to build confidence and self-belief within his squad. As a result, the Northern Ireland team are stronger as group, and have achieved more during Michael’s tenure than any of us could have hoped for. At the time of writing, Northern Ireland proudly sit 23rd in the FIFA World Rankings – when Michael O’Neill took over as manager in December 2011 we were ranked 89th!

*So what can we learn from the Northern Ireland’s achievements? Is there anything about their success that we can use in other areas of life? Absolutely! It is often said that sport mirrors life (or does life mirror sport?)*

Working as part of a team is an inevitable part of life, and I’m not just talking in a sporting context. We are all involved in teams, whether it is at work, at school, as a family, in friendships, in relationships, as parents, as volunteers – I could finish this article as a list. If you think long enough, you will be able to identify situations where you regularly are part of a team.

Some people are gifted to be natural team members. They enjoy the hustle and bustle of being involved in a common goal, and their natural leadership qualities shine through. Other people (myself included) find being part of a team a more difficult experience; it can take us time to find our feet in a team situation. However, through spending time involved in a group project, we can improve our skills and we can learn how to be valuable team members.

The main point that we can all take away from Northern Ireland’s success is that they have found a way to be more successful collectively that they are individually - the team is stronger as a unit than they are individually. Every member of the squad brings something different to the team, but they all contribute in different ways to the success of the group.

With good leadership, and if every member of the team buys into a common goal, success can be achieved in ANY team situation.

*“Alone we can do so little; together we can do so much.” – Helen Keller*

Now there’s a thought!