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THE IRELAND WOMEN'S TEAM - THE LONG ROAD TO THE WORLD CUP

History was made last night (11th October 2022) by the Ireland Women's football team as they beat Scotland 1-0 in Glasgow to secure their place at next year's Women's World Cup.

Amber Barrett, on as a 2nd half substitute scored the famous goal just after the 70-minute mark. A brilliant ball from Denise O'Sullivan found Barrett as she took it away from defenders with an exceptional first touch. She had the composure to finish calmly past the keeper with a great finish into the bottom corner. An emotional celebration ensued as Barrett, a Donegal native, pointed to her black armband in honour of the 10 people who tragically lost their lives in the Creeslough explosion last Friday.

Ireland held on heroically as they defended for their lives, throwing their bodies in the way as Scotland tried to break them down. Scenes of joy and jubilation followed the final whistle as the brilliant World Cup qualify came to a satisfying end for Vera Pauw's heroic Girls in Green.

The women's game in Ireland and around the world is growing, with record crowds turning out for last summer's European Championship in England. Closer to home the Women's National Team have captured the imagination of young women and girls as crowds have been increasing steadily at their home games in Tallaght Stadium. The Women's National League too, is growing year on year. New teams are entering the underage structures with a view to eventually entering the WNL and competing against the best sides in the country. It is believed that, as part of the licensing for the men's League of Ireland, the FAI (Football Association of Ireland) will make it compulsory to have women's teams at academy and senior level to mirror the men's teams. This is a positive development should it happen, but clubs will need financial help from the FAI and the government (that is another day's discussion, however).

The rise of the women's game is great to see but it hasn't been an easy road here in Ireland. Women's football was considered an afterthought by the governing body, the FAI. At all age groups, the women's teams were seen as less important than the men's teams and were treated accordingly. That was until a group of players, led by then captain Emma Byrne, chose to go public with the treatment they'd received for years, in a last-ditch attempt for equality, dignity and respect.

In early April 2017, 14 players, led by Byrne, and with the help of players union the PFAI (Players Football Association of Ireland), held a press conference in Liberty Hall to air their grievances. It was announced to the public that women's team had to share tracksuits with other teams and were forced to change in airport toilets so the tracksuits could be handed back to FAI officials. Their appearance fee was not enough to cover the loss of earnings for players who had other jobs, they had no nutritionists and had no gym membership. Their demands were moderate and basic, but the FAI just ignored them.

At the time, the FAI was run by the incredibly corrupt, narcissistic, embezzling charlatan John Delaney who, it has since been uncovered, ran the FAI in to financial ruin. Eventually, the FAI, through public outrage and

anger, gave in to the players' moderate demands. Since then, the women's team fought for and won, pay parity with their male counterparts.

All of this has led directly to last night. If those brave women, those talented footballers, didn't make that stand, it is unlikely that they would have paved the way for where the team is now, on their way to their first World Cup.

The current captain of the Women's National Team is the incredibly talented Arsenal winger Katie McCabe. Katie is a working-class Tallaght native and a member of the LGBTQ community. She has been Ireland captain since Emma Byrne retired in 2017 and was one of the 14 players who stood up and fought back against the FAI's treatment.

She summed up what qualifying for the World Cup meant in a post-match interview on RTE saying "This is going to change women's football in Ireland. We want to inspire the next generation of kids. We've been lucky enough to play with our idols. They've paved the way for us to be able to do this tonight and we want to be able to keep doing this for young girls – to play football, to become professional footballers and to represent our country at major tournaments. That's what it's all about, inspiring the next generations and we'll be able to do that at the World Cup next year."

This team are an inspiration but without the determination of the team of 2017, without their decision to stand up and fight back against their terrible treatment, this would not have been possible. Change can be won if you fight for it.

The RED Network (incorporating Rebel Telly) are a network of radical socialists within the political party People Before Profit, a 32-county people power movement on the island of Ireland.

www.rednetwork.ie