

Headline: An Insight into Irish Football

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Glenavon Striker Andrew Mitchell, Top Scorer 2016/17

A footballing league with several European spots, two dominant teams and a heap of fierce rivalries is not uncommon. But with these criteria, few fans would name the Northern Irish Premiership as this league.

Featuring twelve teams, each side plays each other three times for the first 33 games, before the Top 6 and Bottom 6 split and play each side in their half once more. After 38 games, there can be up to 3 teams qualified for European football, and a post-season play-off determines a final place. Crusaders and Linfield are the two prominent teams in the country, and the repetitive fixtures lead to long histories between sides. Yet the league is still under-the-radar for most football fans, so I spoke to Glenavon's Andrew Mitchell to uncover more about the league.



“The Irish League is a physical league; you can’t get time on the ball... League 1 and 2 [in England] are similar, you’re pressed quickly. There’s no full-time teams... during the day I’m a school teacher. But when it comes to Tuesday night and Saturday afternoon, I’m a semi-pro footballer; you have to balance football with your other career. Especially in the Irish League, it’s really important to have European football because you get £250,000 for playing in it. If you have that money, you can compete at the top.”

With the Northern Irish National Team reaching the knockout stages of Euro 2016 and narrowly missing out on the 2018 World Cup, Irish football is rising and is an untapped resource in the otherwise expensive European market. Being a physical league, the Irish Premiership features the traditional British grit; nevertheless a high standard of football. Andrew added: “Lots of young players from Northern Ireland go over to England at 16 or 17 – they’ll go to big Premier League clubs... but when they

get to 18 or 19 they'll be released and return to Northern Ireland." This often impedes their progress and they would be better off thriving in their own league.

A competitive league, with part-time players and the relatable grit of League 2; yet the chance of European adventure. What's not to love for English fans?

A huge thanks to Andrew for taking the time to give this interview and help us with this report. To read the full interview with Andrew, [click here](#).