

NOT OVER AT MOON

Wilson believes his Rangers can still eclipse leaders Hanover



MAKING HIS MARK: Killymoon's Wilson has not given up title fight yet

KILLYMOON Rangers have not been uppermost in the thoughts of the Mid-Ulster league title-challengers – not that manager Mark Wilson is concerned.

Hanover, Laurelvale, Warrenpoint and Tandragee Rovers have all been mooted as champions-in-waiting for Intermediate A. But the Cookstown side, who are currently sitting fifth, have barely warranted a mention.

By STEVEN LENNON

This in spite of the fact that, taken at face value, the league lies in Killymoon's hands.

The statistics show that if Wilson's outfit win all their remaining games, the title will be theirs.

Two of the league's favourites, Neil McCullough's Hanover, and Keith Wilkinson's Laurelvale, have still to play Killymoon with the outcome of those matches certain to have major ramifications on the final destination of the league.

For Wilson, it's a tall order for sure, and perhaps the reason that Rangers have not been widely tipped, but still not beyond the realms of possibility.

And Saturday's 3-2 battling victory away to Ballymacash has only strengthened their claims.

"Obviously Hanover have quite a hold over the league at the moment," admitted Wilson, who took over the reins as joint-manager with his brother Michael at the start of the season.

"But there's still three or four teams who could win the league at present.

"We've nine matches left and if we're going to win the league, we're going to have to win eight of the nine and maybe draw one.

"But the next three or four matches will tell the tale of our season. Up next are Lurgan Town, AFC Craigavon and Markethill so they are the kind of matches you'd want to win. They are teams all in mid-table or towards the bottom end of the division.

"Coming to the end of the season though is very hard to predict.

"This year, I feel it's a lot more competitive and there a lot more teams can beat each other and I think it proves it looking at last year, it was only between ourselves Laurelvale and Warrenpoint.

"This time, there's probably five or six teams still in with a shout."

Having been with the club since the early 90s, first as a player and then in two spells as manager, Wilson has been ideally placed to chronicle the club's development.

Although silverware will always be the barometer of success – the club have yet to get their hands on any – Wilson is adamant the club is going in the right direction.

Wilson said: "I've seen a lot of development from when I was a player at the club and we were struggling at the bottom end of Intermediate B.

"Now we're the best team in Cookstown, and one of the best in the Mid-Ulster league, and that was our aim about three years ago when I came back

to the club. We're fighting for cups and fighting for leagues now."

After a few years away from the club, Wilson returned in 2002 as assistant to Rodney Montgomery before succeeding him this season.

And the auspices for the club looked particularly favourable after a brilliant victory over Paul Millar's Irish League giants in pre-season.

"Glentoran came up to play us to mark our 35th anniversary," added Wilson.

"And they brought quite a strong squad with people like Gary Hamilton, Jody Tolan and Michael Halliday playing, and we beat them 2-0.

"It was a strange day so it was, I think it was a bit of a shock but it was quite a feather in our cap."

The momentous victory coupled with a second-placed finish last season meant the club entered the current campaign on a high and with the belief that a title may finally be on the horizon.

The rapid development of the club over the last few seasons has been striking, with a league or cup title, perhaps, the next logical step.

Wilson said: "In or around 1996/7, we were probably one of the bottom teams in the second tier of the Mid-Ulster Intermediate league but from there, we've steadily moved up the B division and in 2004, we were runners up and got promoted.

"In the first year, we finished in the top half of the league, the second year which was last year, we finished second to Laurelvale who beat us by four points.

"We were actually leading until the end of the season, but Laurelvale went through quite an impressive run of victories to pip us to the championship.

"And this year, we got to the final of the Premier Cup where Laurelvale again beat us, we got to the semis of the Bob Radcliffe Cup, Banbridge Town beat us in extra-time."

Expectations at the club may be at their highest in the club's history, but Wilson is confident his squad will not disappoint – if not this season, in the coming ones.

"We've sort of followed on from the success of the last couple of years," added Wilson.

"We've worked hard in building up a bigger squad and getting players who are playing for the seconds and are able to walk into the firsts.

"Every year we want to bring in an extra two experienced players so we have a bigger and stronger squad than we ever had before."

NEIL HAS BIG HAN ON TITLE

HANOVER boss Neil McCullough is confident that his league leaders will keep their bottle to take title.

"It's in our own hands and I fully expect us to go on and win the league," said McCullough.

"Our next two games are away to Markethill Swifts, on Saturday, and Blackers Mill on Tuesday evening and we won both corresponding game quite comfortably.

"After that it's Killymoon and Lurgan Town, and, depending on other results, by that stage the title could be ours.



GROUND CONTROL: Killymoon's Johnny Young displays the art of shielding the ball



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MANAGER OF THE MONTH

OUR Joma Manager of the Month competition for March has been chosen – and will appear in next week's FC Mirror – so now is the time to get your votes in for April.

Every month until the end of the season, one amateur gaffer in Northern Ireland – in true Mourinho style – will walk away with a 'Special One' manager's jacket, courtesy of leading sportswear brand Joma.

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