Terry Kennedy – Leinster Programme 06.01.2017

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Terry Kennedy Senior won the first of his thirteen caps for Ireland against New Zealand in November 1978.

Twenty-seven years later, his son of the same name walked into the Leinster Sub-Academy with many goals in mind, one of which was to play for his province and country at the senior level.

“I hope to follow in his footsteps and, then, maybe, even surpass him,” said Terry Kennedy Junior with a knowing smile, “but don’t worry, I’m not getting carried away. It is early days and I have a long way to go to my first Leinster cap, never mind one for Ireland.”

For starters, the winger plays in the same position as his father. If speed kills, Kennedy is a player blessed with deadly ability. He goes along with the assertion that it is the

outstanding reason the wing was recruited to the Leinster Sub-Academy in the summer of 2015.

“Yeah, it would probably be fair to say that,” he said.

“I never really did much athletics at school in St Mary’s. We would always go out to Santry and do alright in the relay. That was about it. My Dad would have had a bit of pace. I probably would get it from him. I haven’t seen too much of him playing. It is more so what I’ve heard. Rugby has always been a big part of my life and, obviously, in his. He always encouraged me to play and loved coming to watch the matches.”

Kennedy follows in the same tracks as Sam Coghlan-Murray and Billy Dardis as having that attacking X-Factor that Leinster just couldn’t ignore even with such a present-day emphasis on size and strength.

He first came to the public attention as the young man who accumulated an astonishing half-dozen tries in a match last season.

“Yeah, I got six tries in the pre-Christmas trial match for the Ireland U20s against Leinster Development at Donnybrook,” he said.

“It was a weird game. I hadn’t a clue where I stood before that match and wasn’t convinced after it. Obviously, you never expect to do that. We won comfortably. A few of them were the right place, right time and we scored a few good ones too.

“I was still nervous when it came time for the squad to be picked for the Six Nations. You never know. The fact we won well against them might have devalued the game. I wasn’t sure.”

When Ireland U20 coach Nigel Carolan drew up his official squad list, Kennedy was on it. It is just that the Six Nations did not go to personal plan for Kennedy or the collective plan for Ireland.

“I didn’t get picked for Wales but then I was on the bench for France and Italy, getting my two caps which was great.”

The Irish Sevens then took him away from the 15-man game for the matches against Scotland and England before attention turned back to the Under 20s World Cup.

The World Cup was bitter sweet for Kennedy. Part of an amazing journey all the way to the Under 20 Final but on the fringes at the same time. Having seen at close quarters how well the team did, he understands the coaching decisions but it also allowed him time to learn about dealing with adversity and rallying around when you are disappointed on a personal level.

“I was fourth choice back-three. There was the starting team and I was next in line,” he recalled.

“The fact we were going so well meant there was a reluctance to change a winning team for most of the games. I did play against Georgia and got on quite well, but they stuck to the three lads Matt (Byrne), Jacob (Stockdale) and Hugo (Keenan) from there on.”

This left Kennedy to bond with a mini-crew of Leinster’s Adam Coyle, Munster’s Paul Kiernan and Evan Mintern and Ulster Conall Boomer.

“We got to know each other a lot better because we were all going through the same thing,” he said.

“Don’t get me wrong, off the pitch, we still all had great craic. We were a tightly-knit bunch. But, it was tough sometimes, in fairness, when we were winning matches and everyone is celebrating. Obviously, you are delighted for the lads. But, you don’t really feel as much a part of it as the lads directly involved in playing. But that is part of the squad ethos. Learning to deal with that and be bigger for the betterment of the team.”

The pleasure of beating Grand Slam winners Wales, becoming the first male national team to beat New Zealand and dispose of Argentina in the semi-final was diluted somewhat by the defeat to England in the final but like most of those involved, Kennedy looks back with only fond memories.

“It was a brilliant experience to be a part of,” he said.

Kennedy was given a short break before returning to the Leinster Academy for pre-season.

In a sense, it must have been just like starting all over again with so many Ireland internationals ahead of him in the queue.

What do you know? Luke Fitzgerald retired. Niall Morris retired and sadly, Dave Kearney and Fergus McFadden have been side-lined with injury for much of the season.

“It goes from there being a lot of players in pre-season to players getting injured and the internationals leaving for November. You look around and there’s not that many players. Hugo (Keenan) got a shot earlier in the year, coming off the bench against Zebre in November.

“Your chance could come quicker than you think. You have to be as ready as you can be. That is the way I approach it.”

This season so far he has seen action in the All-Ireland League with St Mary’s College, the Irish Sevens and one appearance for Leinster A against Ulster Ravens at the start of the season.

“Looking ahead, I want to develop as much as I can over the remainder of the season, be involved as much as I can in the rest of the British & Irish Cup and then push on to have a good second-half of the season with St Mary’s.

“Then, I will look to concentrate on the Sevens in the summer time. It has been very good for testing and improving my core skills, passing off your bad hand, one-on-one tackling, details which make you a better player.”

Every teenager earning a place in the Leinster Academy has two major goals to play for Leinster and Ireland.
Terry Kennedy is working towards making it a case of ‘like father, like son.’

Article courtesy of Leinster Rugby and first appeared in their official match day programme v Zebre