

# Republic of Ireland



# V

Kick-off 7.45 p.m

Fortuna Arena, Prague  
Thursday 26<sup>th</sup> of March 2026

# Czechia

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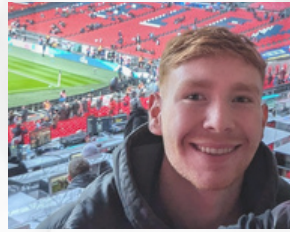




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## Fáilte roimh ár bhfanizine nua!

Hello and welcome to another issue of our lovely fanzine, which we hope you will enjoy and find really useful on your journey to Prague! We've packed it with fun facts and some tips on how to navigate yourself around the place. Plus, and most importantly, we have filled it lots of propaganda to tell you how great we are. If you're a business that wants to give us LOTS of money to show how great YOU really are, well give us a shout!

The Lansdowne Roar Team!

## Window Timetable

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**Monday 23rd:** Window Preview LIVE!

**Wednesday 25th:** Czechia v Ireland Preview

**Thursday 26th:** Pre-Game / Aftermath LIVE!

**Monday 30th:** Denmark/North Macedonia Preview

**Tuesday 1st:** Pre-Game / Aftermath LIVE!

Catch us LIVE! on YouTube, Facebook and Twitter!

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**Head Writer:** James Agnew **Editor:** David Dunne **Additional Art:** Jo Harrison & Sean Dempsey

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## AMHRÁN NA BHFIANN

Sinne Fianna Fáil, atá faoi gheall ag Éirinn,  
Buíon dár slua thar toinn do ráinig chughainn,  
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Le gean ar Ghaeil, chun báis nó saoil,  
Le gunna scréach faoi lámhach na bpiléar,  
Seo libh canaig amhrán na bhfiann



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# Editor's Message

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Well, who would have thought we'd be here, eh? Not me, that's for sure. Heading into the last window, we required two wins, and by God, we got them. One game was one of the finest performances I've seen in green for decades, and the other was a delicious case of smash and grab. So, dear reader, here we go againn.



This will be my first trip to Prague in 19 years, the last being very messy and very juvenile and yes, it was fabulous. However, this time around, there's a job to be done by the Boys in Green and our wonderful, humble little pod. Conor and I will be resuming media duties, with Martin resuming drinking duties.

I think I've just about recovered from the shock of Troy Parrott's last-gasp winner, barely. I'm not sure if my nervous system can handle that again. And my vocal cords...

This could be one of the greatest summers of all time, or one of the biggest disappointments; it really is night and day. We qualify, with the next tournament practically guaranteed as hosts, this could be the big bang Irish football has needed for a generation. A chance to correct the foundations. Blow it, and we're right back to the Israel game and the circus that's going to bring. We've just had a taste.

Don't get me wrong, Israel should NOT be in the tournament, and the world is literally on fire right now. I guess I just want my escapism.

I would like to take this opportunity to thank every one of you who has followed Lansdowne Roar! on its mad journey so far. Honestly, we wouldn't be here without you. I would also like to thank our partners, Traveligo, for jumping on board and for Slattery's staying on board.

Plus, please give a warm Irish welcome to our contributors who have penned a ton of articles for you to enjoy!

Rlghteo, I guess I'll see you all in Prague, be safe!

David



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# Czechia

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**Flag:** Blue, White and Red

**Area:** 78,871 km<sup>2</sup>

**Population:** 10.9 million

**Official Language:** Czech

**Time zone:** UTC+1 (Central European Time)

**Currency:** Czech Koruna

**Current Exchange Rate:** 1 Czech Koruna = 0.04 Euro

**Government:** A unitary parliamentary Republic and a member of the EU

**President:** Peter Pavel

**Prime Minister:** Andrej Babiš

**Anthem:** Kde domov můj (Czech) "Where My Home Is"

**Religion:** 56.9% no religion, 11.7% Christianity, 9.3% Catholicism, 2.4% other Christian, 1.2% other, 30.1% unanswered

**Calling code:** +420

**Internet TLD:** .cz





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# From the Airport to the City Centre

Prague Airport (PRG) to the city centre (approx. 15 km) is best reached by public transport bus 119/59 to Nádraží Veleslavín (metro Line A) for ~30 mins or the Airport Express (AE) bus directly to the Main Train Station for ~200 CZK. Taxis cost €30–€50, while Uber/Bolt are available.

## **Public Transport (Most Cost-Effective - ~€2)**

Bus 119 (or 59/191): Runs from Terminals 1 & 2 to Nádraží Veleslavín (Metro Line A). Best for central historic areas.

Bus 100: Connects the airport to Zličín (Metro Line B).

Night Bus 910/907: Operates from 00:15 to 05:00.

Note: Buy tickets (~40 CZK, 90 mins) from yellow machines, bus drivers, or the PID Lítačka app before boarding.

## **Express & Direct Options**

Airport Express Bus (AE): Connects both terminals directly to the Prague Main Train Station (Metro Line C, Hlavní nádraží). Runs every 30 minutes, tickets cost roughly 200 CZK (payable to the driver).

FlixBus: Direct coach service available between airport and city center.

## **Taxi & Ride-Sharing**

Official Airport Taxi: Located outside arrivals, approx. 750 CZK (€32) for a pre-booked private transfer, or up to €45 for on-site pickup.

Uber/Bolt: Generally priced between €30–€40 depending on demand.

## Useful Links – Yes, they're interactive!

<https://www.pragueairport.co.uk/public-transport-from-to-the-airport/>

<https://www.introducingprague.com/prague-airport>



# New Ireland 21s call-ups

## by Conor McEvoy

On Thursday, Jim Crawford named his Ireland U21 squad for the upcoming qualifiers against Moldova at home and Kazakhstan away, with the campaign already at a pivotal stage. After coming away from November's window empty-handed, Ireland know there is little margin for error if they are to push back into contention for a top-two finish.

Six points from this window would firmly reignite their qualification hopes, and it's a target well within reach given the talent available. Crawford has freshened things up with a number of new call-ups. With that in mind, here's a closer look at four newcomers included in the squad for the first time.

**Jaden Umeh**  
**CLUB: Benfica**  
**POSITION: LW/RW**  
**AGE: 18**

Jaden Umeh is arguably the most exciting underage prospect in Irish football right now, and his inclusion comes as no surprise. The Cork City academy product made his senior debut at just 15 before earning a move to Benfica at 16, a testament to just how highly he is rated.

He has effectively skipped the Ireland U19 level altogether - simply because he looks beyond it. This season, Umeh has been a standout performer for Benfica in the UEFA Youth League, most notably producing a devastating display against Inter Milan earlier this week that underlined his immense potential. Physically powerful, lightning quick and technically outstanding, Umeh is a nightmare for defenders in one v one situations. Comfortable going inside or outside on either foot, he has that rare ability to make things happen out of nothing. There are shades of Rafael Leão in the way he carries the ball and attacks defenders.

It may not be long before he outgrows this level too. If his trajectory continues, senior international recognition could come sooner rather than later and it would be no surprise to see him knocking on the door of Benfica's first team in the near future.

**Aaron Ochoa**  
**CLUB: Malaga**  
**POSITION: AM/LW**  
**AGE: 18**

Aaron Ochoa is another hugely exciting addition to this squad and, like Umeh, is an 18-year-old with enormous potential. Jim Crawford has already highlighted his qualities - a low centre of gravity, sharp movement and real technical precision and it's easy to see why he's so highly regarded.

Currently playing regular first-team football in Spain with Málaga, Ochoa is already operating at a high level for his age. He's a player who thrives between the lines, comfortable receiving on the turn, with the vision to pick a pass and the ability to produce moments of real quality in the final third. Whether it's a clever assist or a goal out of nothing, he has that creative spark.

There's also a distinct Spanish flair to his game, something rarely seen in Irish players. If he goes on to represent Ireland at senior level, he would follow in the footsteps of John Patrick but stylistically, Ochoa offers something very different.

This call-up feels overdue, and if his development continues on its current trajectory, he has all the tools to become a senior international and a very unique one at that.



**Adam Brennan**  
**CLUB: Shamrock Rovers**  
**POSITION: LW/RW/AM**  
**AGE: 18**

Adam Brennan is another exciting 18-year-old included in what is a notably young squad, with many already eligible for the next campaign. The former UCD winger has been one of the standout performers in the League of Ireland this season following his move to Shamrock Rovers - a step up that has proven fully justified.

While the transfer made sense for his development, few expected Brennan to come in and immediately establish himself as a regular starter. Yet he has done exactly that, often looking like one of the most dangerous players on the pitch. He is already putting himself firmly in the conversation for Young Player of the Year.

A direct and relentless winger, Brennan is a nightmare for defenders in one v one situations. Comfortable on either flank, he consistently takes on his man, combining pace with intelligence in the final third. He also has an eye for goal and the awareness to pick the right pass.

Another product of UCD's impressive production line, Brennan looks ready to make the step up at U21 level and, if his trajectory continues, he won't be at Shamrock Rovers for long.

**Sean Patton**  
**CLUB: Reading**  
**POSITION: Striker**  
**AGE: 19**

Sean Patton offers something slightly different to the other new additions - a natural centre-forward who brings a physical edge to the squad. The Reading striker has taken an impressive route to this level, coming through in Ireland before earning his move across the water and developing within Reading's academy setup.

His breakthrough has really come in 2026. A loan spell at Aldershot proved hugely productive, with Patton scoring five goals in six starts, form that quickly earned him a recall and a chance with Reading's first team. He took that opportunity with both hands, making his first League One start on St. Patrick's Day in a 2-1 win over Burton, and has continued to grow into senior football since. With opportunities opening up in the Reading side, this feels like a pivotal moment in his development.

Patton is a powerful, hard-working striker who relishes the physical side of the game. He presses relentlessly, occupies defenders and has shown he can finish chances at a high level.

This call-up is fully deserved, and now the challenge for Patton is to establish himself as a regular option at U21 level.

<https://x.com/reptracker>



# How to get to the Stadium



## How to get there

Fortuna Arena is located in Prague 10 - Vršovice and is about 4 km far from the city centre so it is easily reachable in various ways.

### Public transport

There is a bus stop and a tram station in close proximity to the stadium.

**Tram station Slavia** - Nádraží Eden: Lines 6, 7, 19, 22 and night lines 95, 97, 99.

**Bus stop Slavia** - Nádraží Eden: Lines 135, 136, 150, 213.

**Train station:** Praha – Eden.







# Fortuna Arena



The Fortuna Arena is the home stadium of Slavia Prague. Since opening in 2008, the stadium has had many different names, including Stadion Eden, Synot Tip Arena, Eden Arena, Sinobo Stadium, and now the Fortuna Arena. The overall construction cost of the stadium was 1 billion Czech Koruna, which was scaled down from the original cost of 1.8 billion Czech Koruna.

The plans for the new stadium were first submitted in 2003, but it took until October 2006 for construction to begin. The first match at the stadium was on 7<sup>th</sup> May 2008, between a Slavia Prague Legends team and Oxford University A.F.C.

The first competitive match at the new stadium was played on 17<sup>th</sup> May 2008 between Slavia Prague and Jablonec.

The capacity of Fortuna Arena is 19,370 seats with all four stands under the roof. The stadium has six floors (basement, ground floor and four floors). The Club Floor is in the central part of the arena and it has capacity of 500 seats. There are also 41 private Skybox suites with 460 seats. The stadium provides 33 accessible places for guests with disabilities and 33 places for their companion. Fortuna arena has four entrance gates. Stadium lights are integrated into the roof of the stadium.

## **Baggage deposit**

Baggage deposit can be found at the stadium; it is located next to Entrance Number 4. The fee is 50 Czech Koruna for smaller objects or 100 Czech Koruna for bigger objects. The Baggage deposit opens 90 minutes before the start of the game.



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# Prague – What to see



## **The Charles Bridge**

The Charles Bridge is one of the most iconic landmarks in Prague and is a must-see attraction for anyone visiting the city. It is a medieval stone arch bridge that crosses the Vltava River. It was constructed between 1357 and 1402 under King Charles IV and connects Prague Castle and the city's old town. The bridge is known for its baroque statues and is a popular tourist attraction. It is open to pedestrians only and offers stunning views.

**Prague Castle** – Originally built in the 9th century, the castle consists of constructions of various architectural styles, from the remains of Romanesque-style buildings to Gothic modifications of the 14th century. The Bohemian Crown Jewels are kept within a room inside it. The castle is the largest ancient castle in the world, occupying an area of almost 70,000 square metres.

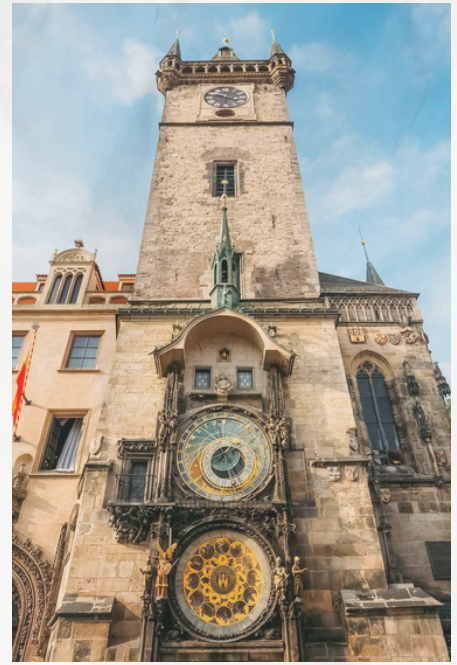




# Prague – What to see

## Prague Astronomical Clock

A mechanical masterpiece from the Middle Ages, the Astronomical Clock, which is attached to the Old Town Hall, is a must see. At the top of every hour, 12 mechanical apostles' parade between small doorways above the face of the clock, most notably featuring a skeleton that represents Death, who strikes the time. Crowds of visitors gather to watch the show.



## Wenceslas Square

Many historical events have occurred in Wenceslas Square, and it is a traditional setting for demonstrations (such as the demonstrations during the Velvet Revolution), celebrations, and other public gatherings. The square is named after Saint Wenceslas, the patron saint of Bohemia. It is part of the historic centre of Prague and is also a World Heritage Site.

## The Dancing House

The Dancing House, also called Ginger and Fred, is a unique looking building famous for its architecture. Photographing the outside of this building is a popular thing to do in Prague but you can also visit the upper terrace for panoramic views. The Dancing House is also a hotel, a bar, and an art gallery.







# Republic of Ireland

- ☐ KELLEHER Caoimhín (Brentford)
- ☐ KEELEY Josh (Luton)
- ☐ TRAVERS Mark (Everton)
- ☐ COLEMAN Seamus (Everton)
- ☐ O'BRIEN Jake (Everton)
- ☐ COLLINS Nathan (Brentford)
- ☐ O'SHEA Dara (Ipswich Town)
- ☐ SCALES Liam (Glasgow Celtic)
- ☐ MANNING Ryan (Southampton)
- ☐ ABANKWAH James (Watford)
- ☐ EGAN John (Hull City)
- ☐ DUNNE Jimmy (Queens Park Rangers)
- ☐ BRADY Robbie (Preston North End)
- ☐ LAWAL Bosun (Stoke City)
- ☐ TAYLOR Jack (Ipswich Town)
- ☐ MOLUMBY Jayson (West Bromwich Albion)
- ☐ AZAZ Finn (Southampton)
- ☐ Vale Harvey (Queens Park Rangers)
- ☐ KNIGHT Jason (Bristol City)
- ☐ BROWNE Alan (Middlesbrough)
- ☐ PARROTT Troy (Az Alkmaar)
- ☐ IDAH Adam (Swansea)
- ☐ KENNY Johnny (Bolton Wanderers)
- ☐ OGBENE Chidozie (Sheffield United)
- ☐ SZMODICS Sammie (Derby County)

**Manager:** Heimir Hallgrímsson  
**Assistant:** John O'Shea





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# Czechia



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- ☐ KOVAR Matej
- ☐ COUFAL Vladimir
- ☐ HRANAC Robin
- ☐ CHALOUPEK Stepan
- ☐ JURASEK David
- ☐ KREJCI Ladislav
- ☐ VITIK Martin
- ☐ ZELENY Jaroslav
- ☐ BUCHA Pavel
- ☐ CERV Lukas
- ☐ DARIDA Vladimir
- ☐ KARABEG Adam
- ☐ LADRA Tomas
- ☐ PROVOD Lukas
- ☐ SADILEK Michal
- ☐ SOUCEK Tomas
- ☐ SULC Pavel
- ☐ VISINKY Denis
- ☐ CHORY Tomas
- ☐ CHYTIL Mojmir
- ☐ KILMENT Jan
- ☐ SCHICK Patrik

**Manager:** Miroslav  
Koubek



# Czechia Tactical Analysis

## By Connor Hackett

### Introduction:

Czechia are coming into this fixture following a mixed campaign, including a big win (6-0 vs Gibraltar) and a damaging defeat (5-1 vs Croatia). However, Head Coach Ivan Hasek's dismissal was triggered following a dismal 2-1 defeat away to the Faroe Islands, which exposed one of the key tactical shortcomings of a side that last appeared in a World Cup in 2006.

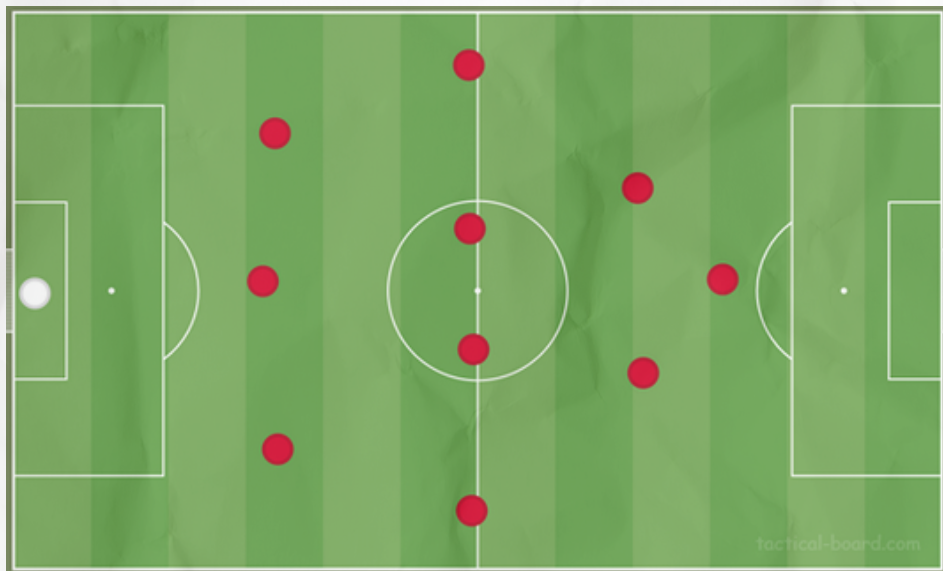
It wasn't just structural issues affecting the side, however, as tensions between a passionate fanbase and players culminated in Tomáš Souček being stripped of the captaincy following the squad's failure to acknowledge the travelling supporters in their final game of Group L. Additionally, the Czech FA formally apologised to the fans and donated the players' match fees to charity.

You get the sense that there is a long way to go before that relationship is rebuilt. So, following a period of Hasek's assistant, Jaroslav Kostl, stepping in as interim manager to see out the campaign, 74-year-old Miroslav Koubek was announced as Head Coach until June 2028. Koubek is a well-respected figure in Czech football circles, spending his entire coaching career domestically, except for one season in China. He was previously involved with the national team from 2016-2018 as assistant coach and also guided Viktoria Plzeň to the Czech First League in 2014/15, during his first spell with the club. Naturally, he has worked closely with a large portion of the current squad and is seen as a pragmatic and stabilising choice.

In an Irish context, it's similar to calling upon someone like Brian Kerr. In a Premier League context, it's like appointing Big Sam to steady the ship.

### Koubek's tactical background:

Koubek has typically favoured three-at-the-back systems throughout his career, and during his most recent spell at Viktoria Plzeň used a variation of 3-5-2, though he also deployed a 3-4-2-1, a shape that was used at times during Hasek's spell in charge. Based on profiles in the squad and attacking moves used throughout their qualifying campaign, I can see Koubek using the latter.





As per Tomas Danicek's analysis prior to the start of the 2024/25 season, Koubek's Plzeň side were extremely balanced going forward, creating chances equally from each attacking channel. This is no surprise given the use of wingbacks in his preferred set up, as well as having Czechia internationals Pavel Sulc (attacking midfielder-having a superb season at Lyon, though is a doubt for the game), as well as forwards Matej Vydra (primarily operates as a second striker) and Tomáš Chory, a 6'6" target man, adept at bringing others into play with his back to goal.



Out of possession, Koubek coached an aggressive, high-pressing team in the league, creating 17 big chances from turnovers, the most that season. In the 2023/24 Europa Conference League group stages, he guided his side to six wins from six, prioritising organisation and compactness as Plzeň averaged just 46% possession and scored fewer goals than any other group winner.

His side also scored the most goals in the league from set pieces and were third best for shots per game from corners. Just like we're seeing week in week out in the Premier League, Koubek clearly places immense value on static set-plays.

### **Czechia's tactical issues:**

The first key issue Koubek will have to address at his new role is, of course, easing the aforementioned tensions between players and fans. As reported in the Irish Times, he said: "The team is not in disarray, there is no fundamental problem among the players. We need to light a fire."

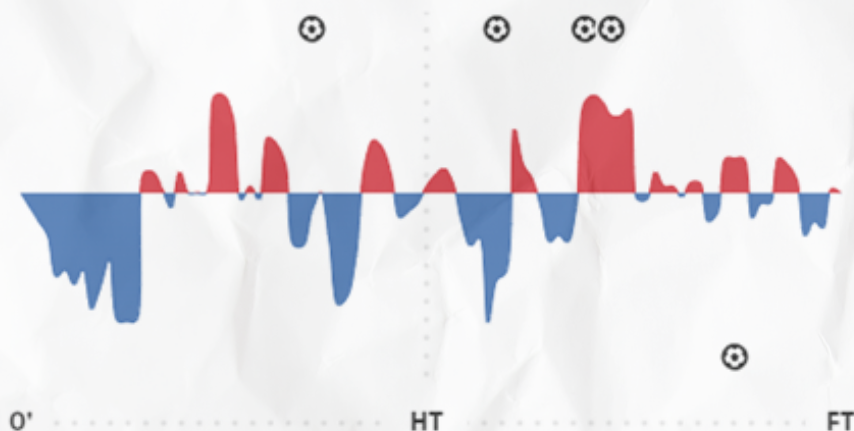
The second issue is the tactical problems the team showed consistently throughout Ivan Hasek's 20-month term at the helm. Hasek switched between a back three and a back four during his reign, with the same principles and difficulties persisting.

Vulnerability in defensive transitions plagued Hasek during his tenure, with the 5-1 loss away to Croatia the most glaring example. In a bizarre thirteen-minute period at the Opus Arena, Croatia ruthlessly exposed this issue, scoring four goals which all stemmed from transitional situations, to put the tie to bed and add fuel to a fire which had slowly been burning following uninspiring performances earlier in the campaign.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=p2heySPMlnU>

Nine months earlier in the UEFA Nations League in Tbilisi, another thirteen-minute collapse in the second half effectively finished the tie, as Czechia simply could not live with Georgia's attacking transitions and vertical play. In a 4-1 hammering, three goals came directly from transitional moments as Willy Sagnol's side ruthlessly turned the screw.





The momentum graphs from both games tell a story.

Czechia's home games were key to securing the play-off spot in their World Cup campaign, with three wins and one draw (0-0 against Croatia). Though on another day, Montenegro could have caused an upset, with a first-half equaliser marginally ruled out for offside following, you guessed it, a transition.

Minutes earlier, but for a loose pass aimed for former Manchester City man Stefan Jovetic, the away side could have been the latest team to expose this weakness, after Czechia lost possession in the Montenegrin half.



This will surely be top of Koubek's list of tactical issues to solve, but with the game against Ireland being his first camp in charge, how much time will he really have to address it? His staff will surely be aware of the counter-attacking prowess that Ireland showed at home against Portugal in particular. It was Parrott who finished off the quick counter for goal number two, but pacy players like Ogbene will be key, as well as ball winners like Knight and Molumby to win breaking balls in midfield and launch fast attacks. The average quality of Ireland's shots grew dramatically over the qualifying campaign, and although it's a small sample, there is a clear correlation to Heimir's decision to be tighter in defence as well as more vertical and transitional in attack. This could be a key route for Ireland to win the tie.



| Opponent | Shots | Shots_on_target | xG_created | xG_per_shot_created |
|----------|-------|-----------------|------------|---------------------|
| Hun (H)* | 9     | 4               | 0.88       | 0.10                |
| Arm (A)  | 8     | 5               | 0.8        | 0.10                |
| Por (A)  | 2     | 0               | 0.09       | 0.045               |
| Arm (H)* | 5     | 1               | 0.4        | 0.08                |
| Por (H)* | 6     | 3               | 1.55       | 0.26                |
| Hun (A)  | 10    | 5               | 1.72       | 0.17                |

Ireland's switch to a more transitional style during the campaign saw their average chance quality trend upwards. \*Data from when games were still 11v11, prior to the red cards.



Eight Czech players, including throw-in taker Coufal, look to take advantage of a final third throw-in

### Are Czechia a bit predictable going forward?

Another criticism aimed at this Czechia side during their qualifying campaign was a lack of creativity going forward. They scored 18 goals in their eight group games, with six of those goals coming in the final game against minnows Gibraltar.

Seven of those 18 goals were from set pieces, so if things are stale in attack, Koubek may look to double-down in this area. He will, however, need to keep their structural issues in defensive transitions in mind, as Georgia were ruthless in exposing the space left behind when they flooded the box during set plays.

Once the ball is cleared, Georgia transition at pace, a regular sight during Hasek's tenure





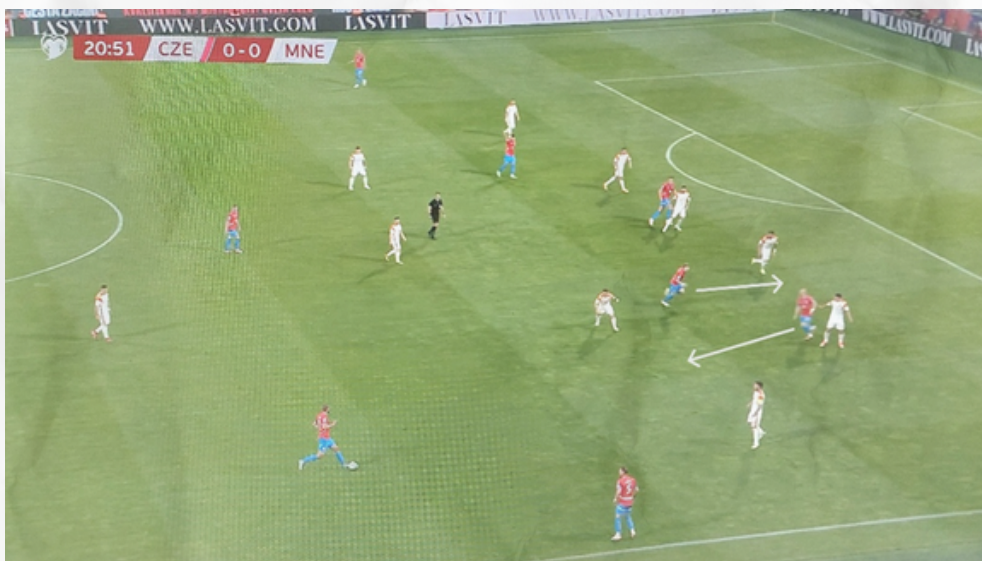
With lots of height in their pack, as well as the importance Koubek places on this facet of the game, Ireland will need to be wary of set piece situations, and ready to pounce at any opportunity to counter. As mentioned, although a 4-2-3-1 was Hasek's preferred shape during the UEFA Nations League and World Cup Qualifiers, he did deploy variations of a 3-4-3 at times. Their principles and attacking structures were largely the same regardless of the formation. A one-minute period during their 2-0 home victory against Montenegro acts as a speed run as to how they attack in open play.

### **Operating out of a 4-2-3-1 formation we see the following occur:**

- 1) Soucek drops in to form a back three (Coufal did it at times when playing with a back four):



- 2) Double movements: Deeper midfielder Sulc makes a penetrating run towards the backline while one of the 'wide 10s' drops in the inside channel to receive depending on the side, in this case Cerny:





3) Schick acts as a focal point to bring others into play, as Wolves' Ladislav Krejčí utilises his passing ability to find him:



Notice Montenegro's low block, a defensive strategy the Czechs struggled against consistently in 2025, including their shock loss to the Faroes, and an uninspiring 1-0 victory over San Marino, the lowest ranked team in the world. In this game, it was a well-taken Adam Hložek strike, as well as a goal from a corner, which gave them the win. As mentioned earlier, but for little more than a toe being offside, Montenegro almost made it 1-1 minutes after the first goal, and it could have been a much different game from there.

Against Portugal at the Aviva, Ireland showed excellent discipline in their compact block, consistently blocking easy central access to Ronaldo and forcing them wide. If they can do the same in the semi-final, I can see Czechia creating very little from open play.





The data shows that Ireland improved dramatically when they switched to an unapologetically defence-first mindset following the campaign's nadir of losing to Armenia.

| Opponent  | Shots_conceded | SOT_conceded | xG_conceded | xG_per_shot_conceded |
|-----------|----------------|--------------|-------------|----------------------|
| Hun (H) * | 5              | 3            | 1.29        | 0.26                 |
| Arm (A)   | 15             | 8            | 2.45        | 0.16                 |
| Por (A)   | 30             | 6            | 2.97        | 0.10                 |
| Arm (H) * | 3              | 1            | 0.21        | 0.07                 |
| Por (H) * | 18             | 3            | 1.22        | 0.07                 |
| Hun (A)   | 18             | 7            | 1.34        | 0.07                 |

The average quality of the shots Ireland conceded consistently fell over the campaign thanks to a switch in strategy. \*Data includes only periods where the games were 11v11.

## Conclusion:

Miroslav Koubek will no doubt bring experience and a calming presence to a Czechia side still reeling from a turbulent qualifying campaign. Heimir Hallgrímsson on the other hand, leads an Irish side with unprecedented momentum and hype for a large portion of its players and fans. Tactically, this could well be a story that writes itself; Czechia have experienced major issues with defensive transitions, while counter attacks played a key part in turning Ireland's fortunes around. Czechia find it difficult to break down low blocks, while Ireland have had plenty of practice in their compact block. Set pieces will prove a threat, but with both sides matching up in terms of average height, I'm backing us to bring this magical campaign to a climax in Dublin.



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# Ireland's road to Prague.

**Ben Mcelwain**

**With Ireland's World Cup Play-Off Semi-Final ahead of us, let's take a look back to how we qualified for the Semi Final.**

## **Round 1: Ireland 2 - 2 Hungary 06/09/2025**

Ireland welcomed Marco Rossi's Hungarian side to Dublin for their opening game of the 2026 World Cup Qualifiers. The excitement was very high in Ireland as a new qualification campaign was about to begin. Hungary shook Ireland from the start with Barnabas Varga scoring a goal inside the first two minutes to give the away side the lead. It didn't get any better for Ireland as only 13 minutes later, a corner whipped in from Dominik Szoboszlai met the head of Roland Sallai to double the away side's lead. Just before half-time, Evan Ferguson had a great chance to pull one back for Ireland however, it was stopped by the Hungarian goalkeeper, Denes Dibusz. Ireland then came out as a completely different team in the second half. Only four minutes into the second half, Evan Ferguson pulled one back for Heimir Hallgrimsson's side. Hungary's second goal scorer, Roland Sallai, received a red card in the 52nd minute after coming in late on a challenge on Dara O'Shea. Ireland kept fighting and fighting, looking for that equaliser, and finally, in the 93rd minute, Ryan Manning delivered a ball in from the edge of the box, which was headed home by Adam Idah to level the game at 2 - 2. There was a big sense of relief at the full-time whistle as Ireland had fought back very well to grab a point in their opening game of the qualifiers.

## **Round 2: Armenia 2 - 1 Ireland 09/09/2025**

Ireland then travelled over to Yerevan in Armenia for their second game of the qualifiers. Ireland came very close inside the first three minutes when Evan Ferguson had a shot from the edge of the box into an open goal but some great defending from Armenia ended up with Erik Piloyan heading the ball off the line. A challenge from Ireland Captain Nathan Collins awarded Armenia a penalty just before half-time. Eduard Spertsyan puts the penalty past Caoimhin Kelleher to give the home side the lead just before the break. Just six minutes into the second half, things went from bad to worse for Ireland as Grant-Leon Ranos scored a second goal for Armenia. Ireland could not believe it. Evan Ferguson once again pulled one back for Ireland in the 57th minute, it wasn't enough as Armenia ended up getting the 3 points, running out 2 - 1 winners. Many Irish supporters felt that the campaign was over already with only 2 games done.



# Ireland's road to Prague.

**Ben Mcelwain**

## **Round 3: Portugal 1 - 0 Ireland 11/10/2025**

Ireland started off the October International window with a trip to Lisbon, to face European giant's Portugal. Ireland played completely defensive this game. It seemed to be working as it was 0 - 0 at halftime. Portugal kept fighting during the second half, however they just couldn't find their chance. Ireland conceded a penalty in the 73rd minute after a handball from Dara O'Shea. Ronaldo then stepped up to face Caoimhin Kelleher to give the hosts the lead but it was superbly stopped by Kelleher's foot. As the game went on, it looked like Ireland would be leaving Portugal with a huge point but Ruben Neves had other plans as he headed home a goal for the home side in the 91st minute to break Irish hearts.

## **Round 4: Ireland 1 - 0 Armenia 14/10/2025**

Ireland welcomed Armenia to Dublin for round 4 of the World Cup Qualifiers. It was a very dry first half from both teams and it was 0 - 0 at the half. Only seven minutes into the second half and Tigran Barseghyan headbutts Finn Azaz which results in a red card for the Armenian number 11. Finally, Ireland get their goal as Will Smallbone whips a ball into the box and is headed past Henri Avagyan in the Armenian goal from Evan Ferguson. Adam Idah doubled Ireland's lead in the 89th minute, however it was ruled out as he was offside. Ireland went on and picked up their first three points of the campaign, as they looked ahead to the November International break.



# Ireland's road to Prague.

**Ben Mcelwain**

## **Round 5: Ireland 2 - 0 Portugal 13/11/2025**

Ireland came into their last home game of the year needing to get three points against Portugal. Hungary got the three points away to Armenia in a 0 - 1 win earlier that evening which meant if Ireland didn't get the win, they would have no chance of finishing second and the world cup dream would be gone. Both teams started well but after a penalty shout from Ireland, they end up with a corner. Josh Cullen puts an unbelievable ball to the back post which is headed back in front of goal from Liam Scales and Troy Parrott heads it home to give Ireland the lead. The place erupted. Chiedozie Ogbene then has a chance to put Ireland two up in the 38th minute but he ends up hitting the post. Ireland have one more chance before the half ends and a great ball over the top from Dara O'Shea finds Troy Parrott who cuts inside and sends the ball past Diogo Costa in the Portuguese goal. Ireland was in Dreamland! Portugal kept fighting for a way back in the second half but couldn't find it. It went from bad to worse for Portugal as Ronaldo got sent off on the hour mark after elbowing Dara O'Shea. Ireland held on for the final half an hour and had got a huge win under their belt in what would be a memorable night for Irish football. The dream is still alive.

## **Round 6: Hungary 2 - 3 Ireland 16/11/2025**

Ireland travelled to Budapest in what was a huge game, the winner takes the World Cup Play-Off spot, a draw no good for Ireland. It didn't take long for Hungary to go one up as only four minutes in and Daniel Lukacs scored. Ten minutes later, Ogbene wins Ireland a penalty after a VAR check. Troy Parrott then steps up to bring it back level at 1 - 1. 22 minutes later and a brilliant hit from Barnabas Varga gave Hungary the lead for half time. Ireland kept fighting and fighting and Adam Idah thought he brought it back level however he was offside. It looked less likely it was going to work for Ireland but with then minutes remaining, a beautiful ball from Finn Azaz met Troy Parrott and he suddenly brought Ireland back into it. Time was ticking and Ireland looked like they would be finishing in third place with no play off. They entered the 96th minute and a long ball was sent into the box from Kelleher which was headed down by Scales and it fell to Troy Parrott who tapped it into the goal to get his hat trick and send Ireland to the World Cup Play-Offs. Everyone went mental. Ireland had done it.

A huge week ahead, hopefully one to remember. COYBIG

**Follow Ben**



# Ireland v Czechia

## Head-to-Head Record



**Games won: 2 Games drawn: 2 Games lost: 4**

05 Jun 1994 Republic of Ireland v Czech Republic L 1-3 International Friendly

24 Apr 1996 Czech Republic v Republic of Ireland L 2-0 International Friendly

25 Mar 1998 Czech Republic v Republic of Ireland L 2-1 International Friendly

23 Feb 2000 Republic of Ireland v Czech Republic W 3-2 International Friendly

31 Mar 2004 Republic of Ireland v Czech Republic W 2-1 International Friendly

11 Oct 2006 Republic of Ireland v Czech Republic D 1-1 UEFA European Championship

12 Sep 2007 Czech Republic v Republic of Ireland L 1-0 UEFA European Championship

29 Feb 2012 Republic of Ireland v Czech Republic D 1-1 International Friendly



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# A Team in the Image of Ireland.

## by Bill Gaine

Following the dramatic end to the qualifying group last November, which culminated in a historic triumph over Portugal in Dublin and Troy's dramatic 96th-minute winner to beat Hungary in Budapest.

It's fair to say that every possible talking point, tactical decision and line of discourse has been done to death in the subsequent four months, and hopefully the volume and buzz of that continues into these games and beyond (for obvious reasons), and we reach our first World Cup since 2002.

There's one point which immediately sprang to my mind following those games, which I think has yet to be genuinely dealt with in the discourse. While it's only natural that Troy Parrott dominated the headlines after his heroics, five goals from two games dragged us into the playoffs. There were elements of the discourse (led by a certain Roddy Collins) that "Inner City Kids Are Different" was a complete null point at best and completely tone deaf at worst.

When I watch Ireland play, what I see is...is a team which is TRULY representative of what Ireland is today, both on the island and the broader diaspora.

There's a proliferation today of nonsense on both ends of the scale when it comes to Nationality and Heritage.

1. What defines whether one can consider themselves "Irish" and what doesn't?
2. How many of the designated "criteria" must one fulfil to be classified as "Irish"?
3. Are people abusing the system in search of personal gain, "England's Rejects"?

So on and so forth, it quite frankly gets nauseating having to constantly argue with halfwits (mainly online), but such is the discourse in 2026.

But take the side which ended our most recent fixture against Hungary, which included representation from:

Cork, Galway, Wicklow, Sligo, Wexford, Kildare

That doesn't account for the representatives from Waterford and Donegal who started, an unused sub from Louth on the bench and an Antrim native who missed the game through injury.

When it comes to our "Granny Rulers", Azaz and Cullen both started, Taylor came off the bench, and Johnston was also an unused substitute.

My favourite story of all, though, is the one of Ogbene who came to Ireland an eye-year-old and has gone on to completely immerse himself in Irish culture for the following two decades, and I've no doubt will continue to make his impact on our country.

Quite a spread of backgrounds, you'd have to say, ay?

I think if anyone is being honest, when looking at the variance in backgrounds and stories amongst our MNT. Of course, there are nuances to being ethnically Irish, or not being born on the island, so on and so forth. That's just a fact.



Recognising our differences is not inherently wrong; it's what we do with that information that is where the more complicated and contentious questions start to arise.

Dual Heritage is something I've covered extensively, and despite what some would have you think, it's a very real thing. I was born in Ireland, lived my entire life here, Irish parents, grandparents, that's my reality, but that's not the same for everyone.

I've no idea what it's like to be born to Irish parents abroad or to have a grandparent from Ireland, I've no idea what it feels like to be born in Ireland to parents from another country and I've no idea what it feels like to migrate to a country as a young child and immerse myself into a new culture while retaining ties with my country of birth. The point is that no situation is the same! Refining what constitutes "Irishness" is impossible, but we can't put black and white arguments into boxes just because it may suit the narrative we want to spin at any given time.

If there was any reasonable doubt beforehand, I think the November window went far in dispelling the myth that the "English players don't care about Ireland". From Taylor flooring Dias against Portugal to the collective reactions following Troy's winner, I think it was even clear for a blind person that they knew what it means to represent Ireland.

If you rewind to the very early days of the Heimir tenure, in advance of our game with Greece in October 2024, he made an interesting assessment. "It's a pretty equal squad, a lot of players can stake a claim that they should be playing". At the time, I saw this as a very diplomatic way of arguing that we don't have a squad of players with sufficient/appropriate quality and still do genuinely think there's very little difference between a lot of our players and the wider supporting cast.

Fast forward to our World Cup qualifiers, we have had twenty-seven players who were given minutes across our six group games, with a further eight being involved in squads, all with varying degrees of backgrounds. In fairness, reflecting on Heimir's comments now, I do think we've seen the evolution of the contingent formally known as "Kennys Kids" to finally take on more ownership in the National Team like Parrott, Kelleher and Collins. These standouts are forming a core, but I do think our strength in-depth will be tested further this month.

Representation does matter, but the great thing about the diversity in the MNT is that it comes based on genuine footballing merit and not because of any DEI or quotas.

This is a team in the IMAGE OF IRELAND! Hopefully, with the proposed National League and rising grassroots clubs, it will only grow further.

## Follow Bill on Twitter



# Flashback

## Ireland v Czech Republic Flashback Match Report – 11<sup>th</sup> October 2006

### Republic of Ireland 1-1 Czech Republic

Pressure was relieved on under-fire manager Steve Staunton as Ireland gave a good account of themselves but ultimately had to settle for a point against the Czech Republic.

This was a much-needed pick up for Ireland after their disastrous 5-2 defeat in Cyprus the previous Saturday. A number of injuries meant that Staunton turned to the likes of Stephen Kelly, Jonathan Douglas and Paul McShane, and they did not let him down.

Both Douglas and John O'Shea went close with efforts in the first half, but it took a point blank save by Wayne Henderson and a subsequent goal-line clearance from Steve Finnan to stop Milan Baros giving the Czech Republic the lead. Ireland had another opportunity just before the break when Andy Reid's long-range shot was saved by Chelsea's Petr Cech.

In the second half, Alan O'Brien went close, before Kevin Kilbane blasted Ireland into the lead after 62 minutes. Damien Duff shot a low cross into the box and Kilbane unleashed a left footed strike past Cech. But the lead lasted just two minutes as Jan Koller held off McShane and from just inside the area squeezed a shot past Henderson to bring the Czech Republic level.

Robbie Keane came close near the end but headed his effort wide in front of the goal. Despite only claiming a point, this was a much-improved showing by Ireland, and some welcome respite for both the players and manager.

Republic of Ireland: Henderson, Kelly, McShane, O'Shea, Finnan, Andy Reid (Quinn 72), Carsley, Douglas, Kilbane (Alan O'Brien 79), Duff, Keane.

Subs Not Used: Colgan, Morrison, Lee, Foley, St. Ledger.

Booked: Kilbane, Douglas, Carsley.

Goal: Kilbane 62.

Czech Republic: Cech, Polak, Ujfalusi, Kovac, Jankulovski, Jiranek, Rosický, Plašil (Grygera 85), Rožek, Koller, Baroš (Jarolím 82).

Subs Not Used: Blazek, Lafata, Pospesch, Abraham, Kulic.

Booked: Baros, Polak, Rozehnal, Kovac.

Goal: Koller 64.

Attendance: 35,500

Ref: Bertrand Layec (France).



# A look at Czechia

By James Agnew

The Czech Republic national team is recognised by FIFA as Czechia and is controlled by the Football Association of the Czech Republic (FAČR).

Following the dissolution of Czechoslovakia, the first international competition of the Czech Republic was UEFA Euro 1996 in England, where they finished as runners up. They have taken part at every European Championship since. They also reached the Quarter Finals of the European Championships on two occasions (in 2012 and 2020) and the semi-finals once (in 2004).

Following the partition, they have featured at one FIFA World Cup, the 2006 tournament in Germany. In the tournament they were eliminated in the first round. Despite beating the USA in their opening match, they suffered subsequent losses against Ghana and Italy.

Czechia are currently 43<sup>rd</sup> in the FIFA rankings. Their highest ever ranking was 2<sup>nd</sup> place and their lowest was 67<sup>th</sup> place. Their biggest win came on 4<sup>th</sup> June 2005 when they defeated Andorra 8-1. They have also recorded three 7-0 victories during their history. Their heaviest defeat came against England on 22<sup>nd</sup> March 2019, a match that they lost 5-0.

Their most capped player (with 124 appearances) is the former Chelsea and Arsenal goalkeeper Petr Čech. Their highest ever goalscorer (with 55 goals) is former Borussia Dortmund and Monaco striker Jan Koller.

The Czechia squad is made up mostly of players that play in the domestic Czech league (The Czech First League), but they also have a smattering of players in the top leagues across Europe, such as Bayer Leverkusen's Patrik Schick, Hoffenheim's Vladimir Coufal and Bologna's Martin Vitik. Their Head Coach is Miroslav Koubek (who has coached a number of Czech clubs) and their captain is West Ham midfielder Tomáš Souček.

In qualification for World Cup 2026, Czechia were drawn in Group L, with Croatia, Faroe Islands, Montenegro, and Gibraltar. The Czechs came under criticism for a heavy away defeat in Croatia, a late home win against the Faroe Islands and then a defeat against the same opposition in Torshavn. Yet despite this, they earned a play off spot and a shot at qualification for what would be their second World Cup appearance. Although this is not a vintage Czech side, they are still a formidable opponent for Ireland, especially as the game will be played in Prague.

After promotion to League A, they have been drawn in Group 3, alongside Spain, Croatia, and England for the 2026/2027 iteration of the Nations League.

\*NB - This article excludes history as Czechoslovakia



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# Useful Information

## General Travel Advice

Irish citizens need a valid passport or passport card to enter the Czech Republic.

Irish passports do not have a minimum validity requirement while travelling to the UK or within the EU. When travelling within Europe with an Irish passport and/or passport card, it should be valid for the duration of your stay.

Irish citizens travelling to the Czech Republic are advised to follow the guidance of national and local authorities and stay fully informed of what is going on by monitoring local news and social media.

## Emergency Assistance

The best help is often close at hand. If you have problems, try talking to your local contacts, or hotel management.

**Visitors can contact the emergency services in the Czech Republic by dialling 112. Specific emergency numbers are:**

- Police: 158
- Fire brigade: 150
- Ambulance: 155
- 

## Public Transport

You must buy tickets for public transport before travelling and validate them at the start of your journey at the yellow machines, which are located at the top of the escalators/stairs in metro stations or on trams and buses. Sometimes tickets can be bought on the spot in trains/buses/trams.

On-the-spot fines are imposed for failure to produce a valid ticket. If you can't pay the fine, ticket inspectors may call the police and you may be arrested.

## Driving

If you're planning to drive in the Czech Republic, you should be careful.

## If you want to drive:

- Bring your Irish or international driving licence and make sure you have adequate and appropriate insurance.
- To drive on Czech motorways, vehicles must display a valid digital vignette (dálniční známka), which can be bought [online](#) for 1 year, 30 days or 10 days.
- Keep up to date by consulting the local motoring hotline, available in Czech and English on 1230 or +420 1230. [Basic Traffic Rules in the Czech Republic](#) can be found online. (Please note this is not a legal document and provides basic tips only).



# The Case For Chieo

## Gearóid McGann

While the vast majority of the football world would have spent last Wednesday evening marvelling at Federico Valverde's Champions League hat trick, those of an Irish football persuasion would have been heartened to see Chiedozie Ogbene make a welcome return to action for Sheffield United. A timely boost to our World Cup play-off ambitions.

It was only Ogbene's second appearance since injuring his hamstring in that famous game in Budapest last November. While his match sharpness will be a concern ahead of the Prague showdown, there are qualities to Ogbene's game that I believe will prove vital to us and should see him earn a place in Heimir Hallgrímsson's XI.

Firstly, pace is not something that this Irish squad has a lot of. Thankfully, it is one of Ogbene's strongest trait, Theo Hernandez can attest to this. There will be times against Czechia when will be relying on this in a both offensive and defensive sense. Offensively, in the sense of providing opportunities for Troy Parrott and defensively in the sense of providing cover to Seamus Coleman.

The Corkman also possesses a good ability to win free kicks in attacking areas for the team. With the height in the Irish team, any opportunity to get the ball into the mixer should be availed of. Ogbene was also the man who won the penalty against Hungary.

While there will be an argument to hold him in reserve, his experience of playing against top international teams such as Belgium, Netherlands and France are reasons why his biggest contribution to the play off could be from the start. Given the explosive way Ogbene plays, he is unlikely to last the full game and the likes of a Johnny Kenny or possibly Sinclair Armstrong could offer more off the bench when play becomes more stretched.

When Ireland find themselves under pressure, Ogbene offers a fantastic out ball option to help relieve the pressure on the Irish defence and bring the play into the opponent's half. His upper strength has enabled him the passed to win balls that look to be 60-40 in favour of his direct opponent.

Naturally, Parrott's exploits in November and his club form since means he will garner a lot of attention from the Czech defence. Having a physical presence like Ogbene's for company will be a great help for the Dubliner.

Sheffield United face Wrexham on Saturday next, the final game before the international window commences. Ideally, Ogbene will see some game time in the fixture to boost both his fitness and sharpness. However, should this not come to pass, Irish fans need not worry too much about him heading into the Prague showdown. He has consistently put in a shift every time he has pulled in the Irish shirt and rest assured,

March 26th will be no different. Éire Abú!

**Follow Gearóid McGann**



# Useful Information

## Reporting Crime

If you're the victim of a crime while in the Czech Republic, report it in-person at a local police station, and get a police report ('policejní zpráva') and police report crime number. You can report it to any police station. However, the Embassy is aware that at the following police stations there are officers who speak English:

Malá Strana (very close to the Embassy),  
Vlašská 3, Prague 1,  
24-hour phone line: (+420) 974 851 900.  
Můstek,  
Jungmannovo náměstí 9, Prague 1 (just off Wenceslas Square),  
24-hour phone line: (+420) 974 851 750.

## European Health Insurance Card

As an Irish resident you are entitled to public healthcare in countries of the European Union (EU), European Economic Area (EEA) or Switzerland if you become ill or injured while on a temporary stay there. Ensure that you get or renew your EHIC (the new name for the E111) before you go, and remember, you need one for every person travelling in your group.

## Irish Embassy

The Embassy can be contacted Monday to Friday, from 09:00 to 17:00.

Appointments are offered Monday to Friday, from 09:30 to 12:30 and 14:30 to 16:30.

If you require assistance in the case of emergency while the Embassy is closed, please call the main Embassy number, (+420) 257 011 280, and leave your name, contact number and a brief description of the emergency. The duty officer will contact you.

## Embassy of Ireland Address

Tržiště 13  
118 00 Prague 1  
2nd Floor  
Tel: +420 257 011 280



# Looking Ahead Past 2026: Trent Kone-Doherty's Road to Ireland

## Scott Mason

Trent Kone-Doherty will likely miss out on any potential Ireland World Cup squad in 2026, but the young talent will certainly be keeping a keen eye on his country.

There is a generation of Irish people whose memories of Saipan – the last time Ireland featured in the World Cup – can only linger through the retelling of stories and the dramatisation of the fallout between Roy Keane and Mick McCarthy.

When it comes to Ireland's squad, the same can be said for many there too.

Seamus Coleman, Matt Doherty, and John Egan probably have their own firsthand account of that tournament, but they would be the minority.

Now, the current crop of Irishmen will be looking to be part of the stories we tell in the future.

The memories of watching the Boys in Green for the first time in a World Cup will stick in the minds of a myriad of the Irish population. A possibility the players will want to seize.

But for the youth, Ireland making the 2026 World Cup is a chance for them to see there is a future in becoming an Irish hero on the world stage.

That very future of Irish football right now looks bright, and one name that is destined to wear the green at Aviva Stadium is Kone-Doherty.

How Trent Kone-Doherty is eyeing Ireland call-up

Kone-Doherty was born in Derry and has chosen to represent the Republic.

In Ireland, the 19-year-old came through Foyle Harps from 2012 to 2019 before moving to play for Derry City from 2019 to 2022.

Liverpool scouted the winger in 2022. The young talent made two appearances for the Reds' first team, but in February 2026, he moved to Norwegian side Molde with hopes of regular football and an eye on an Ireland call-up.

Kone-Doherty represents a profile of a player that Ireland has rarely seen throughout the years.

A “fearless” winger willing to take on the man ahead of him. Aiden McGeady is the only name that could be compared over the last 25 years.



Liverpool youth coach Barry Lewtas described Kone-Doherty, stating, “Trent looks really dynamic; he can take players on, he combines well, and he's a wide attacking player who seems pretty fearless when he's in one-on-one moments.

The rise of Chidozie Ogbene has shown that the wide players in the green jersey can truly lift the crowd. When Ogbene gets on the ball, there is belief the pacey 28-year-old can make something happen.

But even in comparison to the Sheffield United man, Kone-Doherty is a different style of wide man.

Ogbene's pace allows him to be an effective transition winger, whereas the 19-year-old is more akin to a traditional wide man.

While he did leave Liverpool, the Premier League club did try to keep him by offering the winger a new deal, highlighting how highly rated he is.

However, his move to Norway could work out for the best for his Ireland future.

When can we expect Trent Kone-Doherty for the Irish senior team?

Kone-Doherty has featured at the youth levels for the Republic of Ireland on 31 occasions through the under-16s to under-21s.

However, with him now moving to Molde seeking first-team football, there is every chance a call-up could arrive within the next 12 months.

His sights will no doubt be set on Euro 2028, with a potential tournament on home soil on the cards.

However, first, his countrymen must make Kone-Doherty and his fellow Irish youth believe in the Irish football project by booking their tickets to North America. COYBIG.

**Follow Scott on Twitter:**  
**Scott Mason (@ScottMason00) / X**



# Prague Springs eternal in this land of oddity and colour

By Jason Conlon

All I wanted was a plate of chips.

The old babushka, in the canteen, in the tiny train station, wasn't impressed. She threw down a watery bowl of goulash and grunted. We'd just trundled over the Czech border and were three hours northeast of Munich, Prague still an age away. This station in anonymous backwater was charming, very soviet, and wore an air of loneliness and gloom. Was this Monaghan bus station in disguise?

Later in our hotel, the elevator had no doors. A beleaguered old bellhop would hobble over and close a retractable gate, with a rather nice, "click-clack." The thing was positively vintage, and I raised my eyebrows as the man took out his crank and put it in the hole, giving her a good twist. The lift went up the shaft and away we went. It was finally time to explore the city.

More than enough has been written about the famous Charles Bridge that connects the Czech capital. But when crossing the bridge towards Prague Castle be sure to glance to your left, where the dominant Petřín Hill reveals itself; a literal forest of green cascading down to the streets below.

Those in need of a rendezvous point could do worse than hit the tourist trap of Wenceslas Square, where a gentleman must have known I was Irish as he offered me some "green". But on the 26<sup>th</sup> March black is the colour, as there'll be enough pints of stout taken to fill the Vltava River.

Prague's Old Town, with its impressive Baroque and Gothic architecture, is an obvious draw for anybody visiting the city for the first time. The nearby Státní Opera can offer one their cultural fix, too. Feeling haughty, we went to see an adaptation of Amadeus but didn't have a notion what they were saying. Bloody foreign muck. The city's National Museum, meanwhile, is a treasure trove of ancient delights.

Internet forums, lost antiquities of the online era, have really been at the centre of the build-up to this match. Frenzied speculation over tickets, ballots, and meltdowns over the number of undersubscribed away days required, have made it a joy to be a lurker, as otherwise level-headed folks lose the run of themselves.

Either way, the dedicated hordes will soon make their way to the Fortuna Arena. In a country strained under the grey skies of communism, the Prague Spring of 1968 captured a period of freedom, quiet belief, and anticipation for meaningful, long-term change. That mood of revolution was ultimately dashed. Irish football has also sprung great hope since the remarkable events of November; it's now up to the Boys in Green to go and complete their insurrection.

But look, the time for chat is over. As Roy Keane once said, "We'll see you out there."

Hopefully celebrating a famous Irish win, with a few wobbles on the cobbles in-between, all that remains to be said is:

Czech Mate.





# A winning team

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