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SWEET

Euro Under-17 finals boost for Irish



IRELAND'S prospects of qualifying for the Euro Under-17 finals have been boosted by UEFA's decision to double the number of finalists to 16.

■ John FALLON

Next May's tournament in May will be the first time in 12 years that more than eight nations will participate.

runners-up in all but one of the pools will accompany the group winner into the finals. Tom Mohan's Irish side is highly-rated, containing a number of talented individuals.

Irish teams — particularly during the Brian Kerr era in the late nineties and early noughties — were a regular presence at the finals until Europe's governing body chopped it in half.

Everton won the chase to recruit left-winger Steven Kinsella, with their Merseyside rivals Liverpool snapping up Conor Masterson.

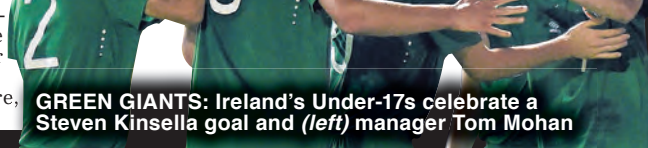
Elite

Brandon Payne overcame a broken leg to join Celtic while Bradley Garmston chose West Brom over a number of other suitors.

Consequently, only once since — in 2008 — did the Boys in Green successfully negotiate through the first and elite phases of qualification into the showpiece.

Ireland progressed through the first qualifying phase last week after beating Gibraltar and the Faroe Islands before playing out a scoreless draw against Scotland.

But this season's batch of hopefuls will enter the elite phase qualifiers in March aware that second place in their four-team group will likely secure them a place in Sofia.



32 nations will be divided into 8 groups at the draw on December 3.

Unlike before,

GREEN GIANTS: Ireland's Under-17s celebrate a Steven Kinsella goal and (left) manager Tom Mohan

Malahide piling on the class!

HAVING FUN: Malahide celebrate at the weekend and (right) Laytown's Ale Van Pawhuys shoots at Artane Beaumont keeper Sean Quillan

■ See inside

