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JP McManus scholarship recipients, Mikeala Morris, from Kildimo, Co Limerick, and Kate Burke, Ballinasloe, Co Galway, with JP McManus and Martin O'Neill, Republic of Ireland soccer manager.
Picture: Alan Place

O'Neill recalls law degree job option

Jimmy Woulfe
Mid-West Correspondent

Irish soccer manager Martin O'Neill speculated what might have been had he taken his mother's advice and stuck to legal studies at Queens University in Belfast, rather than follow his dream to become a professional soccer player.

"I had a pushy mother who sent me in the education-direction. I was at Queens studying law and had the opportunity to become a professional footballer. My mother wanted me to continue with the education and many a time when things

weren't going great for me in football, I thought that she was probably right."

During dark moments in his early days in England as a professional soccer player, he contemplated going back to Belfast to resume his degree. At one point he made arrangements at Nottingham University to enrol in the law faculty there. However, success with Nottingham Forest put paid to that.

"Remarkably that year we got into the first division, or the Premiership as it is known now, and the team went from strength to strength and I kind of pushed it (law) to wayside. Maybe

the night I held the European Cup aloft in Madrid in about 1980, I think I might have said to my mother then: 'I wonder who's right here today', but overall she had a point."

Asked if he would contemplate at some stage completing his degree, he said: "Getting back as a mature student in university, would I be laughed out of existence?"

He was speaking at the University of Limerick at the weekend where he presented 126 students with JP McManus third-level college scholarships, worth €6,750 here or £5,500 in the North for each

year of their primary degree courses. Lee Pollock from Newtownards, Co Down became the 1,000th winner of a JP McManus third-level scholarship.

Mr McManus told the students: "Each of you has worked hard and you deserve nothing more than to continue your studies and excel in your chosen field."

Minister for Education Jan O'Sullivan and Minister for Employment and Learning in Northern Ireland, Dr Stephen Ferry presented the students with their awards.

Mr McManus has contributed €32m to third-level education initiatives.