What we expect of our heroes

I have a lot of admiration for the players at PAFC. But it stems from their shortcomings not their gifts.

We all know about their gifts – the footballing ability that gets them into the first team squad of a professional football club, and the heroics they pull out of the bag to get us a win on Saturday afternoon.

But without realising it we load on top many other expectations. They are to be mature, intelligent (even wise), never make a mistake of judgement and able to soak up all our criticisms with infinite patience and not lose confidence. Also we expect them to play sublime football worthy of the Champions League for ninety minutes.

Poor blokes. My admiration stems from how they cope with it all and how sensible and mature they all seem despite many only being in their early twenties. I remember what I was like in my early twenties and I’m horrified (Oscar Wilde probably had the young me in mind when he said ‘"I am not young enough to know everything" ).

We give people in public positions super-hero status and expect them to live up to it. Psychology calls this transference.

I know this because it happens in my profession too. Often I’m dealing with issues of the heart and soul, so I often run the risk of people putting me in the place of God or their parents, and expecting me (often without realising it) to meet those needs.

And guess what? It doesn’t always end well. I disappoint them and they get upset with me. It’s OK – it’s normal, we’re broken individuals all of us, but we just need to be aware of it and I need to constantly be pointing people in the direction of God – who *does* love us perfectly and *can* meet our needs.

Of course some people encourage this transference because it makes them feel special – they start to believe their own press and they like the attention. And you can see it in footballers as well – maybe not so much at this level (John and the team do very well in speaking sense to the squad and keeping them level) but certainly in the higher leagues. Wherever you see someone in authority abusing their position and coming unstuck as a result, you see someone who has begun to believe their own press, think they’re above the law, feel that they’re something special beyond just their ability to play football, act, make decisions or care for people – the attributes that got them into the position in the first place.

We will always have transference – we will always create gods and heroes out of our public figures – so the trick is to deal with it. This is why the Roman Generals taking their victory parade would have a slave walk behind then saying *Memento mori –* you are mortal. We could try that at Home Park, but we have the Home Park groan that does the very same thing.