

No. 176—MICK MACKEY of Ahane

By SEAMUS O'CEALLAIGH

OFF to America in a fortnight's time, as guest of the Limerickmen's Association of New York, is Mick Mackey, whom many good judges regard as the greatest hurler Ireland has produced.

On such a momentous subject opinions must differ widely, and county and provincial affiliations play a part. Corkmen of the old school still regard Jamesy Kelleher as the most remarkable of a long line of great hurling men. In Tipperary there are many claimants to the mantle—the Mahers, the Leahys, Martin Kennedy, Phil Cahill, to mention but a few. Lory Meagher would probably dispute with the Walshs, the Graces and the Doyleys for Kilkenny's crown. But above and beyond them all, the men that saw Mick Mackey hurl maintain he had a glamour and attraction that was all his own.

I remember meeting, some years ago, a man whose religious beliefs were not those of the majority and who admitted to me that the only break in a lifetime of strict Sabbatarian observance was "a visit to Croke Park one memorable Sunday afternoon to see Mick Mackey hurl."

It would be impossible to adequately cover Mick's hurling career in the scope of a single article. In view of the great interest aroused in his coming visit to New York, and mindful of the unique honour this invitation conveys, I am departing from usual practice in this series by devoting a few weeks to the hurling and football deeds of the mighty Mick.

A TRIBUTE IN VERSE.

These deeds have been honoured in song and story, and I cannot do better than open with a little tribute in verse, written by Tadhg O'Donnchadha of Doon, and which is set to the air of another great hurling ballad, "The Bould Thady Quill."

I

In Lim'rick's fair County—not far from that city—

Was born a hero if ever was one.

He was cordial and jovial, an "artist" at hurling,
His name is Mick Mackey from far-famed Ahane.

Sure he showed all how scoring was "easy"

By crashin' his way through every defence,
He adopted the solo, applied it with "gusto,"

And soon his opponents were "taking offence."

Chorus

For ramblin', for rovin', for foot-

ball or hurlin'

There was no one to equal our hero at play,

May his name be remembered, his deeds be registered,

And happy his life to the end of his day.

2.

In the year thirty-three, in his first hurling final,

'Twas played 'gainst Kilkenny—those men by the Nore—

A point was the margin, defeat was the verdict,

But Mick he showed signs of great things to be sure.

Then thirty-four brought fame and good fortune

To staunch Garryowen and the old Treaty Stone,

The All-Ireland was captured, but the man who helped to take it,

Was our hero, Mick Mackey, from far-famed Ahane.

Chorus.

3.

For fifteen years or more — the pride of all Lim'rick —

His fame it did spread throughout Erin's green "shore,"

When our county was down and inclined to be beaten,

'Twas: "Come on, Mackey! and give us a score."

Oh, who will forget the nineteen-forty final,

Kilkenny fought hard and caused us to fear,

But our darlin', Mick Mackey, his boots he discarded,

And soon all Lim'rick resounded in cheer.

Chorus.

(4)

He travelled "the States," and gave exhibitions,

He's remembered by all who his hurling did see,

In Melbourne and Sydney and 'way off in Dixi,

His name it is sung even down to this day.

Now here's a toast to our greatest hurler,

Forever and ever may he with us be!

From his inspiration may come restoration

Of Lim'rick's proud honour and former glory!

Chorus.

RECORD IN TABLOID FORM. GREAT OIREACHTAS WIN.

In tabloid form I give Mick Mackey's record on hurling and football fields.

Captain of the Limerick teams that won the All-Ireland finals of 1936 and 1940, he also helped in winning the 1934 title.

Mick has five Munster medals, won in 1933, 1934, 1935, 1936, 1940.

He was a member of the Limerick team that won the National Hurling League five years in succession—1934 to 1938 inclusive, the only county ever to win five league titles in a row.

Mick played in nine Railway Cup hurling finals, and won on eight occasions. He was unfortunate that his side were beaten by a point in 1936, but captained the team to a great victory the following year.

He has eight Thomond Tournament medals, inscribed for 1932, 1933, 1934, 1935, 1937, 1940, 1944, and 1945. Limerick were in America when the 1936 final was played, and a second string represented the County in that year's competition.

In addition to the great American tour, Mick was overseas on hurling trips on four other occasions—playing each time in London for the Ward Cup. In 1934 they beat Dublin there; in 1935 and 1937 Kilkenny were overcome, and in 1938 Tipperary proved the masters.

A great Oireachtas win was registered by Limerick in 1939, when they beat the Kilkenny team that had caused the sensation of that season by defeating Cork in a thrilling All-Ireland final. Mick Captained that Limerick team.

It would be impossible to tabulate all the big tournament wins Mick figured in with both Ahane and Limerick, but it must go on record that he played all through one of the most wonderful spells in modern hurling story, and proved the leading man in some of the great victories that helped Limerick write a hurling epic that may never be equalled.

I can only very briefly touch on that remarkable performance here. From October 15th, 1933, to April 24th, 1938—a period of four and a half years—Limerick played sixty-five games, meeting all the leading hurling counties. They won fifty-eight of them, drew four and lost three. That's a record that's going to take some beating!

I will try and recall some of the tournament successes. With Ahane, one of the finest trophies was the splendid John Daly Cup medal; whilst 1916 memorial and Aonach Kincora trophies were other hard-won laurels.

In County colours 1934 saw a big win over Galway, at Ennis, for the Cusack Cup. They won a set of suit lengths by beating Cork, 4-3 to 2-5, at Fermoy. That was a very bad day of thunder and lightning, and the last occa-

sion the far famed "Gah" Ahane donned the Cork jersey. To win the Hospitals Trust medals, at Croke Park, Limerick beat Dublin, 6-9 to 1-2. Another set of suit lengths came at Newport, where Limerick beat Kilkenny, 9-7 to 6-2. As far as I can remember that was the second big Limerick win in a final at the popular North Tipperary centre.

GAMES PLAYED ON FORMER AMERICAN TOUR.

For the benefit of American readers, anxious to recall Mick's previous appearance across the Atlantic, here are the games played on that tour:—

May 17th, 1936, at New York—Limerick, 3-7; New York, 2-3.

May 24th, 1936, at New York—Limerick, 6-3; New York, 0-8.

May 31st, 1936, at Boston — Limerick, 9-4; Massachusetts, 2-2.

On the home front, Mick also kept up the collecting habit, and picked up what must be a near record number of County Championship medals. Starting off with a minor souvenir, he added a pair of junior ones before winning the Senior County hurling title no less than fifteen times—1931, 1933, 1934, 1935, 1936, 1937, 1938, 1939, 1942, 1943, 1944, 1945, 1946, 1947, and 1948.

And for good measure he added five senior County football mementos—the years 1935, 1936, 1937, 1938 and 1939.

That's sufficient to digest, I think, for the present. More next week.