

## No. 176—MICK MACKEY of Ahane (Continued)

THE Munster Final of 1944, played at Thurles on July 16th will ever be remembered as the "Bicycle Final."

Owing to war conditions, travelling to sports fixtures by motor car was absolutely prohibited. There was no mechanically propelled transport of any description but the crowd sensed a great game, and despite Emergency regulations the crowd was of full Munster Final proportions.

Hurling lovers knew it would be a battle royal, and they took Thurles by storm. The ordinary, if restricted, bus and train services on the Saturday were packed until the sides literally bulged and all deposited eager and enthusiastic crowds. Later on, the cyclists began to pour into the Cathedral town but by this time every hotel and boarding house was packed.

The early ones were lucky to get armchairs and couches, but everywhere had more than it could hold and they were still pouring in by the hundred. Luckily, the weather was kind, and under the midnight sky many slept in comfortable nook or convenient haybarn.

#### THE ROADS BLACK WITH CYCLISTS.

From dawn on Sunday morning the roads radiating to Thurles on every side were black with cyclists—a veritable procession stretching away thirty, forty and more miles in all directions. Never was the lure of a Munster Final illustrated in more striking fashion.

In addition to the bicycles, we had the pony traps, common cars, javeys, side cars and brakes to complete a grand picture. And the foot sloggers were there, too, and a few great old veterans tramped every mile of the road from Limerick in order to be able to say they did not miss the Munster Final. The scene at mid-day in Thurles was unforgettable. Under a broiling sun the spacious square presented an old world atmosphere that it may never recapture. It was like a page out of the past—a day that will go down in memory as much for its unusual setting as for the great game the old rivals—Cork and Limerick—served in such generous measure to the hurling hungry crowd.

His Grace, the Archbishop of Cashel, Most Rev. Dr. Kinane, threw in the ball and Bill O'Donnell, of Tipperary, was in charge of the whistle.

#### SPECTATOR'S COMMENTS.

John P. Power, writing in "The Leader" the following week said of that game:

"He was about thirty, well dressed and a good talker. He knew his hurling, too, and his hurlers. From the way he was speaking, fast, cocky, with plenty of slang, I deduced he must have spent some time in America, actually, or through the medium of Hollywood. The long hour or so we were waiting for the game to begin I unashamedly listened to his chatter. For he was not talking to me at all. I just happened to be seated on one side of him and his friend was on the other. But he spoke loud enough as if he did not mind who else heard him.

"Just as the teams were lining up and we were sorting out the players he remarked dolefully to his companion 'Look at that Joe; there ought to be a law against putting old timers like them on the field.' And he proceeded to pick out Mick Mackey, Tim Ryan and Jack Quirke. Really, at the time, I agreed with him. Surely the counties could do better than that. There must be plenty of lads in Ahane and Croom and Fedamore who could run the legs off Mick or Tim. How did they ever expect the Ahane farmer to hold that centrefield against Cottrill, Campbell or a flyer like Christy Ring.

And then, sure Cork were not much better off, putting Quirke up there on the forward line. A hard-driving back like Carroll or Cregan wouldn't give him a ball. There ought to be plenty of young material in the Barrs and the Glen.

"Did they think these men could last for ever? Year after year since 1932 they have worn the colours of their counties through hard, fast, desperate Munster and All-Ireland battles. Take Mick, for instance. He must have been

#### By SEAMUS O'CEALLAIGH

the most tireless, skilful hurler of his day. Certainly he was the most vital. Men who put his name forward as the greatest hurler of the century certainly have grounds for their claim. As a match-winner, Limerick never had his like.

#### IN 1936 AND 1944.

"In 1936 there were not half a dozen men in Ireland who could 'carry his hurley,' 1936, yes; but this is 1944. Since this new, war-ridden decade opened, Mick has been anything but the swift, tearing, slashing champion of the middle thirties. Which is only quite natural, too. With the game he used to play, the fierce, driving game, the match winning game that took him from wing to wing, from goal to goal, he should have hung up his hurley years ago. And here they have him back again. A pity. It was really a pity to ask a man like Mick Mackey to go out there again and be out hurled, out run, by the sweeping, canny hurlers he would be up against. And after the services he did his county, too, the All-Irelands he had won.

"Sure I agreed with the fellow when he said there ought to be a law against throwing these old timers out there to be murdered. This was all before the game really got going, of course. Before these 'old timers' went into action.

"Well I remember a day in 1934 when a certain Martin Kennedy, leading a beautiful Tipperary fifteen, had a mixed Cork team beaten to their knees. Nothing could save them from the slaughter, it seemed. Indeed they hardly deserved saving. Then, quite suddenly, something inspired the Rebels. Tipperary's scoring ceased. From nowhere, it appeared, the ball was being driven down to O'Meara's goal. Cork forwards woke out of their lethargy. They even started to score. The slim, young back-man, for Cork, where these scores really began, kept up the good work. He hurled Tipperary's forwards off their feet in that hectic last quarter. He hurled Cork to a sensational victory. His name was Quirke. Young Johnny Quirke from Blackrock.

#### SWEPT HIS COUNTY OUT OF DEFEAT.

"Thurles, July 16th, 1944, ten years later, saw him sweep his county out of defeat once more. As in 1934 this Cork team half deserved to be beaten. They drew ahead by a goal or two early on, and then leaned back on their hurleys to watch the Limerick men play. But for Quirke, the man I thought was past hurling, Cork would have been a well-beaten side.

"And on the other team, who was it who inspired the men to fight back and go into the lead for the first time with only some minutes to go? Who, indeed, but the other old-timer I would have on the side-line—the indomitable Mick Mackey himself. There he was, with all his old canniness, sure of eye, unerring in his points and passes. The speed may have

been missing in places but the hurling, the art he has always excelled in, was there, grand as ever. He won the match for Limerick. Quirke won it back for Cork; then fate stepped in and made a draw of it.

"Back in the centre-field, too, the grand old master covered himself with glory. Good old Timmie Ryann still proved that art and skill with the caman can make up quite a lot for a not-so-hot pair of legs. Tim practically dominated centre-field for a while and it looks as if he is teaching that fine-looking young McCarthy, his partner, all the finer points of the game, too.

#### THE "HAD BEENS" SHONE.

"So there they were, the old-timers, the has beens, Quirke, Mackey, Ryan, knocking the bluster out of my neighbour and, indeed, out of myself. As we were about to leave the field I heard him trying feebly to excuse himself. 'The standard of hurling is going down. Did you see the way Ryan could—' And so on. In every decade we hear this. The standard of hurling is going down. In the early days of the century when the London-Irish took the All-Ireland across the water the standard of hurling was going down. In Tom Semple's day and 'Fox' Maher's, in Frank Burke's and the Doyle's, in the Leahys' and the Coughlans' day, the standard was inevitably going down. And still we have the Mackeys, and the Clohessys showing up. Men like Jack Lynch of Cork, O'Donnell of Tipperary, Jack Keane of Waterford—going down, indeed. If anything, I think the hurling is a grander game now than ever before."

Many were the tributes paid to Mick Mackey after this game, which ended with honours even. Here are some from the newspapers:

"Mick Mackey was again the star performer. Mick is probably one of the most spectacular personalities that has ever entered the hurling field. A thundering hurler from any point of view, he can give or take in a playful boyish way that appeals a lot to Tipperarymen. 'If Tipperary only had Mick Mackey they would have beaten Cork by twenty goals,' said a man leaving the field. 'Some day, perhaps, Tipperary may have a forward who can smash and turn and twist and shoot like the bould Mick.'

#### OUTSHONE ALL THE STARS.

"If any man could be said to have stood out head and shoulders over such a gathering of stars as both teams numbered that man is Mick Mackey. Quite true, he lacked the speed of the days when his famous solos were features of every game in which he played, but his scheming and strategy, from which he notched 2 goals and 3 points should be an inspiration and example for all young forwards who aspire to reach the top."

"The play-boy, Mick Mackey, selling the dummy or cutting over a beauty of a point from the corner was again the hero of the crowd."

"The game was an individual triumph for Mick Mackey, who led the Limerick rally, weaving his way through the Cork defence to obtain himself or make for others the scores that helped his side to share the honours."

"Mick Mackey revealed all the artistry of his best years, and the points he scored from acute angles bore the hall mark of the master. It was hard to believe he had been hurling since 1931, for he still showed the pace and skill of his best years."

The great 1944 re-play, and the 1945 Munster Final will be dealt with next week.