

To complete the hurling story of Mick Mackey, the man who will yet make the welkin ring as trainer of a new generation of Limerick All Ireland hurling stars, I quote from articles that appeared in the "Sunday Press" some years ago, and which are well worth reproducing. They will be read by the younger generation with avid interest, and re-read by many old admirers with undoubted relish.

"Cuchulain the mythical hero of the Celtic saga, lives as the greatest hurler. Let us sit awhile and talk with the modern Cuchulain—the once irrepressible, incomparable, the great Mick Mackey.

"There was nothing mythical about the solid 5ft. 8ins. Mick. Opponents who attempted to stop his avalanche-like runs will testify to that. No man since the founding of the G.A.A. has captured the imagination to anything like the same degree.

"Meet him to-day. Some two stones heavier, he is the same buoyant, laughing fellow, with occasional lapses into the reflective and serious.

#### RELATIVE MERITS OF OPPONENTS.

"I sounded him on the relative merits of opponents. His view was that the centre half back position is the most vital point of defence. He found most of these defenders tough, and his speed at times gave him the little advantage which is necessary.

"Jim Regan, Johnny Quirke (Cork), John Maher (Tipperary),

#### By SEAMUS O'CEALLAIGH

John Keane (Waterford), Jim Hogan and Larry Blake (Clare), Paddy Byrne (Kilkenny) and Dan Canniffe (Dublin), all these were men whose constant attentions would almost break one's heart, he reflected.

"His view was stated modestly, that some of these men were past their speedy days when he was at the zenith of his. Later on, with the passing of time, he too lost the necessary yard.

"Pressed to speak of his scoring I reminded him that I thought 1936 his peak year in that regard. 'Well,' he replied diffidently, 'I was credited with heavy scoring against Tipperary in 1936. That probably would be my luckiest day.' He thought the best match he played in, was against Cork in 1935.

"On the whole he thought good fortune never left him. Once only had he to retire from a game with an injury. Before taking the field in the League Final in 1938, against Tipperary, a former wound in his side had developed into an abscess. He was lanced and bandaged in the pavilion. It was an hour of suffering.

#### QUOTED ADVERSE CRITICS.

"Desiring to stir him into a heated discussion I adopted the tactic of quoting some of his adverse critics. His equanimity was undisturbed. The broad smile and that humorous glint of the eye convinced me I was unlikely to succeed. However, I ventured. 'They say you planned sometimes to annoy your man by unwelcome little taps!' His reply was that never did an opponent leave the field as a result of an injury from him. At times, perhaps, he did indulge in a little bantering, 'but that does not violate any regulations.' 'They say also,' I went on, 'that you overplayed the ball; that you hung on too long.' 'Balance that,' he said, 'against the number of times I parted, even when I could have gone through myself. Sometimes I parted and the passes went astray.'

"As a final shot, I asked, 'why did you not take your points from near frees in 1935?' 'One was taken when close on time, when we were four points in arrears. I dropped the ball near the square and McCarthy goaled from it.' My other point attempt failed. 'You recollect the frightful conditions. How many close frees were missed in last year's All Ireland under good conditions?' His logic was unassailable.

#### VIEWS ON TRAINING.

"Expressing the view that training was taken too seriously now, Mick said: 'In a way I suppose we did some collective training, but nothing like the way its done these days. First of all, nobody gave up his work. We did about two hours hard training each evening in the Gaelic Grounds, had a meal together in town and then home to bed.'

"That was all we needed to know of each other's play—then forget about it all and get down to the next day's work. I can tell you we were as fit as ever a team was on this kind of training—and better still, we enjoyed every game we played—and the celebrations afterwards.'

"I think the lads to-day take things too seriously altogether—some of them anyhow. Very few of them seem to really enjoy themselves as we did. Scanlan, McCarthy, Power and myself—we had great times in Dublin on All Ireland week-end. True, we wanted to win every match just the same as the other fellows, but, we got a great kick out of playing the game as well!

"I'd say, without fear of contradiction, that our 1936 team was one of the fittest hurling teams that ever walked on to Croke Park, and do you know we didn't get much chance to train at all that year. You see, we came back

from America late in May and we got a bye into the Munster Final. One more match—the semi-final—and we were into the All Ireland final.

"And yet, we were as fit as men could be. Maybe its the way you approach it. We always made up our minds to enjoy every minute of the game and we didn't worry about losing either.' "

#### ANOTHER TRIBUTE.

To conclude this story of Mick Mackey, I turn over to Tony Myles for this tribute:—

"No greater compliment could be paid to the Mackeys than that they were the idols, not alone of Limerick, not alone of Munster, but of all Ireland, for when Limerick played it was to see the great brothers in action the crowd came

"Comparisons, in every generation are inevitably made with preceding generations as far as the merits of hurlers or footballers are concerned. These comparisons are seldom accurate, for times and circumstances differ, but in the case of the Mackey brothers comparisons will always be made with their own contemporaries.

"The fact that they will be ranked with Christy Ring, of Cork, and with other equally prominent players from Tipperary, Waterford or Kilkenny, and in many cases given preference over the best that Munster or any other of the provinces has produced, is sufficient tribute to their merit.

"Shall we ever again, I wonder, see the ball 'glued' to a hurling stick as only Mick Mackey knew how to do it, or shall we ever again see in action a player like him for the way in which he deliberately 'clowned' on the field.

"Never was Mick Mackey so dangerous as when he started his 'antics' on the field. These clowning antics of his kept the crowd splitting with derisive laughter—at least the portion of the crowd made up of his own supporters—but they drove the opposing players and supporters frantic with impotent rage.

"And that was really the object of Mick's antics, for, tender-hearted as a child himself, he knew how deadly mockery can be.

#### TACTICS BASED ON PURE PSYCHOLOGY.

"Thus, I have seen him in Munster and All-Ireland finals streaking along the sideline with the ball in his fist and his hurling stick outstretched rising and falling as if he were tapping the ball.

"The crowd knew it was a foul; Mick Mackey knew it better than did the opposing players who tried to stop him and call the referee's attention to it, but of all the shouting thousands the referee was invariably the person who last saw through Mick's manoeuvres for Mick ensured that his back was to the harassed referee.

"And to add insult to injury, Mick would have his tongue stuck out all the time to the opposing supporters on the sideline who were ready to burst with rage and apoplexy.

"But there was, as they say in Munster, 'a method to his madness.' Those tactics were based on pure psychology; make your opponent lose his temper, you keep yours and you have won half the battle.

"At other times I have seen Mick Mackey come tearing into the opponents' goalmouth, jumping as if he meant to sweep all before him with his stick and then, having completely rattled the backs, come to a dead stand, with uncanny precision, under the falling ball, catch it with one hand among a sea of flying hurleys and flick it to the net. Many a goal-keeper have I seen who was still unsure of the whereabouts of the ball until the green flag was raised.

"With John, cool and stylish, Mick formed a perfect partnership. They will be remembered as long as hurling families are spoken of and famous games are replayed around the hearthstones of Ahane and every village in Ireland."

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