

No. 176—MICK MACKEY of Aha ne (Continued)

THE 1935 All-Ireland final whet the appetite of the hurling fans, and when Munster and Leinster lined out in the Railway Cup decider on St. Patrick's Day, 1936, a then record crowd for the competition saw them play.

It was little wonder! Leinster had ten Noreiders on duty plus five from the Metropolis. Munster called in nine from Limerick, with two each from Clare, Cork and Tipperary. A great game it proved, worthy of the occasion and the crowd, with Leinster gaining the narrowest of wins, 2-8 to 3-4, in a storm tossed finish that will be long remembered.

With victories in quick succession over Laois, Clare, Waterford, Tipperary, Galway, Kilkenny, Cork and Dublin, Limerick won with undisputed merit their third consecutive National Hurling League title.

In the club ties, the Mackey brothers, Mick and John, added further to their collection of trophies by helping Aha ne to victory in the County senior hurling and football finals, and in the replay of the 1916 Memorial Tournament decider, in which St. Finbarrs (Cork) provided the opposition.

Most exciting of all was the meeting of Aha ne and Fedamore in the East Limerick final, highlighted as it was by the clashes between Mick Mackey and Paddy Clohessy—two of the best men in their respective berths in the game at the time.

INVITATIONS FOR AMERICAN TOUR

The publicity associated with Shannonside's record run of hurling successes attracted interest across the Atlantic, and invitations were extended to Limerick for an American Tour.

Ten years earlier Tipperary played their way right across the American Continent—the first County team to tour the United States. They were followed by Kerry, Mayo, Galway and Cavan footballers. In 1934 the Kilkenny hurlers made the trip, so the Limerick visit was the third made by a hurling county.

A few of the later ventures had not proved the success of earlier tours, and it took some time and a lot of negotiation before it was finally agreed that Limerick hurlers and Cavan footballers should go to America—the first occasion both codes were represented together there by visiting Irish teams. The project proved the most successful of all such visits, and enabled the American Association clear old claims due in connection with three previous visits.

It was the only trip a Limerick hurling team ever made to America, although it must not be forgotten that Limerick athletes and hurlers were well to the fore in the teams that participated in the American "Invasion" of 1888: that courage filled idea of early G.A.A. days that proved a financial flop, but laid the foundation of a strong Gaelic athletic movement in America.

THE LIMERICK TEAM

Two of the originally nominated Limerick party—Jackie O'Connell and Dave Clohessy—were unable to make the trip, and the following gathered at the Imperial Hotel on Friday morning, May 8th, 1936, for the first stage of the journey to America:—Timmy Ryan, who captained the team; Paddy Scanlan, Mick Mackey, Garrett Howard, Mick Cross, Paddy Clohessy, Tom Mc-

Carthy, Ned Cregan, Jim Close, John Mackey, Jim Roche, Mick Ryan, Mick Kennedy, Micky Condon, Mick Hickey, Tom Shinnery, Paddy McMahon, Jacky Power, Dan Flanagan and Christy O'Brien.

Denny Lanigan, County Secretary, travelled as team manager, accompanied by Tim Humphreys, Vice-Chairman of the Co. Board.

The team and travelling officials were accompanied to Cobh by a number of admirers, the entire party making the journey by bus. As the time fixed for leaving drew near the approaches to the hotel were densely packed, and traffic in Catherine and Roche's Street became impossible. It was with difficulty that the travellers' luggage was loaded, and when the members of the team appeared they were greeted with enthusiastic cheers and shouts of good luck and a pleasant tour.

BLESSING FROM FRANCISCAN

Rev. Fr. Dermot, O.F.M., an enthusiastic follower of the Limerick hurlers, was present and imparted his blessing to the tourists, after which Mr. Denis Lanigan thanked the citizens for their wonderful send-off, and assured them that the Limerick hurlers would do their utmost to carry the Limerick flag unsullied, and would return loaded with still further honours and fit and well to enter the fray for the regaining of the All-Ireland Crown.

The bus festooned with the green and white colours of Limerick, in addition to the National and American flags, then set off amidst a salvo of cheers which the occupants gratefully acknowledged.

By SEAMUS O'CEALLAIGH

Along the road to Cork greetings were exchanged, and on arrival in the Rebel City animated scenes were witnessed as officials of the Cork County Board wished the travellers good luck and citizens joined in the expression of good will to a great hurling combination.

On the Friday night the Limerick hurlers and Cavan footballers were entertained at the Westbourne Hotel, Cobh, the attendance including P. J. O'Keeffe, General Secretary, G.A.A.; G. Arthurs, Secretary, Ulster Council; Sean McCarthy, Secretary, Munster Council; Sean McCarthy, Chairman, Cork County Board; P. J. Mehigan ("Carbery") and John Joe Sheehy (Tralee).

PRESENTATIONS

A number of presentations were made to the members of the teams. The Limerick Gaelic League and Thomond Fels Committee presented each of the Limerick party with a travelling rug. Mr. Tadgh O'Shea, N.T., on behalf of the Milford Gaels, presented cigarettes, a hurley and a ball to the Limerick captain. Messrs. P. J. Carroll & Co. Ltd., Dundalk, presented "Sweet Afton" cigarettes to the members of both teams and Messrs. M. & P. O'Sullivan, Cork, presented the Cavan and Limerick players with sets of briar pipes and pocket knives.

When the teams embarked on the "Manhattan" at 6.30 on Saturday morning in ideal weather, the Commodore welcomed the visitors and said he hoped that they would have a pleasant trip and bring back to their native land fresh trophies.

The teams were only a day out when Mr. Michael McKnight, one of the Limerick supporters travelling with Limerick, died suddenly on board—a tragic happening deeply regretted by all.

A great crowd—in fact too many—and the customs officers were considerably hampered in their checking job. Music was provided by the members of the Cavan Fife and Drum Band.

GAMES IN YANKEE STADIUM

On Friday the teams were received by Acting Mayor Sullivan at City Hall, and later went to Innisfail Park where they had a light practice. On Saturday they had their first view of the Yankee Stadium.

In glorious sunshine and before an audience of 40,000 people, Limerick beat New York 3-7 to 2-3 and Cavan beat the same opposition in football, 1-7 to 0-5, after two great games, in the Yankee Stadium on Sunday.

The scenes in the Stadium will long be remembered by those present. The brilliant sunshine, the flags, the green sward of the playing pitch, and the variegated colour of the summer dress of the crowd completed a memorable picture.

The Limerick lads were first to appear, and the sight of their green jerseys sent the crowd wild. Three bands—Cavan Fife and Drum, La Salle Brass Band, and the Clan Eireann Pipers led the parade, and the ball was thrown in by Mr. James Reeves,

underwriter of the tour, and the donor of the very valuable trophy for the hurling game.

In charge of the whistle was Mr. Jack Ahearne, of Cork, who was recently the guest of honour at the twenty-second annual banquet of the Gaelic Athletic Association of Greater New York. I am grateful to Rev. Fr. Ahearne, of Copsewood College, for the very fine brochure issued in connection with that interesting event, and which tells how Jack Ahearne, after his arrival in New York from his native Kilbrittain in 1914, played hurling for three years for Limerick in old Celtic Park before transferring to his native County Cork senior team, with whom he has been associated as player and administrator ever since.

BRILLIANT STICK WORK

Right through the hour there was brilliant stick work, Limerick quickly proved worthy of their reputation of being champions—clean, snappy hurlers, speedy and dashing as panthers. They hurled with perfect combination and quickly adjusted themselves to the smaller pitch in the Stadium.

The play of the Mackey brothers enthused the spectators, who cheered to the echo the dazzling work of the pair. The American Press were amazed at their combination and understanding as they raced along the wing—Mick to John, John to Mick, back and forth several times. So they juggled with the leather before one or other parted for a spectacular score. In that first game Mick had 1-3 of the Shannonside total, John contributing another three points.

Limerick won the magnificent Reeves Trophy—the most expensive and artistic ever presented for international Gaelic competition, when they beat New York selected, 6-3 to 0-8, in the second game of the series, again decided in the Yankee Stadium.

This match, played in broiling heat, with the mercury high into the eighties was a searching test, with superior team work the factor that decided the issue in the visitors' favour. On the same occasion Cavan were held to level scoring by the New York footballers, 2-3 to 1-6.

In the final game of the tour, Limerick gained possession of the Limerick Club Cup, when they defeated the Massachusetts All Stars, 9-4 to 2-2, at Russell Field, Cambridge.

WHAT AMERICAN SPORTS WRITER THOUGHT.

American sports commentator, Dan Parker, writing in the New York "Daily Mirror" on the first game at the Yankee Stadium said:

"Nothing reflects the temperament of a people more accurately than the games they play. Hurling is Ireland's national pastime, and if you have never seen a hurling match I beg of you to defer awarding the palm to hockey, football, lacrosse or polo as a he-man's game until you have had Erin's game demonstrated to you by two good teams. Hurling combines the best features of baseball, a heavy-weight elimination tournament, hockey, a battle royal, golf and football.

"It is no game for a fellow with a dash of lavender in his make-up. A good hurler must be prepared at all times to stop, pick his head up from the field of battle, slap it back into position and resume the fray without once taking one eye off the player he's assigned to watch and the other off the enemy's goal.

"Having seen a hurling match one can understand readily why so many of the pioneers of baseball were of Irish blood, and why those of Celtic stock took naturally to America's game. Their encounters have been making one hand catches and sharpening their battling eyes ever since Finn MacCool invented the game of hurling with an oak tree and a Dane's skull.

THE TEAM WORK.

"A good hurling team will keep the air longer than a juggler. It is permissible to catch it with one hand, usually the left, and as it comes sailing through the air and give it a hearty belt with the end of the club. Clever hurlers can pass the ball from hurley to hurley as if they had lacrosse sticks. The teamwork is magnificent to behold. So is the mayhem. The first rule of hurling is to keep your eye on the ball and let your opponent's skull fall where it may. However, despite the terrific amount of shillelah swinging there are surprisingly few serious casualties. The proverbial luck of the Irish seems to be with every hurler who dashes headlong at an opponent swinging his own club at the very same ball at which the opposing player is taking a pot shot.

"It takes a strong physique to stand up under an hour of hurling, for the pace is swift as well as gruelling. It is little wonder that the Irish have no plagiarists in hurling. They invented the game, and though they haven't copyrighted it, no other race has attempted to play it. I suppose the explanation is that no other race is constituted temperamentally like the Irish. However, if it takes an Irishman to enjoy playing the game, one need not be a Celt to get a kick out of watching it. Anyone who watches a hurling game is both fascinated and amused by it. So to those who demand an exotic sports thrill I recommend a visit to a hurling match."

DINED AND WINED WHEREVER THEY WENT.

The Limerick players and officials were dined and wined everywhere they went in America, at dances, dinners, and banquets, but most homely gathering of the lot was that which assembled at the home of Mr. Pat O'Connell, a former member of the old Castleconnell team, and well known then as a tug o' war man and a weight thrower all over the counties of Limerick and Tipperary.

The visitors proved delightful guests and even had not Pat seen to providing talent, the Limerick lads would have sufficed. Mick Mackey sang the "Rose of Tralee," Mick Kennedy obliged with "She Lived Beside The Anner," Timmy Ryan was not found wanting and did his share.

Jim Lee of New York, brother of "Thomond," of the "Limerick Leader," gave one of his famous recitations, and Mike Kett, another of the old Castleconnell team, told how he and the famous "Tyler" helped to revive the team in the early years of the century; whilst John Hartigan, known as the "Aha ne song-bird," did full justice to "The Bold Galtee Mountains."

WONDERFUL RECEPTION ON RETURN HOME.

The team got a wonderful reception on its return to Limerick. The excitement started at Rathluirc, where the townspeople turned out, headed by the local band, to welcome the Limerick lads. At Banogue bonfires blazed, and at Croom over two hundred school children waving green and white flags lined the side walks.

When Limerick was reached, some three hundred cars had joined, the vehicles conveying the returning party. At the City boundary, the Mayor and representative citizens met the players, and the scenes of enthusiasm exceeded anything witnessed in the city for many generations.

Five bands participated in the procession, in which over three thousand pupils from the Christian Brothers' Schools marched, and a public welcome was accorded at the O'Connell monument.

The team travelled home on the s.s. Washington, which left New York on June 3rd, arriving at Cobh on June 9th.

9th May 1956