

The Rugby International At Limerick, 1898

One hundred years ago the Irish Rugby Football Union arranged an international between Ireland and Wales which was played at the County Cricket Grounds (now Limerick Lawn Tennis Grounds) on the Ennis Road. This report is taken from the *Munster News and Limerick and Clare Advocate* of Saturday, 19 March 1898.

Today the International Rugby match between Wales and Ireland was played at the County Limerick Cricket grounds in the presence of a vast assemblage of spectators from all parts of Ireland, as well as from England and Wales. The weather proved most propitious. A splendid game resulted in a win for the visitors by 2 goals and 1 try to 1 penalty goal. Full details will be found appended.

(By our Non-Footballer)

The football fever which has been epidemic in Limerick for a long time past reached what the faculty describe as the "crisis" today when the International match between Wales and Ireland came off in the County Cricket Grounds. It seems, by the way, to a layman like myself somewhat of an anomaly to describe the affair as "international" since neither of the contestants can boast of nationhood; but let that pass. Technicalities of such insignificance cannot be allowed to detain us when such a tremendous and unique event is on hand. "The match is the thing," to quote the words of the Stratford-on-Avon footballer; and there can hardly be any doubt that it was the event of today he had in mind when he wrote them. Yes, beyond all question, the match was the thing of today, and whether or not it caught "the conscience of the King," it undoubtedly secured the patronage of an assemblage of people such as, perhaps, was never gathered together at any similar event in the South of Ireland, and certainly never before in Limerick. For weeks past the nascent fever has made itself felt amongst all classes and conditions of people, and the most unlikely victims have caught the contagion. The obscure corner of the newspapers in which in times past football reports were tolerated have all at once become the chief attraction for everyone. The most level-headed and staid men of business consider it no reflection on their capacity for trade to be heard talking learnedly as schoolboys of "goals"

Submitted by John Curtin

and "tries" and "penalties," criticising the "form" of all and sundry, and speculating on the probable result of the next tie between Rockwell and Garryowen for the Munster Cup. Even our lady friends show an interest in the game and a knowledge of its technicalities that is to say the least surprising. What, indeed, would our football carnivals in the Market Field be without the gay assemblage of ladies that invariably grace them? and what would the hard-pressed teams do, who have so often been helped on to victory by the waving of kerchief and the cheer of encouragement from their fair admirers in the stand? Least likely of all, I have confess I have reason to fear I have myself absorbed the prevailing microbe, in which case disastrous results may be apprehended. The boy in the street has got it; the schoolboy mixes it with his grammar; the nursery-maid and the policeman have all got it; it is in the warehouses and the workshops, and I had almost said the workhouses as well; the "comp" invariably substitute "goal" for "gaol", and the Printer's Devil has insisted on getting a full week off to wash his face so that he might appear "respectable" at the "International." To say that the excitement has been unusual does not at all describe the situation. During the past week it has been intense. Wherever one went football was the theme of the discussion. People have talked only in the language of the football special correspondents, so it can easily be imagined what a murdering of the Queen's innocent English there has been. The siege of William of Orange it is certain did not create half the comment amongst our forefathers as the pitched battle between the Shamrock and the Leek. This language is not to be taken literally, be it understood - lest anyone should think that two such innocent herbs should so far forget themselves as to quarrel. But, as before remarked, the English, as she is spoke by footballers, is as fashionable as the influenza, and I have not escaped. That Limerick was chosen as the scene of such a momentous contest is, of course, a matter upon which all Limerick men may unite in taking a legitimate pride, and it is only simple justice to say that the population without any exception united in putting their best effort forward to show their appreciation. The way they accepted the proposal to close their business establishments during the busiest hours of their busiest day in order that the immense number of young men and

women in their employ might be afforded an opportunity of witnessing the unique event did them the utmost credit and places everyone concerned in the matter, as well as the assistants themselves, under a deep debt of gratitude. To one man, and one alone, Limerick owes the honour, and that man is Mr. John M. O'Sullivan, or as the irreverent and familiar football correspondents aforementioned know him, Jack O'Sullivan. Mr. O'Sullivan is consequently the lion of the hour, and beyond all question he deserves all that can be said of him. Two years ago he was heard to hint about getting an International match for Limerick, but the suggestion was laughed at; a year ago it was regarded as a remote possibility, and even up to a few weeks ago people could hardly believe it probable; but today, thanks to Mr. O'Sullivan's persistent and determined efforts, Limerick's International was made an accomplished fact. Since the selection of Limerick was made and the grounds passed, Mr. O'Sullivan, it need hardly be said, has not been idle. Having once secured the event, he further determined that in the manner of its carrying out it would mark an epoch in football history. That he succeeded in this no one who had the privilege of being present today can for a moment doubt. The arrangements for the fitting up of the field were altogether in Mr. O'Sullivan's hands; while in the matter of receiving and entertaining the teams, he was ably assisted by an influential committee of local gentlemen. Everything was in the fullest degree all that could be desired.

The reception of the teams last night was, by the way, a most remarkable event. Some time before seven o'clock I became one of the stream of people that flowed towards the railway terminus. The approaches to the station were lined with people, and the crowd extended down Queen Street and the other adjoining thoroughfares. It was with difficulty that one could elbow their way to the entrance to the station, and when there, of course, only a very small percentage could be allowed on the platform. Head Constable Feeny, with a number of Constables, assisted the railway officials in keeping order. The crowd must have numbered several thousands, and as may be imagined they were an enthusiastic crowd. On the platform a large number of representative citizens were present to meet the teams, including the Mayor, High Sheriff, Mr. O'Sullivan, and a large number of football devotees. Excitement ran high when the train was seen approaching from the "check" and as she



Wales v Ireland - a scrummage.

Mungret Annual, 1898.

approached the platform she was announced by the explosion of fog signals. The teams, who travelled in a sumptuous saloon carriage supplied by the Waterford and Limerick Railway Co, were heartily cheered on alighting. The crowd was absolutely impartial and showed no preference. The Welshmen looked a fine swarthy lot, and at once impressed me with the idea that I should prefer somebody else rather than myself to come against one of them in a contest for International honours. The exit from the platform was quickly effected, and the sea of faces that met the teams must have been somewhat of a surprise to all of them. They were at once seated in the four-horse brake awaiting and proceeded to Cruise's Royal Hotel, their headquarters. They were accompanied by the Boherbuoy Brass Band. Later on they were given a nice reception on their appearance at the Concert in the Theatre Royal. Mr. Games' song in Welsh was the event of the evening, and I felt a blush of shame for my own country as a patriotic Irishman, that none of the Irish team was able to give an Irish song in return.

Many an anxious eye was cast upwards this morning and dubious prognostications as to a complete wet day were heard, but fortunately towards ten o'clock the prevailing fog was seen to break away, and old Sol shone out gloriously. The early trains into the city brought crowds of visitors from all parts, Cork, Dublin, Waterford, Sligo, Tralee and intervening stations, and towards midday the city presented a very lively appearance indeed. Special trains continued to arrive at intervals, bringing in immense crowds, but the contingent which attracted special

attention was the Rockwell College boys, numbering several hundreds, with a number of their priests. The boys marched through the city two deep and passed on direct to the field, where they were probably the most enthusiastic spectators.

Shortly before three o'clock Messrs Delmege and De Ros Rose's four-in-hand coaches were drawn up in front of Cruise's Hotel, and in the presence of an immense and cheering crowd, the teams took their places, the Welshmen being taken by Mr. Rose and the Irish by Mr. Delmege. The teams wore their much-prized international caps and presented a very smart appearance. On arriving at the field they were welcomed with great cheering by the crowds already assembled. The attendance, which included many ladies, is variously estimated at from ten to fifteen thousand people. All the seats on the covered and other stands were occupied, while in all the other parts immense crowds were assembled. The pavilion was utilised as a temporary post office and a number of operators were engaged in "clicking" off the copy. The Press arrangements were most elaborate and could hardly be improved upon. A neatly covered improvised table, extending about fifty yards along the touch-line, accommodated about fifty Pressmen representing papers in all parts of Great Britain and Ireland, while a number of telegraphic messengers were in waiting to convey the "copy" to the operators. Mr. Downey, Postmaster, Mr. F.P. Hook and other officials superintended. It should be mentioned that the splendid band of the Royal Irish Regiment was on the ground from one o'clock, and while the crowds were assembling discoursed the following programme:-

Overture "Village Festival"
 Selection "Little Christopher Columbus"
 Reminiscences of Ireland
 Valse "Svengali"
 Valse "Nightingale"
 Solo "Orpheo"
 Reminiscences of Wales
 EXTRAS
 Valse "Kathleen Mavourneen"
 Selection "Carmen"
 Valse "Mondnacht and Rhein"
 GOD SAVE THE QUEEN

Arrival of the Teams in the City

The scene at the railway terminus last evening when the Irish and Welsh teams arrived was one to be remembered. Only a limited number of people were allowed on the platform, but even amongst them the enthusiasm was intense. The teams left Dublin by the 2.55 train and were conveyed in from Limerick Junction in the beautiful saloon carriage of the Waterford and Limerick Company. As the train approached the platform fog-signals were exploded, and amid a scene of great enthusiasm the train came alongside. The Mayor (Mr. M. Cusack) and the City High Sheriff (Mr. Stephen B. Quin) and a large number of representative citizens welcomed the teams. Outside the station several thousands of people were assembled, filling the entire space outside the terminus, as well as extending far into Queen Street and other adjoining thoroughfares, and when the teams appeared they were greeted with rounds of cheering. They were then conveyed to Cruise's Royal Hotel in a four-horse brake, preceded by the Boherbuoy brass band, playing an appropriate selection of airs.

At the Theatre Royal

On the invitation of the Limerick Amateur Athletic and Bicycle Club the International teams were present at the concert given in the Theatre Royal last evening. Special boxes were reserved for their accommodation, those on the left hand side, surmounted by the Welsh plumes, being for Wales, and the right hand side, distinguished by the harp on a green background, was for the Irishmen. An excellent programme was presented, to which many well-known local artists contributed, amongst them being Mrs. W. Barrington, Mrs. Cleeve, Miss McCarthy, Mr. P. Fitzgerald, Mr. W. Lee (Cork), Mr. J.C. O'Brien and Mr. J.P. Hall. Mr. Kendal Irwin conducted, and some capital instrumental items were rendered by the band of the Royal Irish Regiment, under the baton of Mr. Chandler, bandmaster. A feature of the evening was the song "O! na byddain haf o hyd," sung in Welsh by Mr. Games, hon. secretary to the Welsh Rugby Committee. The item was much appreciated, and in response to an encore the last verse was repeated.

(By Our Special Football Correspondent)

To describe the gathering of the representatives of nations which viewed the first encounter between the Shamrock and the Leek since the International dispute in reference to Gould's connection with the team of the gallant Little Principality, as immense and brilliant would fall short of the splendour of the scene at the County Cricket Ground today. From an early hour in the afternoon, vast throngs crowded to the scene of the battle. The interest and enthusiasm evinced on all sides in the great event can be better imagined than described, and speculation was rife as to the result. For some months past doubts were expressed that the match would come off this year, but fortunately the dispute was settled, and through the efforts of Mr. Jack O'Sullivan, hon. sec. of the Garryowen F.C. and hon. treasurer of the Irish Rugby Union, Limerick was made the venue. That Limerick deserved this distinction will hardly be questioned. The city by the Shannon has for many years produced footballers of the best type, strong, active, with a thorough knowledge of the Rugby game, and whose abilities have been recognised by the Rugby Union, having been awarded their green caps as representatives of the Green Isle. For instance we had Jack Sullivan, Tom Peel, Jack Macauley, Jack O'Connor, Mick Egan and others, all of whom did battle successfully against all comers. Latterly our title to representation on the International XV has been completely ignored by the powers that be. No doubt the choice has fallen on a few Munster men, but there are others in the Southern Province who have time after time proved their fitness to be placed on the team.

But to the question in hand. Unfortunately from an early hour yesterday evening rain fell, continuing during the

greater part of the night, and as a result the ground was not altogether in ideal condition. The morning broke clear and fine, the prevalence of a good wind having a most satisfactory effect on the sod. At an early hour, however, it was soft and greasy at points, but with the great care bestowed on it for a considerable time past, before the teams had toed the mark it had vastly improved. The work of laying out the ground, marking the touch lines etc. was carried out with great rapidity. From one o'clock the seats in the various departments began to fill up, and by half past three it was estimated that at least fifteen thousand persons were in the enclosures and stands. Shortly before half past three the teams were photographed at the pavilion by Messrs Guy and Company, after which they marched on the field. The Irish team were headed by W. Gardiner, Captain, and were loudly cheered. The Welsh team followed amid much enthusiasm. Promptly at half past three they lined up as follows.

WALES			
<i>Full back</i>			
W J Bancroft			
<i>Three quarters</i>			
V Huzzey	Gwyn Nicholls	W James	
T Pearson			
<i>Half-backs</i>			
J Elliott		Selwyn Biggs	
<i>Forwards</i>			
Alexander	Daniel	Booth	Boots
Hellings	Davies	Dobson	Cornish
<i>Forwards</i>			
M Ryan	J Ryan	McIlwaine	Byron
McCarthy	Franks	Little	Lindsay
<i>Half-backs</i>			
L M Magee		A. Barr	
<i>Three-quarters</i>			
L Q Bulger	W Gardiner	F Smithwick	
F C Purser			
<i>Full-back</i>			
Fulton			
IRELAND			

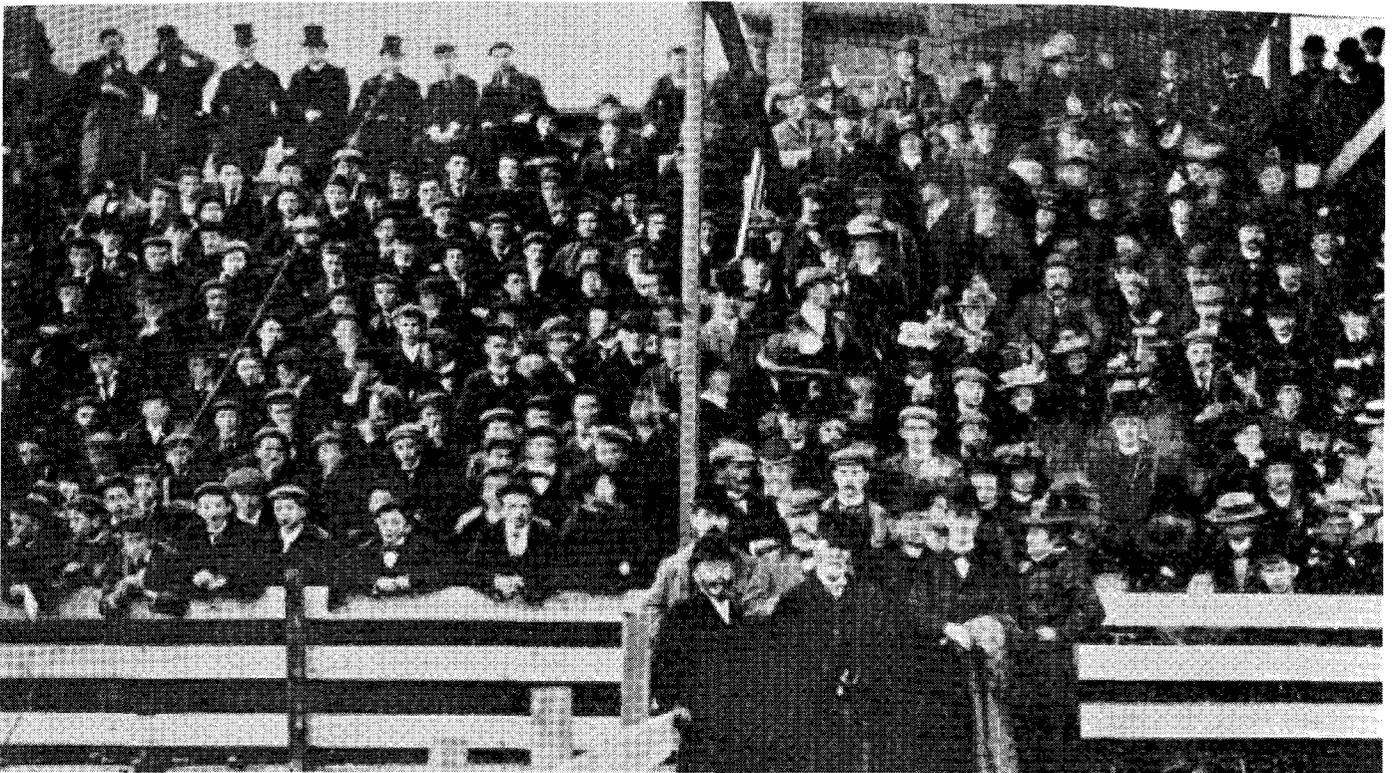
The Game

Wales won the toss and elected to play against the wind, the Irishmen defending the city goal. Gardiner opened, the leather going over. After the kick out Wales was awarded a free. The reply being delayed the leather went near Wales 25 in favour of Ireland, who shoved and got possession. Passing between the home backs followed till the leather reached Smithwick, who missed. A free for Ireland was placed for Bulger, who kicked to Jones, who sent to L Magee, who kicked to the Welsh backs. Ireland passed and were awarded a free, Bulger kicking a splendid goal. After the kick out the home side still forced the packs, and Wales were awarded a free, Gardiner replying to touch at his own 25. Another free for Wales followed, which was placed for Bancroft, but the leather went over, Ireland touching down. From a scrum the Welsh backs were in possession and got to the Irish 25, where loose play followed. Ireland were awarded a free, and the reply fell close to the home

lines. Play was now in the 25 of the Irishmen when the Welsh forwards gave out to their backs, and splendid passing between the Welsh backs brought play close to the Irish line. Jones and Nicholls repeated the performance, and scrum-maging followed close to the Irish line, and Bancroft getting made a splendid attempt at dropping a goal. Jack Ryan was away at the head of a rush to the Welsh, but the Welshmen in return passed with their infallible combination, and returned to the home territory where Ireland were awarded a free, which was kicked by L Magee, the ball going to touch at mid-field. Mick Ryan was next away, and sent to touch. After the throw in a heeled free for Wales did not bring play any further in their favour. The return went to Bancroft, who went away with a great dash, and it looked as if something would result, but he passed forward. Smithwick got from a scrum, but was "grassed." The Welshmen were now in possession, but Jack Ryan tackled with the greatest justice, and play continued at mid-field where Ireland got a free, which went over and was touched down. Wales subsequently pressed hard, but L Magee relieved by kicking. Wales renewed the attack, and Elliott, getting possession, passed to Biggs, who in return sent to Jones, who was tackled and brought down by Jack Ryan. A free to Ireland followed at their own 25, which brought but little relief. Dobson got near the centre and running all the way himself dashed over for a try. The shot at goal was allotted to Bancroft, who kicked a neat goal. After kicking from the half-way, Fulton exchanged kicks, and play followed at the Welsh 25, where Louie Magee was away but was soon grounded. Play was at centre when the first half closed, the score being:

Wales.....1 goal off try (5 points)
Ireland 1 penalty goal (3 points)

On resuming Bancroft re-started and Wales pressed, and on being awarded a penalty free for off-side, Bancroft was entrusted with the kick and shot a goal amidst a scene of the greatest enthusiasm and excitement. The pressure of the Leek was continued until the Irishmen forced their way to the visitors' 25, where Wales were penalised and the oval was placed for Bulger, who kicked, the leather going wide. Tidy passing followed amongst the Welsh three-quarters, one of whom passed forward. In the play that followed Purser spoiled a neat bit of passing amongst the backs of the Principality. In stopping a rush he was injured shortly afterwards and was carried from the field. After a temporary stoppage Ireland were away with a loose rush to the Welsh 25. The Welshmen returned to mid-field, where the Welsh backs were away, neat passing between Nicholls, Jones, Pearson and Hussey being the order. A smart burst away was spoiled by Little. Play continued in the Green Isle 25, and from a long distance passing between the rere division of the representatives of the Principality, Hussey went over for a second try for



View of the Grandstand.

Mungret Annual, 1898.

Wales. Bancroft missed the kick. At midfield the Irishmen got possession and the ball was passed to Mick Ryan, who was collared going into touch. Nicholls was next off with a grand burst, and was followed up by the other three-quarters, who took every pass without mistake, getting within measurable distance of adding another score. Smart passing on the part of the Principalian backs continued to the close of the game, just before which the Irishmen went away to the Welsh territory with a grand rush, and where was when the whistle sounded "no side" with the final score of -

Wales 1 goal, off try, 1 penalty goal,
1 try (11 points)
Ireland 1 penalty goal (3 points).

Notes on the Play

Ireland drew first blood, Bulger sending the oval over the bar for a goal shortly after the start. The programme laid down for the home forwards, behind whom were placed a weakened rere rank, was scarcely followed out. That was to break up the packs, preventing their opponents from giving their backs possession. This was not carried out. Ireland shoved well at times, but Wales invariably got possession and their backs made the most of every opportunity, passing without a fault and getting over when they could. Fulton did not tackle as well as might be expected from him. His three-quarters should have got possession more often. Smithwick was, perhaps better than he has been seen yet, and Bulger was good, but at times somewhat faulty at the tackling business. Purser did a great deal at saving, and it is to be regretted that towards the close of the second half he got his collar bone broken. He was promptly attended to by

Dr. McDonough. Gardiner played a capital game, while Magee at half was ever on the alert, and kicked splendidly with Barr, who also did very well. The forwards, however, did not play their own game, and in failing to do so lost the match. The Ryans, McCarthy, Little, Franks and Lindsay, though they did not do all they could wish, were a powerful lot. On the winning side the backs deserve the very highest praise. The Cardiff combination worked wonders, making lanes through the home side. The forwards got possession, screwed the balls and let out to Biggs and J Elliott, who did their work in the best of fashion. All the three-quarters were equally a topping lot and passed as they liked. Altogether it was a grand game from a spectators point of view, and a meritorious win for a gallant Little Wales.

Mr. Turnbull, Scottish Rugby Union, as referee gave entire satisfaction. The touch judges were:- Wales - Mr. Lwellin, Pontypridd. Ireland- Mr. John Macauley, Garryowen Football Club.

Suggested Testimonial to Mr. J.M.
O'Sullivan

To the Editor of the Munster News.

Dear Sir - Will you permit me to make a suggestion, which I am sure will be taken up warmly, not only in this city but throughout Munster, aye, and even to Leinster and other parts of Ireland.

An International Football match has been played in Limerick. We all know now who were instrumental in having an international in the south and what thanks are due to all concerned. There is one man above all others who has for several years been working unceasingly for this object, and that is Mr. Jack O'Sullivan, the popular Limerick man who has so disting-

uished himself on the football field, and who has done and is doing so much for his old love, "The Garryowen."

My suggestion is that steps should at once be taken to present Mr. O'Sullivan with a suitable testimonial in recognition of his great services, and as a slight appreciation of the esteem in which he is held. The present influential committee will and should hold office to work it up, and I have no doubt a substantial sum would be realised to present Mr. O'Sullivan with a souvenir worthy of the great event.

I am quite certain the Press will take the suggestion in the spirit in which it is offered and thus help on a movement which should be the crowning one in Mr. O'Sullivan's football career.

Thanking you in anticipation, and hoping the testimonial will be a success.

I am, dear sir, yours truly,
A.K.

Munster News and Limerick and Clare Advocate, Sat. 19 March 1898

Departure of the Teams

On Sunday both the Irish and Welsh teams left Limerick by the twelve o'clock train for Dublin. They were seen off by a considerable crowd who cheered as the train steamed out. At the Limerick Junction they were also accorded a warm reception. As might be expected the victors in the match were in high spirits, but the Irishmen took their defeat well, and were gallant enough to admit that they were beaten on the merits by superior force and science. The visitors were very much impressed with their reception here, which they said was not approached anywhere they had been.

Munster News and Limerick and Clare Advocate, Wed. 23 March 1898