

GREAT LIMERICK SPORTSMEN

Dan Begley of Monagea

By SEAMUS O'CEALLAIGH

MONAGEA were one of the great teams of the G.A.A. in early days and their deeds were told in song and story, to illumine the pages that tell so brightly of the glory that once were theirs.

Dan Begley, Vice-Captain of the team on its establishment a little over seventy years ago, was the last of the old glory line when he died at an advanced age a few years ago. With his passing a chapter ended and an era which will be long remembered in the parish.

STORY AS TOLD BY THE LATE T. D. SHANAHAN.

The early story of the games in Monagea were told me many years ago by my esteemed friend, the late Timothy D. Shanahan, whose first cousin was captain of the side in those early days. Here is what he said:

"It was on a beautiful Sunday afternoon in the summer of 1886, that my heart first thrilled at the introduction of Ireland's glorious pastimes in the town of Newcastle West. Two matches, one of hurling and one of football, were scheduled to be played on that afternoon in the Demesne Grounds, kindly given for the occasion by Mr. Charles Curling.

The football match was played first. It was between Kilcolman and a Limerick City team — St. Michael's. Everybody was much interested as it introduced the new rules, and the game resulted in a draw. The players got quite an ovation and it was a very interesting match.

But the greatest event and the star attraction of the day was when forty-two hurlers—twenty-one to the side, marched into the field, led by the Newcastle West and the Boherbuoy Bands of Limerick. The hurling teams represented the Faughs of North Adare and a city team and when they lined up it was a wonderful sight to behold.

VAST GATHERING WILD WITH EXCITEMENT.

The vast gathering of people from all the surrounding parishes went wild with excitement, hats were in the air and every clever display of manly skill and gallant defence was cheered to the echo. The great game went on and on and—it is still going in the recollections of even the youngest of that grand assemblage—the first big Newcastle West Gaelic hosting of modern times.

The next day and all that week the people spoke of nothing but the great games, especially the hurling.

The following Sunday, after the last Mass in Monagea, young men and growing boys, under the watchful eye and the able guidance of William Hough and Dan McEnery enrolled under the colours of the red and green and organised the William O'Brien Hurling and Football Club of Monagea.

By the end of that month new clubs were going in Newcastle West, Knockaderry, Feenagh, Feohanagh, Ashford, Ballingarry, Ardagh, Broadford, Kilmeedy and Dromcollogher.

PRACTICE GAMES.

John O'Connell and Daniel Kennedy of Camas, staunch assistants to William Hough and Dan McEnery, soon had the new club members doing practice games on every Sunday afternoon—an hour at hurling and an hour at football.

After some few months of diligent and strenuous toil behind a hurley the boys thought the time was at hand for the invasion of some neighbouring teams' happy hunting ground, and finally they got their wish.

A tournament was organised in Rathkeale and it was arranged that Monagea would meet Kilfinny. All was excitement, the hustle and bustle of preparation as the entire parish prepared for the great event.

At last the auspicious day dawned, and the wonderful support for the team was demonstrated in the fact that almost every family in the parish sent some representative at least to Rathkeale to see the William O'Briens in action.

AT THE COMMONS OF RATHKEALE.

When the whole crowd—a cavalcade of every type of conveyance in the manner of the time—arrived at the Commons of Rathkeale a football match was in progress, and some officials of the tournament came around and announced that the next match on the list was Monagea and Kilfinny.

Instantly all was life and hustle and in a very short time the William O'Briens were ready for the fray and radiant in their new jackets of red and green.

In a little while they were lined up against Kilfinny—a seasoned team of experienced players who knew all the tricks of the game. Monagea made a very creditable showing, particularly in defence, but tact and experience were against them so they met defeat at their initial try-out.

I remember that when the match was over the captain of the Kilfinny team came into the corner where the Monagea boys were dressing and complimented them on the fine showing they made on their first appearance. It was really very nice of him, and showed both good and clean sportsmanship.

WENT INTO INTENSIVE TRAINING

The William O'Briens did not intend to let that first defeat upset them. On the contrary they went into intensive training, not only on Sundays but on every evening of the week and after a few months more they had developed a team that shone on many a field.

Monagea discontinued the football team in 1890 and went in exclusively for hurling. Activity with the caman was very pronounced in West Limerick around this period and for the next few years the ring and clash of their hurleys were heard in mostly every parish throughout the area. When I left Ireland in 1892 they had a strong team, well managed and entirely able to take care of itself.

OFFICERS AND MEMBERS OF THE CLUB.

The officers and members of the Club at that period were:

William Hough, Chairman; Daniel McEnery, Treasurer; Daniel Kennedy, Secretary; J. P. O'Connell, Organiser; Timothy J. Shanahan, Captain, and Daniel Begley, Vice-Captain.

John and Con Begley, Jerry Reidy, Thomas McEnery, William Kelly, Stephen Drynane, John Dore, Patrick Nash, Jerry J. Curtin, Patrick Enright, John O'Connell, John P. McCarthy, Denis Halpin, Luke Keefe, Patrick Kenneally, Eugene O. King, Maurice Madigan, Daniel Connors, Patrick P. Enright, James Enright, T. D. Shanahan, Daniel O'Shaughnessy, Roger Green, Patrick Collins, David Pickley, Patrick W. King, Ned Anglim, Thomas Shanahan, Patrick Ryan and Ned McEssy were the principal players.

MOST MANLY OF ALL ATHLETIC GAMES.

Timothy D. Shanahan concluded his story: Hurling in my estimation was the most manly of all athletic games and has a whole lot to do in developing the muscles and physique, the springy step and quick determination, such an asset to any man. My great advice to the young men of Ireland is to cherish the good old hurling game both for the sake of the nation and their own physical development.

The next article will deal with the great Monagea successes of the early years of the century.

Dan Begley Of Monagea

By SEAMUS O'CEALLAIGH

I CANNOT leave the first Monagea team of olden G.A.A. days without a reference to the famous poem by the late T. D. Shanahan, recalling those days and telling of the deeds of the far-famed Monagea hurlers of seventy golden years ago.

There have been many changes in the intervening period but the memory of the men who made the welkin ring in the long ago must remain green whilst there is a man to re-tell the well-known lines, composed in remembrance of the Monagea caman wielders, and which reads:

Recollections of Monagea.

Call out the names of hurlers bold—

The boys that we used to know—
Tho' some, I fear, are missing now

Since nigh forty years ago.
Perhaps a few may still survive
The storms, the aches and strife,
While more have drifted far from there
On the rolling sea of life.

Where's William Hough—that veteran Gael—

Our pride in the olden days;
And grand Dan Mack, of deathless fame—

The victor in countless frays.
Alas! I heard they passed away,
And many a heart felt sore,
For Gaeldom had no finer types—
They were sportsmen to the core!

Has Gardenfield the same brave hearts—

Dan Begley, Jerry and John?
'Twould do you good to see them play,

And strapping, athletic Con,
The boys from Strand were staunch and grand,
Jack, Paddy and Tom—"the Dash,"

With Moss and Bill, yes, Tim and Phil,
And Denis from by the Clash.

Camas and Ballykenny, too,
Were well represented there,
Where Steven and Liam, yes,
Dave and Sean,

With Paddy—"The Crusher"—
were,

And Tom and Jack, true Dore and Nash,
Staid Roger would compromise,
Kennedy kept the book accounts,
And Connell used to organise.

Does Ned reside by Barna's side,
At the top of Boherdub?
Is Maurice by Rathcahill Wood,
Where the throstles sang their love?

Gaels would come down that old glen road,

The neighbouring lads to "trim"—
The Anglins and McCarthy boys,

With Pat and his brother—Jim!

Yes! there's one more—he's sleeping now

In the cold and hallowed clay—
Whose thundering crash and camans smash

Drove every doubt away—
When Dhowal Mor was to the fore—

God rest that athlete from Crean—

'Twas well we knew his aim was true
With the ash at Glen-mag-eeen!

There were others that I forget,
And many are laid to rest

Near blessed scenes of long ago—
More have gone east and west!
But off' I think of dear old times,

Yet, longings are all in vain,
Youth's days are fled, loved friendships are dead—

We never shall meet again!

THE PARNELL SPLIT.

In common with most other districts, Monagea suffered from the effects of the disastrous "Parnell Split," and Gaelic activity pressing period of our national life.

The century was all but over when matters Gaelic recovered

from the worst effects of the "Split," and in this period of resurrection one of the first to hit the highlights were the hurlers of Monagea.

One of the leading figures of after years—a mere boy then—gave me, some years ago, his recollections of that glory spell.

Here is what he said:

"The famous Monagea team was at the zenith of its glory during the years 1900 to 1908. During that period the wearers of the green and gold had a series of victories seldom equalled by any hurling combination, notwithstanding the fact that the area from which they were drawn was a comparatively small one.

HUGE CROWDS OF ENTHUSIASTIC ADMIRERS.

"Their matches always drew huge crowds of enthusiastic admirers who anxiously followed the destinies of the boys from Monagea.

"They were sought after for tournament and charity matches because promoters knew of the crowds that flocked to see them where ever they played.

"They usually travelled by car or brake and it was no unusual sight to see the long car and thirty or forty traps or side cars leave the Chapel gates of Monagea on a Sunday and proceed in processional order to the venue of the match.

"The triumphal return was generally a never to be forgotten scene. A few local musicians usually accompanied the boys and lusty lungs pealed forth that famous song of T. D. Shanahan's 'The Boys in Green and Gold'. The whole parish assembled at the Chapel gate to await the return of the all-conquering heroes and the cheers which greeted them as Denny Mack brought his prancing steeds to a standstill were echoed in the Glens of Glenmageen and Clash An Afrion.

THRILL OF JOY.

"As one who waited amongst the throng to join in the loud hurrah, I can vividly recall the thrill of joy I felt when the sweet music of Paddy King's melodeon was wafted to my ears through the keen night air. It was a signal of victory!

"The thud of the horses' hoofs, the rattle of the cars over the stony roads, the song of victory punctuated by an occasional shout created an impression in my mind that shall live there for ever.

"This mighty team was composed of seventeen stalwarts selected from the following:—Dan Begley (Captain) and later Tim Sheehan, Denis, Michael and Ned Shanahan, John and Pat Hogan, Dan Greene, Pat and John O'Connell, John Hennessey, William and Maurice King, Bryan King (goalkeeper), Pat King, Pat Hough, Michael and Batt Danaher, Moses and Pat McCarthy, Ned McKessy, Batt Danaher and Tim Horan.

"The late Dan Kennedy, N.T., locally known as 'The Master' was the energetic Secretary of the club and the late William Hough and Tim Shanahan of Barna were its two principal officials.

THRILLING ENCOUNTERS.

"They had some thrilling encounters with Ballyagran and Kilfinny, and Ballygarry, too, supplied them with strong opposition.

"They trained fairly hard for the important contests and their good Parish Priest, the late Father Edward Clifford, placed his field at their disposal at all times.

"Several humorous episodes in connection with their period of activity are recorded.

The securing of hurleys was a difficulty not easily surmountable by some but others in the club rather enjoyed the system whereby a nice young ash tree would suddenly disappear from a plantation notwithstanding the weary vigil of some inveterate crank who held certain well founded suspicions about those hurlers."

Monagea's fight for the County Senior Hurling Crown of 1902 will be amongst the matters dealt with in the next article in this series.