

# Great Limerick Athletes

No. 74—PATRICK BUTLER of Kyle, Cappamore

(By SEAMUS O CEALLAIGH)

OF the seventeen men that won for Limerick its first All-Ireland Hurling Crown away back in 1897, fifty-seven years ago, only four remain—Pat Buskin of Croom, and a Cappamore trio: Sean Hynes, Pat Muicany and the subject of our sketch this week—Patrick Butler of Kyle.

I have had to go back a bit for some of our stories, and this week we return to the closing years of the last century for the high lights of Pat Butler's career.

This raking up of the past is agreeable work, and if the reader gets even half the pleasure in reading as was mine in collecting the material I'll be well satisfied—and so, I think, will he.

The task could not have been accomplished without the help of many good friends, who, in a lot of cases, did most of the spade work, leaving to me only the finishing touches. In the present instance I have to thank, not for the first time, a real enthusiast in Cappamore, Mr. Joan P. Crowley, who went to great pains to secure the full story of his career from Pat Butler himself, although this meant a few journeys on foot three miles up the mountains. To him I am more than grateful for making possible this story of one of the real old nobility of the Gael, who helped to place the first hurling crown on the brow of his native Limerick days when such an achievement was dearly earned and all the more highly prized for that.

## GREAT MEN IN THE WORLD OF SPORT.

Limerick gave great men to the world of sport. Champions in Cionaskeagh, Tipperary Town, Jones's Road; in athletic arenas right out to the Golden Gate; my concern in these articles is the building of a monument to the men who kept hurling from dying down the years by Shannonside; to those old-timers who fought for football honours in the infant days of the G.A.A.; to our handballers who kept the flag of Limerick to the fore in no uncertain way; and, last, but by no means least, to our athletes who captured the imagination of sportsmen everywhere and gained us a place in world athletics that must always be a source of joy and pride for Limerickmen no matter where they may have found a home.

I have been reminded time and again that many great men have been forgotten in the mention of the grand figures of an era or a district. I am fully aware of the shortcomings in these articles, but, nevertheless, I feel they are worthwhile, before the last of the old champions will have died away and we are left without any authentic record of their deeds. There may be many I have missed—believe me, it was not from any partisan motives nor because they were thought unworthy of inclusion. There are grand stories still to be got of the old pioneers like Pat Butler—the men who made the G.A.A., as we know it to-day, possible. Without them there would have been no Association. And they have stories to tell, these old-timers, stories that will add to the athletic lore of our great county in years ahead, and maybe prove an inspiration to men as yet unborn to emulate the great deeds of famed Limerick figures of that glorious past which it has been such a pleasure to resurrect in these columns.

Before this series comes to a close I would appeal to any of my readers who think they can add to this gallery of great Limerickmen who gained athletic renown either at home or in exile, to let me have any information they can give concerning them at the earliest opportunity, and I will do my best to see they are included.

## BACKGROUND TO THE OLD-TIME HURLING.

Now, to get back to the career of Pat Butler, let us discover the background to the hurling of the early G.A.A. days. The traditions of the game were handed down from the old parish to parish contests and the thrilling tales of the superhuman feats when the patrons of some of those forges where Fenian Pikes were tempered met in hurling or football rivalry.

Some years ago I heard a grand old Gael recounting one of those extraordinary episodes of strength, speed and endurance. Around about the time Pat Butler was born it so happened in the course of a football match between two adjoining parishes that the ball was brought into the streets of Kilmallock, where the foremost contenders were checked, and as neither side could manoeuvre towards their goal in the narrow spaces, a stubborn struggle ensued. Eventually the police were called out, the Riot to Murroe and Araglen. Although Act was read, and a dozen players he

were arrested. On the day of their trial one of the magistrates left the Bench to give evidence against them. "I stood on the heights of Alma," said he, "but I saw more men knocked over in the streets of Kilmallock in the desperate fury of this dreadful ball game."

The coming of the G.A.A. brought order into the playing of the games. But the tales of the olden arena still make one wonder at the strength and endurance, the courage and loyalty of the early players. The younger generation can have little idea of the conditions which prevailed fifty or sixty years ago when some of our great Limerick men won their All-Ireland medals.

## WHISTLE SELDOM SOUNDED IN THOSE DAYS.

The whistle seldom sounded in those days, when it took fitness and courage to enter the championship arena with seventeen men determined on victory. They played All-Ireland finals on rough fields only mown that morning; they "tugged off" at the side of a ditch after walking maybe ten or more miles to play the match. They fought Munster Championships with a rope tied to two posts to serve for goals. Crude, heavy, unsmoothed hurleys; long, three-quarter length knickers; the huge "slitter," the bare feet—they are all part of the past, a glamorous past for many of the olden champions, who hold that for all our present-day records and great games, we miss the glamour and romance of days that cannot come again.

Born at Kyle, Cappamore, eighty years ago, on January 4th, 1874 to be precise, Pat Butler's earliest memories go back to the very foundations of the G.A.A., when, as a schoolboy he participated in some of the first games organised under Gaelic rules. His early school games were played with a handle of an axe and an old sponge ball, and Pat tells how he often got a nasty cut with these crude methods from some of his schoolmates. Later they used a turned stick for a caman and a rag ball, and with these played many a game with the lads from Cappamore school—winning sometimes and being beaten often also.

## REAL CROSS-COUNTRY AFFAIR.

Pat has one memory of the old "Hurling Home" days, and tells of a game in which he participated—twenty-one aside. They started in the centre of two divided parishes where the ball was flung in, victory going to the team who succeeded in getting into their own parish first—a real cross-country affair that could and often did last for many hours.

After leaving school he threw in his lot with the Araglen team, and at the age of fourteen figured against Murroe in a match for the County Senior Crown. The latter won by a small margin. The Araglen lads later won their first set of medals at the Blackboy but lost in their next outing to Long Street, Cappamore.

About this time Paddy Lee, Creamery Manager, became Secretary of Cappamore Club, which Pat Butler joined. A field for training was secured from Mr. Fogarty of Portnard and several practice games were played there.

Fixed to meet Kilfinane in the County Championship, when they arrived at the venue, Sheehan's Cross, the Kilfinane lads refused to play, so they had no game. They next met Caherline at Dromkeen, where the game ended abruptly following a dispute concerning a disallowed goal. The re-play took place at the Markets Field, where Caherline won by a point. Pat played in the left top wing position always, except on a few occasions when he was pressed into service as full-back—a difficult position then, as demonstrated by the number of nasty leg cuts he got in that berth.

## GOOD PLAYERS OF HIS DAY.

The good players of his day around the Cappamore locality he recalls are Sean Hynes, Pat Cummins, Pat Mulcahy, Pat Leonard, Denis Connelly, Michael Gleeson, Jamsey Ryan (J), "a good footballer, too," Pat Crowley, "who had a terrible long puck," John Mulcahy, Patrick McNamara, John Reddin and John Godfrey. And of the inter-county men he met, he considers Tom Semple and J. Mockler of Tipperary, with "Drug" Walsh of Kilkenny, the best.

As to his other interests outside of hurling, Pat tells how as a member of the Bilbao team he figured in many stirring tug-o-war contests. The heaviest man on the team, he was always picked for the end of the rope, and won several trophies at this sport, although his best remembered "pulls" were on occasions when they lost the police were called out, the Riot to Murroe and Araglen. Although Act was read, and a dozen players he

other athletic events, he was deeply interested in sports meetings, and travelled to any in his neighbourhood. And he now takes pride in the doings of the Blackboy cross-country juniors, the most of whom lived near Cappamore—the Carmody brothers, J. McCarthy, J. O'Donoghue and the O'Connors, besides William Hanley, now in the Curragh and figuring strongly in both hurling and cross-country work.

Pat Butler in his day was also a good swimmer, a keen fisherman, and kept some useful gun dogs. He spent many a happy day up the hills hunting for hares and fowling.

A good footballer as well, Pat played many matches with the Cappamore Football Club, his most memorable being the occasion they beat Pallas at Hospital, 1-2 to 1-0. His main love, however, was hurling, and it got pride of place always with him. Fond of a game of handball at times, he won several rubbers, beating Bilbao teams on many occasions.

## PLAYED WITH SEVERAL TEAMS.

During a lengthy hurling career, Pat Butler—"Paudeen" to his intimates of those hectic days—played with several teams in County Limerick. A member of Araglen, and later Cappamore for the big championship tests, his hurling interest was so intense that he lined out with teams from Doon, Murroe and Cappamore in friendly games.

With Doon he figured on numerous occasions and had many great contests with Pallas, who won most times. However, the Doon lads had one great win, by 5-6 to 4-2, in a "needle" game that provided a topic for conversation for many a long day afterwards. One of his games with Cappamore was against Dundrum, whom they beat 3-4 to 2-3, after a thrilling tussle.

How close Cappamore were riding to Kilfinane in the memorable year of 1897 can be judged by the County final result that season. Played at the Markets Field on May 1st, 1898, the final tally was: Kilfinane, 4-9; Cappamore, 4-8.

A dispute, however, prevented Cappamore from being represented on the Kilfinane selection that opposed Tulla, Clare, in the first round of the Munster Championship played at Greenpark Race Course, Limerick, on 19th June, 1898. The Kilfinane lads won 2-5 to 2-3. Differences were patched up for the Munster final, decided at Tipperary on September 25th, 1898, and the Kilfinane "pick" beat Blackrock (Cork), 4-9 to 1-6, after a great struggle.

Kilfinane were back at Tipperary on October 23rd and this time, again aided by the Cappamore lads, they beat Tulla 4-6 to 2-5 in a Croke Cup tie.

## MURPHY CUP FINAL.

Cappamore were in wonderful form the following Sunday at the Markets Field, when they beat Croom in the Murphy Cup final by 6 goals and 16 points to 1 point. The victorious players were: S. Hynes (capt.), J. Conroy, D. Connolly, P. Mulcahy, J. Mulcahy, M. Davern, J. McNamara, P. Butler, J. Condon, J. Mackey, J. Reddan, M. Davern, E. Nugent, M. Hilliard, P. Cummins, W. Keefe and James Conroy.

The All-Ireland final was played at Tipperary on November 20th, 1898, in which the Kilfinane selection beat Tullaroan (Kilkenny), 3-4 to 2-4, after a thrill-packed game.

We next meet the Cappamore lads at the Markets Field on February 19th, 1899, where they beat Caherline 0-9 to 0-8 in the semi-final of the 1898 Senior Hurling Championship. The referee's decision being questioned, a re-play was ordered, which Caherline won, 3-3 to 1-3.

On February 26th the Kilfinane selection drew with Blackrock, at Mallow, four points apiece, in the Munster decider for the Croke Cup. Re-played at Mallow on May 21st, the Limerickmen won, 1-7 to 1-6, after an unforgettable game.

The final for the Croke Cup was played at Thurles on July 9th, with a very large attendance, including the Most Rev. Dr. Croke, Archbishop of Cashel, to whom the players were presented before the contest by Frank B. Dinneen of Ballylanders. The Kilfinane lads won again, beating Kilkenny 3-8 to 1-4, thus completing a great double.

Space only permits one further reference to the great games in which Pat Butler figured—the County final of 1904, played at the Markets Field on August 13th, 1905, in which Cappamore beat Ballingarry, 3-7 to 1-5.

## PLAYED ALSO IN CHICAGO.

During a spell spent in Chicago, from where I had a letter during the week, written by that grand Galbally world's champion jumper, Jim Fahey, Pat Butler played with

the Chicago hurling team and won several matches against New York sides. On one occasion in Chicago, Pat Butler was amazed to see a former hurling comrade on the Araglen team, Pat Cummins, driving a load of hay through the great American city.

Looking back over all the great games he played for the All-Ireland Championship, the Croke Cup and the County Championship, Pat Butler names a match against the Young Irelands at Castleconnell as the most exciting of them all—a real thriller from start to stop.

He walked to almost all his matches, sometimes as much as fifteen miles to a venue, and back again, then after hurling a hard hour. On one occasion, when returning in a horse and common car from a match at Limerick the wheel of the car came off and they were all flung into a dyke but luckily no one was hurt.

Pat was also a good referee and officiated at local venues for many seasons. They had plenty of fun, too, in those days, and he tells of one occasion when they were cutting up a couple of ash butts to make their own hurleys after stealing them from another farmer's land. They boiled a pot of spuds and a goose and worked all night at making the camans, as they could not operate during the day, as the farmer from whom they had whipped the "makings" was a regular visitor to the house.

## ADVICE TO YOUTH OF TO-DAY.

The old veteran has some advice to give the youth of to-day. He feels the present-day players indulge in too much raising of the ball instead of striking it as it comes to them. He says the present lads are not as strong as the youths of his time, and this he attributes to the fact that the old-time player was better fed in rough food against the dainty stuff of this age. "I would like the boys of to-day to do more exercise, particularly walking, whilst plenty of slow running is also good," went on Pat, who continued: "I did not smoke, and I think it's bad for any player, and there should be no drinking before playing a match. And I would like to see old hurlers taking more interest in our hurling clubs, not leaving it to men that never played the game, as is sometimes the case."

And on this note we leave the old hurling champion, with a parting wish that he enjoys many more years to tell of the hurling glories that once were ours.

No. 75—Mick Osborne of Ballylanders.