

No. 147—MICKY CROSS of Cloughaun

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MICKY CROSS grew to maturity during a glorious spell of Cloughaun hurling supremacy and could hardly escape being influenced by the happenings around him, as the feats of the famous club were recounted and tales of do and daring on the hurling field told at firesides, corners, and cross roads, with well known Cloughaun men the central figures in a period that is now generally recognised as the golden era of a club that has left such a deep impress on the Limerick Gaelic scene.

Cloughaun first made its appearance as a club around the period of Micky's birth—a few years following the foundation of another famous club—Young Ireland between which pair one of the greatest rivalries Limerick hurling has known developed in after days.

Cloughaun's first essays were in the lower grades—the foundations were built sound and strong, and although the name disappeared altogether for a spell, some who were to make such history with Cloughaun in their real heyday got their hurling introduction through the medium of another great club of nearly half a century ago—Commercials, who might be said to be the forerunner of Cloughaun, who made such a mark on the Limerick Gaelic stage of two score years ago.

CLAUGHAUN-YOUNG IRELAND CLASHES

Cloughaun had amassed quite a galaxy of honours on the hurling fields of Limerick and of Munster by the time Micky Cross was ready to take his place in the ranks. From the junior to the senior team was a quick march when his talents were recognised, and while still in his teens he was sharing the honour and the glory that were Cloughaun's at the time.

In the Canal Field, earnest workers put the finishing touches on the teams that gave such good accounts of themselves at venues anywhere they went, and two uncles of our subject, Jim and Willie Cross, were to the fore as the most ardent and enthusiastic supporters of a Cloughaun that could boast more devoted followers than most combinations of the time.

In fact, the most enduring memories many of us retain of the great Cloughaun-Young Ireland clashes is of the wildly excited cries from the side line as the respective supporters tried to shout each other down, in unison

with the herculean efforts of the hurlers, who contested these games with a vigour and determination that has not been excelled in our time.

Into this maelstrom of hurling thrills and spills Micky Cross fitted to the entire satisfaction of the hard taskmasters in charge of Cloughaun fortunes.

UNFORGETTABLE GAME

In the horizontal bars of green and white he gave some memorable displays, his greatest, maybe, against the old rivals, Young Ireland, in an unforgettable game for the 1926 championship. That was one of Cloughaun's sweetest victories, and they crowned a remarkable season by taking the county crown—the last of the five won by the club, and in which Micky was again one of the leading stars, with Newcastle West providing the opposition.

The scatter came all too soon afterwards in the Cloughaun ranks, and the great team that had figured so magnificently for a dozen years never again contested a County senior hurling final.

But the Cloughaun standard was borne on inter-county fields and no man represented the Club with greater distinction than did Micky Cross.

First called to the Limerick colours in 1923, he played his first game against Tipperary and helped in the winning of Munster honours that year, later figuring against Galway in the All-Ireland final—the only one the Westerners have won to date.

Bridging the gap of years from the final of 1923 to that of 1933, when Limerick lost to Kilkenny, were three City club stalwarts—Micky Cross of Cloughaun, and the Young Ireland pair, Micky Fitzgibbon and Bob McConkey. Of the trio, only the Cloughaun man continued the full span, to share the Limerick triumphs of 1934 and 1936, besides participating in the American tour of the latter year.

Cross played in the first great hurling final of the Inter-Provincial series for the Railway Cup, in 1927—a game that left a fragrant memory with those lucky enough to witness what many regard the outstanding hurling match of all the great ones Croke Park has witnessed.

OUTSHONE ALL RIVALS

The Cloughaun man played in six further Railway Cup finals—from 1929 to 1932, and again in 1934 and 1936.

In 1932 he was picked to play for Ireland against America at the last of the modern Tailteann, a match they won 9-7 to 3-6.

The following year he secured his second Munster Championship medal, when helping Limerick defeat Waterford, in an unfinished final at Cork, later awarded to Limerick.

The Shannonsiders lost that All-Ireland final to their great rivals from the Nore, after a magnificent game, and all were unanimous that one of the big successes of the day was the Cloughaun representative, who outshone all rivals. No defender cleared as he did that day, his deliveries being of surpassing length, and always directed towards the Kilkenny goal.

Three further Munster Championships came his way—1934, 1935 and 1936; whilst he won his first All-Ireland medal when Limerick triumphed over Dublin on a replay of the 1934 final. Two years later the second blue riband success came, Kilkenny being the defeated finalists on that occasion.

Four times he helped Limerick to National League honours—in 1933-34, when Dublin were beaten 3-6 to 2-3; in 1934-35, when the final game resulted: Limerick 6-6, Laois 2-2; the following year, when Dublin were again the victims, 7-2 to 5-4, and in 1936-37, when the defeated finalists were Cork, and the score, 11-6 to 5-1.

VETERAN OF TEAM IN TRIP TO NEW YORK

Tournament successes came to him in plenty, and he helped in the winning of Thomond Feis honours on five occasions, between 1925 and 1935. He travelled with Limerick to London for some thrilling Bank Holiday hurling and was the veteran of the team that made the trip to New York in 1936 and one of those most sought after by Limerick exiles in America.

Every honour the game could bestow was secured by this unassuming Gael, who was a hurler to his finger tips. Strong and fearless, very quick to turn and hit, he was a brilliant tactician. Pluck, stamina and grit were the big factors in his make up and he delighted in a hard, vigorous match, for the crash of the ash was the sweetest of music to him.

Blessed with plenty of dash and resource, he shone in ground work and from his position as right half back often drove balls to the opponents' goal-mouth and that on the sod, off either hand.

Shortly after his retirement in 1937, "Carbery" paid him this tribute:

"I met the smiling hurling veteran, Micky Cross, as stout and clever a wing back as ever swung ash. Always the 'big game' man, he was twenty years in the lime-light and was never out of trim, summer and winter. He just loved hurling and lived for it—like successful men in every walk of life. A hospitable hostel was nearby, but Micky Cross is almost a pussyfoot and we just thrashed out old and new matches 'on the flags' in the midsummer eve, oblivious to happenings around us."