

Great Limerick Athletes

No. 90—TOM CULHANE of Glin

(By SEAMUS O'CEALLAIGH)

GLIN football records go back to the closing years of the last century, when the first Club there was inaugurated at a public meeting. This combination, called the "Emmets," boasted many fine young players, who speedily went to the front and figured prominently in many outings against West Limerick and North Kerry teams.

Soon a great rivalry sprang up between Abbeyfeale and themselves that survived the passing years, and games between this great pair form some of the brightest episodes in the story of Limerick football. In 1899, the Glin lads beat Abbeyfeale for the championship of the West, and were listed to play the far-famed Commercial's in the final of the County. This game was fixed for the Markets Field on December 9th, 1900, but owing to some misunderstanding over travelling Glin did not play, Commercial's getting a bloodless victory. The City men were then at their zenith under the captaincy of the one and only Con Fitzgerald, and with Glin boasting his brother, Paddy, reputed as capable a man on the field, a match of matches was missed on that occasion. Other famous Glin figures at the time included one of the best all round athletes then in the country in M. Feary; the grand old captain Paddy McCoy; Maurice Fitzgerald, M. J. O'Shaughnessy and E. Dore. A decade passed before Glin "made" another County final, and on this occasion they lost to Kilmallock, 1-8 to 1-1, with the venue the Markets Field, and the date, April 4th, 1910.

THRILLING FIGHT.

Again champions of the West in 1910, they figured in a thrilling fight with Commercial's for County honours that season. The final, not played until May 12th, 1912, took place at the Markets Field and the heroic nature of the struggle can be judged by the final summing up: Commercial's, 1-1; Glin 1-0. Captain of that fine Glin team was the late Jack Dunne, who later played a noble part in the fight for national independence and died at a pathetically early age as the result of hardships endured during that gallant bid to overthrow the might of an Empire. Registering a "come-back" in the hectic games of these years were a few of the veterans of pioneer days—Paddy Fitzgerald, Paddy McCoy and M. J. O'Shaughnessy, who was a centre-field player of speed and stamina. Also to the fore then were such stalwarts as the Club Hon. Secretary, David O'Leary, N.T., who gave such service to Glin football down the years; Matt Dillane, Patrick Walshe, T. Culhane, J. Sheehy, Patrick Lawler, Maurice Culhane, John Thompson, W. Quaide, M. O'Connell, John Cusack, Edward O'Connell and Maurice O'Shaughnessy.

Football in Glin died away sometime following this defeat and it was not until Rev. P. Lyons, now P.P., Monagea, was transferred there from Kilmeeedy, in 1925, that an effort was made to re-establish the Club. The drive and enthusiasm of Father Lyons met a ready response, and to his great organising ability and active help in field and forum is due in overflowing measure the bulk of the credit for the days of glory that followed.

The new team played its first match on Whit Sunday, 1926, at Rathkeale, against Ashford, scoring a victory that set them on the road to a remarkable double—the winning that season of both the junior and senior county titles. The junior crown was won at Foynes on October 24th, 1927, when Bruff were defeated 1-5 to nil. Glin won the Senior Championship of the West when they beat Newcastle West in the final by eleven points to five, and were pitted against Garda for the County decider. Their opponents were title holders two years earlier but had lost a lot of their players and were eventually forced to give a walk-over—Glin gaining the first of their seven senior crowns without a battle.

INTERESTING RECORD.

Space will only permit bare record of the county finals of the ensuing years

1927—At Foynes, November 20th, 1927, Commercial's, 2-5; Glin, 2-5. Re-play at Glin, March 4th, 1928, Commercial's, 3-4; Glin, 1-1.
1928—At Croom, April 7th, 1929, Glin, 2-6; Knockane, 1-3.
1929—At Newcastle West, March 30th, 1930, Glin, 2-0; Knockane, 1-0. Unfinished. Awarded to Glin.
1930—At Hospital, June 23th, 1931, Glin, 4-8; Knockane, 1-3.
1931—At Hospital, April 3rd, 1932, Glin, 2-1; Knockane, 2-1.
Re-play at Limerick Gaelic

Grounds, June 12th, 1932, Glin, 0-4; Knockane, 1-10. Glin objected to the constitution of the Knockane team and were awarded the match. Knockane were suspended for 12 months.

1933—At Foynes, May 6th, 1934, Glin, 1-4; Newtown Rangers, 1-0.
1934—At Foynes, May 5th, 1935, Glin, 2-5; Newtown Rangers, 2-3.
1937—At Askeaton, May 15th, 1938, Ahane, 2-3; Glin, 0-8.
1939—At Askeaton, May 26th, 1940, Ahane, 0-1; Glin, nil. Unfinished. Awarded to Ahane.

And to bring the Glin record right up to date I include the 1947 County Junior Football final, played at Limerick Gaelic Grounds, on November 2nd, 1947, which resulted: Oola, 3-1; Glin, 2-1.

The names of the players who won the 1930 championship were: John Kelly (Capt.), Rev. P. Lyons, Chairman; Seamus Duggan, N.T., Hon. Secretary; Thomas Culhane, W. Thompson, Jack Barry, James O'Sullivan, Patrick Mulvihill, Philip Mangan, Stephen Barrett, James Ryan, Patrick Hennessy, Michael Drohan, Maurice O'Connor, Patrick Conway, Michael O'Connor, John Culhane, Garrett Pierce, Thomas Moore, Thomas Mulvihill.

Only five of the 1930 team were on the side that took first championship honours to the parish four years earlier: Seamus Duggan, Jack Barry, Patrick Conway, John Kelly and Mick O'Connor.

TOM CULHANE.

The subject of our sketch this week, Tom Culhane, began football about 1926, while he was a school-boy under Seamus Duggan, N.T., who was responsible for his first steps in the code that he figured in so brilliantly during later years, and when Tom grew older he played the game as a colleague with his teacher in the Glin and County teams. Seamus Duggan played for Munster in the Railway Cup final of 1932, and Tom Culhane donned the royal blue of his province in 1935, and continued to represent Munster each season until his untimely and much-mourned passing in March, 1940, at the early age of twenty-seven.

Tom's first big game, and one that gave quiet satisfaction to the Glin folk, was at Listowel. It was a tussle between a well trained Glin National School team and the Secondary School of St. Michael's, Listowel. The Glin supporters expected a good beating, but to the surprise of all, victory came in sterling fashion. It was the first real glimpse of Tom Culhane as a football force, while some of his teammates that day were to share with him in after years many honours in the Limerick senior championship arena. Glin school that day had Jimmy Ryan as goalkeeper, who later played with his adopted parish team, Foynes; and James Dore, a good scorer on that occasion, who is still in Glin doing fine work educating the children of his former football colleagues as a secondary teacher.

UNIQUE RECORD.

Tom Culhane was winning senior renown on Limerick football fields whilst still eligible for minor play, and he figured in many great games for Glin for Limerick and for Munster all through the 'thirties. A referee of no mean ability, he must have been one of the youngest ever to have charge of an All-Ireland senior football final, when he took control of the great Kerry v. Galway game for the 1938 title.

He not only began to play football at an early age but talked football very young. A loveable character at one time described as the "Idol of Croke Park," he was certainly the pride and joy of Glin and doyen of the most popular lads in the town and surrounding district. In his early days the football spirit had completely gripped the Glin people and Tom had not far to go to find an audience. Across the road from his home in Church Street he met each night a number of enthusiasts, old in years but young in spirit. Foremost amongst that many were Bill Thompson, Dan Conway, Moko Fitzzy, Jack Bambury and very often a few at the upper windows at Jack Mac's. Nobody cared, it was all football, and this little band cares less now, and if it is possible, they are still discussing in heaven these great games of Tom Culhane. Seamus Duggan, Patrick Conway, Micky O'Connor, James Dore, John Kelly, Tommy Fox, Mick Dillane, John Fitzgerald, Michael Normoyle, Michael Costello, Jack Barry, Mosen Conors, Paud and Tom Mulvihill, Jimmy Sullivan and Phil Mangan.

Tom was a very correct, good

living boy. At one time he thought he had a vocation to the priesthood, but on finding that the sacred calling was not for him, he returned home, and so much did his Parish Priest think of him that he appointed him sacristan to the parish church on the first vacancy, a post that he filled with credit until he resigned in favour of his younger brother, Michael, who also became famous as a footballer in the Gardal and Roscommon teams in this country and later in America.

PRESS TRIBUTES.

A few extracts from Press reports on his career will be read with interest:—

"Tom Culhane refereed the first drawn game between Kerry and Galway in this year's All-Ireland championship, and his swift rise to national recognition as a whistle man is remarkable. He has played for Munster in several Inter-Provincials and as half-forward and is worth his place on any team for his place-kicking alone. He has speed, too, so he is easily number one man on the Limerick fifteen."

"Well into the 1930's he was still on the Limerick minor selection. That will give some idea of how young he is to be a G.A.A. giant. In one particular year his promotion was so rapid he played minor, junior and senior."

"Another record of his is that he refereed two important matches in one day. That was in North Kerry where he is recognised as an 'impartial outsider' in the County Championships. His name is honoured among the Gaels of Strand Street, Dingle and Boherbee—men hard to please, so critical are they of the way games are conducted."

"Glin, where the Knight comes from, is full of Culhanes," as I've been told; so, if you're ever in the pretty Shannonside port of call, ask for the Parish Clerk if you are anxious for a chat on Gaelic games with the youngest referee-player in the country."

On the occasion of his lamented passing many tributes were paid his memory. Mr. Padraig O'Caomh, General Secretary G.A.A., had this to say: "Tom Culhane's death was a great shock to us all. He was a fine character and a great player, and his death is not only a loss to Munster but to the Association as a whole, for he gave his time and services most unselfishly to the advancement of Gaelic pastimes. He was a member of the Committee of prominent referees and players appointed by the Central Council to consider the rules governing football and make recommendations as to their working. In this connection he gave a great deal of time to the work of the organisation, and much valuable advice."

"A NOBLE TYPE."

"Carbery" wrote: "Tom Culhane, of Glin, was so young and blooming when we knew him in football and referee circles that it is hard to think that he has gone from us (Slan beo). The hardest team to give honours outside its own county is Kerry. They gave Tom Culhane that honour and not without reason. He was a brilliant winger. Like many brilliant men on field and far he died young. Young Culhane was a noble type. I will conclude with this fine tribute by James F. O'Reilly:

"Better one crowded hour of glorious life Than five an age without a name."

"Widespread was the sorrow and great the shock on hearing of the death of Tom Culhane. It is, indeed, very sad to see such a fine young fellow, in the bloom of manhood, full of the joys of life and a noted athlete, struck down to answer the call. But Tom was, indeed, well prepared and in readiness to meet his Creator. The possessor of much talent, a charming singer, and a very well-known and famous footballer, but not only did Tom possess these many qualities, but he was a sincere Catholic, a faithful Pioneer, and an admirable young man in every way. His cheerful disposition and attractive personality endeared him to all with whom he came in contact and every place he went he left a good impression."

"On numerous occasions he gave some never-to-be forgotten exhibitions of football in Croke Park, playing centre-field in All-Ireland matches, and for Munster in the inter-provincial championships. He displayed some tactics on the football field on many occasions that sent the spectators into raptures of joy and brought about the admiration even of the opposing team, and the applause of all Croke Park. He was a young man of splendid physique and a born footballer, as he was generally called. The G.A.A. by his death have lost one of the most famous and skilful footballers they have ever had, and Ireland a very true and patriotic Irishman."

FINAL TRIBUTE.

Consequently it was only fitting, and a very well deserved tribute to one who had actually been selected to play with them, that a two-minute silence was observed in Croke Park on St. Patrick's Day, and the players were clothed with mourning as a mark of respect to their dead Gael—to poor Tom who was surely there with them in spirit. It was, indeed, very tragic to find him missing from the Munster team, and to think that to-day he who appeared so physically fit and the picture of health lies low and will never again figure in Croke Park to be cheered and applauded by thousands.

"Tom's good, virtuous life resulted, as it always does, in his peaceful, happy resignation to leave this vale of tears. To quote the words of a famous philosopher: 'It is right living which prepares for safe or even joyous dying.' May the Lord have mercy on his poor soul and grant him everlasting bliss."