

No. 122—NED DUNDON of Mount Pleasant

By SEAMUS O'CEALLAIGH

SOME sixty years ago the little picturesque district of Mount Pleasant had one of the finest hurling sides to grace the playing fields of West Limerick. Unlike such teams as Foynes, Monegay, Rathkeale and South Liberties, the Mount Pleasant men had no great hurling tradition to back them but they had determination and grit, the stuff of which real hurlers are made, and this they moulded rapidly to become a first-class combination.

The first step towards the inauguration of the Club arose from a simple incident. A few men of the locality shaped some hurleys and commenced to play a bit at evening time. After a time the idea of getting together a team was formed, and soon there were almost thirty young men swinging the caman.

Then a suitable name had to be found and it was decided to call the team the "Liberators" in honour of the great Daniel O'Connell. They appointed no club officials, just a captain. Such things as funds and collections were unknown and the players had no proper playing attire, but the hurleys they made themselves.

BACKWARD CONDITIONS.

Needless to say there was no proper playing pitch in the district either but the kindness of some farmers enabled the players to get in the necessary training. To the nearby venues they usually journeyed by foot but for longer distances the general mode of travelling was by common carts, as traps would not carry enough and side-cars were not available. Most times they played in their bare feet and refreshments were rare.

Still, despite such conditions, those iron men held together and in due time were rewarded for their great work and loyalty to the cause. Participation in the championships had to be ruled out because travelling facilities in the locality were poor and the Club had no financial aid to meet expenses. But tournaments were numerous then and the Mount Pleasant men competed in as many of these as possible. And the record they left is a proud one, indeed—victorious in every outing, bar one, during the lifetime of that gallant Club who boasted such a bevy of first-class hurlers, including the subject of this sketch—the great Ned Dundon.

THEIR FIRST OUTING.

The "Liberators" first ever outing was against their neighbours, the renowned Foynes "Father Murphy's". Played at Dysert, the Mount Pleasant men surprised all by notching a good win. This was a friendly engagement, but they repeated the success a little later at Borrignone, in their initial tournament appearance.

Their first set of medals came at Shanagolden, where they beat Askaton Desmonds—a much appreciated success, particularly because of the fact that they were short a leading player. The re-shuffle in the team brought Tom Sheehy out-field, while Jim Griffin guarded the posts. Midway through the second half, Griffin made a remarkable save when he blocked a tremendous drive from the Askaton maestro, Dan McNamara. The game, however, came to an abrupt ending five minutes later when two players came to handgrips and play had to be abandoned—the medals being awarded to Mount Pleasant.

On another occasion the Mount Pleasant men journeyed to Stonehall, where they played two Kildimo teams—the Faughs and the Sarsfields—in a local tournament. The "Liberators" won the first game easily but encountered sterner opposition in the second. Shortly after half-time, in the gathering dusk, the ball got lost in a nearby field of corn. No other ball being available, the game had to be called off. To the venue the teams again journeyed the following Sunday to finish the hour. Mount Pleasant gained the laurels, and their captain, Larry McNamara, got a magnificent gold watch as the token of victory.

SWEETEST VICTORY OF ALL.

The sweetest victory of all was, perhaps, the heavy defeat inflicted on the famed Monegay men—the "William O'Brien's" in a tournament at Ardagh. The losers were captained that day by the renowned poet-Gael, the late T. D. Shanahan. The ball the Monegay players brought with them was very large and heavy—in the best traditions of the olden Gaelic days, Dundon and Paddy O'Connell, Not

alone were they amongst the greatest defenders of their day but they were two of the best wing fulls that ever came out of the west. The Mount Pleasant players were good men all, but the gallant Ned Dundon, long since gone to his reward, contributed more than his share to the success of this great team and so deserves a due place among the other great hurling stars of Limerick. Two brothers of his, Bill and John, also gave fine service to the club—a family contribution that meant much to the "Liberators."

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OTHERS OF A GALLANT BAND

Justice would hardly be satisfied without some reference to some others of that gallant band. There was Larry McNamara, their capable captain, usually to be found at midfield or in the half-forward line. Of stocky build, he stood five feet nine and weighed over eleven stone. Though not a stylist, he was a great man to fight for a ball and a difficult one to dis-possess. Also of great strength and daring, he was a fine companion and a real Gael, beloved and respected by all who knew him.

The tall, sturdy Tom Sheehy was as good a keeper as ever stood in the gap. Tom, however, only played on the team for a few years as he left for America, where he died in 1897. The two other Sheehy brothers—Mick and Jim, were also useful hurlers and usually played at centre-field, where they formed an ideal partnership.

As full back the stocky Mick Conway was almost unpenetrable. Another outstanding figure was Charlie Cullinan, who was a useful forward. A man of small proportions he was a great fighter for a ball.

The veteran Paddy Fitzsimons was, perhaps, the outstanding ball player of the lot and one of the best full forwards in Limerick in his time. Possessing a drive with the force of a cannon and deadly accurate, he was the "Liberators" greatest score getter.

Tom Stack, too, was a splendid hurler. The mighty Tom was a tall sweeping giant, who sent long dropping balls straight to the opponents' goal, where his forwards were waiting to pounce on them. He was also a magnificent jumper.

OTHER MEMBERS.

The other members of this old-time side also deserve recalling: Jim Mangan, John Wall, Tom Frost, Jim Griffin, Paddy O'Brien, Dan Aherne, Paddy Enright, Jim O'Brien, Mike Farrell, Tom Farrell, Jim Green, Paddy Kennedy, Jack Ryan, Tom Kelly, Jim Fitzsimons and Jim Fitzgerald.

This fine Mount Pleasant team was in existence for about half a dozen years, a period during which they covered themselves with glory. Then, like many other great teams of their day the big break came. A few prominent players retired and others began to emigrate. One after another they went—to England, America and Australia and it is doubtful if any of them ever saw home again. And so passed from the Gaelic stage a fine team and a grand body of men that deserve to be remembered with other old pioneers of the G.A.A. in Limerick.

ANOTHER SPLENDID SUCCESS

Another splendid success for the "Liberators" came in the Newbridge tournament, when they annexed a fine cup by defeating Curraghchase Home Rulers. During this hectic game, Paddy Fitzsimons scored one of the most brilliant goals of his career. It was a lightning shot that came from a fine goalmouth clearance by Mick Conway, that Paddy O'Connell shot well downfield. Fitzsimons met the falling ball, and with the grand flick of the wrist so characteristic of his hurling, slammed home an unstoppable goal.

The boys from Cnoc Aoibhinn had another proud tournament victory when they journeyed to Lyons's Field, Rathkeale, and defeated the local side. Rathkeale William Abrahams had a sturdy team at this period but they were outclassed by a much stronger "Liberators" combination. On this occasion, Paddy Enright was called upon to guard the gap and the goalposts were entrusted to right back Paddy O'Connell, who, with every drive sent the ball almost the full length of the field. Paddy used a sally hurley he made himself and with which he could send the sliotar a great distance. By this victory another set of medals came to the Mount Pleasant side.

WENT UNDER TO SOUTH LIBERTIES.

The only defeat the Mount Pleasant lads suffered was in the Askaton Tournament when they encountered the South Liberties, who were then one of the leading clubs in the country. Needless to say, the city side had many advantages which the "Liberators" lacked. They had proper togs, a very flourishing club and much better training opportunities. The West men were skilled hurlers but lacked the combined work of the "Liberties." But the Lower Shannonsiders put up a stout fight and were not badly beaten.

The "Liberators" had many grand players, and foremost of them was undoubtedly "Big" Ned Dundon, who, as a defender, was often referred to as "like the side of a house." A magnificent back, he gave yeoman service to the team. Ned was the great burly left-back of the "Liberators," the hero of many a hard fought tussle. He stood six feet two, weighed around fifteen stone, and was built in proportion—a fine figure of a man, capable of holding his own—and a bit more—in the best of company.

Playing opposite him, in the right wing berth, was Paddy O'Connell, also a truly great back, whose command of falling balls and mighty length of puck were a delight to see. A tall, powerfully built man, standing over six feet and weighing around thirteen stone, Paddy was one of the best athletes in the county with running and jumping just second nature to him. Prominent in the athletic arena for nearly ten years he won a handsome collection of valuable prizes.

CLEARANCES OF GREAT LENGTH.

Ned Dundon's clearances, too, were of tremendous length and very few balls ever passed him. Ned used a specially shaped stick—a grafawn to be exact—which seemed to stop everything—as if it possessed some magnetic power that just attracted the sliotar to it. His style of pulling on oncoming balls was delightful, a kind of play seldom seen nowadays. Incidentally, many of the other Mount Pleasant defenders modelled their play on his. "Pull first when the time," was their motto. There is no doubting the superiority of Ned Dundon and Paddy O'Connell, Not