

No. 139—DENS GRIMES of Kilfinane

By SEAMUS O'CEALLAIGH

MUNSTER final day has come around once more, and with Limerick, as a team, again vitally interested in the outcome, it is only in the order of things that we should go back the years to meet the captain of the first team that brought a Munster and All-Ireland hurling crown to Sarsfield's County.

With hurling holding sway in Limerick for so long now it is difficult to realise that the early renown of the County was gained with the big ball, and that Limerick had two All-Ireland senior football titles to their credit before Kilfinane won the tenth Blue Riband hurling final, that for 1897, beating Kilkenny in the decider—the Nore-siders then also without a hurling title to their name.

And stranger still, Limerick contested their first Munster hurling final in 1891, and lost it on a replay to Kerry, who went on to win the All-Ireland title, beating Wexford in a remarkable final after extra time—the only occasion extra time was played in an All-Ireland final. And it was Kerry's only hurling triumph—the County afterwards giving most of its attention to football.

Limerick had lost two further Munster finals—to Cork, in 1893, and to Tipperary, in 1895, before the Kilfinane lads beat Cork, 4-9 to 1-6, in the 1897 decider.

A THRILLING FINAL.

The echoes of Limerick second great victory in the All-Ireland football arena were still ringing loudly, when Kilfinane, led by Denis Grimes, figured in one of the most thrilling of County senior hurling finals, and beat Cappamore by a single point, 4-9 to 4-8.

The names of that Kilfinane seventeen will be read with interest: Denis Grimes (captain), T. Ryan, P. Flynn, Maurice Flynn, T. Flynn, T. Casey, James ("Sean Og") Hanley, John Finn, Michael Finn, Patrick O'Brien, F. Dunworth, T. Brazill, M. Downes, J. Corkery, M. Regan, A. Carey, J. Connery.

Six weeks later the Kilfinane selection lined out representing Limerick, against Tulla, Clare, at Greenpark Racecourse, Limerick, and a great game resulted. Tulla were worthy foes, having beaten Tubberadora the previous year in a terrific tussle for the Croke Cup, and later won the trophy at Jones' Road, Dublin, by beating Crossstown (Wexford) 6-16 to 0-2.

A CAPTAIN'S PART.

Denis Grimes played a real captain's part in overcoming the Clare challenge, his good generalship and fine personal display being major factors in securing a narrow 2-5 to 2-3 victory.

The winning Limerickmen were: J. Reidy (goal), J. Cathrell, P. Noonan, J. Hourigan, P. Keating, P. Buskin, J. Flood, P. Flynn, M. Flynn, M. Finn, J. Hanley, F. Dunworth, P. O'Brien, M. Downes, T. Casey, T. Brazill, D. Grimes.

Limerick contested the Munster senior finals in both hurling and football the same day at Tipperary Town. In football, Commercials (All-Ireland champions) lost their title to Dunmanway (Cork), 0-5 to 0-3, after a splendid tussle.

The result was reversed in hurling, in which Kilfinane beat the famous Blackrock (Cork) side, 4-9 to 1-6. The Limerickmen were stronger, more athletic, possessed of greater dash and played with splendid combination, and there was no doubt that they richly deserved their victory.

EXCITING PERIOD.

"Sean Og" was mainly responsible for registering a goal and a point for Limerick early in the game, but Blackrock soon equalised and a very exciting period ensued. Tom Irwin saved the Cork fortress in gallant fashion from some hot raids, and by clever play, his side had soon another brace of points recorded. Limerick, however, were not to be denied, and from fine work by Grimes, Buskin, Finn and Flood, they sent in another goal and point before the interval, when the score stood: Limerick, 2-2, Cork, 1-3.

"Sean Og" led off immediately after the re-start, but Cork disputed every inch of the ground, and the play became exceedingly fast. From a free, Limerick put across another minor, but the real Shannonside effort came when Hanley shot a great goal from midfield that virtually decided the issue. Cork never recovered from that hammer blow and when Cathrell scored a goal, which he quickly followed up with a brace of points, the end was in sight. The long whistle found Limerick the hurling champions of Munster—the first occasion the Southern Crown came to Garryowen.

THE NEW CHAMPIONS.

The new champions were: Denis Grimes (captain), James Hanly, Michael Finn, John Finn, Pat O'Brien, Maurice Flynn, Frank Dunworth, Thomas Brazill, Michael Downes (Kilfinane), J. Reidy (goal), J. Cathrell (Ballingarry), P. Buskin (Croom), Jim Flood (Caherline), J. Hynes, P. Mulcahy, J. Condon, P. Butler (Cappamore).

Exactly a month later, the Kilfinane selection were back again at Tipperary Town, where they disposed Tulla of their Croke Cup, on the score, 4-6 to 2-5.

It is interesting to note at this stage that the Kilfinane team at this time were known as the Robert Emmets, and it was in honour of the great Irish patriot they adopted the colours of green and white—which have, ever since, remained the County colours.

Tipperary Town was again the venue for the Blue Riband decider—the date, November, 20th, 1898. A great crowd assembled there and were treated to a close and exciting game, with the issue in doubt to the end.

COUNTY-WIDE INTEREST AND ENTHUSIASM.

The success of the Limerickmen in winning Munster honours aroused County-wide interest and enthusiasm, a fact that almost led to their undoing in the All-Ireland final.

In those days, hurling boots were unknown, and most of the players appeared in their bare feet. For the All-Ireland final some Kilfinane and other enthusiasts decided to procure rubber shoes for the team. Those same shoes were almost the cause of losing the game.

The November evening of the final was dull and misty, with the ground slippery. The Kilfinane supporters were congratulating themselves on the fact that their men were well shod for this important engagement. But they were quickly disillusioned. No sooner had the game started when it was noticed they were falling frequently, whilst Kilkenny were "holding their feet" without any bother, and led at the interval, 2-4 to 1-0.

DISCARDED THEIR FOOTWEAR.

During the half-time break, Denis Grimes had a hurried consultation with three members of his team and some of the leading

supporters, and soon the spectators were amazed to see shoes flying in all directions. The Kilfinane men had discarded their footwear and they returned to the fray in bare feet.

The second half was not long in progress when the crowd saw a welcome change as far as Limerick were concerned. There was no falling now—they stood up manfully to every charge and soon Tullaroan's lead was being overtaken. Desperately the Leinstermen strove to maintain their position but all to no avail. There was no stopping those heroes in green and white and Limerick won their first hurling All-Ireland 3-4 to 2-4, with the same seventeen as had won Munster laurels from Cork 2 months earlier.

GREAT CELEBRATIONS.

There were great celebrations in the hillside town that night. Tar barrels blazed on the surrounding heights and every house in the town was illuminated when Denis Grimes and his hurling heroes arrived home to be accorded a rousing reception—the cheering and excitement of that night of nights continuing well into the wee small hours.

Denis Grimes saw other glory days later, and led the Kilfinane sides that drew with Blackrock at Mallow (0-4 each) in the Munster final of the Croke Cup—Kilfinane winning the replay at the same venue, 1-7 to 1-6 after an unforgettable hour's hurling.

The Croke Cup hurling final took place at Thurles on July 9th, 1899, the contestants being Limerick and Kilkenny, with Mr. Pat McGrath of Tipperary the referee.

DR. CROKE PRESENT.

There was a very large attendance, including His Grace, Most Rev. Dr. Croke, first Patron of the Association, to whom the players were presented before the contest by Mr. F. B. Dinneen. Limerick won in spectacular fashion, 3-8 to 1-4, their players being: Denis Grimes (captain), James Hanley, M. Finn, Patrick Flynn, M. Flynn, T. Casey, P. O'Brien, Jim Flood, T. Lloyd, D. Riordan, John Hynes, Patrick Mulcahy, John Condon, Patrick Butler, Patrick Buskin, T. Brazill and M. Downes.

Denis Grimes continued to lead his men for many a day, all the time, in the words of a great admirer, "a veritable invincible, through the fire of many battles."