

Open letters to 'Caman' and the Limerick Hurling Selectors

Forget about "ground pulling"

IT is now almost twenty-five years since Limerick won an All-Ireland senior hurling final. During that period many promising hurlers have donned the green jersey only to disappoint their legion of followers when they promised most.

The aftermath is inevitably the same—"Caman" in the "Leader" proceeds to "ambush" the unfortunate players for their failure and, Solomon-like, lays all the blame on the fact that they did not play what has come to be known in Limerick—"ground pulling." He then proceeds to hurling. He then proceeds to a selection committee the type of hurler, who, according to him, will be a world-beater and a panacea for all of Limerick's hurling ills.

"What we want," he says, "are good hard youngsters, who will pull on the leather and that on the ground." This has been his sickening refrain all down the years. Again he returns to it after the Wexford defeat.

"Fancy hurling cuts no ice in forward work. . . . What we need are men of the hard-hitting school who will keep the ball on the ground and match stroke for stroke with the toughest backs in the country."

This type of criticism is, to my mind, the root cause of all our failures down through the years.

Anyone who has made a critical analysis of hurling, as played by the All-Ireland winning counties, will very quickly come to the conclusion that hurling is a magnificent art of many skills.

The majority of the players of these winning combinations are highly skilled hurlers and are supremely equipped with many and varied strokes.

Just think of Tipp's Jimmy and John Doyle, Kilkenny's Eddie Kehr and Seamus Cleere, the Ruckards of Wexford, Christy Ring, and our own maestro, Mick Mackey, Paddy Ciochessy and Dick Stokes. All of these are, or were, past masters of lifting, handling and striking and of the art of solo running and of the art of scoring.

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It is tantamount to a wild pull "and may God direct it." Of course, I know that "Caman" and the Limerick mentors will reply that Limerick teams are wasting golden chances by fooling and fiddling trying to pick the ball instead of getting rid of it. Yes, indeed, the "ground puller" will mess around trying to pick a ball, but why does he? It is not because he has never been taught to pick, lifting or handling a ball in training. It would be interesting to know how many selectors are supplied to Limerick teams in their training spells. Unless a hurler is constantly tricking, fiddling, handling and playing around with a ball in training he cannot hope to be competent in lifting a ball in actual match play.

Most scores, particularly points, scored in a game are delivered from the hand. Limerick hurlers intuitively feel this during a match and try to execute a pick-up to score or clear, but, unfortunately, having been denied this "luxury" in training, they fall hopelessly and this results in the messing around with the ball.

NO SHORTAGE Limerick were never short of stylish and fully-equipped hurlers. The present team has plenty of talent and young players like Eamonn Cregan, Donal Flynn, Bernie Hartigan and P. J. Keane need only the right handling to come to the top. Let Cregan and our other stylish players play their own game; "Christians" allowed him to in colleges competitions and we know with what results; he wasn't allowed to play his own game in the All-Ireland minor final the previous year and we also know how he fell asunder.

I appeal to our hurling selectors, therefore, to let our players practise the pick-up essential art, supply each man with a couple of selectors, they needn't be new ones, old tennis balls would be ideal, then practice passing the selector to a teammate from the hand, this has been a clever Kilkenny innovation and is ideal for putting a better placed colleague in possession.

Above all, insist on every player doing a few lengths of the field at every training session soloing with both hands, right hand first and when he has mastered this then the left, ten minutes or so in a straight line up and down the field pulling and doubling on the ball without waiting, this will help to speed up their game.

Finally, have your practice match. Stop the game frequently to point out faults, particularly tactical errors in the backs and forwards. This would be a golden opportunity to discuss with a player what kind of stroke he should have executed. Should he have lifted the ball, particularly when he was a few yards away from his opponent, or should he have pulled first time. Above all, encourage our players to prove their game and develop a spirit of camaraderie.

somebody in charge who will have patience and offer encouragement to the players. I'm sure "Caman" and the Limerick selectors will be prepared to give the above ideas a trial. I can assure them that they worked in the early days in Wexford. I know, because I was an active worker in the emancipation of hurling.

SAOI IOMANAIOCHTA.

TO SPORTS EDITOR

Hurling selectors under fire —More practical suggestions

DEAR SIR—I wish to compliment you on your new G.A.A. page. The improvement in the lay-out, the special reporting of matches, the avoidance of duplication in reporting—all are welcome changes.

"Caman" is an obviously sincere G.A.A. man, an able writer, a wonderful G.A.A. historian and a fearless critic. He has served his county well in many spheres, not least by hitting hard in his columns when hard-hitting was required. But there are times when I feel dissatisfied with his column—as when he inadequately reports an important game or applies the bludgeon instead of the surgeon's knife in offering critical comment.

His reporting and comment on that very important match against Wexford in last Friday's paper is a case in point. There is disastrous changing of the winning team at half-time cost us the match. These are the people who have "robbed" players of self-confidence by hastily dropping and promoting completely new men to key positions in the vital League match against Tipperary earlier this year, putting forwards in the backs and backs in the forwards and promoting any old place. Note the fate of that promising midfielder, Eamonn Carey!

PUBLIC OPINION But if one of the able observers happened to be a Limerick Leader reporter, then the lessons learned would be passed on to the public in general—the thousands of interested Limerick people. In that way a well-informed public opinion would be created which would beneficially influence selectors and players subsequently. Alas, neither "Caman" nor any other Limerick reporter, as far as I know, was present at that game.

Where has been the intelligent coaching, individual and collective, the encouraging words in defeat, as well as in victory; the happy, friendly relationship between team and manager? The excessive gloom; the sour, disappointed faces which greet the team after defeat is a disgusting sight. I know one successful county player who said to his own club manager once: "I wish the county team got the kind of advice you give our club team, Father."

It is becoming very clear why Limerick needs, namely, a Paddy Leahy (Tipp), a Fr. Maher (Kilkenny) or a Fr. Mahon (Galway); some one person who knows his hurling, will take a keen, friendly interest in each member of the team, advising and encouraging him.

down Slaneyside for many years. They were patient in Wexford; they built up their game through many skills, primarily the pick, handle, look and deliver system, and who can deny that the displays of Wexford over the past fifteen years have been a source of rapture to all lovers of hurling?

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Christy Ring, star of the Gael-Linn, will be shown in the Savoy Cinema, Limerick, from Monday, November 16. Ring is one of the great stars referred to in "Observer's" open letter to the Limerick hurling selectors.

Bits in Brief

Knocknary looked well placed at the interval of last Sunday's South Limerick junior hurling final when they led Croom 5-1 to 2-4. A record crowd saw a great fight back by the Maigue side, who eventually emerged very worthy winners of their first South title in junior hurling, 7-8 to 6-3.

The move of John Howard to Croom, who also had the service from the Quilly brothers, Tom Lynch, Joe Carroll and Stephen Moloney. Keane, Hayes, Toomey and Rice were best for the losers.

Brureg had some consolation for their loss of the championship when they beat Camogue Rovers 10-11 to 3-6 in the South Limerick Junior Hurling Shield final.

South Liberties advanced to the final of the East Limerick junior hurling championship at Murrus last Sunday, where they defeated Doon by 0-12 to 1-5 after a hard-fought encounter. Tony O'Neill was toast of the winning side with a personal tally of eight points.

St. Patrick's had a comfortable win over Treaty-Sarsfields at Limerick Gaelic Grounds in the semi-final of the City Senior Football Cup competition.

East Limerick hurling fans have an attractive game on their plate at Caherconlish next Sunday, where South Liberties and Boher meet in the junior divisional final.

VITAL DISPUTED GOAL FOR GLIN

Quaid cousins bat gallantly but in vain

by DAN MULCAHY

GLIN, 4-1; CastleMahon, 1-4. SCORING with over half-time a Glin goal allowed owing to the position of the Glin 2-1, CastleMahon 1-1. Highlight of the game shortly after the half when the Quaid cousins wide open again with a mahon goal, winning scores level. The score from a hectic 40 minutes after Sean Finn had pounced on the net of the goalkeepers before Sean Doyle and Whelan cut the net.

Although admittedly the better of the two teams in the semi-final, the Shannonsiders had to fight every inch of the way and when the scores were level entering the last quarter it looked for a time as if the honours might well go to the Upper Teal parish. At this stage the CastleMahon men, with no less than six Quaid cousins on the field, fought with rare verve and determination and for a hectic spell of tension and excitement the scores were very much in the balance.

Indeed, it was anybody's game up to ten minutes or so from the end when Glin struggled through for a goal that was hotly disputed by their rivals. This score, which was followed by lengthy argument and interruption, was the end of the road so far as CastleMahon was concerned and the real climax for the final whistle when Glin added a further goal to their winning tally.

The teams were on level terms up to the controversial Glin score and during the preceding spell of exciting exchanges at both ends, CastleMahon lost at least a couple of good chances of taking the lead at a vital stage. However, lead at the general run of the play (Glin were the more finished combination and were fully deserving of their hard-earned win).

PLENTY OF THRILLS The game itself was an exceptionally good one, with plenty of thrills and spills for the big gathering of fans. Despite the close marking and fringements, play was generally in keeping with the traditional semi-final standard and there were quite a number of fine individual performances. Not the least of them was the first performance by veteran Sean Finn in the Glin net. Moir Meade was a tower of strength in the last line of the Shannonside defence, where he was ably assisted by Michael Adams and Dave O'Connell.

Jimmy Reidy and Pat J. Fitzgerald were always very much in the picture at midfield while in the attack the Glin scores came from Mick Dillane, Jimmy O'Connell and Tim Healy. Jim and Jack Quaid, former Limerick hurling stars, were the driving force behind the gallant CastleMahon effort. Their cousins, Donal, Tom, Dave and Oliver, in non-main roles, retained the unique family reputation. Dan Sheehan, although not in his best shooting form, contributed a big share to the CastleMahon effort, as did also Joe Lane, Tadgh Duane, Paddy Moloney and Frank Whelan.

Glin set the pace in the opening minutes and had three wides before Mick Dillane caught the CastleMahon defence off the mark for a goal. The opening score of the game.

After Jack and Tom Quaid had beaten off a couple of further determined Glin drives, the Deciders forced a series of free kicks, but the efforts were frustrated by Sean Finn in the Glin net. Eventually Paddy Moloney opened the CastleMahon account with a point and Dave Quaid followed up with a similar score. Then Jimmy O'Connell climaxed a determined Glin offensive with a rasping shot to the net in spite of a temporary clearance by Oliver Quaid. CastleMahon retallied with a point when Dick Murphy sent over the bar from a free, and Tim Healy promptly hit back for the winning goal.

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