

'ALL-IRELAND POST MORTEM: KILKENNY SHOW CHAMPS THE WAY

Limerick Flop After Bright Start

BY CORMAC LIDDY

LIMERICK, 1-13 (16); KILKENNY, 3-19 (288)

THIS blistering hiding by Kilkenny at Croke Park on Sunday will be talked about for years. Major errors by those on and off the field, added by strokes of misfortune and downright bad play, culminated in Limerick's most punishing reverse for years. For all concerned it would be best to forget the tragic day and move forward to what can only be better times to come.

To be over-critical just now would be all too easy. Today's side in recent

years have given hours of fantastic entertainment and value for money. To slam them as some are now doing would not be fair... the players themselves must be suffering enough because of the sickening twelve-points thrashing.

Let us not forget, either, that the players put in hours of dedicated preparation... running, jumping, strenuous press-ups, etc., and sacrificed hours of their time in an effort to bring further glory to themselves and the county.

Such glory has not come. Instead a deep gloom hangs over the county but out of sorrow can only come joy and to write off the present squad for good would be totally unfair. Limerick were thrashed... all know that. But matters could very well have been different had the luck which is so necessary for any team been with Limerick on Sunday.

On no occasion did Limerick get the breaks... why was the penalty from which Eddie Keher scored Kilkenny's second goal awarded? To me there was no foul.

Why was a penalty not given to Limerick when Matt Ruth was fouled close-in deep into the second half? Referee John Moloney, in fairness, probably played the advantage rule but

where is the advantage when a player is fouled and nothing comes of his effort?

Why was a goal disallowed after 23 minutes of the second half? There seemed nothing wrong with the score to me. These handful of happenings could have made a major difference to the outcome.

Let us not forget, too, that Noel Skehan made some brilliant saves in the Kilkenny goal and that Seamus Horgan tragically allowed Kilkenny have a soft goal in the 25th minute which put Kilkenny two points in front instead of a goal in arrears.

For all Limerick's badness the irony of the whole thing is that with that all-important even distribution of the luck that is part of every game the side could still have won.

Then they would be heroes all over again... instead of being over-criticised by those who had put too much faith in the outcome.

All the ominous signs which prompted me to express grave doubts about the prospects of victory became sad facts.

Fluent

That fluent start which brought four points before Kilkenny got a score set the stage for what all hoped would be another glorious afternoon for Limerick.

But such was not to be and inequities must be held for a considerable time as to what went wrong. Granted the side was outburled, out-run, out-manoeuvred and outclassed. But

Why, for instance, was Bernie Hartigan again taken off the field on final day when several others were much worse?

Why was Liam O'Donoghue switched so often when he was completely outburled? Jim Treacy? He was one of Limerick's few stars and throughout was on top of his game despite the efforts of some to blunt his skills.

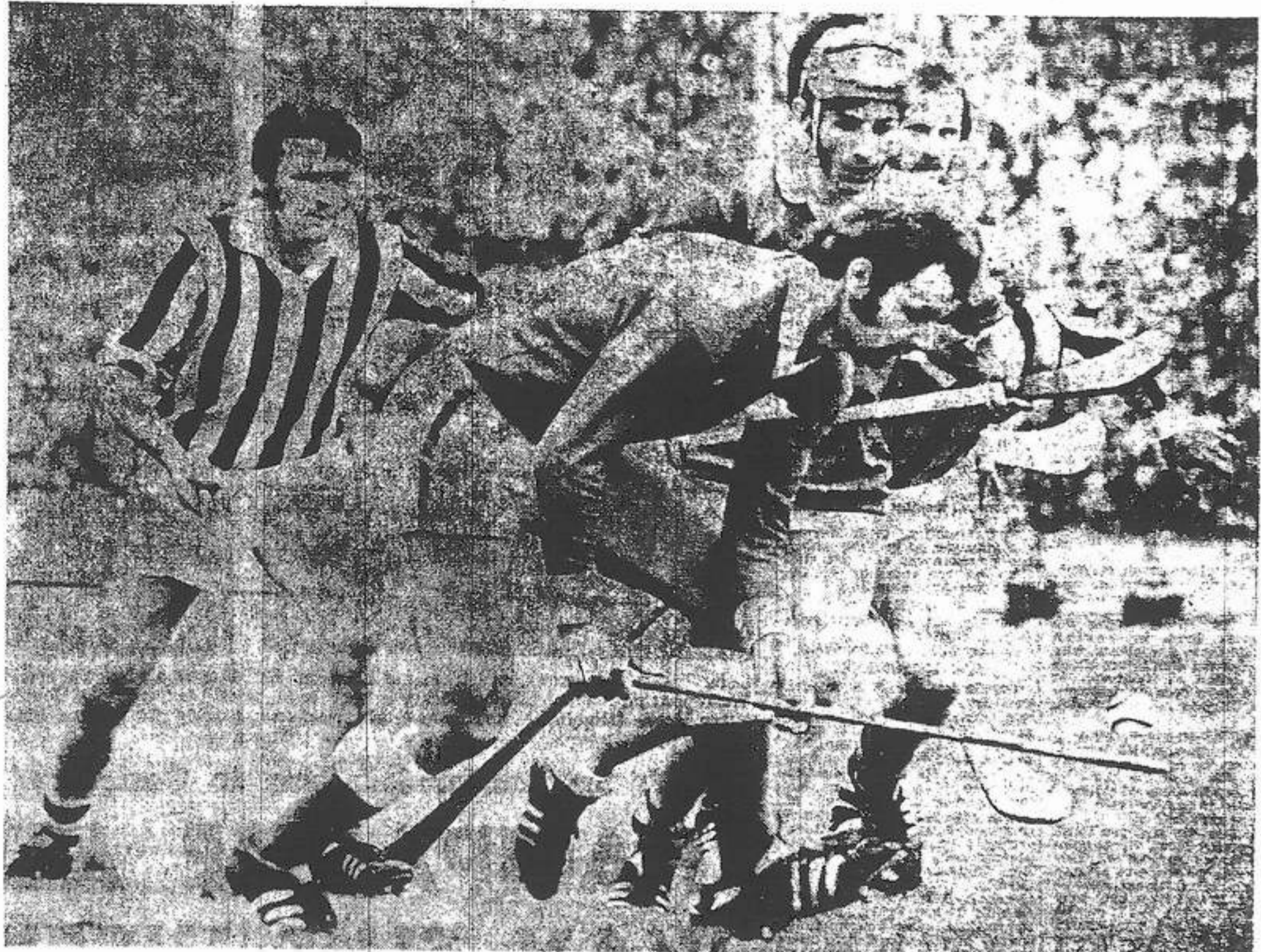
FINISHED

Players who finished the 80 minutes could very well have been replaced at a very early stage.

It was there for all to see from early on that Jim O'Brien was totally off form. A year ago O'Brien played as great a part as anybody else in Limerick's win but this time he will be first to admit he was never playing well.

Had Phil Bennis been brought in earlier he might have made a difference. Had Pat Kelly, too, been introduced earlier matters could have worked out differently.

To me Matt Ruth, for all his very commendable endeavours, was making no serious headway the string of changes which had to be made to try and bring ab-



A fine picture of Eamonn Rea in action during the All-Ireland final.

HOW AND WHEN THE SCORES CAME

WITH CHARLIE MULQUEEN

seconds - the ball is

seven minutes - Eamonn Grimes

three minutes - Limerick

seven minutes - Limerick

three minutes - Fitzpatrick's

seven minutes - Fine

nine minutes - Bennis

thirteen minutes - Now

fifteen minutes - Level

seventeen minutes - Seamus

twenty seven minutes -

keeper and trickles through his legs and into the net. Kilkenny now lead 3-3 to 1-7 and Limerick never head them again. Joe McKenna gets another lovely point before the interval and Bennis points a free, but Kilkenny are already on the road back to the top of the hurling tree, and three points by Keher (two from frees) and Brennan put them 3-7 to 1-9 in front at half time. Bennis missed a penalty for Limerick in the 37th minute as a time when a goal would surely have been a great morale booster for the sagging champions.

The second half

Two minutes - Keher point free.

Three minutes - Fitzpatrick's turn.

Seven minutes - Fine point for Limerick by Eamonn Grimes but with Kilkenny leading by 3-10 to 3-11, it's a goal Limerick need - and how!

Nine minutes - Bennis points a fifty yard free.

Thirteen minutes - Now there are only four points between them, but in the space of ninety seconds the Limerick defence is ripped open by majestic forward play that saw Purcell, Keher and Keher fire over points of supreme quality.

Fifteen minutes - Kilkenny are rampant now and Limerick have no answer. Purcell points another beauty - 3-14 to 1-12 and the writing is on the wall.

Keher (four, two from frees) and Liam O'Brien add further points for Kilkenny and all Limerick manage in reply is a point by Eamonn Rea. The rout is complete long before the end. The champions have fallen and are replaced by worthy incumbents of the throne in Kilkenny. How sweet their revenge for the defeat of 1973.



Liam O'Donoghue beats Jim Treacy in a race for possession.

out improvement only made matters worse. I felt sorry for the forward-line star Joe McKenna. He was having a "blinder" early on and picked off a glorious early point but then for the second year in a row, he was chopped and changed. He continued to have a top class game but I think his efforts could have brought far better results had he been allowed continue in the position in which he was doing best. The same applied to Liam O'Donoghue.

For Limerick to have chopped and changed their few

in-form players was a wrong tactic in the opinion of many. The little things that could have made all the difference were not happening for Limerick this time. That unfortunate penalty miss by Richie Bennis just before the interval was a bitter blow and there were others, too.

While early on the policy of Eamonn Cregan lobbing in frees and 70s looked a wise move, it might, in retrospect, have been wiser to try for points.

Pat Hartigan was once again the defensive star but he only shaded the top ranking from Eamonn Cregan who again had a superb game. It was certainly no fault of this pair that bitter gloom is now our lot.

Disaster

Midfield was a disaster for Limerick. To me Bernie Hartigan tried enthusiastically and wholeheartedly and contributed a share of good hurling. For he to be taken off was, I think, an unwise decision. Eamonn Grimes was only very rarely doing well and, indeed, he was never at the same high standard which he set himself last year.

For the second year in row Frankie Nolan had the satisfaction of scoring the first score in the final. The Patrickswell man fared reasonably but his club-mate Richie Bennis was never playing well... even his free had not the same degree of authority as previously.

Willie Moore was badly off form and could never halt Eddie Keher, and it was the Doon man's worst display for a long time, and of course, Jim O'Brien was as poor in the other corner.

Kilkenny this time were superb. They hit Limerick with a ferocious degree of skill to which there simply was no answer.

It was a reverse of a year ago when Limerick swamped Kilkenny... this time it was exactly the opposite.

How a four point lead early on was altered to a four goal defeat simply illustrates the punishment given to Limerick. Now is the time to move forward and make changes. The

present squad gave thousands many hours of fantastic hurling and what at one time seemed unbelievable entertainment.

It could not last forever. Thank you for all the wonderful hours of pleasure you gave... players, substitutes, selectors and officials.

Let us hope that this second major reverse in a few months will not split the ranks. The acceptance of defeat has always been the trademark of a good, solid county.

Progress can only be made... let us not forget that Limerick were, in fact, in an All-Ireland final. Only two teams out of very many get that far and it took some doing to do so. Credit must be given for that and, as stated, despite all the poor play on Sunday the result might well have been different.

Liam O'Donoghue on a few occasions seemed sure to get goals but brilliant saves thwarted his efforts.

But when all is said and done, it must be admitted that Kilkenny were fantastic. Few will ever forget the majesty of Pat Henderson - the tremendous calm and utter brilliance of scoring the first score in the final. The Patrickswell man fared reasonably but his club-mate Richie Bennis was never playing well... even his free had not the same degree of authority as previously.

Most of the Kilkenny were tremendous but, of course, Jim Treacy had a poor outing. Their captain, Nicky Orr, too, was again given a tough time of it by Eamonn Rea. Rea showed some brilliant touches early on and had been given more possession he could have altered the trend of the game.

Sean Foley, and Willie Moore, were both off-form. Tom Ryan, too, could not reproduce his best, although he did reasonably and might have been allowed to continue.

To sum up, it was a bitterly disappointing occasion and no doubt, "inquests" will be held into what happened for many a long day. But before getting too deep into the inquests it should be realised that Limerick were

well and truly trained. TEAMS, SCORERS: Kilkenny - E. Keher 1-11 (17 from frees), M. Brennan 1-2, P. Delaney 1-0, K. Purcell 0-2, P. Hartigan 0-1, M. Crotty 0-1, L. O'Brien 0-1 each.

Limerick - R. Bennis 0-3 (from frees), L. O'Donoghue 1-0, E. Rea 0-3, M. McKenna 0-2, F. Nolan, S. Grimes and M. Ruth 0-1 each.

Limerick - N. Skehan, F. Larkin, N. Orr (capt), J. Treacy, P. Lawlor, P. Henderson, T. McCormack, L. O'Brien, F. Cummins, M. Crotty, P. Delaney, B. Fitzpatrick, M. Brennan, K. Purcell, E. Keher.

Limerick - S. Horgan, W. Moore, P. Hartigan, J. O'Brien, T. Ryan, E. Cwekil, S. Foley (capt), B. Hartigan, E. Grimes, J. McKenna, R. Bennis, M. Ruth, L. O'Donoghue, E. Rea, F. Nolan, Subs: P. Bennis for Ryan, 46th minute, P. Kelly for B. Hartigan, 66th minute, P. Fitzmaurice for McKenna, in injured, 77th minute.

Referee: John Moloney (Tipperary). FIGURES OF THE GAME: Kilkenny: First half - 9 wides, 13 fouls, 1 seventy. Second half - 9 wides, 8 fouls, 1 seventy.

Limerick: First half - 7 wides, 11 fouls, 1 seventy. Second half - 10 wides, 12 fouls, 3 seventies. Attendance: 62,071. Last year 38,000.

Sporting memory

One of the most cherished memories I will always have of Sunday's All-Ireland final came at the Irish Sports Centre when Pat Hartigan, having given another outstanding display, hid his obvious disappointment and forced his way through the thousands of mobbing Kilkenny supporters to reach Pat Delaney just as he was about to go on to the Hogan Stand.

Hartigan warmly congratulated Delaney in what was, in the circumstances, a very sporting gesture.



Joe McKenna gets in his shot as Tom McCormack comes across to intercept.

THEY FOUGHT THE FAIR FIGHT

By CHARLIE MULQUEEN

WE FOUGHT a fair fight... it may be little consolation to state unreservedly that Limerick lost their All-Ireland title like true sportsmen at Croke Park on Sunday last. But just as Kilkenny accepted defeat in the right spirit twelve months ago, so, too, did Limerick this year and of this, at least, we can be proud. One must be a good loser even more than a good winner, and on both counts Limerick came out on top.

That said, one must then take a close, clinical look at the lessons of the All-Ireland final. The initial reaction, quite honestly, has to be that Kilkenny were in a different class for all but 65 minutes of a most enjoyable match. In retrospect, also, one sees ways in which Limerick could have done anything to save their title.

Likewise, however, one feels that more could have been done to avoid the second half rout. And as twelve months ago we praised those behind the scenes, so must we this time take them to task for making changes that hardly looked wise or necessary and for indecision when action was imperative.

It was apparent after twenty minutes, or even less, that Jim O'Brien, such a hero in '73 but a hurler obviously out of form all season, was in the worst of straits against Mick Brennan. But the team was allowed to suffer on in an unequal contest when all around him changes were being made like snuff at a wake.

One found it difficult to understand the reasoning that brought Liam O'Donoghue from top of the right to the half-forward line when he was having much the better of matters against the slow and ageing Jim Treacy. Joe McKenna, one of the few Limerick stars, was likewise moved from the No. 10 spot at a time when the only worthwhile attacks were coming from his promptings. Pat Henderson, admittedly, had to be curbed and he was for a time by the brilliant McKenna.

But just when the Shironeman had the Kilkenny star reasonably under control, Richie Bennis was restored to the "40" and Henderson was off on his bike again. Matt Ruth looked out of his depth... but he played out to the end; poor Bernie Hartigan was whipped out of the fray for the second successive year... surely many more should have gone before the great Old Christians servant... and one found it hard to understand the delay in introducing young Pat Kelly, who at least looked the part for the short duration of his stay.

RICH DIVIDENDS

Others will have different points to make. But one must face the facts and acknowledge that Kilkenny played with a speed, skill and determination that was markedly absent from Limerick, except for the opening quarter. They adapted a similar approach to that of Limerick in '73, and it paid the richest of dividends.

Hard as he tried, Willie Moore just couldn't con-

trol Eddie Keher, but many other corner backs would have fared no better against the inspired Rower Instiogue star. Keher was brilliant, so too was Kieran Purcell (although Pat Hartigan battled successfully and gamely all through) and Mick Brennan completed a devastating front line. Pat Delaney never mastered Eamonn Cregan, but his power was always evident, and midfielders Liam O'Brien and Frank Cummins recovered from a very poor start to dominate for long stretches.

Pat Henderson, of course, was supreme and on the day had no equal, except perhaps for goalkeeper Noel Skehan, who made some magnificent saves, notably from O'Donoghue and Ruth at vital stages in the second half when a goal just might have restored Limerick's flagging fortunes.

McKenna, Pat Hartigan, Cregan, and to a lesser extent, O'Donoghue, Rea and Nolan, came through the game with merit on the Limerick side. Others, notably O'Brien, Foley, Grimes and Bennis, so superb last year, disappointed considerably and never showed the style that made them keymen in the triumph of '73.

It was a gloomy game for Limerick; indeed the past nine months have had more than their share of gloom for the champion county. The crushing league final defeat was one set-back... another was the narrow and lucky win over Waterford... and de- quiting was the suggestion of internal strife, exaggerated no doubt, but with some shred of truth.

Now the real battle lies ahead... will we take it lying down or rise sad face it like men? That is the

test of the true champion, and Limerick can prove themselves by coming back in the league and setting themselves up for another almighty bid in 1975. I for one refuse to believe that the present squad has had it... there is talent galore, and hopefully the character as well, to put the disappointments of this year far behind.

THE LEAGUE GAME IN A MONTH'S TIME AGAINST KILKENNY AT THE GAELIC GROUNDS WILL TELL A TALE OR TWO... IT COULD BE THE START OF THE LONG ROAD BACK.

COLOUR

All-Ireland final day in Dublin has a mystique and colour not associated with any other sport. The hats, the rosettes, the singing, the cheering all play their parts in making it a marvellous occasion.

It has its bad moments, too... like the black marketeers flogging stand tickets at grossly inflated prices on the way to the ground... and some hotels, such as the much lauded Gresham in O'Connell St. refusing to open its bars before the match... what do they take G.A.A. fans for? Across the street in the Royal Dublin, supporters poured in from all over, and were perfectly behaved.

So, Limerick's bid to win their first ever two-in-a-row has failed and badly so, too. But this time let's not knock the players... we gloried in their achievements long enough. Let's now rally behind them and help to pick them off the ground.