



# OFFICIAL OPENING OF MACKEY STAND THIS SUNDAY

By SPORTS EDITOR, CORMAC LIDDY

THOUSANDS OF hurling enthusiasts from all quarters of the country will throng to Limerick on Sunday. Any meeting of Tipperary and Cork at senior level sparks off intense interest and when these two great hurling counties clash in a Munster final all the atmosphere of a great occasion is generated for those present.

But next Sunday's meeting also means a great deal to Limerick Gaels. It marks the opening of the new Mick Mackey stand and many of the thousands lucky enough to have a ticket will be paying tribute to a man they probably never saw play but have heard so much about this sporting legend that they can conjure in their minds an imaginary picture of this super-man of the late '30's and '40's when he electrified crowds all over the country with his dash, skill, courage, and strength.

I never saw Mick Mackey play. But from my earliest days I heard him spoken about in my home and as I entered my teens and was taken to the various Munster championship games the talk invariably centred round the "great days" of Mackey.

My father, Rory, had the distinction of being captain of the first ever Limerick team of which Mick Mackey was a member, the minor side of 1929 which lost to Waterford in the Munster championship in Dungarvan.

Though fate dictated that I attended a rugby orientated school I never lost my interest in hurling. Indeed I will always remember the trips to Cork, in particular, for championship games as a young boy.

Those were the days when a championship tie away from home was a "day out". Sandwiches, and cooked chickens, were prepared on the Saturday night and it was a case of 10.30 Mass at the Augustinians to link up with the other fellow travellers. That meeting used take place in Tom Mullane's in Roches Street and invariably it meant "stocking up" of supplies for the thirsty route ahead.

En route to the game a picnic would be enjoyed to ensure that on arrival at the ground that we played our part in the revelry and hanter that is part and parcel of the big occasion.

But I cannot remember a trip when the name Mick Mackey would not be brought into the conversation at one time or another.

In those happy days, too, every young boy demanded that he be "Mick Mackey" for the street puck abouts such was the fame of a man whom the vast majority of us had never seen play.

Many years later after I had become a journalist I was asked if I could interview Mick Mackey. It seemed a pretty tall order but flushed with the exuberance of youth I said I would make contact and see if Mick would agree.

To my amazement he readily agreed and I spent many a pleasant hour in his company at his home in Ardnacrusha. There he was friendliness personified as he recalled the good days and those when things had not quite gone Limerick's way.

Though he did not often do so Mick Mackey was a tremendous story teller. His remembrance of particular incidents that had turned a game in a particular direction astonished me.

It was, without question, the thrill of my young journalistic life to have had the pleasure of listening to Mick replay many of the great games in which he was always the central character. And though he gave and took hard knocks Mick Mackey cherished memories of many of those great battles.

One of my first memories of a Munster final at Limerick was when, as a fourteen year old, I was taken by my father to the final of 1955 in which Limerick met Clare.

It was said at the time that Clare considered themselves such certainties that in many parts of the county the victory bonfires had already been prepared.

On a gloriously sunny afternoon it is now history how Limerick went on a scoring spree that afternoon and shattered the dreams of the Claremen with one of the biggest upsets in the history of the competition.

And, of course, it did not just happen. For the Limerick trainer of the day was none other than Mick Mackey and he had expertly done his homework. Fast ground hurling was his instruction to his Limerick team who because of their great speed became known as "Mackey's Greyhounds".

As a fourteen year old it was not possible for me to meet the mighty Mackey on that occasion but I will always cherish memories of that great day in Limerick's history.

I last met Mick Mackey when he joined the welcoming party in 1973 when Limerick bridged the long gap when they again triumphed in the All-Ireland final. As ever Mick was overjoyed with that victory and he was big-hearted in his praise of those who had brought it about.

Nevertheless Mick, like many another, inwardly believed that the Limerick team of his era was the best of all time.

I think the greatest tribute that can be paid to Mick Mackey is that there are so many thousands like myself who never had the privilege of seeing him play. Yet for us, just as for those who followed his every move in every game up and down the country, his name lingers on.

There will never be another Mick Mackey. His likes will never be seen again. But at least his memory will be with us for many more decades thanks to the erection of this great stand in his memory.

It is a fitting tribute to the greatest of them all.

## MESSAGE FROM THE PRESIDENT G.A.A.



The late Seamus O'Ceallaigh, G.A.A. historian.



Michael McDonnell, asst secretary, Limerick Co Board.



Declan Moylan, treasurer, Limerick Co. Board.

Is ónóir agus pleisúir speisialta dom bheith anseo inniu i bPáirc na nGael, leis na h-áiscanna nua atá curtha ar fáil, a oscailt go hoifigiúil.

The Gaelic Athletic Association has over the last number of years made considerable and significant progress in improving its games and providing better facilities for players and spectators. Many club and county grounds around the country are now of the highest standard. Much of this development is essential in meeting acceptable requirements of players and spectators in the context of safety and comfort.

In the past, we have been criticised for not being innovative and for not improving facilities. Paradoxically we have in recent times been criticised for being over ambitious. This criticism has, however, been selective and has concentrated on the issue of ground capacity while to a great extent ignoring the broad programme of imaginative development across all levels of the Association.

The Limerick County Board and all concerned with the developments here in Gaelic Park are to be congratulated on a splendid achievement. Limerick has a proud record in the annals of the Association and the new stand is, I feel, appropriately named after the county's most revered son, the late Mick Mackey. It is also appropriate that the facilities here should be opened on the occasion of one of the great events in the calendar of the G.A.A., the Munster Hurling Final. Cork and Tipperary Munster finals are enshrined in the folklore of the Association and I am sure that to-day's game will match those epic encounters of the past.

Seán Ó Dubhlaíne, Uachtarán, Cumann I. áitcheilias Gael.

## A source of great joy for us . . .

ON BEHALF of Limerick County Board GAA I wish to thank the editor and management of the "Limerick Leader" on the production of this special feature to mark the official opening of the Mackey Stand. "The Leader" of course, produced similar publications in 1984 to mark the GAA Centenary and in 1986 to honour the first GAA Congress in Limerick, which added much to the respective occasions. The continued coverage by "Limerick Leader" of our games and other activities has been of great benefit and is much appreciated by the County Board.

July 17th is a really big day for Limerick, not only for the GAA but for the city and the region. It sees the return to Limerick of a Munster final between Cork and Tipperary after a long absence. It also has been designated as the occasion for the official opening of the Mackey Stand. This most attractive Munster final would in its own right ensure a "full house" in the Gaelic Grounds, but the opening of the stand will, especially for Limerick people, add immensely to the occasion.

It is a source of great joy for us to see the Mackey Stand and the other improvements at the Gaelic Grounds completed. This has been made possible through the efforts and support of countless people. Speaking it were our



Jim Hickey, chairman Limerick Co. Board.

development committee, under the able and dedicated leadership of Noel Drumgoole. Our monthly lottery has been the main source of funding and our organisers John Loftus and his office staff, all our agents and above all the individual members of the lottery, are deserving of the highest commendation.

The Munster Council GAA, through their financial assistance and advice, have been most helpful while the

assistance from GAA Central Council is also much appreciated. I must not forget the subscribers to our Loan Investment Scheme and the other fund-raising efforts in the early years of the campaign. The firms who have taken advertising space in the grounds and many business people and individuals who subscribed have all helped to reduce our bank indebtedness.

The finished job to be seen at the Gaelic Grounds could not have been achieved without the expertise of our consulting engineers, Michael Punch & Partners, and our main contractor, Tom Hayes & Co. Limerick Corporation, particularly the planning section, played a very important part while the opening of Shamrock Bridge has been a great boon in improving the accessibility of the Gaelic Grounds.

So many people have helped in completing all the necessary arrangements for Munster final day that it would be impossible for me to thank them. I would like to say a sincere "thank you" to all.

In conclusion I wish to extend a hearty "Cead Míle Fáilte" to all our visitors on July 17th, and hope that it will be a memorable and enjoyable occasion.

SEAMUS O'BRIEN, Chairman, Limerick Co. Board GAA.

### The Mackey Stand Development Committee

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# OFFICIAL OPENING OF MACKEY STAND THIS SUNDAY



Aerial view of the Mackey Stand.

## Gaelic Grounds—one of the leading provincial GAA grounds in the country

## A message from The Mayor, Cllr Paddy Madden

By NOEL W. DRUMGOOLE

ON SUNDAY next Limerick hosts the Munster Hurling Final between Cork and Tipperary. While the capacity of the grounds exceeds fifty thousand it has been decided to limit the numbers to fifty thousand on this occasion. Based on the demand for tickets it is evident that in excess of sixty thousand would be present if the stadium could accommodate that number. This clearly indicates the drawing power of the Munster final and the pity is that we do not have a stadium in Munster (or indeed nationally) that can cater for such an attendance. However, that is an issue which no doubt will have to be debated and resolved on a rational basis by the Munster counties which already have provided major stadia. There was a time when Limerick was the premier stadium in Munster, with better facilities than any other venue to cater for major games in the province. However, over the past few years Cork, Thurles and Ennis to a lesser extent, made tremendous progress in improving their facilities, while we in Limerick failed to move with the times. The end result was that Limerick found itself propping up the bottom of the table in Munster in the stadia rating. This was hard to accept — our pride was jolted and we set about restoring our Gaelic Grounds to its rightful place as one of the leading provincial GAA grounds in the country. The initial objective of the Development Committee set up by the county board was to examine and report on the development of Pairc na nGael. However, it did not require a report from a committee to highlight the fact that we had fallen far behind our neighbouring Munster counties in what we had to offer. Our needs were evident for all to see. The committee immediately formulated positive and specific proposals for short and long term development. The immediate need



was for a grandstand to replace the old Hogan Stand which had a capacity of only one thousand seats. Following a great deal of consideration it was decided to erect the new stand on the city side of the ground covering the entire length of the field. In other words the seated uncovered terracing at the Ennis Road side of the ground would be continued through the site of the old Hogan Stand to the end line of the field. The entire area would be roofed and all of the other facilities required in a modern stand would also be provided. The magnificent new stand now in place at the Gaelic Grounds has incorporated spacious dressing rooms with most modern showering units for players and referees; dining area for teams after games and training sessions; hospitality rooms and meeting rooms;

first aid room; television and radio rooms in the upper section of the stand and press facilities; covered dug-outs for substitutes and mentors during games and special viewing and toilets for the handicapped. The playing surface has also been extensively renovated and protective netting has been erected behind the goal areas to ensure that slingers and footballs are quickly retrieved to help speed up play and add to the enjoyment of the games. Floodlighting along the front fascia of the stand will allow for training of the teams during the winter months. A new electronic scoreboard has also been provided. All in all we now have a stadium worthy of a city and county with a great sporting tradition. But what about the financial aspects? To plan and provide a modern stadium is not difficult. The problem is in raising the necessary finance to pay for the development. The development committee set about raising funds over the past number of years with what might be termed moderate success. Various type draws and loan schemes were organised through the clubs in the county. Some clubs were excellent in the way they co-operated while others made little or no effort. We had always tried to impress on clubs that the provision of a modern stadium was not just the responsibility of a committee but of all clubs and supporters in Limerick. We also recognised that clubs throughout the county have over the past few years undertaken their own major developments and were faced with consequent financial problems. However, we endeavoured to impress on all concerned that if we were to have a stadium up to modern day standards then all clubs would have to accept the sacrifices and hard work which its provision entailed. There had been for many years an attitude that the Gaelic Grounds was not their responsibility. Perhaps justified in the past in that clubs were never asked to help financially or indeed in any other way. The accounts or affairs of the Gaelic Grounds were not discussed at county convention. We are pleased to say that in the recent past that attitude has changed and the response of clubs and supporters has

dramatically changed. That change is clearly evident in the magnificent response to our monthly lottery launched some two years ago. It is based on a subscription of £5 per month. The draw is motoring extremely well and though it necessitates an amount of hard work the effort is well worthwhile. The lottery has been the backbone of our fund raising over the past years and we thank all who have supported it so consistently. The developments now evident at the Gaelic Grounds would not have been possible but for that support. However, the task is not complete. We still need the continued support of all for some time if we are to be in a position to meet the repayments on the considerable bank debt. We also thank all those who supported our five year ticket scheme. We have no doubt that all participants will find that the scheme offers excellent value. Munster and Central Councils of the GAA have also contributed to the cost and we are hopeful that the State will help through a grant from the National Lottery funds. The cost of the development at the Gaelic Grounds will be in excess of £1½ million and it would be expected that the State would encourage and support voluntary sporting organisations to provide sporting facilities by making grants available. We have through our own efforts and from GAA grants raised over £700,000. We now have a stadium of which we can be justly proud but it will take the continued support of all over the next few years to meet our financial commitments. The value of a stadium which can attract over 50,000 to Limerick city for a major game is considerable not just to the GAA but also to the business community particularly the restaurant, hotel and licensed trade. The initial response to our appeal for funds from the business community has been poor. We hope that recognising the benefits they will respond more generously. A further incentive to all to support the project is the fact that the stand is named in memory of our most renowned hurler Mick Mackey. It provides an opportunity for all followers of Gaelic games to honour in a fitting manner a player who gave so much not alone to Limerick hurling but also to the game at national level. While the stand is named after Mick, it also serves as a reminder of the other great Limerick players of that era. Furthermore we must not forget the men of great vision and courage who back in the early thirties purchased the grounds and entered into personal financial commitments to ensure its further development. We owe a great debt to these men. So on Sunday next we celebrate the official opening of our new Mackey Stand. It is the culmination of many years of effort, sacrifices and hard work of a great many people. Once again our Gaelic Grounds takes its place as one of the leading venues in Munster. Our new stand has covered accommodation for over nine thousand patrons with sideline seating for seven thousand and terracing capacity in excess of thirty-five thousand. We will now with our fresh image, be a popular choice for competing counties and spectators alike. It is fitting that we are combining the playing of the Munster final with the official opening of the Mackey Stand. We now have a stadium worthy of our greatest hurler and of a county with a great sporting tradition.

I AM earnestly looking forward to attending Sunday's Munster final and the seeing at first hand the magnificent new stand which will fittingly honour one of Limerick's and indeed Ireland's greatest sporting heroes — Mick Mackey.



Limerick has always played a big part in the overall organisation and I am glad now to see so many new G.A.A. clubhouses and pitches with the highlight for 1988 undoubtedly the opening of the new stand. I hope that the improvements continue and that the G.A.A. in Limerick will continue to be a major force on and off the field.

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The playing surface has also been extensively renovated and protective netting has been erected behind the goal areas to ensure that slingers and footballs are quickly retrieved to help speed up play and add to the enjoyment of the games. Floodlighting along the front fascia of the stand will allow for training of the teams during the winter months. A new electronic scoreboard has also been provided. All in all we now have a stadium worthy of a city and county with a great sporting tradition. But what about the financial aspects? To plan and provide a modern stadium is not difficult. The problem is in raising the necessary finance to pay for the development. The development committee set about raising funds over the past number of years with what might be termed moderate success. Various type draws and loan schemes were organised through the clubs in the county. Some clubs were excellent in the way they co-operated while others made little or no effort. We had always tried to impress on clubs that the provision of a modern stadium was not just the responsibility of a committee but of all clubs and supporters in Limerick. We also recognised that clubs throughout the county have over the past few years undertaken their own major developments and were faced with consequent financial problems. However, we endeavoured to impress on all concerned that if we were to have a stadium up to modern day standards then all clubs would have to accept the sacrifices and hard work which its provision entailed. There had been for many years an attitude that the Gaelic Grounds was not their responsibility. Perhaps justified in the past in that clubs were never asked to help financially or indeed in any other way. The accounts or affairs of the Gaelic Grounds were not discussed at county convention. We are pleased to say that in the recent past that attitude has changed and the response of clubs and supporters has

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