

# Dream becom

By JOHN O'SHAUGHNESSY

Offaly ..... 3-16  
Limerick ..... 2-13

THE All-Ireland dream is over, shattered beyond belief at Croke Park on Sunday when the final five minutes took on nightmare proportions, as a revitalised Offaly staged the most remarkable recovery of modern times, to deflate a Limerick side that already had one hand on the trophy.

The Midlanders had won the all-so-psychological battle on Saturday afternoon when a story surfaced that Mike Galligan might be out. A chunk the armour, Cregan told his troops, and Limerick fans became despondent-even before they had set out.

In the fight proper, Limerick won 12 rounds, with their opponents having claimed the first at the start of each half, before delivering the knock out punch.

The 20,000 or so Limerick fans were sure they were about to share in a piece of history as the Munster champions were riding comfortably at 2-13 to 1-11.

A five points cushion, and not even the hint of danger in sight. Offaly seemed resigned to defeat.

It was only a matter of time, or so we thought. The masses gathered to get ready to run on to the pitch to salute their heroes.

But what followed was nothing short of unreal, the type to qualify for inclusion in Ripley's Believe It Or Not Blackpool emporium.

Real Roy of the Rovers stuff, if you like.

In the 65th minute, the ball was floated into the Limerick goalmouth. Referee Willie Barrett, who had a fine game, spotted an infringement by Joe O'Connor, on the edge of the square.

Johnny Dooley seemed in two minds, whether to go for a point or the real thing. Trainer Dermot O'Donovan, behind the goalmouth, indicated the best option was to go for the point.

Dooley picked his spot and, hey presto, the ball was in the back of the net. The revival was under way.

What was significant was, when that goal went in there was no rally cry from Limerick. The ball was delivered just as they were, and, within another 40 seconds, they were behind for only the second time.

Offaly calculated that they were now at their most vulnerable and the ease in which substitute Pat O'Connor ran on to a long delivery, without a challenge in sight, to rattle the net, forewarned of worse to follow.

Five points on the trot, in the space of about three minutes, from John Dooley, John Troy, Pat O'Connor and Billy Dooley (2), made a completely mockery of what had gone on earlier.

The transformation was

unbelievable.

From five behind to six in front, it was as complete a transformation as one could have demanded. It was the most memorable scoring burst ever at the national stadium.

It was the second Limerick collapse in the championship — Clare had gone so far behind in the provincial final that a two goal salvo, and a few points thrown-in, in the last few minutes was of little value to them.

The Limerick support withdrew from the front lines at Croke, to be replaced by the "faithful" on the other side. Offaly could not conceal their delight.

The glory went to Offaly — and the sympathy to Limerick.

It was of absolutely no consolation to Tom Ryan's men to be reminded that they figured in one of the really great All-Ireland senior hurling finals.

The prize they had fought so hard for had eluded them once again. Once again the Croke Park bogey had struck; this was the sixth successive defeat for Limerick hurling teams in finals, stretching back to 1974.

The new champions did not steal the honours—they were handed to them, gift wrapped. Given their almost hopeless position entering the final lap, it took a long time for victory to sink in.

As they went on that late scoring spree, their opponents were glued to the turf. It was as if they had spent every ounce of energy in their bodies. Had the game been played over 60 minutes, Limerick would have won; had it gone on for another five, Offaly's winning margin would have been wider.

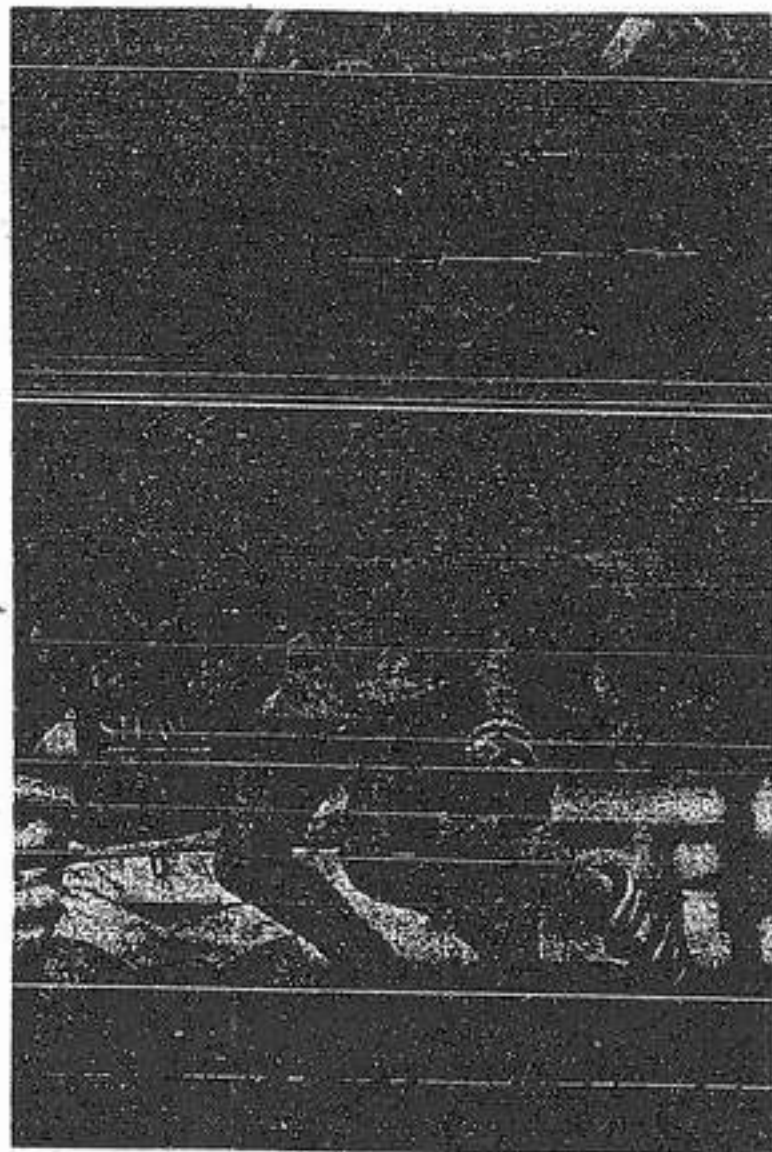
The tactical battle was won by Offaly. Here one must pay due credit to masterminds Eamonn Cregan and Dermot O'Donovan, who pulled the right strokes at a time when their charges were about to surrender. They also spotted frailties in the losers rearguard and, when the heat was on, the message was to send the ball in their direction.

Two crucial substitutions were made, and the team was altered to prepare for that never to be forgotten charge.

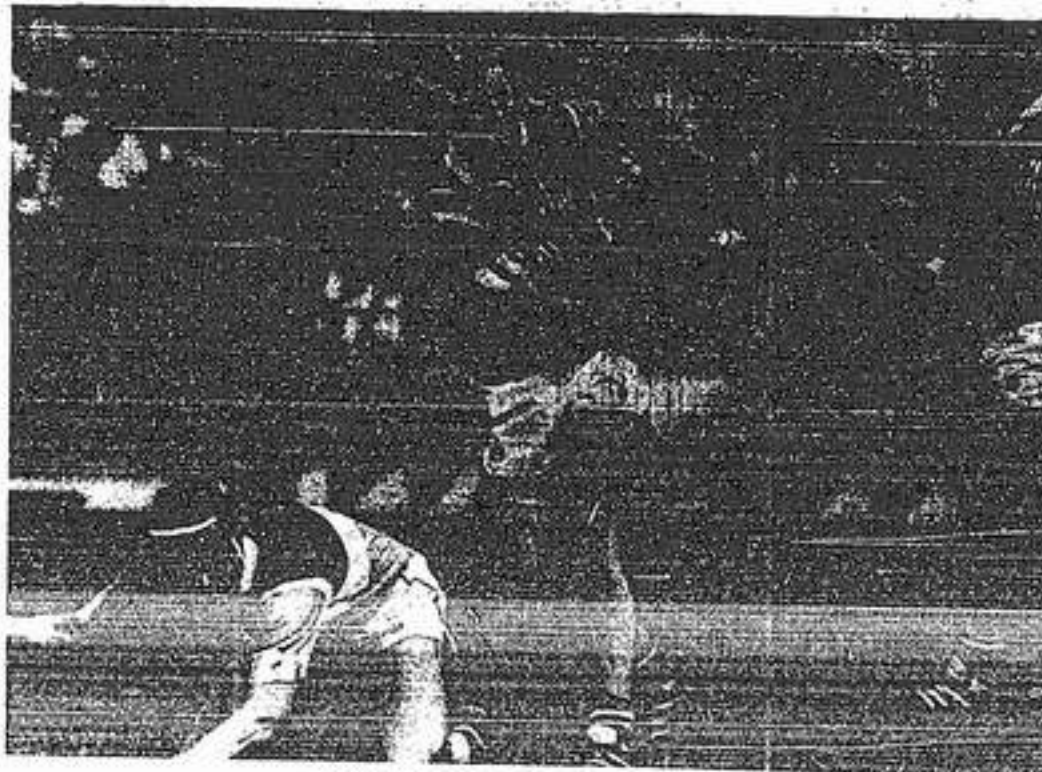
Always ahead on the scoreboard from the third minute, when Damien Quigley hit the first of his two goals, and, incidentally, his first for the county, Limerick were five points to the good at the half way stage. And it should have been even more.

There was a mini scare when John Dooley, Declan Pilkington, Dáithí Regan and Joe Dooley sent over four on the trot, in a six minute spell. But Limerick, who had failed to find their range for 12 minutes, until Kirby brought relief with a pointed free, pulled away again. In their second positional change of the afternoon, the selectors sent Claran Carey to centre back, moving Ger Hegarty to midfield, and that restored more balance.

They were still cruising after 64 minutes, when Kirby delivered another



High jumps as Mike Houlahan jostles for possession.



Gary Kirby attempts to set up an attack.

free. Seventeen wides seemed just a mere statistic, as eyes were directed to the podium.

What happened afterwards defies logic.

Defeat was a terrible disappointment to Limerick. There they were so close to ending 21 barren years, only to see it snatched from them.

They had entertained thoughts of victory for 65 minutes; Offaly, on the other hand, had that feeling for just five minutes. Sport can indeed be cruel. That said, it took a team of quality to come back from the dead.

Serious analysis of this final must lead to the conclusion that Limerick held the upper hand for so long with a performance that never really matched up to their previous wins.

A glance at match statistics shows that just two members of the forward divisions scored, a situation which was slightly improved upon when substitute Leo O'Connor found his range.

Earlier heroes Mike Galligan and Frank Carroll found it difficult to get breathing space from their opposite numbers. Neither was captain Gary Kirby his usual influential self. Kevin Martin, Brian Whelehan and Hubert Rigney were under instructions to shadow them. Space was limited and under such close scrutiny, there was no time to manufacture openings for others. In other words, their reputations had preceded them.

Claran Carey put in a lot of hard running in midfield, but was not a key figure. Ger Hegarty, so impressive in the first half, lost his way afterwards.

Limerick's strength and power play carried them over quite a few awkward situations, but it was at a cost. They expended so much energy that when it came to

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the final crunch, legs had given way.

Facing into the strong breeze in the second half, they were unable to turn defence into attack, and that put extra pressure on the men behind.

Offaly, with more variation in their play, had a few aces in hand, and their first time crisp striking was not matched.

There were times when the Limerick rearguard failed to either get or hold possession, and, when they decided to run with the ball, found themselves in alleyways.

Damien Quigley, first half hero, hardly saw the ball, and Pat Heffernan was also starved of service.

Limerick, whose pre-match preparation had been so thorough, sent out the wrong signals on Saturday when it was disclosed that Mike Galligan was a doubtful starter. Offaly had one up on them.

In fact, Offaly looked more relaxed when they took the field at the start. A few Dublin based journalists detected from the stands that Limerick were a little uptight.

What must annoy is, that the Midlanders won the title without scaling the heights of previous matches. Limerick, even at a lower key that previously, were for so long superior to them. Full-back Kevin Kinahan was uncertain and Shane McGuckin could never cope with Damien Quigley. Those in front were left to carry the can.

McGuckin was called ashore, and the best tribute that can be paid to the Na Píarsaigh man was, that he had three markers over the 70 minutes. He also had the distinction of ending as top scorer.

Advantage was to Limerick but carelessness led to a series of wides, with Kirby, Carroll and Hegarty hurrying the parting shots.

Offaly, with less play, kept hanging in, in the knowledge that there were shortcomings on the other side. Playing into the elements, they were level at 1-4 each in 20 minutes, and though they managed just one more point to the break, did not see a six points deficit as unmanageable.

They had, after all, held danger men Carroll and Galligan in vice-like grip and, what they had failed to do with the wind behind them, were unlikely to rectify later.

Mike Houlahan, who worked like a terrier in midfield, Ger Hegarty behind him, and wing back Dave Clarke, must have despaired as chances were lost.

Also in that first half, there was never much danger to the full-back line of McDonagh, Mike Nash and O'Connor, who carried their good work well into the second period.

There was often a hint or two from Offaly that they were just waiting for the opportunity to put it all together. Whelehan and Martin were doing all that was required of them at half-back, and Johnny Pilkington was a menace to Limerick in midfield.

Offaly, lively but ineffective up front, waited a long

time for their scores to flow but once the Dooley trio snapped into gear, did more damage inside 10 minutes than in the previous 60.

Both sides had their flaws, but Offaly hid theirs somewhat better.

It was, overall, a marvellous contest to watch between two very sporting teams.

Mike Houlahan gave Limerick the lead with a point from the half way line inside 50 seconds.

Two minutes later and Offaly were in front when, after a Johnny Dooley penalty had been blocked, his brother Joe was in like a flash to hit the net.

Kirby added another point, and there was even a more positive response from Limerick when Damien Quigley went off on a solo, and hit a peach of a goal.

After 15 minutes, it was 1-4 to 1-2. Billy Dooley and John Pilkington restored equality.

Galligan, and Ryan switched positions, Limerick were showing more authority and looked on the way when Carey dropped the ball into the goalmouth, and Quigley, with a clever flick, beat Jim Troy. It was now 2-6 to 1-4, and by the half-way stage, that was extended to 2-8 to 1-5. Offaly had not been particularly impressive.

It was important for Limerick that they should score first in the second half to consolidate their position. They didn't, it was stalemate for five minutes, and then the warning signals were out, after four on the trot from Offaly left it 2-8 to 1-9.

Houlahan and Hegarty knew it was time to react.

They saw to it that Limerick recharged their batteries. In 47 minutes, Kirby eased the tension, and Hegarty set up the wily Quigley to add further credence to their challenge. Now it was Offaly's turn to look suspect, and their fans showed concern.

When Kirby made it 2-11 to 1-9 in 50 minutes, it looked as if they had weathered the storm.

O'Connor came in for Galligan, hit a beauty from the touchline and Limerick were sailing—or so we thought.

It was a long journey home afterwards.

Limerick: Joe Quaid; Stephen McDonagh, Mike Nash, Joe O'Connor, Dave Clarke, Ger Hegarty, Declan Nash, Claran Carey 0-2, Mike Houlahan 0-1, Frankie Carroll, Gary Kirby 0-6, Mike Galligan, T.J. Ryan, Pat Heffernan, Damien Quigley 2-3, Sub. Leo O'Connor 0-1, for Galligan.

Offaly: Jim Troy; Shane McGuckin, Kevin Kinahan, Martin Hanamy, Brian Whelehan, Hubert Rigney, Kevin Martin, Johnny Pilkington 0-1, Dáithí Regan 0-1; Johnny Dooley 1-3, John Troy 0-1, Joe Dooley 1-3, Billy Dooley 0-5, Brendan Kelly, Declan Pilkington 0-1. Subs: J. Errity for McGuckin, P. O'Connor 1-0 for Joe Dooley, M. Daiguan 0-1 for Regan.

Referee: W. Barrett (Tipperary).

The attendance was 54,300.



Leo O'Connor off on a run.

## Homecoming for hurlers

By JOHN O'SHAUGHNESSY

UPWARDS of 10,000 people are expected to line the streets of the city this Monday evening to welcome home the defeated Limerick senior hurling team.

Special arrangements have been put into place, following consultations between the Limerick County GAA Board, the Garda and officers of Limerick Corporation.

The O'Connell Street, Patrick Street and Merchant's Quay areas will be closed to vehicular traffic from 6.

In the interest of safety, the public are asked to cooperate with Garda and civil defence stewards, who will be on duty at all strategic points.

The special train carrying players, wives and girlfriends, as well as members of the county board, will arrive at Colbert Station at 7.

The public will not be allowed inside the main entrance at the station.

The plan is that the official party will depart Colbert station at approx. 8, and travel via Edward Street to Punches Cross, where they will proceed via O'Connell Avenue to O'Connell Monument, to be met by the CBS Band.

They will then parade down O'Connell Street to the civic offices at Merchant's Quay, via Matthew Bridge, turning into Nicholas Street.

The party is due at the civic offices at around 9.

The Mayor, Council Dick Sadler, will preside, and the team and officials will be addressed by the chairman of the county board, Gerry Bennis, chairman of the county council, Eddie Creighton, team manager Tom Ryan, captain, Gary Kirby, and chairman of the homecoming committee, John Naughton.

Motorists are warned that traffic will be seriously disrupted in the city centre, disrupted in the city centre, disrupted in the city centre, disrupted in the city centre.

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In particular, the following points should be noted:

1-No traffic/parking allowed in Merchant's Quay after 6.

2-No parking allowed in O'Connell Street, Patrick Street, from Malloy Street lights to Matthew Bridge.

3-Buses with players will travel along O'Connell Street against the one-way system, with no traffic in O'Connell Street after 6.30.

4-Traffic entering the city from west Limerick and intending going towards Dublin, should detour via Mangret, Fr. Russell Road, Ballinacra, Childer's Road.

5-Heavy traffic from Dublin towards Shannon, are advised to turn left at the Parkway, along the Childer's Road and onto the Dock Road, via Fr. Russell Road.

6-Heavy traffic from Shannon going towards Tipperary/Dublin, is advised to detour at Coonagh roundabout, in the direction of Raheen and onto the Childer's Road, via Ballinacra.

7-Traffic from the Castlefort area will not be

allowed into the city, further than Balls bridge, where it will be diverted.

8-Mary Street/Nicholas Street will be kept clear at all times.

9-All traffic entering the City from Patrickswell will not be allowed enter the city beyond Punches Cross.

10-Traffic entering the city from Corbally will have to divert at Mary Street lights.

11-Liddy Street/Arthur's Quay closed to traffic from 6.30.

12-Motorists are strongly advised not to park in O'Connell Street/Merchant's Quay after 6. Cars parked will be towed away.

A courtesy car, courtesy of Leonard's Garage, will cover the route in advance of the official party to advise on the precise time of arrival at various points.

The MC at the civic offices will be Donal Fitzgibbon.

Music will be provided at Merchant's Quay, to the Johnny Hammond Sound, from 7.30.

Members of the Order of Malta and St. John's Ambulance Brigade will also be on duty.