

News

Limerick hurling brought to book

■ Controversial work blows the lid on the drinking, politics and propaganda that has cost Limerick hurling

Aine Fitzgerald

QUESTIONS about almost every Limerick hurling issue over the past 70 years, including the drinking culture, politics and propaganda, are posed in Henry Martin's new book on Limerick hurling.

Unlimited Heartbreak: The Inside Story of Limerick Hurling, features over 100 interviews from high profile names in Limerick hurling, including Richie Bennis, Tom Ryan and Cian Carey.

"Any Limerick hurling fan who claims to be a genuine hurling fan will want this book," the Galbally teacher and author told the Limerick Leader this week.

"I'm not looking for any plaudits. There would be no book without the contributions of these people.

These people are key," he continued.

With the book only hitting shelves this week, Mr Martin agrees that it is far too early to get to gauge how controversial the book will be. So far, he says, the feedback has been positive.

"Stephen McDonagh rang me on Sunday morning to say that he couldn't get to bed on Saturday night. Frankie Carroll is also pleased with it and Tom Ryan is highly impressed," he said.

The 400-page book opens with the words of Micheál O'Hehir on All-Ireland hurling final day in 1973.

There is talk of Limerick players being carried shoulder high, with O'Hehir telling listeners that "if Limerick men had an extra pair of shoulders they'd put Richie Bennis up there

on top and just in under him they'd put Eamonn Cregan".

Both men went on to manage the Limerick senior hurling team and are key figures in the book right up to the present day controversies.

Eamonn Grimes was the captain of the team on Sunday, September 1973. In his acceptance speech, he thanked "each and everyone" who helped bring back the McCarthy Cup to Limerick for the first time in 33 years. Later in the book he cites JP McManus and Declan Moylan among influential people in the 1973 campaign who helped bring about the success, providing meals and starting a fund for the team. Pat Hartigan goes on to explain how his fellow South Liberties club man

Mr McManus found his way through the dressing room window that day.

Fast forward to the 1994 All-Ireland. A crushing defeat at the hands of Offaly to this day leaves deep scar tissue.

In the book, Richie Bennis, never shy about leaving the dug-out when he was Limerick manager, feels Tom Ryan should have done likewise. Mr Ryan, however, rejects any such criticism.

"We f***ed away that All-Ireland ourselves. I know what they are saying about Croke Park that day: they are saying I didn't get up out of the dug-out and all that. I have no comment on that talk, it isn't even worthy of a comment. It shows the thinking of supporters and it shows the showmanship that goes on

among other managers on the sidelines," says Mr Ryan in the book.

Later Eamonn Cregan, who managed Offaly to that All-Ireland victory in 1994 against Limerick, took over the management role of the senior team in the end of 1997.

"When I took charge of that team I found them ill-disciplined," he says. "Some of them, though not all, were a law unto themselves because they had been successful. They appeared to be able to get away with things that I didn't accept, that perhaps Tom was prepared to accept. Then, perhaps Tom didn't accept them and they were just testing me," he says before adding that it was time to blood new players.

While in his response

Tom Ryan points out that he gets on fine with Mr Cregan today and got on fine with Mr Cregan then, he says: "I would say he dismantled the best team in the country. There was plenty of mileage in them. First of all, Cregan couldn't manage the players, and as I have often said, they weren't easy players to manage. Then when he wasn't able to manage them, he dropped them."

While many give their accounts for the first time on various aspects of the inter-county scene, including the victories and the defeats, the controversies and the rows, there are also some notable absences from the book - people who didn't wish to give their account.

Among them are former county board secretary

Jimmy Hartigan and former county board chairman Pat Fitzgerald.

According to Mr Martin, when he approached the former secretary to see if he would be interested in being interviewed, Mr Hartigan said: "If I'm interested I will contact you." He never did.

Likewise Pat Fitzgerald, according to Mr Martin, also declined to be interviewed, saying that it would not be appropriate in his current position as secretary of the Munster Council.

Unlimited Heartbreak: The Inside Story of Limerick Hurling, published by The Collins Press, is available from bookstores at €19.95. The book launch takes place on Saturday, October 10, at the Cú Chulainn Bar, Patrickswell



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