

## GAA LIMERICK SHC FINAL

# Na Piarsaigh deliver on their biggest day of all



**Jerome O'Connell**  
In the Gaelic Grounds

Na Piarsaigh	2-18
Ahane	0-13

"THE famine is over - let the feast commence" said an elated Na Piarsaigh captain Kieran Bermingham as he lifted the Daly Cup for the first time in the club's history.

And, the club from the Caherdavin area on the north side of Limerick city were worthy winners of this final against an Ahane side that were chasing a 20th title on the summit of the Limerick SHC roll of honour.

"The boys of 2009 are the men of 2011", said Bermingham in a hugely emotional speech recalling how they lost their only previous final appearance by all of 17-points to Adare.

But this time round there was no stopping Na Piarsaigh as they displayed every ounce of the maturity they have earned over the past three seasons under the stewardship of manager Sean Stack.

There were times in this final of the Limerick's Live 95FM sponsored championship that the men in Light Blue could have faltered but never did they demonstrate any nerves or sense of panic.

Overall it wasn't a final of classic propositions, but rather an efficient more than emphatic display from Na Piarsaigh.

But still all the heroes were in blue, led by man of the match Shane Dowling, who finished with 1-10. While the freetaker was ultra accurate from placed balls he also notched three superb points from play and was an amount of primary possession.

He was helped along the way by Pat Gleeson, James O'Brien, Kieran Bermingham, David Breen and Kevin Downes.

It was Ahane that settled the quicker with John Meskell (free) and Niall Moran firing over points inside the opening four minutes.

But bit by bit, Na Piarsaigh found their feet and Ahane were to go over 15-minutes without a score after Moran's effort.

By then they were to trail 1-6 to 0-2.

As he had done in the semi-final, Niall Moran tried for a goal from a 21-metre free in the 6th minute and when the effort was saved by a combination of Brian Hartnett and Padraig Kennedy, it appeared to bring Na Piarsaigh to life.

Pat Gleeson and a Dowling free had already levelled the game but then David Breen pointed before their first goal arrived.

And, it was a killer for Ahane - David Breen delivered long into the goalmouth and there appeared no trouble when Tadgh Flynn gathered. But he delayed his clearance and Kevin Downes managed to flick the sliothar to the empty net as Flynn looked to strike down field.

Dowling from play and from a free followed up and the lead was seven points with just 12-minutes played.

Ahane weren't helped by inaccuracy in front of goal and already their tally was four and by the game's end it would reach 14, compared to four for the winners.

Another missed opportunity came in the 19th minute when Niall Moran's penalty was diverted over the bar.

After Dan Morrissey was fouled, Na Piarsaigh called both corner forwards, Kevin Ryan and Shane Dowling onto the goal-line along with Kennedy and it was Ryan that stood firm behind Moran's drive.

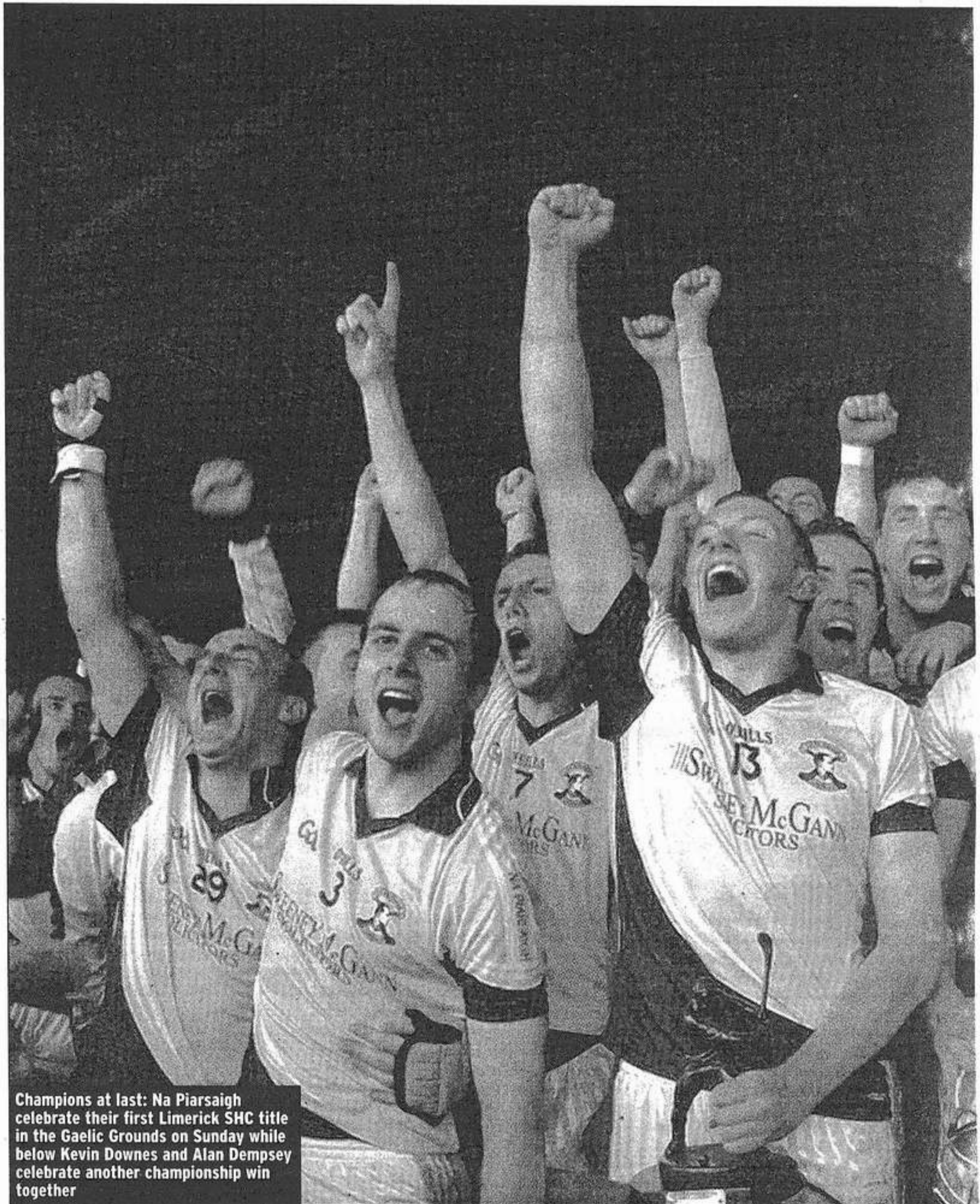
Brothers Ollie and Niall Moran did find the range from play in quick succession, but still two goals separated the teams with five minutes to the break.

Than Richard Ryan saw his goal effort crack off the upright and down the field when Na Piarsaigh and two Dowling frees stretched the lead again.

Crucially before the half time whistle, Ahane were dealt two blows when full back Darragh Madden and midfielder, John Meskell were both forced off injured.

Just eight seconds after the restart a Fergus Ahern point looked to kick-start the fight back but Na Piarsaigh were not for wilting and Downes, Dowling (free) and Adrain Breen fired over for a 1-14 to 0-8 lead with just seven minutes of the second period played.

Then came an Ahane rally with two Niall Moran frees and points from



Champions at last: Na Piarsaigh celebrate their first Limerick SHC title in the Gaelic Grounds on Sunday while below Kevin Downes and Alan Dempsey celebrate another championship win together

Dan Morrissey and Sean Madden.

But up the field went Na Piarsaigh and when Cathal O'Reilly gave away a penalty Dowling made no mistake to drive to the net for a 2-14 to 0-12 lead with 12-minutes to play.

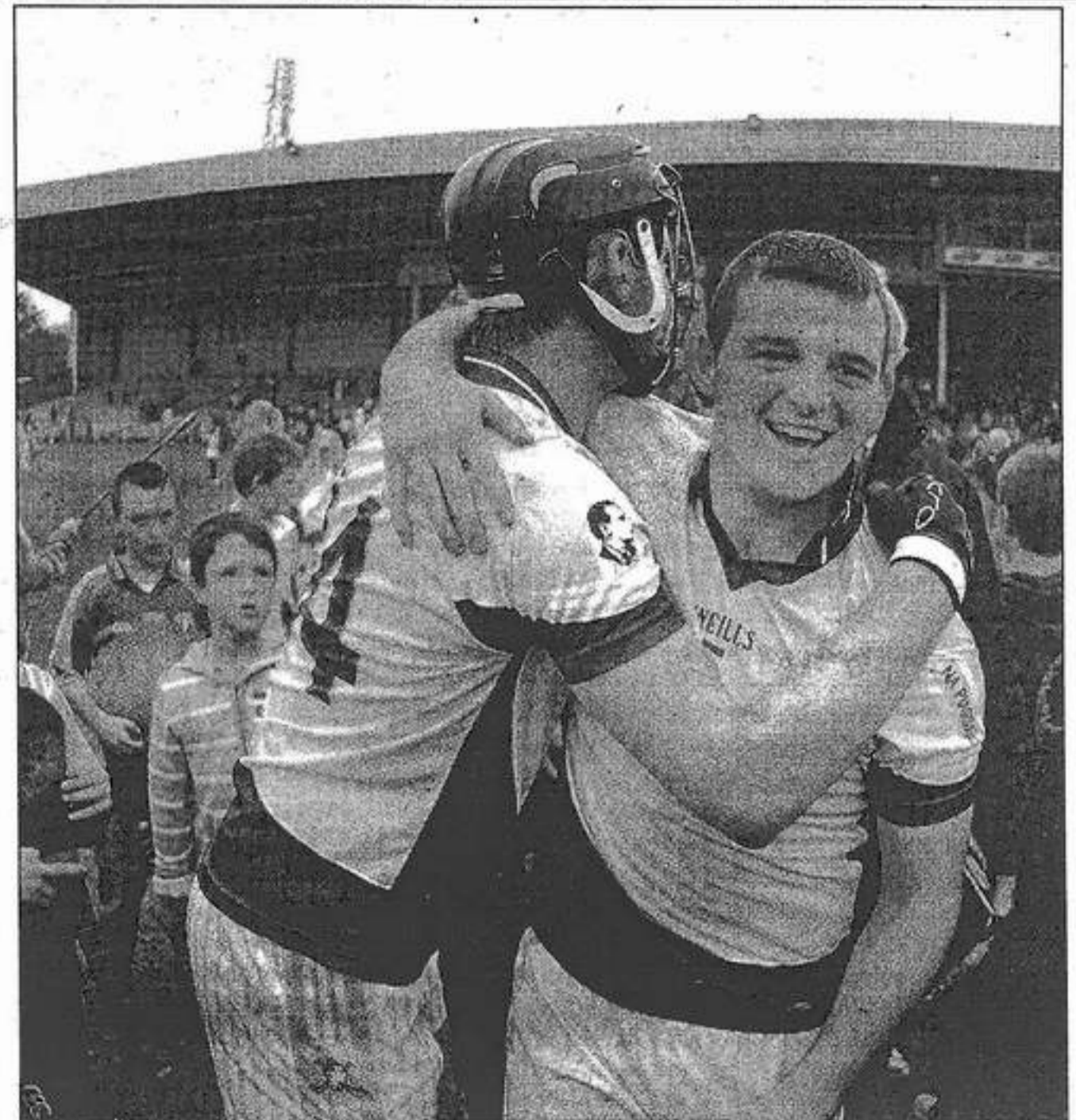
Paul O'Connor hit back with the new champions finished with four successive scores from Adrian Breen, Shane O'Neill and two more Dowling frees.

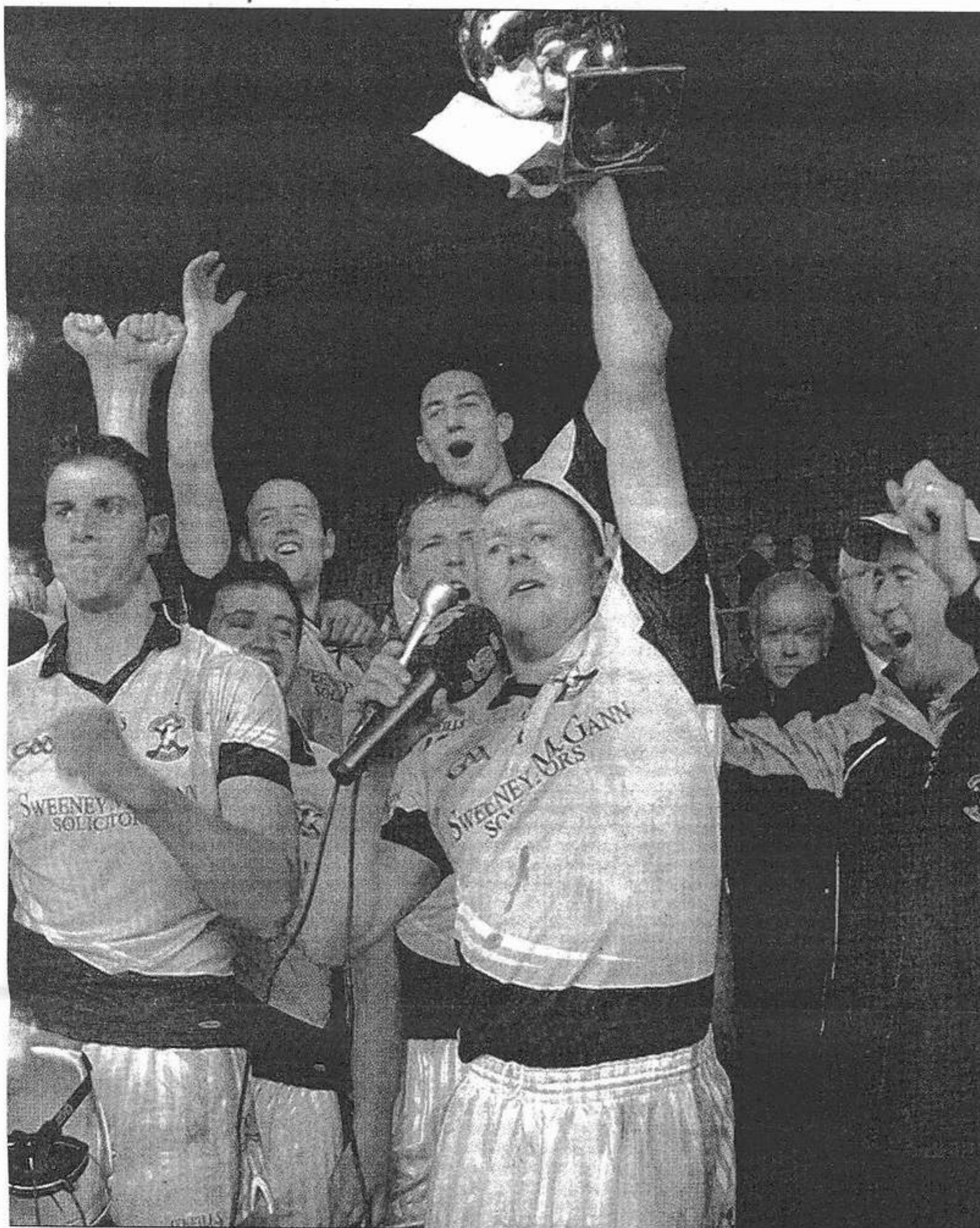
**SCORERS - Na Piarsaigh:** Shane Dowling 1-10 (1-Open, 0-7-frees), Kevin Downes 1-1, Pat Gleeson, David Breen, A. O'Brien, Brian Hartnett, Cathal King, Pat Gleeson; Robert Sheehan, David Breen, Shane O'Neill; Shane Dowling, Kevin Downes, Kevin Ryan. Subs: Adrian Breen for Robert Sheehan (4-1), David Lynch for Alan Dempsey (4mins), Damien Quigley for Kevin Ryan (59mins).

**NA PIARSAIGH -** Padraig Kennedy; Aidan Hennessy, Kieran Breen, Kieran Bermingham; Alan Dempsey, James O'Brien, Brian Hartnett; Cathal King, Pat Gleeson; Robert Sheehan, David Breen, Shane O'Neill; Shane Dowling, Kevin Downes, Kevin Ryan. Subs: Adrian Breen for Robert Sheehan (4-1), David Lynch for Alan Dempsey (4mins), Damien Quigley for Kevin Ryan (59mins).

**AHANE -** Tadgh Flynn; Alan Doherty, Darragh Madden, John Doherty, Cathal O'Reilly, Mike Carr, Paraic Treacy; John Meskell, Fergus Ahern; David Laing, Niall Moran, Daniel Morrissey; Brian Healy, Ollie Moran (capt), Richard Ryan. Subs: Sean Madden for Brian Healy (15mins), Mark Foley for Darragh Madden, inj (30mins), Paul O'Connor for John Meskell, inj (34mins), Sean O'Connor for David Laing (38mins), Cathal Ryan for John Doherty (55mins).

**REFEREE -** Shane Hourigan (St Marys Sean Finns).





# O'Neill savours that winning feeling at last after 17 long years of trying

**Jerome O'Connell**

BACK in 1994 Shane O'Neill was in the Na Piarsaigh team that won the county intermediate hurling championship to secure senior hurling for the club for the first time since their foundation in 1968.

For the last 17 years O'Neill has remained a constant in the Na Piarsaigh senior hurling side and on Sunday he finally got his reward.

"That was as sweet as it gets and it was a long time coming," he said as took another congratulatory pat on the back in the dressing room beneath the Caherdavin end terrace.

"I remember I met the Cratloe boys out in Bunratty on the Wednesday after they won their first one and they said 'Shane it is worth all the wait' and it is," said the 37 year old forward.

"We were in a semi-final in '96 and then in '99 we had a genuine chance when Ahane beat us after a couple of great matches and really since then we haven't been good enough until this squad came along," he explained.

"All the guys I hurled with back in the '90's were out there on the field and its great."

Two years ago O'Neill's chance looked to have by-passed him when Na Piarsaigh lost 1-17 to 0-3 to Adare in their maiden county final appearance.

"I don't believe that you have to loose one to win one but we learned a huge lot from that defeat and it was in the pit of our stomach to think back that we only scored three points," he said.

"This is fantastic, massive for the club -U-16s won yesterday and we are in the U-14, minor and U-21. Three years ago we lost four of them within 10-days so we have won two now in two days and hopefully we can keep on going."

He continued: "We have had 30 lads

training since the start of the year because I think lads could sense that there was something there. What happened two years ago against Adare was that they got scores and got a run on us but today when Ahane came back there was no panic".

O'Neill is at one end of the 31-man

**"This is as sweet as it gets and it was a long time coming ... this is fantastic, massive for the club."**

squad and at the other end is teenager Shane Dowling.

"This is the greatest day of my life - you can win a Munster U-21 championship with Limerick and look out and see a sea of green and you can put in a lot of hard mornings and win a Harty Cup with Ardscoil Ris but I wouldn't be in any of those teams if I wasn't playing with Na Piarsaigh," said Dowling.

"There is an underage setup there and when you walk into Na Piarsaigh on Saturday mornings, you can't see grass with all the youngsters and its that effort that makes you become champions," said Dowling, who hopes to add a minor and U-21 medal in the coming weeks.

He added: "I am so delighted for Shane O'Neill and Damien Quigley who have tried so hard through the hard times".

"We were five or six points up at half time and then went seven or eight up but Ahane came back to three or four and were constantly bringing it back but luckily we got the penalty and it hit the back of the net and that was it.



Final foes: The Na Piarsaigh panel (above) prior to their county final win over Ahane (below) in the Limerick SHC final in the Gaelic Grounds last Sunday



## BIG MATCH IN BRIEF ...

### Main Man - Shane Dowling

In this calendar year, Dowling has now won a Dr Harty Cup, a Munster U-21 championship and now the Limerick SHC. And, yet to come are appearances in the county minor and U-21 hurling finals.

He didn't miss a free from any angle and finished with seven points from frees. On top of that his second half goal from the penalty spot was impressive. But to top it all off, Dowling was Na Piarsaigh's 'go-to' man when they were in trouble and he always answered. And, there was of course three first half points from play, one better than the other.

### Turning Point

Already in his career Kevin Downes has scored some memorable goals but few will be as crucial as his 10th minute goal. A true poachers finish - when many would have turned their backs to await Tadhg Flynn's long delivery down field, Downes put in the extra effort and put himself in a position to perform a perfectly timed flick as the

goalkeeper delayed his clearance. They moved Na Piarsaigh from two to five points clear and put them already in the driving seat.

### Talking Point

Damien Quigley was introduced as a sub in the 59th minute to complete 30 wonderful years in the Light Blue when he finalised a unique achievement of winning every county hurling championship available, on the field of play - U-12 ('82), U-14 ('85), U-16 ('87), minor ('89), U-21 ('90), junior ('90), intermediate ('94) and now senior (2011).

### What Now?

Na Piarsaigh advance directly to the Munster club championship semi-final on November 13 when they will be away to either the Tipperary (Drom & Inch or Clonoulty Rossmore) or Waterford (Tallow or Ballygunner) champions. Before that the club's U-14, minor, U-21 and junior sides are chasing county honours to add to their U-16 and senior successes.