



GAA MUNSTER CLUB HURLING FINAL

Super sub Breen helps Na Piarsaigh over the line

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| Na Piarsaigh | 1-13 |
| Crusheen | 0-9 |

Colm Kinsella
In Semple Stadium, Thurles

GOOD things come to those who wait.

Winning a prestigious Munster senior club championship title must have seemed like a lifetime away to Na Piarsaigh after their capitulation to Adare in the county senior hurling final of just two years ago.

But on Sunday, the Caherdavin club completed a remarkable transformation in their fortunes, earning their place at club hurling's top table, adding a first ever provincial title to the county senior hurling championship they won for the first time in their history earlier this autumn.

For the first time since Kilmallock's success of 1994, the O'Neill Cup will winter on Shannonside as a result of Na Piarsaigh's remarkable season.

The replayed final win over Crusheen caps a remarkable year for the city outfit which has won all before it on the Limerick club front in 2011. The Limerick champions are now reaping a rich harvest for producing a conveyor belt of under-age talent over the past decade or more.

Na Piarsaigh can now look forward to an All-Ireland club semi-final date with Loughiel Shamrocks on February 11-12. The new Munster champions now harbour realistic ambitions of lifting the ultimate prize in club hurling at Croke Park on St Patrick's Day.

Ultimately, the game was decided by Na Piarsaigh's indomitable spirit, admirable self-belief and will-to-win.

Trailing by three points 0-6 to 0-9 towards the end of the third quarter, their task appeared a significant one, but they settled to it with renewed vigour.

Crucially, while the new champions rattled off a significant 1-7 before the end, their opponents failed to score. Na Piarsaigh's ability to create scoring opportunities is also highlighted by the tally of 13 wides over the hour.

Substitute Adrian Breen rifled home the defining goal in the 58th minute following good approach play from Kevin Downes and Shane Dowling. It stretched Na Piarsaigh's lead from an uneasy two points to five. An electric Breen went on to finish with a terrific personal tally of 1-3 from play.

While Breen will enjoy much of the plaudits, four of the winners' starting forwards managed to score from play through David Breen and Kevin Downes, who contributed a pair of

points each, as well as Kevin Ryan and Kieran Kennedy, who chipped in with one, Na Piarsaigh's defence and midfield deserve a huge degree of credit too.

For the second successive week, Crusheen were unable to breach their opponents defence. Kieran Breen, David Lynch, James O'Brien and Brian Hartnett marshalled a tenacious Na Piarsaigh defence which refused to yield, while Cathal King worked tirelessly in the middle third.

The Munster Council reduced it the admission charge for the game to €10 three days before the replay, but the filthy weather in the hours before throw-in put pay to the decider attracting a bumper attendance.

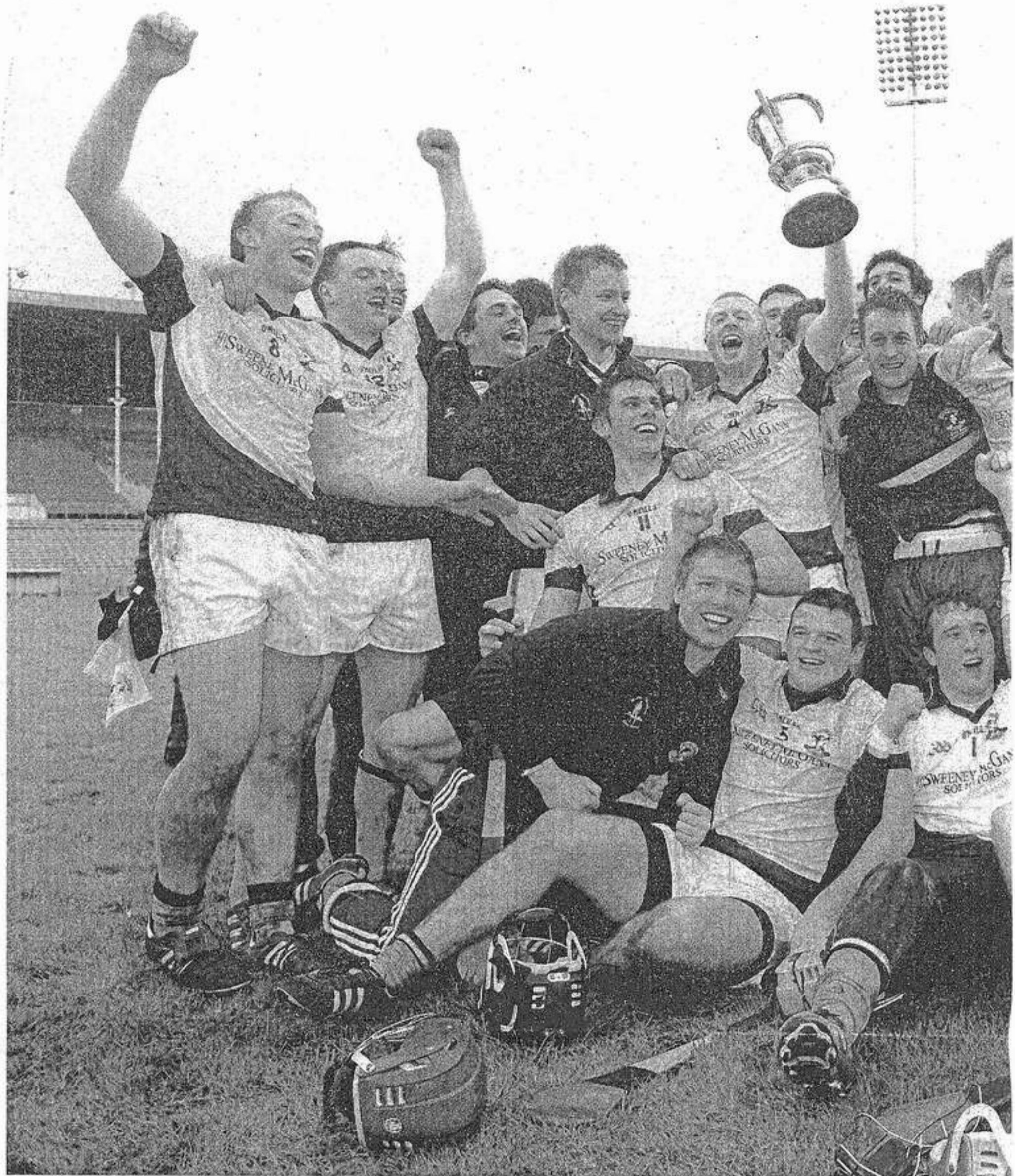
At least conditions had improved for the 2,486 paying customers by the time game began. If the drawn game was somewhat lacklustre, the exchanges here were full-blooded from the throw-in. Indeed, three Na Piarsaigh players were yellow-carded inside.

Those opening minutes showed the steely determination and desire with which the Limerick champions approached the replay. Na Piarsaigh raced into a useful 0-3 to 0-1 lead after 12 minutes. Their opening two points came from Kevin Downes, while Kevin Ryan clipped over the third.

The wet and greasy underfoot conditions didn't help the flow of the game although referee Cathal McAllister did his best to help continuity. Crusheen's defence settled to their task in the second quarter, limiting the Na Piarsaigh attack to a single point over the remainder of the half.

The Clare champions rattled off four points without reply, with their industrious centre half forward Jamie Fitzgibbon hitting a brace. Crusheen led 0-5 to 0-4 at the break and when they stretched into that three-point advantage mid-way through the second half, Na Piarsaigh were facing an uphill battle. Not for the first time this year, however, they proved more than up to the task.

SCORERS - Na Piarsaigh: Adrian Breen 1-3, Shane Dowling 0-3 (two frees, one '65), Kevin Downes, David Breen 0-2 each, Cathal King, Kevin Ryan, Kieran Kennedy 0-1 each. **Crusheen:** Jamie Fitzgibbon 0-4, Pat Vaughan 0-3 (two frees), Tony Meaney, David Forde (0-1) each. **NA PIARSAIGH -** Padraic Kennedy; David Lynch, Kieran Breen, Kieran Bermingham (Capt); Alan Dempsey, James O'Brien, Brian Hartnett; Cathal King, Pat Gleeson; Shane Dowling, David Breen, Kevin Ryan; Kieran Kennedy, Kevin Downes, Shane O'Neill. **Subs:** Adrian Breen for Gleeson (27 mins), Aidan Hennessy for Bermingham (39 mins), John Madden for O'Neill (47 mins). **CRUSHEEN -** Donal Touhy; John Brigdale, Cronan Dillon, Alan Brigdale; Ciaran O'Doherty, Cian Dillon, Cathal Dillon; Pat Vaughan, Tony Meaney; Gearoid O'Donnell, Jamie Fitzgibbon, David Forde; Patrick Meaney, Gerard O'Grady, Fergus Kennedy. **Subs:** Conor O'Donnell for Forde (43 mins), Joseph Meaney for Tony Meaney (51 mins). **REFEREE -** Cathal McAllister (Cork)



High kings of Munster: Na Piarsaigh (above) celebrate their Munster Club SHC final win last Sunday; below - outsta

Stack in 'dream land' but job not

Colm Kinsella
In Semple Stadium

VICTORIOUS Na Piarsaigh manager Sean Stack admitted he was 'in dreamland' after the Limerick kingpins claimed an historic first AIB Munster Senior Club hurling title in Thurles.

Clareman Stack, who also won the title as a player, said he was hugely proud of the players' efforts in finally seeing off back-to-back Clare champions Crusheen.

"I am in dreamland at this moment, but where will this road take us, I have no idea," Sean Stack admitted.

"With Crusheen you have to battle it out. We were confident we had the bench and Adrian Breen, when the physicality waned a small bit, is a serious athlete and look at the damage he did.

"We thought if we got to the 45 minute barrier in this match, we had a serious chance.

"When our lads spotted David Forde going off, it was a big lift to us. We felt he was their main engine."

Scoring sensation Adrian Breen made the kind of impact he could only

have dreamed of when introduced as a substitute just before half time. UCC student Breen pilfered 1-3 from play, including the match-clinching 57th minute goal.

"It suited me more coming on to the game. It took the guys of maybe 50 minutes before we started to open them up," 19-year-old Adrian Breen said.

"It was a tight game all the way, like we knew it would before we finally cracked them open. It wasn't easy won.

"At half-time it was a question of not panicking. Our composure has helped get us this far. If we can hang in there, bring the game into the home stretch, we always feel we have a major advantage because of our work-rate."

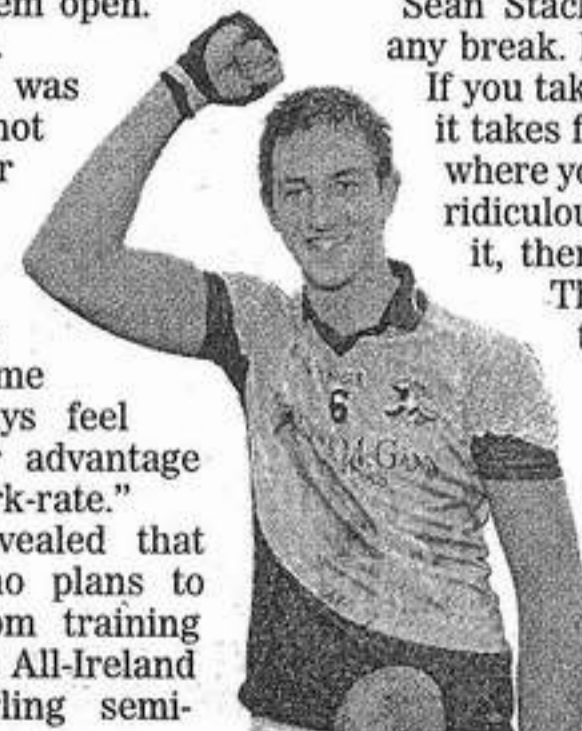
Sean Stack revealed that the squad has no plans to take a break from training ahead of their AIB All-Ireland Club senior hurling semi-

final date with Loughiel Shamrocks in mid-February. Sunday's victory propelled the Caherdavin side into 6/4 favourites with the bookies' to add the All-Ireland club title to their first provincial success.

Although their All-Ireland semi-final clash with Ulster kingpins Loughiel on the weekend of February 11/12 is still two months away, manager Stack has no plans to let the city side rest on their laurels.

Sean Stack said: "There won't be any break. I don't believe in breaks. If you take a break for two weeks, it takes four weeks to get back to where you were, so why do it? It is ridiculous. If the lads are enjoying it, then they keep on doing it.

They love training and if they don't come down on a Wednesday night they will miss it and they will be doing something else like going to the gym and putting on bulk that they don't need for hurling. We will keep them doing a bit. No rest"





GAA MUNSTER CLUB HURLING FINAL

Captain over the moon as Na Piarsaigh rejoice again

Colm Kinsella

DELIGHTED Na Piarsaigh captain, Kieran Bermingham said the turnaround in the fortunes of the Caherdavin club's senior hurling team inside the past decade had been enormous.

Corner back Bermingham recalled how the new Munster champions had been fighting for their survival in senior ranks in the not-too-distant past.

"The mood in our dressing room is brilliant. To be fair, five, six, seven, eight, nine years ago, we were playing senior hurling to survive," Kieran Bermingham pointed out.

"Now we want to play senior hurling to win Munster championships to win. It's unbelievable. No one sets out at the start of the year to train for a Munster championship. You set out to win the county. We were lucky enough to achieve that and we brought it to the next level.

"All credit to Sean (Stack), Paul (Beary), Donal (Hartnett), PJ (Breen), they are all terrific guys. It is brilliant.

"To be fair, five and six years ago a lot of the guys were in their early teens. They were winning county titles.

"We knew if we could stay alive in senior, the day wasn't far away when we would be challenging for titles.

"It is great. It will probably take time to sink in.

"We came to Thurles to do a job. We knew we didn't do ourselves justice in the drawn game. All credit to Crusheen, they put us to the pin of our collar. Thank God, we came out on top in the past couple of minutes.

"We went out with the same intent as last week. Last week, it wasn't good enough and this week it was.

"There is no bad team in a Munster final. You would expect Crusheen to push on and get scores like they did.

"Credit to our backs. They conceded no frees.

"We were a point down at half-time, but happy enough with that. We knew if we performed to the best of our ability and with a bit of lady luck, we would come out on top.

"On paper, our six forwards could easily be mistaken for six inter-county forwards. They are absolutely brilliant/ In the drawn game our panel was tested and our panel came out on top. This week our whole panel was tested again and we came out on top again. Being honest we hadn't thought about an All-Ireland semi-final. It wouldn't have been right to do so before the replay with Crusheen was over."

Bermingham paid tribute to talented teenage forward Adrian Breen, who made a major impact when introduced as a substitute. Breen had started the drawn final, but was left out of the starting line-up for the replay.

"When we called the team and Adrian Breen wasn't on it, that is very, very hard to take at 19 years of age," Kieran Bermingham said.

"But all credit to him, to go out there and bang 1-3 from play when he came on. It couldn't happen to a nicer guy."

A classy defender, Kieran Bermingham was a member of Limerick's All-Ireland U-21 winning squad of 2001.

JEROME O'CONNELL Talking GAA



Croke Park in sight as Na Piarsaigh learn from experience

MINUTES after Na Piarsaigh were beaten by 17 points in the 2009 county senior hurling final by Adare, manager Timmy O'Connor spoke to the media.

"We've a lot of young lads on that team and there's a lot of good young players coming through. So the future looks bright for Na Piarsaigh. It didn't happen today, but hopefully it will happen in the future," said a dejected O'Connor after his side's first ever senior final appearance ended in tatters.

Two years later, O'Connor's prophecy came true when the Daly Cup finally made the short journey from the Gaelic Grounds out the Ennis Road to their Caherdavin base. Sean Stack was coach with O'Connor but when O'Connor became Na Piarsaigh charman, Stack stepped up to manager. It was a seamless change and one that paid rich dividends. There were a number of other key moments too.

1. 2009 changes

TEN of the starting team from the '09 final defeat to Adare were in the starting team last Sunday.

Interestingly, all the newcomers are the club's talented youngsters who have burst their way through bulging with medals and awards - Alan Dempsey, Pat Gleeson, Shane Dowling, Kieran Kennedy and Cathal King.

Of more interest is that just three of the players remain in the same positions as two years ago - goalkeeper Padraig Kennedy, corner back Kieran Bermingham and centre forward David Breen.

2. Solid defence

WHILE there is no doubting the attacking talent available to Na Piarsaigh, their defence was more often than not their achilles heel.

Firming up the central defensive partnership was always key and this season the men in light blue have found the ideal duo.

Kieran Breen was midfield in 2009 but was always more comfortable at full back and has been rock solid throughout 2009. Indeed full back was where he made his only Limerick senior championship appearance back in Ennis in 2006.

In front of him is U-21 player James O'Brien. O'Brien played the majority of his underage and Ardscoil Ris hurling in attack with most identifying him as a No.11. Indeed when Justin McCarthy gave him his Limerick senior debut in Tullamore in 2010 it was at wing forward.

But building the defence around Breen and O'Brien has given Na Piarsaigh a solid foundation and they've now gone seven games

without conceding a goal.

3. Big scalps

SINCE winning the county intermediate championship in 1994, Na Piarsaigh had beaten most senior clubs throughout Limerick in championship fare.

But the big three of Patrickswell, Adare and Kilmallock continued to dominate Na Piarsaigh.

All that changed in 2010 when Na Piarsaigh shocked Adare in the county quarter-final in a game that was revenge for the final defeat of the previous year.

Then this summer they put the Patrickswell ghost to rest. The confidence gained from these two wins can't be underestimated.

4. Finishing power

BACK in early September, Na Piarsaigh played Patrickswell in the county quarter-final.

David Breen was sent off for a second yellow card in the 41st minute and at the time The Well led 0-11 to 0-8.

But the dismissal galvanised Na Piarsaigh and they were to hit nine successive second half points.

Everyone worked for each other against the extra man and it was to be a defining moment in Na Piarsaigh's season.

Again in the county final win over Ahane, they put the shoulder to the wheel when they were struggling to find form and then down in Walsh Park it was certainly their huge work ethic that won the day as they again finished well.

It was the same in both games against Crusheen. On both occasions it looked as if the match was going beyond them but they found another gear in the closing minutes.

They almost sealed the deal the first day but when they burst for the finishing line in the replay, Crusheen didn't have an answer.

5. Young leaders

SEVEN of the players that saw action last Sunday were part of the Na Piarsaigh side that won the 2010 county U-21 A hurling championship. David Lynch was team captain.

"The big one is to come yet - the losing final drove us on to this, so now hopefully the winning feeling will move us on another small bit and rectify it for the big one later on in the year," said Lynch of their dream for senior honours.

Success with Ardscoil Ris and the Limerick U-21 side of this summer further enhanced the medals collection of the rising stars and even at their tender age, the likes of Shane Dowling, James O'Brien and Kevin Downes are the leaders on the team.



Centre back James O'Brien shows his delight.

PICTURE: SPORTSFILE

finished yet

Stack agrees that Na Piarsaigh have earned the right to be considered 'serious contenders' to land the All-Ireland club title on St Patrick's Day. The second All-Ireland semi-final will be contested between Offaly and Leinster champions Coolderry and Galway kingpins Gort.

Former Clare star Stack warned, however, of the threat Loughiel would pose to their All-Ireland ambitions in February.

"I believe the teams that are left in contention now in the All-Ireland series are no better than Crusheen," Sean Stack said.

"I thought Crusheen were serious contenders. Their manager told us after the game that he felt they had the six best backs you could possibly find. And they have. To grind it out against them, we would have to be considered as serious contenders now. But I have seen teams get beaten by the likes of Loughiel and Dunloy in All-Ireland semi-finals over the years. We are meeting them now and it could be a bad February day (weather wise) in Parnell Park or wherever it is. We have to be ready for it."

IN BRIEF

MAIN MAN - DAVID BREEN

A DIFFICULT call in the circumstances with several Na Piarsaigh players putting their hands up for the accolade. The likes of Kieran Breen, Brian Hartnett, substitute Adrian Breen and centre half-back James Breen have strong claims, but for his overall work-rate, the award goes to David Breen. Breen also struck over two precious points from play, including a real beauty from long range in the 53rd minute.

KEY MOMENT

THE complexion of a low-scoring final changed utterly the moment substitute Adrian Breen rifled home the game's only goal in the 58th minute. While Na Piarsaigh had been the better side through the final quarter, their lead was a precarious two points approaching the final few minutes. However, Breen's goal provided the Limerick champions with breathing space.

TALKING POINT

MUCH of the pre-match build-up was dominated by talk of the final venue and how the cost of €20 had prevented a significantly greater number of supporters from attending. The official attendance at the drawn game was 2,893 and the Munster Council chose to reduce the admission fee to €10 for the replay. And the attendance figure this time round? It was down by some 400 on the drawn game to 2,486.

Martin Kiely SIDELINE VIEW



Maybe now Na Piarasaigh will get the respect they richly deserve

WITH light fading they stood on the field long after the final whistle had blown. Na Piarasaigh supporters of all ages had that dazed look about them as they still tried to accept that they had climbed the highest mountain in the club's history to win the coveted Munster Club title after a cracking contest against the very sporting Crusheen from Clare.

This was the proudest day in the history of the Na Piarasaigh club and for so many they were unable to hold back the tears as Kieran Bermingham held the cup high in the air. This win was a reward for the men of vision who started the club in 1968 but also for the very many people who have worked so hard to produce young players during that time.

Seventeen years had passed since a Limerick club had last won the title and it shows just how hard it is to win such a major honour. It has taken a few years for this team to fully develop and during that time they have had to endure some very hard lessons.

Two years ago, the county final against Adare was a very bitter pill to swallow but instead of going backwards they kept on working and under Sean Stack they are the kingpins of club Munster hurling.

In the build up to this game the club had to endure some very harsh words from the Chairman of the Munster Council in relation to the game being played in Thurles. Walsh was out of line but the Na Piarasaigh chairman Timmy O'Connor stood his ground and let his facts do the talking. The following day Walsh knew he was wrong and to his credit phoned O'Connor and admitted he was wrong.

Very few pitches would have stood up to the heavy rain during the week and field caretaker in Thurles, Philly Burke, had the pitch in smashing order. Na Piarasaigh made changes to their starting lineout and the team looked to have better balance.

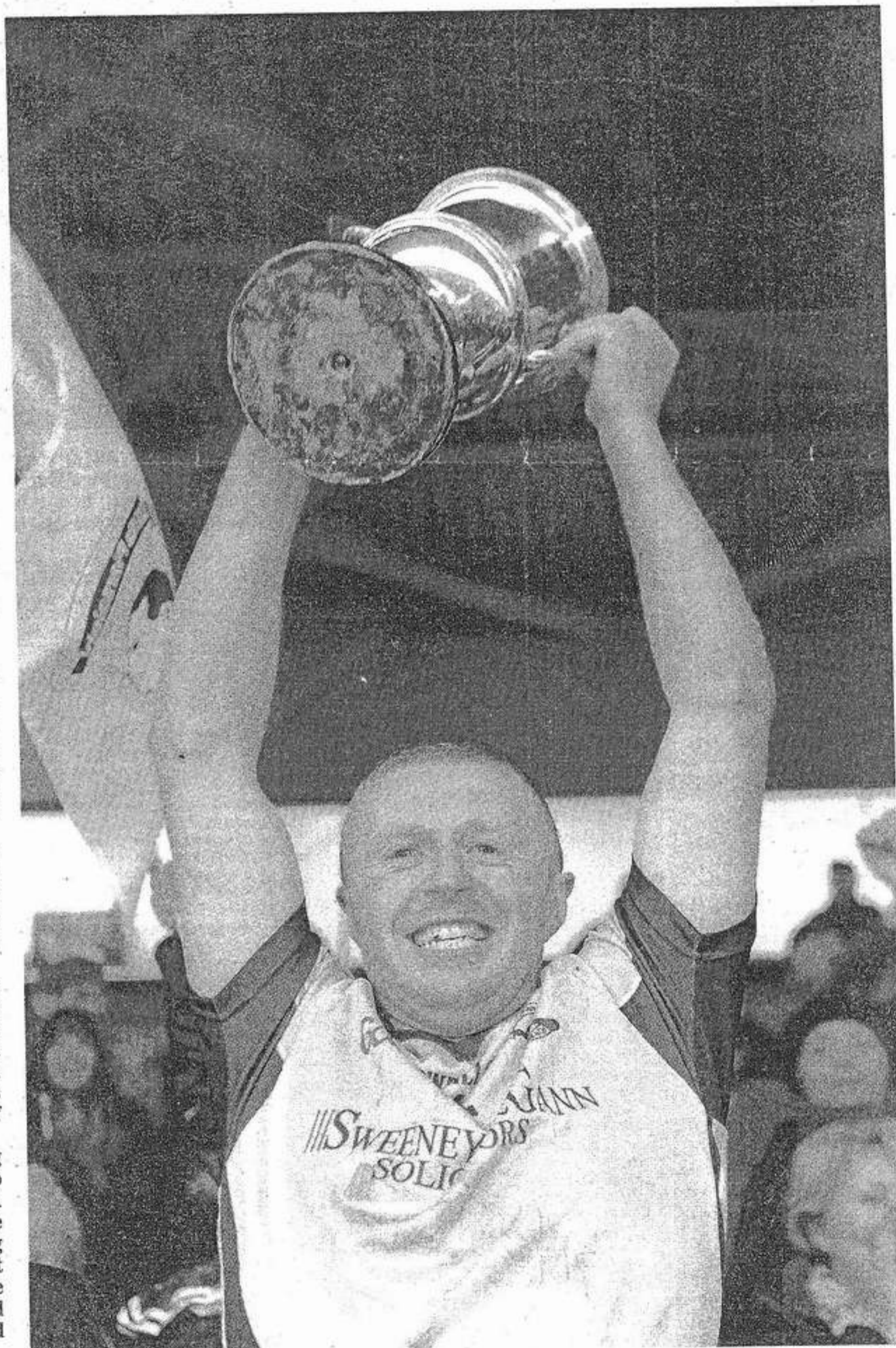
As a team Na Piarasaigh are growing in maturity with every game and the skills are now being matched with the steel so vital to win games at this level. We had early signs when, in the opening minute, three players had collected yellow cards, Brian Hartnett, Kevin Downes and David Breen had entered the black book of referee Cathal McAllister.

It took almost eight minutes for the opening score to come and it fell to Kevin Downes who showed some skill to convert from a tight angle. Both teams showed great fighting spirit while scores were hard to come by. Midway during the opening half Crusheen were winning a lot of possession but when they look back on the game they failed to make use of it. They did score four points in a row as Pat Vaughan and Jamie Fitzgibbon were on target.

At that stage Crusheen looked very impressive but little did we think that they would fail to score for the final ten minutes of the first half. Na Piarasaigh weathered the storm in every way as they bravely hurled against the elements and in many ways this was the platform to their victory.

A week previously Na Piarasaigh were slow to move players around but not this time. Cathal King was hurling well at midfield and his point, seven minutes before the short whistle, saw his team just one point behind at the break. Indeed they could have gone in ahead if Adrain Breen's golden chance had not gone wide.

It was a bitterly cold day for hurling and ball



Happy days: Kieran Bermingham raises the Billy O'Neill Cup after Na Piarasaigh's Munster club SHC final win over Crusheen in Thurles on Sunday. PICTURE: SPORTSFILE

"Two years ago, the county final against Adare was a very bitter pill to swallow but instead of going backwards, they kept on working and under Sean Stack, they are now the kingpins of Munster club hurling."

handling must have been difficult but, credit to Crusheen, they wasted little time in going about their business in the second half. Ten minutes had passed and they had gone three clear and at that stage they were making ground.

Some of the Na Piarasaigh players were finding it very hard to get into the game. In the past they might have folded as a result but nowadays they are playing more like a team and working for each other. Shane Dowling was well below his normal high standard but he did score a couple of crucial frees that played a major part

in bringing his team into the game.

Leaders play such a major part in most sports but in this game Na Piarasaigh had a few. James O'Brien, once again, was having a cracking game at centre back.

His high catches were a major feature in this game and overall this young man has grown in confidence during the past year and I think the best is yet to come.

As a unit the Na Piarasaigh backs had a very good game and I think Kieran Breen is finding his form with every game. Forwards are finding it hard to score goals on Na Piarasaigh as they have not conceded a goal since the second round of the championship against Adare.

David Breen was marking the best player on the Crusheen team in Cian Dillon but it was Breen who won this duel and when his team needed him most he showed us just what he is capable of doing.

Dowling's frees had tied the game up at nine points each and with ten minutes to go Crusheen looked a tired team. Na Piarasaigh had the pace but also the finishers and with good points from Kieran Kennedy and David Breen they went two clear.

Adrian Breen was having a telling impact on the game and when he goaled after Dowling showed super vision to find Downes the game was over as a contest.

There was no stopping him now as he scored the final two points to seal a very special day for his family and his team. His grandfather Jimmy from Kiltleely would be so proud.

This win by Na Piarasaigh is a massive boost for Limerick hurling also and maybe now this club will get the respect it deserves. This victory has not come about by accident and it has taken years to develop so many of these players and when it comes to working this club has set the bar very high.

This win should give so many in Limerick hurling a major lift and other clubs have the ability to follow what Na Piarasaigh has done. Croke Park is in sight now for Na Piarasaigh but they would not want to take the Ulster champions for granted.

Cappamore look to complete Limerick treble

LAST May, while footing turf in the bog in Cappamore, Daniel O'Donnell was asked by Mathew O'Malley, "What's your plan for the year ahead?" O'Donnell replied, "The plan is to win the County title".

For a young man starting out in his first year of management it was a brave reply, most especially given the poor run of form that Cappamore have had in recent times.

Little did he know then that seven months later such words would come to pass and in a most fitting way Cappamore won the county junior hurling title last Saturday after they blew the Kilmallock challenge away.

If ever a club needed such a vital boost it was this famous club who for so long produced great hurlers and this win will give the club a massive boost to build upon for the future.

The last time Cappamore won the junior title was in 1952 and two years later they won the senior title. The club were blessed with some mighty men in that era but the men who won last Saturday have created their own bit of history and I would say this latest win has set a firm foundation for future teams to follow.

Next Sunday in Mallow Cappamore will hope to make it three in a row for Limerick teams in Munster and I wish them the best of luck.