

## FULL TIME

## GAA - ALL IRELAND CLUB SHC FINAL

## MATCH STATS

**NA PIARSAIGH** 2-25  
**CUSHENDALL** 2-14

## SCORERS

**NA PIARSAIGH:** Shane Dowling 0-7 (4frees), Adrian Breen 1-4, Kevin Downes 1-1, Alan Dempsey 0-4, Peter Casey and David Breen 0-3 each, Ronan Lynch (free), Will O'Donoghue and Pat Gleeson ('65) 0-1 each. **CUSHENDALL:** Neil McManus 0-7 (7frees), Alec Delargy 1-1, Karl McKeegan 1-0, Shane McNaughton 0-3, Christy McNaughton, Conor Carson, Eoghan Campbell 0-1 each.

## NA PIARSAIGH

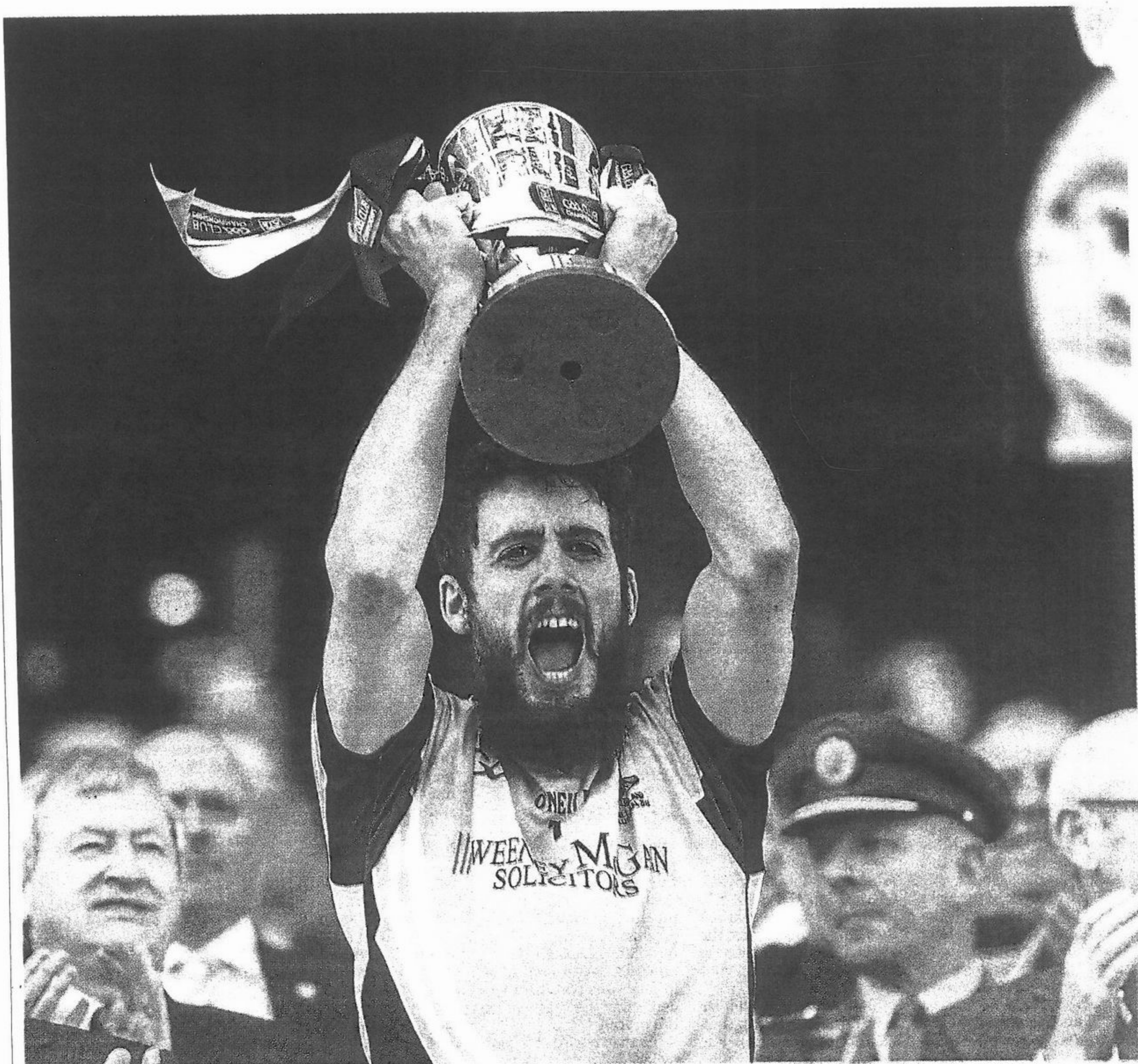
1. Padraic Kennedy
  2. Mike Casey
  3. Kieran Breen
  4. Kieran Kennedy
  5. Mike Foley
  6. Ronan Lynch
  7. Cathall King
  8. Alan Dempsey
  9. Will O'Donoghue
  10. Shane Dowling
  11. David Breen
  14. David Dempsey
  13. Kevin Downes
  24. Adrian Breen
  15. Peter Casey
- Subs: Kevin Ryan for David Breen (53mins), Pat Gleeson for Will O'Donoghue (56mins).

## CUSHENDALL

1. Eoin Gillan
  2. Ryan McCambridge
  3. Martin Burke
  4. Arron Graffin
  5. David Kearney
  6. Eoghan Campbell
  7. Sean Delargy
  8. Shane McNaughton
  9. Alec Delargy
  10. Conor Carson
  11. Neil McManus
  12. Sean McAfee
  13. Paddy McGill
  14. Donal McNaughton
  15. Christy McNaughton
- Subs: Paddy Burke for Sean Delargy (33mins), Karl McKeegan for Donal McNaughton (37mins), Aidan McNaughton for Christy McNaughton (42mins), Eunan McKillop for Arron Graffin (54mins), Eoin Laverty for Paddy McGill (57mins).

Na Piarasaigh lit up St Patricks Day as they romped to Limerick's first ever All Ireland club SHC title with a totally dormant final display

# HISTORIC TITLE IN CROKE PARK



That winning feeling: Cathall King lifts the Tommy Moore Cup after Na Piarasaigh's win over Cushendall in Croke Park on Thursday PICTURES: SPORTSFILE

## JEROME O'CONNELL



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TWO years off the 50th anniversary of the club Na Piarsaigh wrote the most glorious chapter in their history.

All Ireland champions and in some style with 11 points to spare at the end in Croke Park.

The classy victory over Ruairi Og Cushendall was a first ever Tommy Moore Cup for Limerick and first hurling senior championship silverware in Croke Park since the Liam McCarthy Cup victory of 1973.

The Shane O'Neill managed Na Piarsaigh certainly saved their best for the big occasion. Twelve games into this championship they simply clicked and left their opponents chasing shadows across Croke Park.

What a display - 27 scores from the Caherdavin men, spread across nine different players. At the other end they restricted the Antrim and Ulster champions to just 2-7 from play over the hour.

Such was the dominance of the Limerick city side that this St Patrick's Day final was all but over after 25-minutes as they led 2-10 to 0-3.

Limerick teams at varying levels have failed to perform on the big stage of Croke Park on finals day but not Na Piarsaigh. They grasped the opportunity from the off and had the sliothar in the net with just 30-seconds played.

It was Adrian Breen that flashed home the opening goal and he went on to be named TG4 Man of the Match with a personal return of 1-4 from play for the roaming full forward.

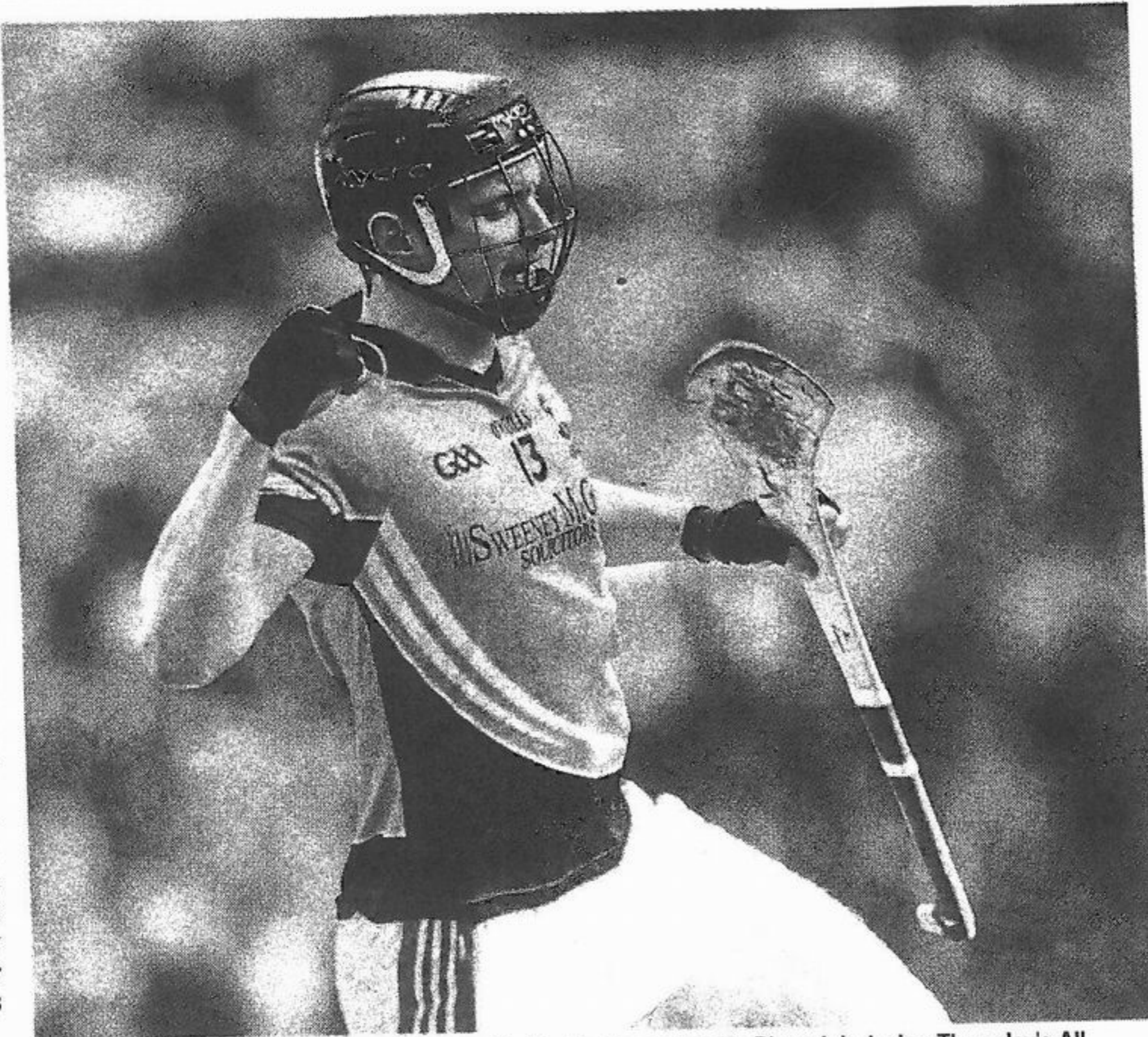
There was a Cushendall response to the early goal but then came two separate scoring sprees from the Light Blues to set history in motion.

Adrian Breen and Shane Dowling shared the early scores as the 1/3 favourites showed their class to move 1-4 to 0-2 clear on nine minutes.

David Breen almost had their second goal but up the other end it was Shane McNaughton that ended 11-minutes without a Cushendall score to stop the Na Piarsaigh sequence.

But the reprieve was only temporary. The next scoring burst all but sealed the win - this time 1-6 without reply to move 13-points clear.

A score from either sideline from Alan Dempsey led



Jumping for joy: Kevin Downes celebrates his first-half goal for Na Piarsaigh during Thursday's All Ireland club hurling final against Cushendall in Croke Park PICTURES: SPORTSFILE

the way with Peter Casey, David Breen and Dowling frees pushing home their advantage.

Dowling almost goaled on 17-minutes but was denied by a timely hook but five minutes from half time there was no denying Kevin Downes.

There was a kicked effort from Sean McAfee but Padraic Kennedy dealt comfortably with the effort but in reply did come three scores in a row from the men in maroon but even that brief confidence boost was all but eroded when Casey and Downes had injury time points to confirm a 2-12 to 0-6 half time lead.

When the sides emerged back from beneath the Cusack Park Na Piarsaigh pretty much continued where they

left off.

There were two early points for Cushendall but then came five successive points for the Limerick side. Ronan Lynch (free), Dowling, Casey and Breen brothers David and Adrian were on the mark to move 2-18 to 0-8 clear. That was a 16-point lead with 36-minutes played in the All Ireland final.

Eight minutes into the half came the first Cushendall goal with Alex Delargy connecting with a long free to find the net.

In the style of champions Na Piarsaigh found three points in response - 2-21 to 1-10 with 10-minutes to play.

While the Antrim side were finding more scores it was 19-minutes into the half when Eoghan Campbell had their first point from play in

the half, with Neil McManus frees dominating.

Alan Dempsey and Shane Dowling pointed from distance after a flurry of wides (they ended with 12 wides, Cushendall had five). The scores moved them 15-points clear with eight minutes left.

Kevin Ryan and Pat Gleeson were introduced by Shane O'Neill and his backroom team of Kieran Birmingham, Alan Cunnigham and Darragh Droog as they raced towards the winning line.

Three minutes from the end, Karl McKeegan had the second Cushendall goal but it was Pat Gleeson that had the final say in injury time with a pointed '65 before referee Diarmuid Kirwan signalled the wild celebrations of the new All Ireland champions.

much work was done defensively with captain King keeping Cushendall dangerman Neil McManus scoreless from play.

### Big winners

Na Piarsaigh ended up 11-point winners after being 16-points up early in the second half. That still left them short of history with Portumna 19-point winners over De La Salle in 2009. Last year Ballyhale beat Kilmallock by 12-points.

### What now?

Na Piarsaigh have three Limerick and three Munster titles and now an All Ireland in five years. Next target - to defend the county title.



Happy days: Kevin Ryan and Na Piarsaigh manager Shane O'Neill celebrate in Croke Park

## O'Neill thrilled players saved the best till last

### REACTION

SHANE O'Neill could not have been prouder that his players produced their best display on the biggest stage.

"It's to perform and the manner of the performance that is so important," he said with pride outside the winning dressing room beneath the Cusack Stand.

"Probably the best performance since we have been there in the last two years. There was a great performance against Sixmilebridge in the 2013 Munster final too," he recalled.

"Bearing in mind the surroundings and it's an All Ireland final and what can happen, you might expect a couple of players to be like rabbits in the headlight because it's an All Ireland final but I think the early goal settled that and allowed them to play," explained the winning manager.

"It's all about the win but we weren't going to win if we didn't perform and the manner of the performance and the boys attitude was great. Maybe in an All Ireland final you might be looking at some players, even some main men, mightened perform, but I think from 1-15 the guys were outstanding."

He added: "I think getting the goal definitely settled us".

"We were hot favourites and a lot of time when you are that hot, fellas may not perform. The only time we weren't favourites was against Thurles so we are

used to that. To perform as favourites on the biggest day, from a management point of view is just the best," he smiled.

"It means so much to the club - two trains were sold out a month ago to come up, including 250 kids. It's been absolutely fantastic with a great buzz but the guys kept their focus all the time practically over the last couple of weeks when you could feel the excitement building around town. It's such an unbelievably occasion for everyone that was involved in the club in the 60s, 70s, 80s and 90s - it's being building for a while and especially the last five years and thankfully we are after getting there."

O'Neill and backroom staff are only two years at the helm, after Sean Stack stepped down after five years in charge.

"There is a massive amount of work involved in it - what you do at club level is what you were doing at county level 10-years ago. It takes over your life but our management have been unbelievable."

He acknowledged the win was historic on a wider scale.

"It's great for Limerick but we were only concentrating on ourselves to make sure we did the business but when we stand back and reflect and see it is the first time a Limerick team in Croke Park has won in many years."

## Game at a Glance

### Main Man

Adrian Breen was named as TG4 Man of the Match and what a display with a return of 1-4 and it was his goal on 30-seconds that laid the foundation. Enroute to Croke Park he scored 6-17 and he revelled in the wide open spaces with some fine scores. Elsewhere Alan Dempsey, Shane Dowling and captain Cathall King were among those to lead what was a terrific team display.

### Talking point

How had it taken Limerick so long to produce an All Ireland club SHC winner. Eight different counties had champions in the roll of honour

since the inception of the national competition in 1970. Kilmallock (twice and most recently last year), Patrickswell and Ballybrown all fell at the final hurdle.

### Turning point

Na Piarsaigh were hot favourites so 'getting themselves right' was the key preparation. And, that's what they did. Many teams freeze in Croke Park but Na Piarsaigh reveled. Their work-rate and teamwork was a joy and testament to management and they entire panel. But it didn't happen by accident - while the forwards clocked up the scores a look down the other end of the field showed

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# 'Days like this will be very hard to pass'

**Jerome O'Connell** got the reaction of Na Piarsaigh players following their All Ireland club final win in Croke Park on Thursday

THE scenes of joy stretched from the centre of the Croke Park field to Caherdavin.

"I've always wanted to win this one for various reasons. I would like to consider myself a thorough clubman. Often when you play with the county team you find yourself adrift from the club set-up but I live beside the place and I grew up there and I will finish there," explained a joyous Shane Dowling.

"I knew numerous people there and I try to give as much as I can back and because Na Piarsaigh isn't a parish it can be difficult to get that spirit but over the last number of weeks everyone has rallied and to repay everyone back for all the hard work is just superb," he explained.

The inter-county man was quick to remember all who helped build the club, which was only formed in 1968.

"People who played will get credit but I have to stress is that the subs that just as big a part to play. And not just the subs, there are people

back at home in hospital and people who have died this year and people who are getting old who founded this club and without them we wouldn't be here today. Sean Stack was with us for five years and without him we would not be here today. The U-12, U-14, U-16, minor managers all the way up have as such to do with us being here today," outlined Dowling, who finished with seven points.

"These days don't come around too often and I am going to enjoy it - we will get back into the county scene whenever that will be," he smiled

"If you win an All Ireland with Limerick it is probably a small bit wider because you have a bigger number of people involved but your club is special. I know it's a cliché but it is special because it is all voluntary and is the heart of the community. I think days like this will be very hard to pass."

He does hope that Na Piarsaigh's Croke Park silverware will inspire all.

"There are clubs back

home who will be jealous and that's only natural but I would like to think that anyone with the best interests of Limerick hurling at heart will know that this has broken a hoodoo - this rubbish that Limerick teams can't go up to Croke Park is dead and buried now."

After two losses at All Ireland semi final stage, Dowling said that the margins are small.

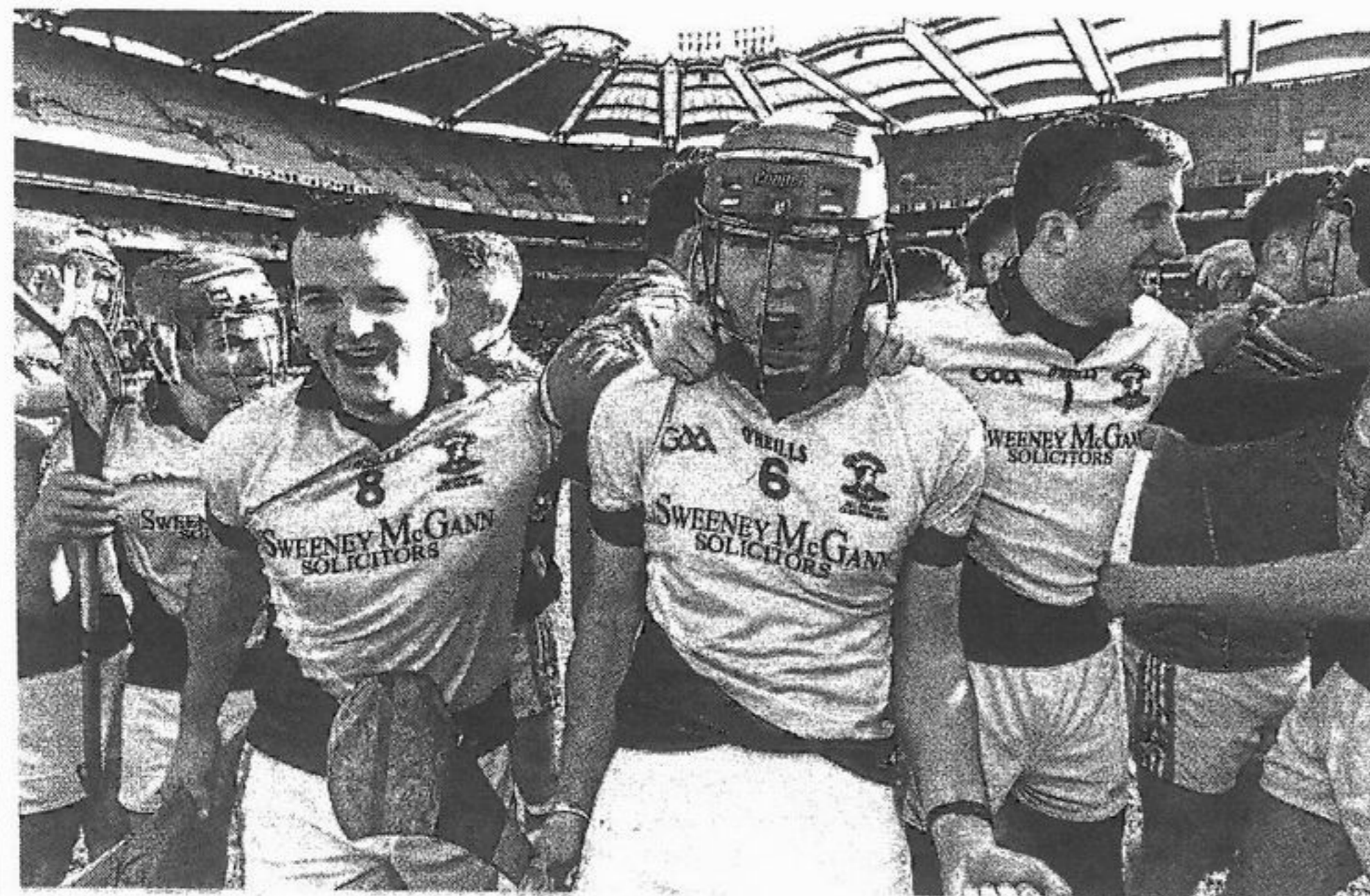
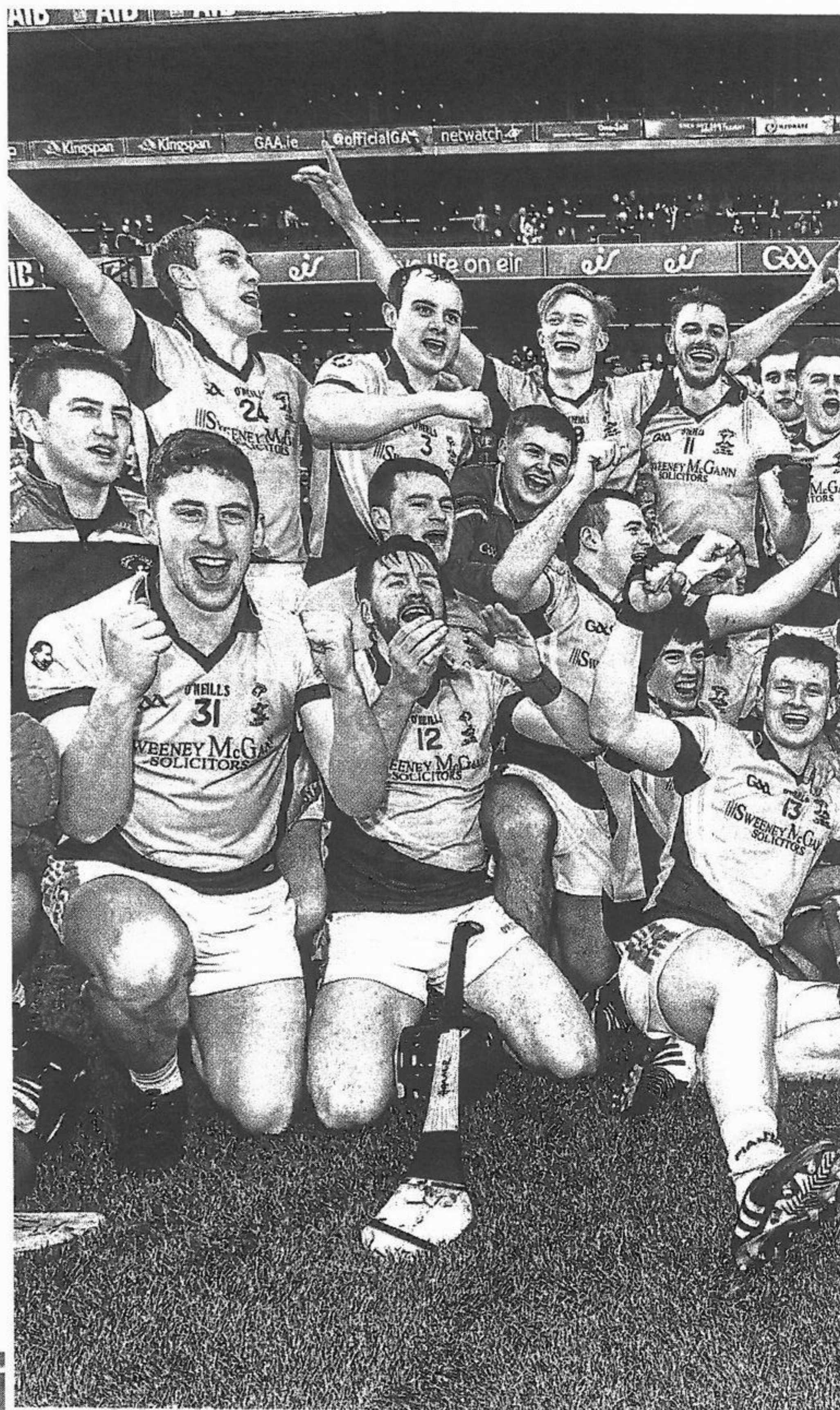
"The difference this week was that we got a bit of luck and there is no point saying otherwise.

Against Sixmilebridge we were nine points down, Thurles was nip-and-tuck the whole way, Patrickswell in the county final was one point, Kilmallock in the county semi final was one point - you need luck," he explained.

"When we got to the All Ireland semi final as hard as Oulart pushed us, I think the past experience showed and we always knew that once we got to Croke Park that we had the players to express themselves and I think that happened."

Captain Cathall King had the honour of becoming the first Limerickman to lift the Tommy Moore Cup as captain.

"It was special to look



down on the team and the amazing support that came and the roar and atmosphere," he said of climbing up the steps of the Hogan Stand.

This means everything - it means the lifetime of work put in with ball and stick against the wall and every dirty training sessions - it means everything to be recognised as the best team in the country at the moment."

Na Piarsaigh were on the shortlist of potential winners from the outset but the captain insists focus was key.

"You don't look that far ahead - that's not to say we are

not confident but you just have to take it game by game. We looked to win the county championship and then see what happens in Munster. We came through Munster and then two matches to go out and win," he explained.

"It's a long journey but thankfully we got there," he gasped.

"It's Incredible - absolutely incredible. A joy with all those lads."

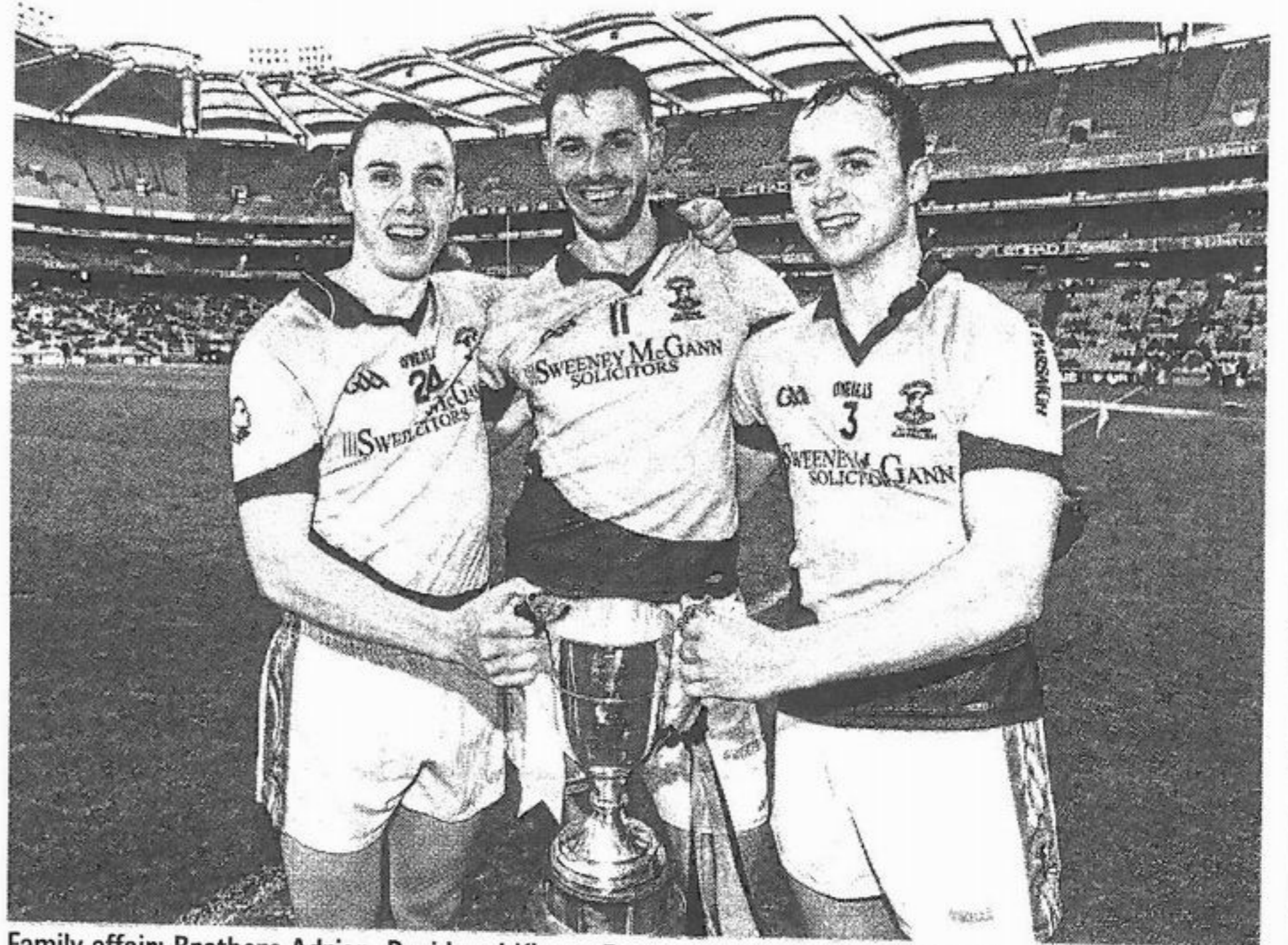
Na Piarsaigh were 1/3 hot favourites but King said their mantra was simple.

"We were looking to play a whole 60-minutes of high in-

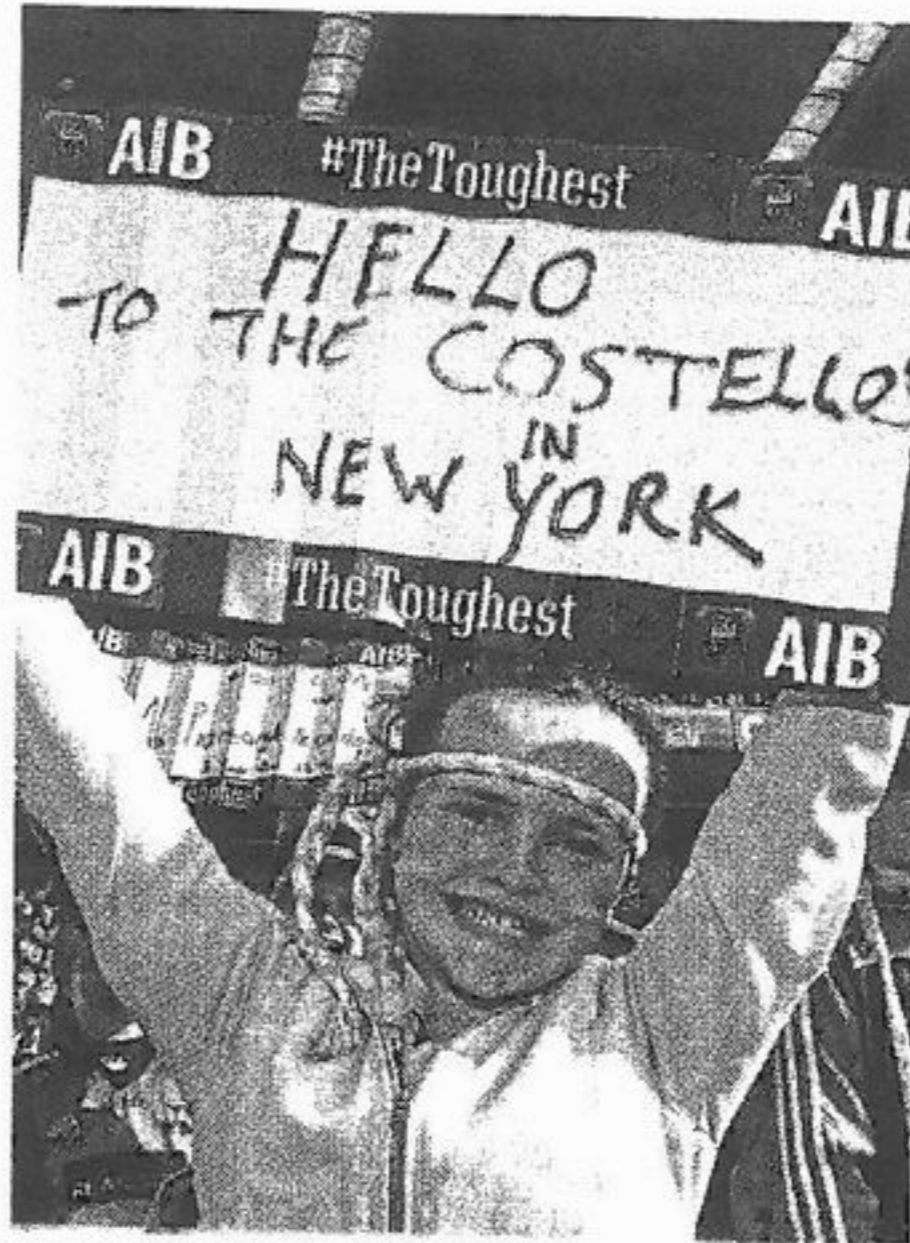
tensity because we hadn't played a full 60-minutes yet - we had let teams back in and fallen out for 10-15-minutes and we just said from the moment we hit the grass we are hopping and we are hopping until we come off," he explained.

"If you are going to win competitions you have to play your best on the days that matter and the most important day of the year we clicked and thankfully that was all there was to it."

Goalkeeper Padriac Kennedy also paid tribute to the focus of the entire panel, management and clubs.



Family affair: Brothers Adrian, David and Kieran Breen with the Tommy Moore Cup after Na Piarsaigh's All Ireland club final win over Cushendall in Croke Park on Thursday PICTURES: SPORTSFILE



Clockwise from above: Na Piarsaigh supporter Grace Costello, from Greystones, sends a message to New York; young Na Piarsaigh supporters in full voice; club stalwart Timmy O'Connor with his grandson Fionan Gormley

"We kept our heads to the ground and trained hard but there seemed to be a lot of hype up north with stuff on social media and stuff but our lads just did their work. Today showed - the way we performed was unbelievable," he outlined.

"Credit to the management - it's been 17 weeks since the Munster club final and the way everything was handled was unbelievable," said Kennedy of Shane O'Neill and his backroom team.

"I am absolutely over the moon - the result was a small bit of a surprise to us. It will

take a while to really settle in but to be out there in the middle of Croke Park with all your family and friends was absolutely amazing."

Kennedy has happy that his colleagues found their best form when it mattered.

"We couldn't have asked for better in the wide open spaces of Croke Park - this was the fittest we ever were. It's amazing to look down the field and watch them do their work. The forward play was amazing - sometimes they get stick for not putting away as much as they should but today there were lethal," he said.

Back in 2009 Kennedy was also in goals when Adare put 17-points between themselves Na Piarsaigh on the city sides maiden county final.

Kennedy remains between the posts but remembers that day.

"I was just saying after the game to one of their players. I told them about our county final when we lost by 17-points and look at where we are standing now and they can come back too. They are a serious side and I don't think they showed it today but it did show us what kind of team we are," he said.



On top of the world: Shane Dowling cuts a happy figure on Croke Park after the game