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Then & Now

Tom Aherne



Centennial of Limerick's historic win

Just over 100 years ago, the Shannonsiders brought home their second All-Ireland title

WITH LIMERICK hurling still celebrating their eight All-Ireland success, we recall the career of Willie Hough from Monagea who captained Limerick to their second success 100 years ago. During his hurling days with Limerick he operated, once he established himself at centre half back. With his wingmen Jack Keane and Denny Lanigan, he formed a halfback line so effective that it was known as the Hindenburg Line. The great writer Carbery described it as one of the greatest halfback lines in the history of the game. He described Willie as follows:

He was a regular Hercules of a man. He carried great speed with his strength and was one of the smoothest and most commanding hurlers I have ever seen in action. At centre back he was a master of every strike and every movement known as first class hurling. He used his powerful wrists and shoulders with fine skill and many of the strokes, whether on the turf or overhead was half a field length. I often travelled 100 miles to see Willie Hough in action at centre back and it was worth every mile. He was nature's gentleman.

His career with Limerick lasted from 1915 to 1926. He made a comeback in 1929 for the Munster Championship match against Waterford but defeat was their lot. He lived in an era when, for many no effort or sacrifice was too great when it came to playing and promoting our national games. He was a class hurler who would have got his place on any county team in that era. In his hurling days he weighed around 14 stone. He had that wonderful gift of being able to read a game perfectly and as a result be in the right place at the right time. He was renowned for his positional sense, clean striking and long ground clearances.

Willie Hough was born on May 4, 1892 in Monagea parish and a few miles from the town of Newcastle West. His father was a top class player and mentor, and he was also

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the first Chairman of the West Limerick Board from 1902 to 1910. He attended the local national school from 1899 to 1910 and his teachers were Principal Daniel Kennedy also secretary of the GAA club and John Aherne. He participated in lots of Gaelic games, which was tough and robust when growing up.

He received further education at De La Salle College in Waterford. He went on to captain the college team to win the 1913 County senior hurling title. The performance of the team brought them under the spotlight and the Waterford selectors picked eight of the team to face Tipperary in the Munster Championship. Willie Hough was their captain and even in defeat he received great praise in the Waterford Star newspaper. "Never was a team better captained and never did a commander infuse more hope and spirit by sheer example than Hough. He was here there and everywhere always on the ball. Now playing tig with his opponents and slapping shots into the forwards with a frequency and accuracy that charmed those who could appreciate hurling at its best".

He qualified as a national teacher at De La Salle College, and his first appointment was to Baltimore in West Cork. He hurled with UCC, whose captain was Dr Jim Reidy also from Monagea. They were defeated by Middleton in the Cork County hurling semi final and he was asked if he would line out for the county team. He declined and in 1914 a vacancy became available in Monagea School when one of the teachers retired and he was appointed. This was the start of a long career teaching in his native



This is the Limerick (Newcastle West) team that won the 1918 GAA Hurling All-Ireland title. Limerick beat Wexford (Selection) on the score of 9-5 to 1-3 in the final, played at Croke Park on January 26, 1919

parish. In 1918 he succeeded John Aherne as principal a post he held until he retired in 1957.

Willie captained Newcastle West when they won the Limerick senior hurling title in 1917. They defeated Young Ireland by 3-4 to 3-1 at Rathkeale on June 2. Up to then the county selection rested with the county titleholders. However, Newcastle West decided to forego this honour and leave the matter to a selection committee. Politically it was a difficult time in Ireland following 1916, and conscription attempts during World War I. That was the background against which a strong Limerick selection set out on the 1918 All-Ireland campaign. After a 5-3 each draw with Tipperary in a hectic encounter at the Markets Field they topped the training.

Jim Dalton was their trainer and they were based in Foynes during the summer months. Part of the training involved climbing to the top of Knockpatrick Hill high above the village. The three heavyweights' Denny Lanigan, Jack Keane, and

Willie Hough, had to descend half way down and re climb to the top to the apparent delight of the other players. The special training paid off and they won the replay by 3-0 to 2-2 and defeated Clare easily in the Munster final.

Limerick were offered a walkover in the All Ireland final as Wexford were unable to field a team due to the flu epidemic, but declined a bloodless victory. Limerick won its second All Ireland title on January 26, 1919 defeating Wexford by 9-5 to 1-3 on a cold bleak day. It was a disappointing final played in front of 12,000 spectators, with Willie Walsh of Waterford the referee. It was a one sided final with Limerick superior in all sectors of the field. Their superiority lay in their preparation which had them trained to the ounce, their overall strength as a unit, and their first time hurling on the ground and in the air.

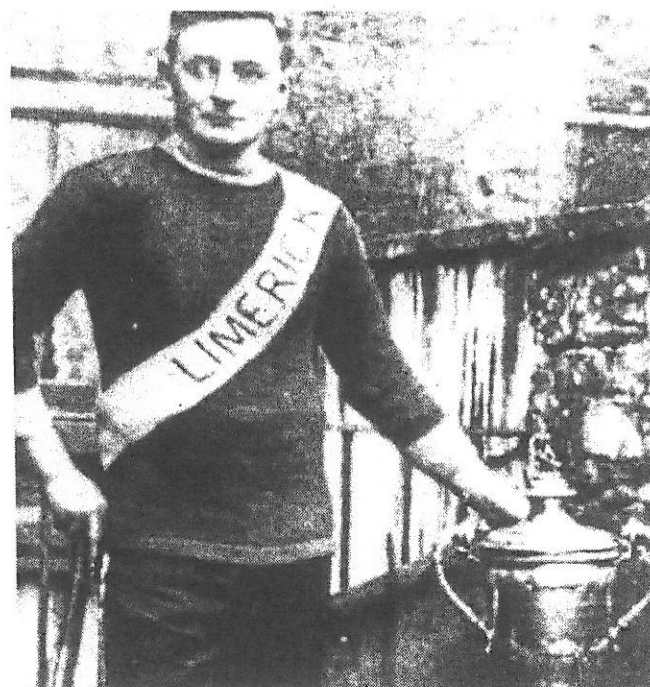
Willie Hough was presented with the All Ireland cup by President of the GAA Kilkenny man James

Nolan. The team returned that night to Limerick by train. There were no enthusiastic supporters there to greet them (unlike 2018) and it is said that a passer-by asked "Where was the match today lads?"

Willie was also a member of the Limerick team that won its third All Ireland title on March 4, 1923. It was the 1921 final delayed because of the Civil War. Limerick defeated Dublin by 8-5 to 3-2 in a disappointing final with Willie Walsh in charge. Willie won his third County club medal when Newcastle West defeated Bruff by 3-2 to 1-2 to win the County title at the Market's Field on December 1925. Willie won two All Ireland senior hurling medals, three Munster medals, three county championship medals, and numerous tournament medals.

In retirement he took up refereeing and distinguished himself in National League games and Munster championship clashes. His greatest honour came when he had charge of an All Ireland semi-final between Galway and Kilkenny. He also excelled in administration and from 1924 to 1928 he was vice-chairman of the West Limerick Board. In 1936 he was elected treasurer of the Munster Council and remained in that post unopposed for a period of twenty six years. As a tribute to his services to the council they presented him with a trip to the United States. It was an indication of the commitment and dedication of a man who once cycled twenty nine miles to Limerick to play a game against Tipperary at the Market Field and after the match cycled home.

Willie died on April 13 1976 aged 83 years, and on Sunday September 9, the Monagea GAA club is commemorating the centenary of Willie captaining Limerick to victory in the 1918 All Ireland final. There will be Mass in Monagea Church at 10am, followed by the unveiling of a plaque at Monagea GAA grounds and wreath laying at his grave in Monagea cemetery.



Willie Hough, who captained the winning Limerick team 100 years ago in 1918