

Limerick waiting 40 years for an All-Ireland hurling championship title

Mike Dwane

"TO win a Munster championship back in those times was a huge deal for us. People forget that Limerick hadn't contested a Munster final between 1956 and 1971. So to come out of Munster in 1973 was a huge deal," recalls Limerick full-forward of that All-Ireland winning year - the county's last - Eamonn (Ned) Rea.

While Tipperary fans behind the goal claim to this day that Richie Bennis' winning point had trailed off wide, that score in Thurles set up an All-Ireland semi-final against London, who had scored a shock win over Galway in the quarters, reuniting Eamonn Rea with his brother Gerry.

"He was playing full-back for London so I ended up marking him in the semi-final," recalled the Effin man. While Gerry held him scoreless in the semi, Limerick prevailed and Eamonn went on to score two points against Kilkenny in Limerick hurling's most celebrated day.

"Kilkenny would always have to be the favourites, you'd have to say. Mind you, a lot of people gave us a 50-50 chance owing to the fact that they were missing a couple of their key men (including Eddie Keher)."

While the level of media scrutiny was not as intense as today, there had been hype leading up to September 2, 1973.

"The TV cameras were there and there would have been a lot of press interviews leading up to it and then of course Limerick was always a great sporting city and a great hurling city and county.

"The crowds that turned out to see us train were unbelievable. There was around 5,000 who came to see us on the last session before we left for Dublin. So that created a huge buzz and I remember



Jim O'Brien, above left, and Phil Bennis, Limerick, in action against Frank Cummins, Kilkenny in the All-Ireland Hurling Final, September 2, 1973 and captain Eamonn Grimes, below, goes up the steps of the Hogan Stand to collect the Liam McCarthy Cup



thinking we'd have to do our best to win it for them."

Mick Mackey had captained the last Limerick team to win an All-Ireland in 1940 so the weight of expectation on the 1973 panel was every bit as heavy as on the Limerick teams to contest All-Irelands in

the 1990s.

"We kept hearing about the Mackeys, the Clohessys, the Herberts and the Powers just like the current generation keep hearing about us and are probably sick of hearing about us," said Eamonn.

But does he believe he will live to see

another All-Ireland win for Limerick?

"It depends on how long you are giving me. Sometimes, it can happen when you least expect it. You'd have to say that Kilkenny are so good now it makes it very hard for everybody else. Tipperary are not far behind them if

you forget about last year's debacle against Kilkenny. Galway are there or thereabouts and Clare look very promising to me. Munster is a bit of a lottery and anybody could come out of it. If it wasn't for Kilkenny, everybody has a good chance," he said.



Big freeze: A view of ice floes on the river at Athlunkard Bridge in January 1963

Shannon freezes over during winter of 1963

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SKATING and ice hockey were suddenly popular sports in Limerick 50 years ago as the city and county were gripped by the coldest winter in living memory.

The last time the Shannon completely froze over in Limerick - at Arthur's Quay - was in January 1963 as temperatures plummeted below minus 20.

It was not only the temperatures themselves but the protracted nature of the cold spell which made 1963 Limerick's hardest winter in centuries. Some schools in West Limerick were under snow and remained closed until April and May.

Contemporary Limerick Leader reports show that while children took to the lakes and quarries with skates, much hardship was endured through burst watermains and home heating oil freezing in tanks. Icicles as long as 20 feet were seen hanging from burst pipes.

Sales of anti-freeze rocketed as people struggled to keep cars on the road and publicans reported not having enough water to wash glasses. One shopkeeper told the Leader of having found

three dozen bottles of lemonade frozen solid.

The Leader reported: "The ebb and flow of high tides did not prevent large patches of ice forming on the river below Sarsfield Bridge and Arthurs Quay was completely frozen over.

But the full effects of the protracted cold wave are even more apparent in the upper reaches of the river. At Athlunkard Boat Club, the Abbey river is an ice floe, stretching almost half-way across, and undulating in its formation, where it was built up at different tide levels.

The canal at Guinness's old wharf is a solid ice pack. It is possible to walk across from either side, and the ice, five inches in thickness, is littered with boulders which were evidently thrown to test its strength."

The dock at Limerick Port had completely frozen over while the Leader reporter, waxing lyrical, compared people walking around Limerick to Shackleton and Scott.

"And for the first time in living memory, too, a new sound is heard in Corbally. It is the continuous, eerie and sharp noise of cracking ice, known well to arctic explorers, and now breaking the winter silence a mile from the city centre."

Closure of railway

AS traffic lights began to spring up around Limerick, 1963 saw the closure to passengers of the North Kerry railway line which ran from Limerick city to Tralee.

It was the end of an era for the people of County Limerick as stations - Patrickswell, Kilgobbin, Ballingrane Junction, Rathkeale, Ardagh, Newcastle West, Barnagh, Devon Road and Abbeyfeale - fell out of use. Goods traffic along most of the line would cease in 1974.

75 YEARS SINCE

Cement factory opens

MINISTER for Industry and Commerce Sean Lemass presided at the formal opening ceremony at the Irish Cement plant in Mungret, which commenced production in April 1938 - a month before its sister plant in Drogheda.

It realised a long-held ambition of the Limerick Harbour Authority to locate cement production in a region rich in limestone and shale deposits.

In the year it opened, the Mungret factory had a capacity to produce 75,000 tons a year and the plant's output had grown almost tenfold by the mid-1960s.

75 YEARS SINCE

Munster at Thomond

MUNSTER played their first match in Thomond Park in 1938, handing out a defeat to Leinster in an interprovincial.

The ground had been christened earlier that year when Young Munster defeated a Bohemians side that featured a young Ted Russell.

100 YEARS SINCE

Planes over Limerick

THOUSANDS gathered in the city in September 1913 as the newly-formed Royal Flying Corps engaged in military exercises over the city, basing their four aircraft at Rathbane Camp. For three weeks, citizens stared in wonder at their first sight of flying machines.

The pilots made several sorties west over the county, causing astonishment at a race meeting at Newcastlewest. The Limerick Leader recorded that the flights occasioned in the onlookers "something of the surprise and astonishment that planetary transit or an eclipse would occasion in their forefathers".

100 YEARS SINCE

Limerick volunteers

IN the year of the Lockout in Dublin and rising nationalist fervour, the second branch of the Irish Volunteers outside of Dublin was formed in Dromcollogher in November 1913.

The force was backed by the local priest Fr Tom Wall, a native of Bruff, with the Limerick Leader reporting that "the Volunteer movement has been taken up very enthusiastically in Dromcollogher where a corps of close on a hundred active and brawny young men have already enrolled".

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