

No. 208—Paddy Kelly Of Newcastle West

(By SEAMUS O'CEALLAIGH)

I FIND it hard to decide whether to describe Paddy Kelly as a Limerick City man, where he was well known and loved during a spell of over forty years association with many aspects of the sporting life of the city—or credit his career to the town of his birth, Newcastle West.

Conscious of his deep attachment all through life to the western capital and mindful of the fact that when he eventually retired from his business connection with the well-known city firm of William Todd & Co., Ltd., he returned to the homeland and passed peacefully away there on February 18th, 1927—widely mourned by a large circle of friends—I give the honour to the west—and honour it is, for Paddy did more than one man's part for Gaelic games and athletics during a period when his enthusiasm and example were to prove of worth-while value not only to the youth of Limerick but many well outside the immediate sphere of Shannonside influence.

THE 1900 COUNTY JUNIOR FOOTBALL FINAL.

Paddy opened his hurling career in Newcastle West and had displayed some useful form with the home lads before being apprenticed to the drapery trade, when he moved to Limerick City. He "lived-in," as was the custom of the time, and so missed the opportunity which came a short time later of helping the home town boys in Limerick's first County Junior Football final, which Newcastle West won. It was for the 1900 title, and the spirit of the times was evident in the naming of the teams: Newcastle West Boers, 2-10; Kilmallock Rebels, 1-4.

The players in that first final of fiftyseven years ago will be read with interest, although it is doubtful if the two "Boers" listed actually played with the winners.

Newcastle West—J. Collins, captain; T. Harte, T. Hunt, J. Kruger, J. Cronje, W. Mackessy, J. Bresnahan, J. O'Dwyer, J. Hartnett, M. S. Quin, L. Hickey, T. Reidy, D. O'Sullivan, T. Connors, T. Phealy, D. Scanlon, T. Moore.

Kilmallock—P. Quilty, Captain; J. O'Malley, D. O'Grady, P. Mackessy, J. Higgins, P. Buckley, T. Hickey, J. Keane, M. F. Ryan, T. Ryan, J. Scanlan, C. Treacy, M. Adams, M. Nagle, P. Murphy, J. Doherty, J. Healy.

JOINED THE LIMERICK COMMERCIALS.

The football fever evident in Newcastle West about the period sent Paddy seeking a football outlet on his arrival in the city, and for a youth in the drapery trade there was only the one way to turn—in the direction of the renowned Limerick Commercial, who after a dozen years participation in the Gaelic arena—from the very commencement of the championships, had annexed no fewer than eight county titles, two Munster and two All-Ireland crowns. And we must not forget that Gaelic activities were at a standstill for three years of that period in Limerick, as the result of the "Parnell Split."

For over quarter of a century, Paddy continued one of the leading lights of the great city club, and when they won the last of their sixteen county titles in 1927, he was Chairman of the Commercial—the guiding spirit behind a great revival that brought well merited success to the storied standard.

During the years of his active association with the Commercial, that famous club won the second eight of their total of county crowns and figured in some stirring games with the then leading football clubs of the Limerick arena—notably Glin, Abbeyfeale, Knockane, Askeaton, Foynes, Kilmallock, Ballylanders, Ballyhabill and Newcastle West.

When they played the latter in the 1920 final, Paddy must have found it difficult to decide where his support should lie, but the problem was quickly solved for him when Commercial got away to a facile win.

HURLED WITH SARSFIELDS CLUB.

In hurling, Paddy gave his allegiance to the Sarsfields Club, a combination also associated with the drapery trade, and he hurled with them through many a campaign, including three inter-house competitions, which they won. Sarsfields have long since passed from the Limerick Gaelic stage and we have little to remind us of a team that gave much to the local scene in days when hurling was fighting for its very existence in the City of the Violated Treaty.

I can only trace one list of their players, and it is in connection with a game they played on November 23rd, 1905, in a field next Ascot Terrace, and which resulted: Sarsfields, 1-12; St. Munchin's College, 3-4.

The teams were:—

Sarsfields—J. O'Leary, M. Lynch, P. Kelly, T. Lynch, J. Keane, J. Naughton, J. Bassett, M. Leahy, J. Kirby, P. Hayes, J. Freese, P. Liston, T. O'Donnell, J. Dwane, M. Stapleton, M. Brouder, T. Archdeacon.

St. Munchin's College—M. Fitzpatrick, P. Feely, J. Lee, J. Maloney, T. Normoyle, P. Kearney, W. Tobin, T. Twomey, J. Gleeson, T. Mulcahy, S. Gleeson, M. Barry, J. Dolan, J. Mortell, W. Leonard, T. Irwin, P. O'Neill.

OF A BRIGHT AND CHEERY DISPOSITION.

Familiarly and affectionately known as "Long Kelly," Paddy was a man of remarkable physique and of a bright and cheery disposition. Keenly interested in the development of athletics, he gave much time and energy to this important work—an interest he shared to the end with his passionate attachment to the fortunes of the county hurling side, which he followed in fair weather and foul, rarely missing an important game, no matter how distant the venue.

I will conclude with an appreciation which appeared in the Press from the pen of an old friend, following his death, a little over seventeen years ago:

"Paddy Kelly is dead, and in his passing Newcastle West has suffered the loss of one of its most esteemed and popular personages.

"Paddy, when I first knew him, was employed in one of the big Limerick drapery establishments, and was one of the most outstanding figures in the public and social life of the ancient borough.

"I remember his great big form—he must have been at least six feet and a half in his socks—coming round William Street Corner with that genial smile and boisterous laugh that were so essentially a part of his whole make up.

"Over forty years, they told me, he was in Limerick, and I have not yet met a man in the city who was so much admired and loved and respected. Most of them referred to him affectionately as "Long Kelly"; others preferred to call him "Pat"; others choose to describe him as the "Big Fellow"; but all were agreed on one point—that he was a true gentleman and genuine and sincere friend.

STAUNCH AND STERLING GAELE.

"Personally, I would prefer to remember Paddy as a staunch and sterling Gael, as sincere and true a follower of Gaelic pastimes as ever graced a hurling or football field. He was himself, I am told, an active hurler in his day; he certainly knew as much about the game as any man I have ever met. "The famed Limerick team had no more ardent and enthusiastic admirer and he could recall in detail the triumphs and tribulations of the Shannon hurlers from way back, it seemed, to the dawn of the game in Limerick.

"I do not think he ever missed an inter-county game and it was a real pleasure to hear him recall incidents connected with struggles that had long vanished into the oblivion of history. What a fine figure he must have cut at many a final at Croke Park, with a word of encouragement for the home team and always a genial smile.

"I remember him, too, at sports meetings, striving ever to promote athletics with that unrestrained spirit of enthusiasm that was so essentially a part of his existence.

"Often I saw him advising, admonishing, but always encouraging youngsters to cultivate the arts of the athletic arena; you would find him at big national meetings in the city or at unheard of novice fixtures in a remote corner of the county. It was always the same with Big Paddy; wherever and whenever his services were needed they were gladly and willingly given. Indeed, he must have contributed more than any other individual to whatever measure of success had been attained in the promotion of athletics in the city and county. If the movement had not been as successful as it might be in Limerick, it was certainly not through any fault of Pat Kelly's.

THE REAL PAT.

"But I never got to know the real Pat until he came home to the old town after forty years of voluntary exile. His strength was then broken, it seemed, but his indomitable spirit was as strong and as virile as ever. Ill-health failed to eradicate from his fine open countenance that youthful expression of buoyancy and good-fellowship by which he will best be remembered. Like all of us, poor humans, he had his faults, no doubt, but they were far outnumbered by his good and noble qualities and his noble sense of forbearance in the face of a relentless and inevitable fate.

"I was always glad to meet him, to hear him talk of old times and old faces long forgotten in the thickening mists of time; to listen to his reminiscences of the good old days, and join in that great laugh of his, that big, hearty laugh of his that did one good to hear in these days of shallow hypocrisy and empty sophistry. But we will hear the laugh no more; it is hushed for ever in the unbreakable silence of death. As I walked away from the grave at Churchtown on Monday, I could not restrain a silent tear; for I knew Paddy Kelly;

"I was honoured by his acquaintanceship. I was proud to call him friend."