

No. 151—MICKY O'SULLIVAN of Ballyhahill

(By Seamus O'Ceallaigh)

TREATY were forging to the football front in Limerick City in the early 'forties, and the senior fifteen made a gallant bid against Abbeyfeale in the first County final contested by a city side since Commercial's won their last of sixteen titles in 1927.

Treaty juniors won the City crown that same year (1941) and a big Thomondgate contingent made the journey to Rathkeale on March 15th, 1942, for the meeting of Treaty and Ballyhahill in the County semi-final.

It was a well contested game, the city lads led 0-3 to 0-1 at the interval, but Reidy, with a pair of points put the sides astride before the end of the third quarter. When a mere youth kicked the West into the lead with a beauty point, we were told he was the American-born son of a great Limerick footballer, Roger O'Sullivan, who, for a number of years, captained the Cavan team in the United States.

MADE GAELIC HISTORY.

That was our first introduction to Mickey. O'Sullivan, whom we were to see one late July day in 1950 captaining the New York side that made Gaelic history by defeating Cavan, at Croke Park, in the National Football League final.

To get back to the Limerick arena, Ballyhahill won that hard fought game against Treaty, 0-5 to 0-3 and their next outing was to Askeaton, where they played South Liberties in the County final.

The pair first met on March 22nd—a week after the Treaty game. At half time, Liberties led, 1-3 to 1-2, and points by Jack O'Sullivan and Regan put the Eastern men a goal clear with ten minutes play remaining. It was then the youthful Mickey O'Sullivan came into the play, replacing an injured colleague, and immediately made his presence felt. Swinging low, from a great drive by W. Reidy, he placed P. Walsh for the goal that insisted on another day to decide the issue.

THE RE-PLAY.

The re-play was at Rathkeale on April 12th, and Ballyhahill won, 3-4 to 2-3, Mickey O'Sullivan gaining his first championship medal—a Limerick junior football one, at the age of seventeen years. And his father, Roger, was happy, too, for besides seeing his son follow in distinguished Gaelic foot-falls he was also trainer of the Ballyhahill team.

But Roger was not the only old Gael to give sons to that Ballyhahill success. Michael O'Shaughnessy, who played some great football in the course of the championship, was son of Tom O'Shaughnessy, captain of the old Ballyhahill Brother Sheares team; whilst Patrick O'Shaughnessy worthily represented his father and namesake, a sterling member of another old Ballyhahill side.

Twelve months later, almost to the day, April 11th, 1943, we were back at Rathkeale, this time to see Sarsfields and Ballyhahill contest the 1942 County minor football final.

It was at the height of the transport difficulties caused by the great world conflagration then in progress, and Sarsfields showed wonderful club spirit by cycling

the twenty miles to the venue.

The City were riding the crest of a wave in minor ranks at the time, and Thomondgate teams had captured seven of the eight minor titles contested to that date. They won once more against Ballyhahill, but star of the thirty was Micky O'Sullivan, who gave a sparkling display and did as much as three men to break the city mastery.

BACK TO 1944.

And now, I go back to Rathkeale, on October 15th, 1944, for a last memory of Micky in the home arena. It was the occasion of the County senior football final for that year, the contestants, St. Patrick's, the holders, and Ballyhahill.

It was a great game, fought at a fast pace. Ballyhahill were slow to get into their stride; a little unsteady in the opening stages they lost early chances, but when they got really moving they surely made things hum. "Saints" led at the interval, 1-4 to 0-1.

The second half was one succession of thrills. The challengers made a great bid to dethrone the champions and in a hectic finish provided the great crowd with a succession of thrills rarely equalled in a county decider.

Micky O'Sullivan hit the high spots that evening, but it was his last great game with Ballyhahill, for he crossed the Atlantic a short time afterwards, and was soon hitting the headlines in both hurling and football, and claiming plenty of attention, being hailed as an American born player—a real "local boy made good."

HIS BROTHER HAD BETTER LUCK.

Micky failed to take a Limerick senior medal with him to the States, but his brother Eddie had better luck. He helped Ballyhahill beat Treaty-Sarsfield, 1-4 to 0-5, in the County minor football final, played at Adare on November 5th, 1950, and was a member of the Western Gaels side that dethroned the Thomondgate lads in 1953, after five titles in a row had been collected by the city team. That great Western victory came at Kilmallock on October 25th, 1953, the score, 0-9 to 1-4, in their favour. And before the week was out, Eddie was on his way to join his brother, Micky, in New York.

And now the pair are back in Ireland—members of the New York team to play Dublin next Sunday in the second football game of the St. Brendan series.

Football came kindly to the O'Sullivans, and Micky was a protege of that grand player and referee, the late Tom Culhane of Glin—from whom he learned many of the finer points of the game.

His early football progress was handicapped by the fact that the standard in Limerick was not too high at the time, but occasional trips over the border into neighbouring Kerry helped to perfect his style, and he became one of the most promising Limerick County players of the early 'forties.

SAW SERVICE IN KOREA.

After his return to America he joined the United States Army and saw eighteen months service in Korea. He really hit the headlines, however, when he captained the Kerry team that won the New York football championships of 1948 and 1949.

But his proudest moment was when, as captain of the New York

side that came to play Cavan in the 1950 National Football League final, he bore the cup away in triumph from Croke Park.

Micky was back again in Croke Park on May 18th, 1952, as American captain, but the New York lads were handicapped on that occasion through lack of practice, as they shut down in America for the winter season and they were well beaten.

But the O'Sullivans—Micky and Eddie—came into their own in the first game of the St. Brendan Cup series, played at the Polo Grounds, New York, nearly twelve months ago.

The Ballyhahill lads proved the chief architects of the great New York victory, 0-10 to 2-3, after one of the most exciting games ever played in the "States."

THE GAME.

Mayo, National League champions, opened with an early goal, and New York's first score came in the tenth minute when Micky O'Sullivan "brought the house down" with a grand movement that ended over the Mayo crossbar. Hughes had New York's second point before Tom Langan planted a goal to the New York net—a score that seemed to settle matters in Mayo's favour.

But the Limerick brothers were planning and plotting, and five minutes from the interval Eddie packed a lovely point between the upright, Micky supplementing with a like score inside the same minute. And when Brendan Maguire had another New York point the issue was back in the melting pot again, the teams resting: Mayo, 2-0; New York, 0-5.

Points came thick and heavy in the third quarter, with the teams level at the end of it: Mayo, 2-2; New York, 0-8. Ten further minutes yielded but a point each from Jim O'Donnell (Mayo) and Pat Foley (New York), and when Eddie O'Sullivan missed what looked a golden opening all the indications pointed to a draw. In the gathering dusk, however, Eddie again got possession, and electrified the crowd when he swung a perfect shot between the uprights for what proved the winning point.

GREAT ACHIEVEMENT.

Two brothers together on a representative side like New York is a great achievement, and to have the honour repeated for the second St. Brendan Cup tie is indeed unique. Limerick football will be well represented in Croke Park on Sunday, whilst the hurling team to play Tipperary have also worthy sons of Garryowen in O'Grady and Frawley.

Micky O'Sullivan is the long serving man of the quartette. A dashing footballer with fine hands, his lightning thrusts and accurate placing of the ball should lead to many scores on Sunday. Now thirty years of age, he is 5 ft. 9 ins. in height, and weighs, as the Americans put it—168 lbs.—a twelve stone man in our way of putting it.

They had a vote in America some time ago to determine the most popular players on the hurling and football fields there. Hurling's most popular figure turned out to be the great Kilkenny man, Terry Leahy, whilst footballers' popularity poll was headed by Micky O'Sullivan, who is also a first class hurler, and helps his home county side with the caman in all the big New York games.