

Great Limerick Athletes

No. 105—JACKY POWER of Monaleen

(By SEAMUS O'CEALLAIGH)

TWENTY years on the hurling fields of Ireland, during which he played in every position except goalkeeper, and clashed with the greatest hurlers of that era, is the proud record of Jacky Power — hurler, footballer, and athlete — on some aspects of whose career we will dwell for a few minutes.

Born in the parish of Monaleen on May 30th, 1916, Jacky was hurling as soon as he was able to toddle and captained the Monaleen school team in the "Limerick Leader" cup competition. At Monaleen his teacher was the late John Kelly, N.T., a former Chairman of the Limerick County Board G.A.A., who was later Chairman of the County Board N.A.C.A., and it was from him that he received his first lessons in both hurling and athletics.

His first "outside" club was St. Patrick's, with whom he played in the minor County championships in 1931. The following year he opened a partnership with Ahane that carried him through minor and junior to senior ranks, which he reached in 1933, and continued to the present day, amassing a record of successes that can compare favourably with the best anywhere.

GREAT HURLERS HE MET.

One judges a man by the company he keeps and a hurler by the men against whom he played. In this respect, Jacky has a particularly large litany of stars, including Jimmy Langton and Terry Leahy (Kilkenny), Jack Lynch, Johnny Quirke and Christy Ring (Cork), Tommy Doyle and Tommy Treacy of Tipperary, all encountered when he figured as a defender; with Paddy Larkin and Paddy Phelan (Kilkenny), John Maher, Tommy Purcell (Tipperary), and John Keane (Waterford)—the great ones he met when playing in the attack.

He met and beat all the above mentioned in many hectic engagements and it is a tribute in itself to his work that only three occasions are remembered when he was really mastered: as a back, on Jimmy Coffey, of Tipperary, in 1937, and on Bobby Dinneen (Cork) in 1939, and, as a forward, on Willie Murphy, of Cork, in the late 'forties.

The best players of his early days in Annacotty included Timmy Ryan, the Mackey brothers, and their uncle, Anthony, of Ahane; Sean Kelly, of Young Ireland; Mickey and "Pa" Cross, of Claughaun; whilst the Herbert brothers were all reared up with him.

PROMISING ATHLETE.

A very promising athlete, it was unfortunate that his pre-occupation with hurling and football engagements prevented him devoting more time to the track. He competed in the Limerick County Championship Sports at Elton in 1939, and was out in the 100 yards flat, but was not placed in this event. He, however, won a County championship title in the long jump and also participated in the hop, step and jump. He fell at his first attempt in the latter, and as Limerick were playing Cork the following Sunday in the Munster hurling final he was advised not to continue any further in case he was injured.

His first senior game for Limerick was in the 1935 Thomond Feis, when he replaced Micky Cross, who had to retire injured. He afterwards played in the Munster Final of that year when Paddy Clohessy was off — filling the left half-back berth, with Garrett Howard in the centre position.

A FIRST-CLASS FOOTBALLER.

Also a first-class footballer, he wore the Limerick jersey in both junior and senior grades for many seasons, and captained the Shannonside junior fifteen that defeated Kerry, at Killarney, in 1939, to win the Munster title.

Jacky's lifetime of hurling was punctuated with a galaxy of glory spells, from which he collected all the honours the arena has to offer—All-Ireland, National League, Railway Cup, Munster Championship, Oireachtas and Thomond Feis, with Tournament successes

galore, including victories in London and New York—and then, county titles almost beyond count.

In the inter-county senior hurling arena he helped win the All-Ireland titles of 1936 and 1940, the Munster finals of 1935, 1936 and 1940, the National Hurling League trophy from 1935 to 1938 and again in 1947, the Oireachtas Tournament of 1939, several Thomond Feis and other tournament ties.

IN NINE RAILWAY CUP FINALS.

Jacky wore the Munster jersey in nine Railway Cup Finals and was on the winning side on seven occasions. No Irish team was picked during his days of stardom, and he was unfortunate in this for it is almost certain he would have gained a place on it at least a few years.

When business reasons took him away from Limerick, Jacky continued his hurling and football in Mayo and Kerry, and actually did very fine work for hurling in both these counties.

He won his first All-Ireland when going to Glenstal School of Arts in 1936, but previous to that he had participated in the great American tour with the Limerick team, a wonderful experience for a lad of his age. He also travelled to London on a few occasions to play for Limerick in the Monaghan Cup games.

Jacky came of good Gaelic stock — his father played with the old St. Michael's hurling team in the City, whilst an uncle, on his mother's side, Thomas Fitzgerald, of Askeaton, was a first class footballer.

He regards the 1935 National Hurling League final between Limerick and Kilkenny at Nowlan Park as the best display of first class hurling he ever saw—a feeling that is shared by many who remember that unforgettable battle of the hurling gods when the top stars of Nore and Shannon were in their heyday.

VIEWS ON PRESENT DAY PLAYERS.

Asked his opinion of present day players, Jacky did not consider them as good as the players of his day as "they have none of that do or die spirit most noticeable under a falling ball. They are more prone to let it hop than to go in and pull first time in the air. Half forwards now stop a ball in front of them oftener than the opposing backs, not like the days of Dinny Barry Murphy or John Mackey. Hurling and football are not as good now either as they were in my good days. The general public are more interested than ever but the players themselves seem to be losing that love for the games that was such a feature in the past. I'm afraid those in charge of our games must hasten to attract young men to play the games by some other way than the trophies they offer; otherwise, I fear, matters will have reached a sorry plight in another ten years. I don't mean anything leading to professionalism but such a thing as free scholarships, or entry to a trade, or some outlook for the future, would be a big incentive to the working man's son, and the sooner he is brought into the game and catered for, the sooner we will have the bite back in it."

OUTSTANDING GAMES.

With space running out, I can only pick a few gems from the many great efforts of a grand hurling career. Playing at left corner forward in his first All-Ireland final, that for 1936, his first goal off the great Paddy Larkin of Kilkenny was a real beauty. At centre back against Tipperary, at Thurles, in 1939, he gave an outstanding display despite the close attention of that hard hitting Tipperary man, Ned Wade.

Limerick made a remarkable "come-back" in 1940, and to no man more than Jacky Power is the credit due. I quote from a Press report of the period: "Jacky Power was one of Limerick's star players in the drawn Munster Championship game with Waterford in Kilkenny last Sunday. From the start he entered wholeheartedly into the struggle—bringing all his well-known dash and hurling craft to

bear on every effort which broke up the attempts of the Waterford men to achieve success. It was brilliant individual play on Power's part which kept the Waterford men in check. In the second period, too, when Limerick made positional changes he dominated the exchanges. His goal was a powerful effort following a dazzling solo run. Power has been an outstanding member of the Limerick team for some years, always striking magnificent form and seldom spending an "off" day. One of his finest qualities as a player revolves around the manner in which those brilliant "one-man" efforts of his can completely change the fortunes of a game."

CLASSIC PERFORMANCE.

Among his many other great games was his classic performance against the great Terry Leahy, of Kilkenny, in the 1947 National League final—the last great trophy Limerick won. But Jacky had another day of glory—the 1949 Munster final against Tipperary, and here is what the "Limerick Leader" said of him: "Jacky Power has played many great games in his long career, but was never better than on Sunday and had he got proper support would have won the game on his own. It was amazing the way he was able to cut through knots of Tipperary players or dance his way towards the goal with the ball on his hurley. It was a thrill a minute finish as Limerick, led in inspiring fashion by Jacky Power, made tremendous efforts to get the all important score. For a few breath-taking seconds the veteran Ahane player seemed to have attained his objective, when, after a scintillating solo run, he shot to the net, but cheers quickly died as Con Murphy called a Tipperary free for something that few could fathom at the time."

And so we leave the great Limerick maestro with the proud hurling record, and the grand memories. Long may he flourish!