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No. 215—Mick Quinlan Of Knockaney

(By SEAMUS O'CEALLAIGH)

THE village of Knockaney has been even since the dawn of history and legend linked with our athletic tradition.

That this tradition has been worthily upheld down to the present day is obvious to every follower of Gaelic games.

Knockaney's great fair or "Aonach" was second only to that of Tailteann in County Meath. One of the Ossianic romances "The Pursuit of the Lilladocker" has the hill of Aine for the start of that famous pursuit, the first recorded cross-country race in Ireland.

Later times saw deeds as brave, and old people still recall the feats of Father Ailbe Hanley, one of which was to throw a blacksmith's sledge over the castle, a square tower some sixty feet high, which is still standing. This priest, like Father Sheehy and others, was "on the run." He died Parish Priest of Ballybricken and was buried in his native Knockaney, in the Protestant Churchyard.

PUT OUT THE LIGHTS OF NEW YORK.

One of Mick Quinlan's team mates of the 'nineties, Mick Ryan, "put out the lights of New York." He was playing a match in Madison Square Gardens when a ball struck by him fused the electric system.

The first appearance of Mick Quinlan before the Limerick sporting public was in that year of hurling destiny for Garryowen—1897, when Kilfinane won for the county its first All-Ireland title.

Mick's first outing was with his native Knockaney, when they beat Effin at Kilmallock in the first round of the senior hurling championship.

The Knockaney lads thus qualified to meet Kilfinane in the second round, and three meetings were necessary before the issue was decided in favour of the Kilfinane men, who later won out the county title and went on to capture Munster and All-Ireland honours, to which they later added the coveted Croke Cup, to complete a magnificent double, not often recorded in the seventy years story of Irish hurling.

THREE GAMES AND MUCH EXCITEMENT.

In the first meeting, at Knocklong, the Kilfinane lads had an overwhelming success, winning by 5-10 against a blank sheet for their opponents.

An objection by Knockaney brought a replay a fortnight later. This took place at Elton, and proved a terrific tussle, fought at a very fast pace, with close markings the outstanding feature. The only score after twenty-five minutes play was a goal recorded by the Knockaney men. At this stage a dispute took place out of which a row developed and the game had to be called off.

The third meeting took place at Bruree three weeks later and the fine crowd that saw this game were treated to hurling of a high order, and plenty of excitement as the sides battled hard and in close company for the best part of the hour, Kilfinane pulling away in the final stages of a great game to register the win that opened the road to the successes which were to follow.

THE KNOCKANEY TEAM.

The Knockaney team of those three clashes will be recalled with pleasure by South Limerick old timers: Mick Ryan (captain), Mick Quinlan, Bill Gammell, P. Coughlan, Jim Gould (goal), P. Russell, C. Hayes, Ned Cleary, Pat Kirby, Jim Kirby, John Kirby, D. O'Leary, Eddie Guerin, John Casey, M. Ryan, P. Real, M. Hogan.

This was the last occasion for some years that Knockaney had a team. The following season, the sister parish, under the name of Loughgur, took over.

Our next meeting with Mick Quinlan is on athletic fields. He hit the high spots at a great sports held at Kilfinane on St. Patrick's Day, 1900. As was usual in the Kilfinane of that period, the competitors included noted figures of the track, but it was an early season gathering and some of them lacked training. Mick, however, was in rare form. He won the hurling long puck with the magnificent drive of 120 yards—a great performance, even taking into

account that a following wind helped the competitors.

MATTER FOR ARGUMENT.

We may argue until we are blue in the face as to whether the old-time hurlers were the superior of our present-day exponents. I have listened to a group of Cork old-timers insist that the men of the past were unrivalled, and when the name of Christy Ring was mentioned as an example of what the hurler of to-day was capable of, they were all of them unanimous in their opinion that no player of the past quarter of a century could hold a candle to men like the evergreen Jim Kelleher of Dungourney, Sean Og Hanley of Kilfinane, Tom Semple of Thurles, or Drug Walsh of Mooncoin.

It is hard to measure the hurling merits of men of different times. The rules have changed. Teams have been reduced from twenty-one a side to fifteen; the scoring space has altered, the weight of the hurley and ball is now hardly half of what it was in the early hurling years.

IMPROVED METHODS AND CONDITIONS.

Playing pitches have improved beyond all recognition, and the strong, well set, sweeping ball-players of a long vanished era have given way to the lighter, speedier and more polished caman wielders so familiar to the present day hurling lovers.

Under the influence of modern training methods and improved facilities, performances on athletic fields have yielded record after record, and in many instances figures considered impossible under the olden conditions.

Not so, as far as the hurling long puck is concerned. Mick Quinlan's powerful 120 yards drive of almost sixty years ago is in no danger from the exponents of to-day. It may be that the lighter hurley and ball is not capable of the performance, all we know is that the distance has not been even nearly approached for two score years.

WAS FIRST IN THREE OTHER EVENTS.

On that unforgettable feast of the National Apostle, almost in the shade of famed Ardpark, Mick Quinlan, in addition to his fine hurling puck win, secured first place in three other events—the 100 and 220 yards flat races, and the hop, step and jump. His winning figure in the latter was 42 ft. 6 ins.—well short of what the Kilfinane athletic lovers were used to getting from their own renowned Dan Shanahan, but "enough for the day"—and that's all that troubled Mick on the occasion.

That he was an "All Rounder," Mick proved by finishing second to R. J. Casey of Martinstown (still happily with us and long domiciled in Toomevara) in the putting of the 28 lbs. with follow, also taking second place, this time to Willie Drake of Kilfinane, in the running high jump, the winning effort in this being 5ft. 9 ins., with Mick returning 5ft. 8 ins.

By SEAMUS O'CEALLAIGH

THE summer of 1904 was a busy one for Mick Quinlan, for in addition to figuring in many thrill-packed hurling games, he played in at least one memorable football encounter and gained some notable athletic triumphs, winning prizes in a wide variety of events, including the 100 yards flat, putting 28lbs., the high and long jumps, the "hop-step" and the hurling puck, getting the amazing distance of almost 120 yards in the last mentioned—exceptional even when allowing for the strong breeze which aided the competitors.

The old rivals, Cork and Limerick, met in the 1904 Munster Senior Hurling Final, which was played at Tralee on September 4th. For half an hour the game lived up to the best of the Munster arena and we had some unforgettable exchanges. Two rather easy goals shortly after the resumption took most of the fire out of the game and Cork finished in strong style to win readily 4-11 to 3-1.

THE LIMERICK PLAYERS

Mr. T. O'Sullivan of Listowel refereed, and the Limerick players were:— Tim Lloyd (captain); W. Ryan (Caherline), T. O'Brien, Joe O'Connell, P. O'Dea (Young Ireland), J. Cathrell (Kilfinny), J. Carroll, M. McCarthy, J. Mackey (Castleconnell), P. Gore (Bruree), M. Feely (Croom), P. Flaherty (Rathkeale), P. Butler (Cappamore), T. Flynn, T. Brazil (Kilfinane), M. Quinlan, M. Whelan (Bruff), and M. Clifford (Ballygran).

The Bruff Stars enjoyed a very successful spell in the early months of 1905. Opening with a classic encounter with Kilfinane Emmets at Elton on February 5th, this match ended in a draw after a grand display of hurling. Kilfinane 1-7, Bruff 2-4. In their next outing, the Bruff lads beat Grange shortly afterwards, figuring in another drawn encounter, this time with Young Ireland, who were a powerful combination at the period.

In the East Limerick Senior Hurling Championship semi-final,

played at the Markets Field on April 23rd, Bruff created something akin to a sensation by disposing of Caherline by 2-7 to 2-5, after an unforgettable display. The Caherline lads were strongly fancied as they had beaten Kilfinane to qualify for the semi-final.

EAST LIMERICK SENIOR FINAL

A great crowd were at the Markets Field on June 11th to see the East Limerick Senior Hurling Final, in which the contestants were Bruff and Cappamore. The sides were neck and neck for three quarters of the hour, and the crowd were settling themselves for a finish to remember, when a Cappamore goal, rather against the run of play, upset the Bruff lads, who went out by 3-13 to 2-7 in a surprisnly tame finish. Cappamore advanced to take their first County Senior Hurling Final, defeating Ballingarry in the Final by 3-7 to 1-5.

Mick Quinlan captained the Bruff Stars through that exciting campaign, and was an inspiration to his fellow players in every game.

The Bruff team in the Eastern Final was:— Mick Quinlan (captain), W. Gammel, J. Guerin, E. Guerin, J. Guerin, J. Moloney, C. Hayes, M. Whelan, M. Feely, M. Hogan, E. Cleary, P. Real, P. Russell, J. Gould, and P. O'Brien.

It has been often said that the Bruff team of this golden spell of over half a century ago, fully deserved the highest honours of the Limerick arena, and set a record of attachment and devotion to the national games that has carried down the tradition that is now enshrined in the splendid playing field where future generations will honour the great figures who laid such solid foundations.

NOTED FOR HIS POWERFUL DELIVERIES

Mick Quinlan gained the limelight in athletics, in football and in hurling. The caman code was his favourite and he shone on many a field. Noted for his powerful deliveries, it was nothing surprising to see him drive a ball from goalmouth to goalmouth, covering almost the entire length of the pitch on occasions. In a memorable Munster decider against Tipperary he had the distinction of hitting two frees from the Limerick full back line that registered a pair of points—a feat long remembered by old-time devotees of the Cork Athletic Grounds.

Another day of days in Mick's career was his scoring of a goal and ten points off frees at Tipperary in a Munster Championship game against Waterford.

A notable success scored by Bruff in early 1907 was the defeat of Young Ireland, 5-8 to 5-5, after a most exciting game.

Limerick were heavily defeated by Tipperary at Cork Athletic Grounds, 2-12 to 0-4, on June 23rd, in the opening round of the Munster Senior Hurling Championship.

THE SHANNONSIDE PLAYERS

The Shannonside players were: Tim Flood, James Flood, Wm. Ryan, Patrick Creamer, Michael Kiely, Thomas Kiely, James Bourke, James Neligan, Richard Power, John Leonard, Patrick Flaherty, John Aherne, Thomas Hayes, Michael Quinlan, Michael Whelan, John Riordan and Michael Danaher.

This was the last appearance of Mick in County colours, a circumstance dictated more by his own

insistance on not playing except when in the peak of physical condition rather than through any lack of confidence on the part of the team selectors. It was a similar determination to have a full and proper preparation for every outing which made him decline an invitation from Tipperary to play for Munster in the Railway Shield series on one occasion, when the notice of the fixture did not permit his putting in a fortnight's training for the contest.

The story of Gaelic games bristles with the names of some great men from the Bruff district who left an imprint which time has not effaced. In a lengthy gallery we meet famed figures of the calibre of Micky Creed, a hurler and athlete of marked ability, whose smallness of stature made him a warm favourite on athletic fields. Standing only 5ft. 5ins. high, he crossed a lath a foot above that figure on more than a few occasions—a remarkable achievement.

OTHER LINKS IN GOLDEN MEMORY

Another Bruff "citizen" for many a day was Mick Finn, whose abiding memory of the strenuous All-Ireland and Croke Cup duel victory march of the Kilfinane men of 1897, and his participation therein, was of the initial game in that campaign at the Greenpark Racecourse, Limerick, where the Kilfinane lads emerged victorious, to the great joy of a huge throng of followers led by the Kilmallock 'ninety-eight Baibec Band, with its leader, Paddy O'Brien, in full costume, personifying Robert Emmet.

The names of Mick Quinlan, Bill Gammel, Mick Whelan and the Guerins we have met fairly frequently during the course of this narrative and it only remains to recall the contribution of such as Willie Naughton, Con Scanlan, Chris. Ryan, Ger. O'Donnell, Bill Hogan and Bill Moroney to link the years and build the bridge over which many others—some of equal renown—were to pass along the years.

It is inspiring to find a son of Mick Quinlan following in the fine footfalls of fifty years ago. Patrick Quinlan has to his credit a championship medal with Bruff. Across the Irish Sea he helped London-Irish win the Provincial Championship of Britain in 1956, and in football he took a London County title with St. Mary's.

To the Bruff memories he might yet add another golden link, as his father did so majestically in the past.