

# GREAT LIMERICK SPORTSMEN

## Liam Ryan Of Cappamore

By SEAMUS O'CEALLAIGH

THE name Ryan is synonymous with all that is great in Cappamore and Limerick hurling.

And my hurler of the Limerick year is a grand member of that famed clan—Liam Ryan, whose father, still one of our greatest hurling enthusiasts, was a member of the Limerick team of the great 1918-21 period.

We have completed another decade, and I think the fifties will be remembered in Cappamore as the most successful spell in the history of Gaeldom there.

Looking over the Record Book, we trace the Cappamore deeds in the East since the formation of the Divisional Board in 1944. The championship successes recorded by them are:

- Junior Hurling—1949 and 1952.
- Minor Hurling—1945, 1947, 1949, 1951 and 1954.
- Juvenile Hurling—1955.

### IN COUNTY FINALS.

The club performance in County Finals reveal thirteen appearances in all since the foundation of the G.A.A., with six of these during the last decade:

#### Senior Hurling.

- 1897—Kilfinane (afterwards All-Ireland champions), 4-9; Cappamore, 4-8.
- 1904 — Cappamore, 3-7; Ballingarry, 1-5.
- 1929 — Croom, 7-4; Cappamore, 2-1.
- 1954—Cappamore, 2-11; Western Gaels, 3-5.
- 1956—Cappamore, 5-4; Cloughaun, 2-7.
- 1958 — Cloughaun, 2-9; Cappamore, 1-4.
- 1959 — Cappamore, 2-8; St. Patrick's, 0-4.

#### Junior Hurling.

- 1935—Askeaton, 4-5; Cappamore, 1-7.
- 1949—Dromcollogher, 3-3; Cappamore, 1-6.
- 1952—Cappamore, 4-10; Castle-town, 1-3.

#### Minor Hurling.

- 1945—Cappamore, 5-2; Young Ireland, 2-1.
- 1947 — Cloughaun, 2-2; Cappamore, 1-2.
- 1954—Cloughaun, 6-6; Cappamore, 2-5.

The Cappamore success story might be said to open in the autumn of 1949, and I have vivid memories still of the great Junior Hurling Championship final of that year and the pulse stirring finish, in which John Mulcahy missed the equalising goal by inches, to give Dromcollogher a richly earned victory.

The Cappamore team on that unforgettable occasion was:—Seamus Ryan, M. Conroy, C. Quirke, P. Clarke, W. O'Dwyer, Paddy Creamear, Willie Cunningham, John Mulcahy, J. Hayes, Chris. McCarthy, Phelim Carbery, Eddie Stokes, Jimmy Coffee, Dan Ryan, J. Corbett.

### REMARKABLE SERIES OF GAMES.

We next take a step to 1952, and the most remarkable series of games ever hurled between any pair of teams in Limerick in the one championship. The teams actually met five times before Cappamore finally triumphed and the close nature of the exchanges is best judged from the total score of all five:—Cappamore, 16 goals 21 pts. (69 points); South Liberties, 10 goals 34 pts. (64 points).

The first meeting was on April 27th, when "Liberties" won, 2-7 to 0-6. This put Cappamore into the "losers" group, from which they worked their way back to the Divisional final on September 28th, when they again encountered South Liberties.

A draw resulted — Cappamore, 3-4; South Liberties, 2-7. The next meeting was abandoned at the interval, owing to the tragic death of veteran "Liberties" Gael, Mick Kelly. His old favourites were leading at the time, 2-8 to 2-2—the date, Oct. 12th.

They met again the following Sunday, when the second draw resulted — Cappamore, 4-4; South Liberties, 3-7. The issue was decided on October 26th, when Cappamore had a runaway win, 7 gls. 5 pts to 1 goal 5 pts.

The greatest crowd that up to then had witnessed a Limerick County final, in any grade or code, assembled at Kilmallock on November 16th to see Cappamore crowned junior hurling champions.

Liam Ryan, just turned sixteen at the time and a student at St. Flannan's College, made a dramatic appearance in that game. Beset by injuries in their long series of matches, the selectors made a last-minute decision bringing the youthful Liam Ryan to the right-half-back berth — a decision they had no cause to regret, for Liam had a brilliant game to uphold the family tradition right nobly.

### CAPPAMORE LINE-OUT.

The Cappamore line-out that day was: Seamus Ryan, Matty O'Malley, Willie Cunningham,

Sean Ryan, Liam Ryan, Paddy Creamer, Paddy McCarthy, Jack O'Brien, Joe Keogh, Bernard McCarthy, John Mulcahy, Tommy Ryan, Willie McCarthy, Phelim Carbery, Danny Ryan.

I have pleasant recollections of the great display Liam gave in the County Minor Hurling semi-final of 1954, played as a curtain-raiser to the All-Ireland Junior Hurling semi-final, in which Limerick ousted Galway.

Spectators that day included the late Bishop of Limerick, Most Rev. P. O'Neill, D.D.; the Minister for Posts and Telegraphs, the late Mick Keyes; the then President of the G.A.A., M. V. O'Donoghue; Gerry O'Keeffe, Chairman of the Munster Council, G.A.A., and the Parish Priest of Hollywood, California, Father John O'Donnell of Grange.

The Cappamore team that evening included three lads who were to win county senior hurling honours a few weeks later: the brothers Liam and Seamus Ryan and Johnnie Walsh.

The full Cappamore line-out was — S. Hayes, A. Hayes, E. O'Shea, J. Kelly, G. Kennedy, S. Ryan, P. Barry, Liam Ryan, P. Ryan, M. J. Hynes, J. Walsh, T. Bourke, M. Hayes, M. Cosgrove, M. Ryan.

All the cars from Cappamore and Dromcollogher were again hitting citywards the following Sunday for the meeting of the pair in the semi-final of the Senior Championship.

### THE TEAMS.

Many of those who had faced each other in the exciting 1949 junior hurling final, which Dromcollogher won, were once more in opposition on this occasion, the line-out reading:—

Cappamore — Seamus Ryan (goal), John O'Malley, Willie Cunningham, Tom Ryan, Sean Nash, Paddy Creamer, Seamus Ryan, Liam Ryan, Paddy O'Malley, John Walsh, Jack O'Brien, John Mulcahy, Phelim Carbery, Sean Ryan, Tom Galvin.

Dromcollogher — Cathal McCarthy (goal), Louis Kelly, Donal Broderick, Denis Savage, Eugene Noonan, Dick Stack, John Savage, Derry McCarthy, Joe Scully, Gerry Egan, John McCarthy, Bill Keating, Tim Lenihan, Dan Noonan, Sean Ryan.

Cappamore were in terrific form that day, displaying three great essentials—speed, caman craft and hurling power.

They made it their motto to get rid of the ball at lightning pace and outhurled the Western lads in every department, to qualify for a county senior hurling final in which they had not appeared for a quarter of a century and only once won—fifty years earlier.

The 1954 county win and the subsequent prowess of the Cappamore lads, including the part Liam played in captaining the Limerick team that won the sensational Munster final of 1955, will be amongst the matters dealt with in the next article.

# Liam Ryan Of Cappamore

By SEAMUS O'CEALLAIGH

**A** BRILLIANT chapter in the history of Cappamore hurling was completed at Kilmallock on Sunday, October 3rd, 1954, when the Club won the county senior hurling title, which had only once previously rested in the parish—away back in 1904, exactly half a century earlier.

Cappamore put great power and push into the early exchanges of this terrific game with the pick of West Limerick, and secured an early grip that they were lucky to have in the hectic closing seconds, when a whirlwind western finish threatened to engulf them.

It was a magnificent game worthily won, and a tribute to Cappamore tenacity that they fought it to a successful conclusion deprived as they were of the services of their great schoolboy pair of brothers—Liam and Seamus Ryan—who had returned to their studies before the game.

## CAPPAMORE TEAM.

The Cappamore players who actually won the title were:—

Seamus Ryan (goal), Eamonn O'Malley, Willie Cunningham, Tom Ryan (M), Sean Nash, Paddy O'Malley, Jack O'Brien (captain), Jack Walsh, John Mulcahy, Jimmy Ryan (F.), Tom Galvin, Sean Ryan, Phelim Carbery.

Subs.:—Joe Keogh, Willie McCarthy, Willie Hynes.

Cappamore gave a heroes' welcome to their team that night and the victory was right royally celebrated.

The parish was to know even higher honours, however, for it fell to the lot of Liam Ryan to lead Limerick to one of the most sensational victories recorded by any county in the Munster Championship series. 1955 looked a vintage year for Clare hurling and they opened the Munster campaign with a thrill-packed and most encouraging win over the great Cork team, which had captured three consecutive All-Ireland titles in the preceding years. When they subsequently beat magnificent Tipperary, still playing many of the grand figures of the golden years from 1949 to 1951, the Munster crown was generally regarded as theirs.

They had one more game to play, however, against a Limerick team led by Liam Ryan of Cappamore. The critics were almost unanimous in writing this meeting off as one of the most one-sided in the history of Munster Finals. It was one-sided alright but when the captain went up afterwards to collect the Munster Cup the figure was not in the expected saffron and blue of Clare. Rather was he in the green and white of the rank outsiders, Limerick, who scored one of the most amazing successes ever recorded over a hotly fancied side.

## A PROUD DAY.

That was a proud day for Liam Ryan, as he bore the Munster Cup home to Cappamore, and a proud one, too, for Limerick hurling. Our hopes were high indeed that evening, as we thrilled to the events of that unforgettable occasion and built castles in the air. These rose higher and higher in the subsequent weeks, as the new-found hurling power of the Limerick "greyhounds" was hotly discussed in every hurling company, and proved the main topic of conversation for Gaelic crowds.

Defeat by the great Wexford team of all the talents in the All-Ireland semi-final did nothing to reduce the new-found Limerick hurling status and we entered 1956 full of hope in the future.

Meanwhile, Cappamore had parted with their County crown in rather peculiar circumstances and Ahane added to their Limerick hurling renown by taking the 1955 title.

Cappamore returned the following year full of urge to recover lost glory, and an epic recovered certain when themselves and Ahane qualified for the County semi-final. The pair met at Kilmallock in late August and a power-packed game it proved. Cappamore opened in whirlwind style and they had chalked the respectable total of two goals and three points to their credit before all the late-comers were in a position for the game.

## HURLING HURRICANE.

It took Ahane ten minutes to get to grips with this hurling hurricane, but then a more even standard ruled and Cappamore were glad of the early scores as the champions moved into the attack. They launched barrage after barrage and we began to wonder if the fine defence in which Seamus Ryan, Paddy Creamer, Eamonn O'Malley and Sean Nash were starring, could hold out much longer.

Then a dramatic goal from a free, forced through by Liam Ryan, changed the whole aspect of play and put the final damper on Ahane's hope of holding the title. It was an opportunist score at a crucial stage and typical of the great hurler that conceived and executed it.

When Cloughaun met Cappamore in the County Final they had behind them a record of unbroken success in such games. And so it was an added feather in Cappamore's cap when they beat the famed city lads, 5-4 to 2-7.

## THE WINNING TEAM.

The Cappamore team that occasion were: Seamus Ryan (goal), Eddie O'Malley, Willie Cunningham, Tommy Ryan (captain), Sean Nash, Paddy Creamer, Sean Ryan, Seamus Ryan, Paddy O'Malley, Roger McCarthy, Liam Ryan, Chris McCarthy, Tom Galvin, Phelim Carbery, John Mulcahy.

Both teams lost early scoring chances but a super-midfield display by Dermot Kelly was of very material advantage in gaining some valued city scores, and Cloughaun were not flattered to lead at the interval by three goals clear.

A Cloughaun point right from the re-start put City hearts aglow but jubilation was abruptly cut when a long, powerful drive by Paddy Creamer forced the Cloughaun cul baire over his goal line in the bid to save his posts.

This was the spark to the fuse that electrified the Cappamore lads. Liam Ryan pointed a close in free and followed with a terrific drive through a crowded goal-mouth for the net, before Collopy blocked down a piledriver by Paddy O'Malley that Galvin met on the rebound to shoot to the net for the third time in the seven minutes from the resumption, but had it disallowed.

Cloughaun rallied from this respite and had a point from Dermot Kelly before a fine centrefield effort by Chris McCarthy sent Carbery moving and a smart pass to Galvin brought the opportunity goal that only needed the John Mulcahy point which followed to put the sides level.

Ten scoreless minutes followed before Cloughaun went on top once more from a point by Dermot Kelly off a free at near range. Encouraged by this, Cloughaun fought desperately for the clinching goal and it was only inspiring net-minding by Seamus Ryan that held them at bay during vital minutes when they looked rampant.

## THE TURNING POINT.

The turning point came in dramatic fashion six minutes from the end when from a touch-line puck, Liam Ryan shot through a forest of ash. All the way to the net, to set the green and gold waving in all its profusion, to be repeated a minute later when Galvin sealed the fate of Cloughaun with a spectacular goal that broke all hope of a City come-back.

Liam Ryan was majestic in his hurling in all these games but it is doubtful if his greatest efforts then, or on the golden day in 1955, when he starred against the great Johnny McGovern in a tournament game at Kilkenny, surpassed some of the wonderful games he played this season, when Cappamore again hit the hurling high spots and recaptured in no uncertain fashion the Limerick hurling crown, gaining in the process an undying place in the hearts of all true lovers of hurling and sporting behaviour.

Since he first pulled on the minor jersey for his club in 1951, Liam Ryan has won many hurling distinctions. Four years a minor with his club, he figured three seasons in the Limerick green and white in this grade, and won two East Limerick Minor titles, losing in the county semi-final in 1951 to Treaty-Sarsfields, and going out before Cloughaun in the 1954 County Final.

With St. Flannan's College he figured in many stirring encounters and helped to win the Dr. Harty Cup for them in 1952. Later that season he returned to play for Cappamore, who were short of players, against Castletown, in the Limerick County Junior Hurling final. Barely sixteen at the time, he starred at right-half back and richly earned the county junior medal he won.

## IN INTER-PROVINCIAL COLLEGES CHAMPIONSHIP.

He won the Inter-Provincial Colleges Championship with Munster in 1953, and with his brother Seamus would be a certainty for places on the Munster Railway Cup hurling team but for the fact that absence in Maynooth is an unsurmountable barrier.

Captain of the Limerick team that beat Clare in the 1955 Munster Senior Hurling Final, Liam has three Limerick senior hurling medals to his credit—1954, 1956, 1959.

Liam is also a noted athlete and last year was captain of his college side. He won the 100 yards championship of the college, was second in the 440 yards and helped in winning the replay.

His brother, Seamus, won the half and one mile college titles, was second in both the long jump and hop, step and third in the 440 yards. In addition he won the one mile walk to secure the all-round championship award, which Liam held the previous year.