



Anthony's 'life of great dignity' is remembered by sporting world

Stars from the world of rugby turn out in force to support coach's wife and family

ÁINE FITZGERALD

E: aine.fitzgerald@limerickleader.ie

TWO hours before the Mass began the cameras began clicking. Keith Wood and Marcus Horan entered St Flannan's Church in Killaloe.

Placed on the outer edge of the first seven pews of the Catholic church was a Mass booklet. On the ground below it, a bottle of water.

The two strapping retired Munster players paced the aisles, making sure everything was in its correct position. They wanted the perfect send-off for their fallen teammate, Anthony Foley.

As the clock ticked towards noon, more and more mourners gathered.

Over 30 journalists stood watching from an elevated height at the garda station across the road from the church. Among them was a reporter from L'Équipe, a French nationwide daily newspaper devoted to sport.

On the stroke of noon as The Fields of Athenry was played on radio stations across Munster, the fallen sportsman's teammates lined up outside St Flannan's Church.

To the strains of How Great Thou Art, the coffin was carried forward.

While the audience outside the church gates may have been global, the scenes inside the church at The Green in Killaloe were strictly private, pulsing with pride for a father, husband, son and friend.

"Anthony trusted me with everything, with the children, their schooling, the house, everything. And I intend to honour that trust and I'm going to make sure that our two adored boys will grow up decent, solid men, full of integrity and honesty, just like their dad," vowed the late Anthony's wife Olive.

The previous night the coffin in which her "soulmate" lay had sat in the same place under the large crucifix as thousands filed past to pay their respects.



Fond farewell: Anthony Foley's remains are carried out of Killaloe Church followed by family and friends. See more funeral photos on page 20 of this section. Also check page 18 and sports section for more coverage PICTURE: MICHAEL COWHEY

To see him lying still, at just 42, in an open coffin in a church was too much for many.

Olive and her two boys had taken him home on Thursday night for his last night on Foley's Hill.

On Wednesday night, candles had been lit in windows in homes across Killaloe to guide him on his journey from Limerick to County Clare.

"The tributes that were paid passing Thomond Park, passing his beloved Munchin's - the whole drive from Limerick to Killaloe and the homecoming he got as he was brought through our town and the candles and prayers...it was beautiful," wept Olive during the funeral service.

"He would absolutely have.....hated

“Anthony's values were so perfect...he will never leave my heart”

Olive Foley speaking at the funeral Mass of her late husband

all the fuss ..but he would have been very proud," she followed up, to spontaneous applause which rippled out into the yard of the church and across the rolling Clare hills.

In the same yard nearly everyone

seemed to have a story about meeting Anthony Foley or being inspired by him.

During a two-hour Mass Fr Pat Malone, PP, Clarecastle as well as Olive reminisced about a man who "never held a grudge".

In one of several poignant moments during her emotional tribute, Olive described her last conversation with her husband last Saturday week, just hours before he died. Her voice broke with emotion when she mentioned their two boys. Tony and Daniel brought up the bread and wine to the altar for the offertory.

"We chatted about the lads and how they were getting on in the athletics, and how Tony was faring in the

javelin."

"Tony had a chat too. It was a lovely conversation...I didn't know it would be our last," she said, breaking down. "It was an idyllic life. Our home was so happy and it was a haven for all the most important things in life. Anthony's values were so perfect."

"The show will go on and I'm going to stick to our plan, because Anthony is going to be with us in spirit every step of the way. He was my soulmate and we were perfect together. He will never leave my heart."

The Munster and Irish legend, died suddenly in Paris on Sunday, October 16. An autopsy revealed that he had died from acute pulmonary oedema caused by heart disease, a condition that resulted in a build-up of fluid in his lungs.

Murroe, Killaloe, Limerick, Munster and Ireland has mourned in the days since.

At 1.50pm on Friday, rugby players lined up in the churchyard to escort their former coach on his final journey. He had taught them tactics to toughen their minds for testing times. They needed them now.

Shop workers had come out from behind their counter to stand vigil as the procession passed.

They whispered to each other as the leading lights in rugby including Paul O'Connell, Brian O'Driscoll, Ronan O'Gara, Simon Zebo and Joe Schmidt came into view.

Irish rugby legend Tony Ward was there too. At his elbow was former Irish Times rugby correspondent Edmund Van Esbeck.

"That, there, was courage. Courage and dignity," said Tony, referring to Olive's tribute to her husband as the coffin carrying his remains turned the corner in the direction of Relig Nua cemetery where the rugby giant was then laid to rest.

See page 20 for more photos

Son's appeal gets audience worldwide

ANNE SHERIDAN

E: anne.sheridan@limerickleader.ie

AN APPEAL by Anthony Foley's grieving son Tony, age 11, has touched the hearts of people across the world this week.

People in France, Australia, New Zealand, the United States, Tanzania, and a priest in Swaziland were among those who were moved by the young boy's tribute to his father, who would have turned 43 this Sunday.

At the request of Tony Foley, a Facebook appeal page - Axel Foley Memorial - was established and it quickly became a phenomenal hit online.

Within just 24 hours, the page received more than 24,000 'likes' on Facebook and his special appeal in his father's memory was shared nearly 6,000 times.

In the campaign - #8masses4no8 - Tony is asking people to go to Mass for the next eight Sundays, starting this coming Sunday.

The number eight also has a special significance for the family, as Anthony wore the number 8 jersey in the days when he lined out for the Munster team.

The Bishop of Limerick, Dr Brendan Leahy, said the gesture was "both moving and inspirational."

"The Foley and Hogan families have found themselves in one of the worst places imaginable. But yet this young man has been moved by the support they have received to, in turn, think of others. I was very struck last week by his mother Olive's strength in the face of this tragedy, not least in her eulogy at the funeral mass on Saturday. She is clearly a woman of deep faith and it will help her through this very difficult time. That faith is clearly passing off onto her sons," said Bishop Leahy.

Fr Seamus Enright, rector of the Redemptorists, said he was heartened to read of the online appeal, particularly as the weeks leading up to the festive period can be lonely for so many people who have lost loved ones. Karen Dominic Crotty, who lives in Wisconsin, wrote: "We will pray for your dad, you, your mom and your bother for the next eight Sundays and the eight Sundays after that and on every Sunday."

Images that defined the week as Limerick mourned the loss of Anthony Foley





CLOCKWISE FROM MAIN: the image that Brian Arthur captured of a garda standing to salute near Thomond Park as the hearse passed by; the graphic designed by Ken Coleman was among the images of 'Axel' Foley which went viral; underneath, rugby star Simon Zebo sheds a tear during a minute's silence before the game

THE LIFE and untimely passing of rugby legend Anthony Foley has produced many homages to the man, father, son, team-mate, Heineken Cup winner, and coach that he was, writes Anne Sheridan.

Among the striking images which touched people's hearts was the photo of a garda standing to salute, as the coffin bearing the remains of the 42 year-old father of two, who died in Paris, was brought from Shannon Airport, through the city, and past his spiritual home in Thomond Park.

Captured by photographer Brian Arthur, it received over 8,900 'likes' on Facebook alone, in addition to over 1,500

shares. Brian told the Leader that in actual fact he passed at least three members of An Garda Síochána along the route, and all saluted the hearse as it passed by.

The home of Munster Rugby was also the scene of poignant, moving and highly-charged emotional scenes on Saturday last, as the home team beat Glasgow Warriors in a tribute to their fallen coach.

Munster and Ireland star Simon Zebo was also pictured, with a tear streaking down his face, and looking to the heavens - in a symbolic nod to his beloved coach - after a triumphant try.

And for many, it was hard not to grieve, as Anthony's sons, Tony and Dan, joined the players on the pitch at full-time for a powerful rendition of Stand Up and Fight - a sight which reduced many grown men to tears.

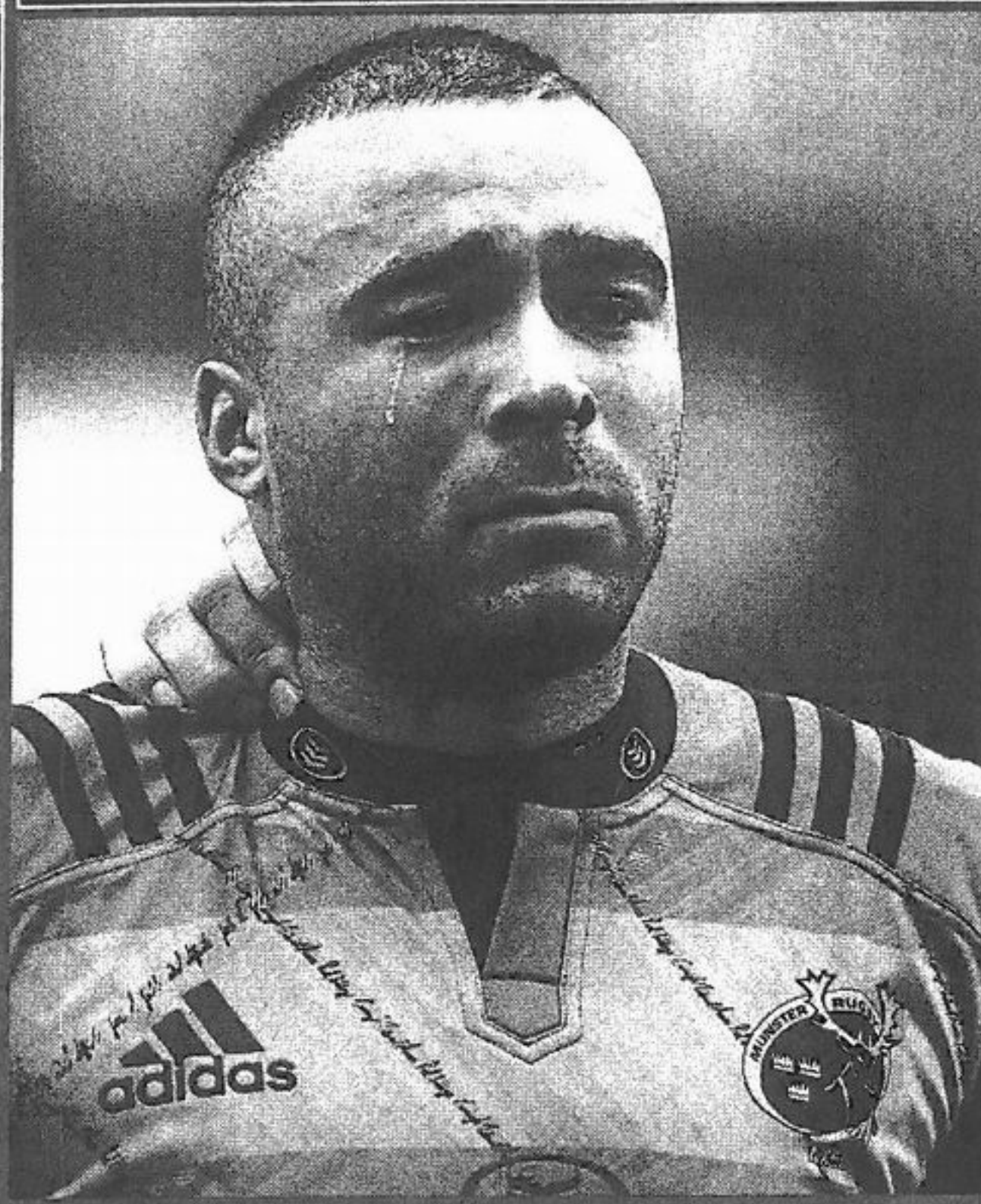
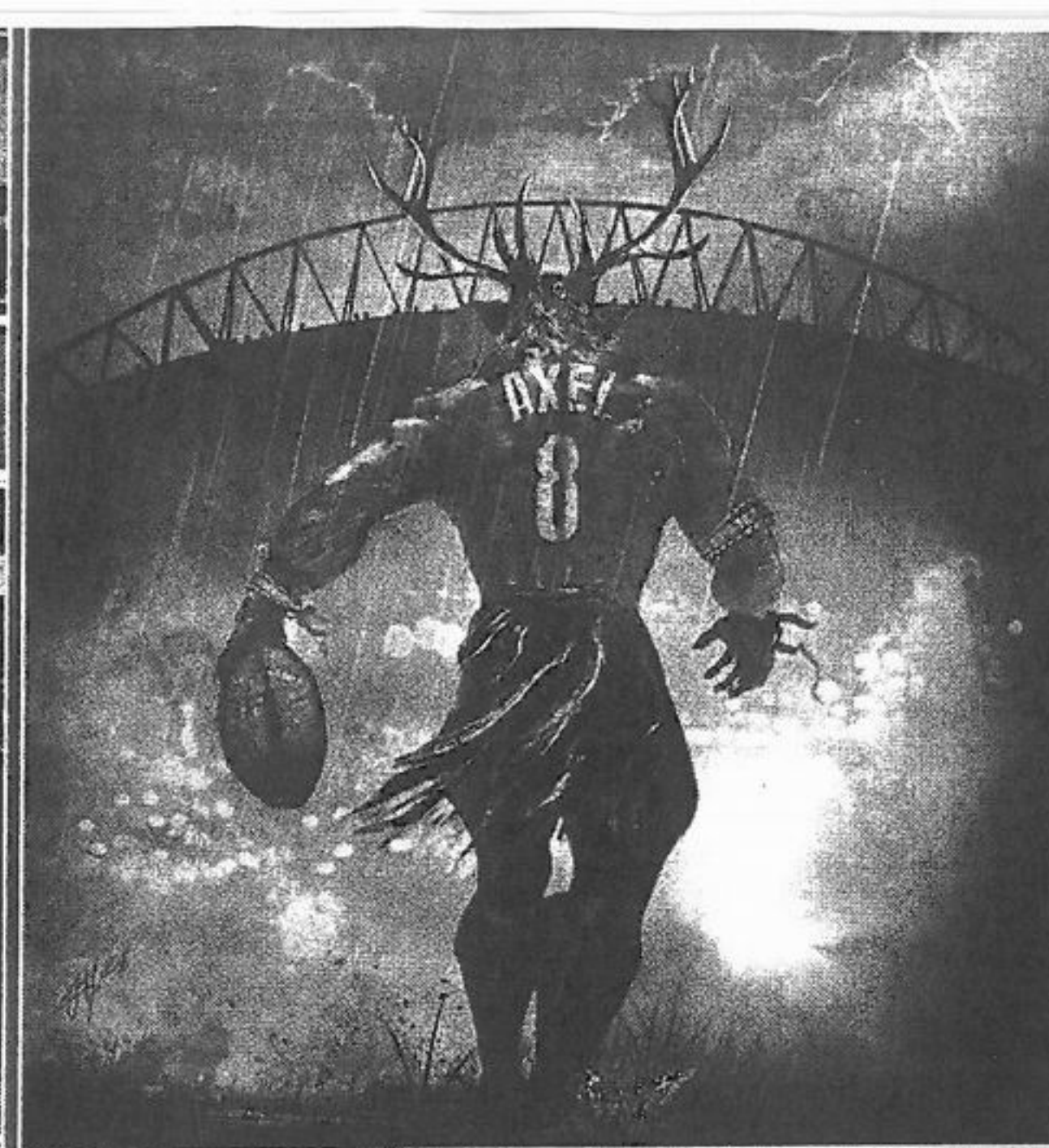
Photographer and digital artist Ken Coleman also produced a striking image of 'Axel' running onto the pitch, and seen in the above graphic. Ken said he "can't get over the the online reaction" to his illustration.

"I have done some Munster based art before, more on capturing the spirit of the fans and the team, rather than depictions of the players themselves," he told

the Limerick Leader.

"I have a lot of friends who are die-hard Munster fans so I did this for them as much as anyone. I have had reactions and private messages from as far as Japan.

"People have also been extremely respectful in asking for permission to use the image as their profiles pictures in tribute to Anthony over the weekend. It just goes to show the immense passion, emotion, respect and heartbreak that people felt over the weekend. I am delighted I created something that helped express that but I never expected that incredible reaction."



Munster lead tributes to loved former leader

MARIA FLANNERY

E: maria.flannery@limerickleader.ie

LIMERICK has been awash with tributes to the late Anthony Foley since news of his sudden death on October 16 broke.

Tears have been shed by young and old, fans and friends, for rugby legend 'Axel', and throngs of supporters made the cathartic journey to Thomond Park on Saturday to watch Munster line out against Glasgow Warriors in the team's

first game since his death.

The home fans held aloft a mosaic made up of thousands of signs, which combined read '8 AXEL 8' in the west stand.

The red and white signs were held up during an emotional minute's silence, in a powerful tribute that has been shared from hundreds of angles on-line.

"Saturday's game in Thomond Park unfolded as a fitting tribute to Axel, with Munster Rugby, the supporters and the community all playing

their part in the best possible way," said a spokesperson for Munster Rugby.

The back page of the match programme was also dedicated to Anthony, with his jersey's number eight making the shape for a timeline of Anthony's life and achievements.

The page spells out his sporting achievements, including hurling for Clare under 16s in 1989.

A hanging pair of boots in the programme tribute signals the end of Anthony's playing ca-

reer at Munster in 2008, after 201 appearances, 58 of which he played as captain.

Munster players took to the pitch with 'Axel' stitched in gold under the crests on their jerseys. Gracious white and blue Glasgow Warriors jerseys bore the same stitching in red. Munster's number eight jersey was retired for the match.

The ultimate tribute however, was Munster's stunning victory of 38-17 against the gracious Warriors, a fitting send-off for a man who led the

team to such success over the years.

Amid a sea of emotion, the victory was bittersweet, for the players who had lost a coach and former teammate, and for Tony and Dan Foley, who mourned the passing of their father.

The young boys joined the team for a stirring rendition of Stand Up and Fight on the pitch after the match, a powerful moment that's sure to remain in Munster hearts for many years to come.



The Munster team form a circle following their win over Glasgow Warriors which included the sons of Anthony Foley, Tony and Dan, who are between Munster's CJ Stander (24) and Rory Scannell (12) PICTURE: LIAM BURKE/PRESS 22