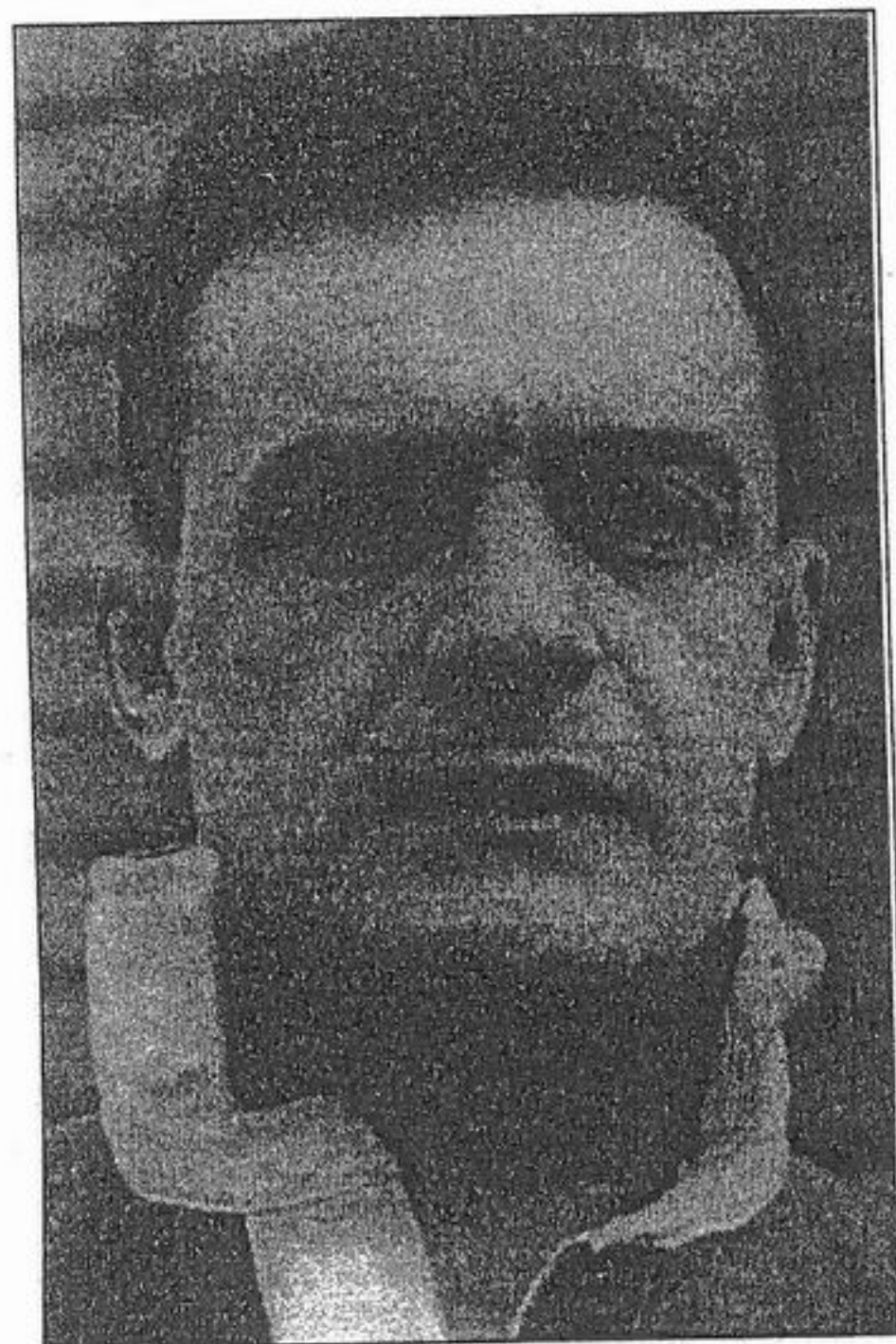


# TRUE SPORTING GREAT

## RATHKEALE'S W.A. MULCAHY

True Sporting Great, Living Legend, Gentle Giant are trite clichés, sometimes used with reckless abandon to over-emphasise admirable qualities in an individual, but that is not the case in this short treatise, which traces the phenomenal success on the rugby fields of the world of Rathkeale's Dr William (Bill) A. Mulcahy.



WA Mulcahy as a player in his Irish jersey.

The retired doctor embodies and gives living expression to all these great attributes, as his prowess on the playing fields and his dedication to his chosen profession has genuinely singled him out as a true giant among men and has deservedly won him respect here in Ireland and abroad.

On a rare visit to his native Limerick these days, the *Weekly Observer* caught up with Dr. Mulcahy when he visited Killballyowen Park, Bruff on the occasion of the All-Ireland League game between Bruff and his adopted Skerries, and the unassuming, modest doctor recounted his days on the rugby fields that took the boy from Rathkeale to the very pin-

nacle of the rugby tree and saw him parade his undoubted talents from Thomond Park, Lansdowne Road, Twickenham to the great citadels of rugby of the Southern Hemisphere in Dunedin, Christchurch, Auckland, Brisbane, Sydney, as a Lion. Born in Rathkeale and extremely proud of his West Limerick origins, the son of the local G.P., Bill's brother who resides these days in Newcastlewest was also an accomplished rugby player, winning a Munster Senior Cup medal with Bohemians in 1958. He was attracted to rugby from an early age as his father was a player with Old St. Mary's, now St. Mary's College in Dublin. There was no organised rugby in the area at the time,

with Newcastlewest being the nearest Club, though in the very early years of rugby it is believed there was a team in Rathkeale. After primary education at the local National School and one year in the local Secondary School, the young Mulcahy entered St. Munchin's College, then at Henry St., Limerick and there he had his first introduction to the sport that would shape his future and win him the respect of individuals all over the world, wherever rugby is played. It is a career that saw him win 35 caps for his country, captain his country on 11 occasions, make 6 Test appearances for the British and Irish Lions, win numerous caps for Leinster, and play in both Munster and Leinster Senior Cup finals. One might say 35 caps pales in comparison to the haul of caps being won these days, after all Malcolm O'Kelly has 72 and Ronan O'Gara won his 50th against England, but it has to be put into context. When Bill Mulcahy was in his prime and proudly wearing the green shirt of Ireland 1) The now Six Nations was then Five Nations, 2) There were very few summer tours, one to South Africa in his entire career, 3) There were no autumn Internationals, 4) There were no substitutes allowed, 5) Caps were not awarded for games against the lesser rugby playing nations such as Japan, Canada, U.S.A., Romania etc and of course 6) There was no Rugby World Cup. It is a matter of conjecture as to how many caps the Rathkeale man would have won in a situation whereby there would be as many opportunities to play for your country as there is today. Suffice to say, many more. Bill Mulcahy is a product of an era when rugby was the great bastion of amateurism in sport and he has mixed feelings about the transition to the professional era. When pressed, he feels there is a greater fitness level demanded of players today. He says that the Heineken Cup is a big step up from the traditional

Interprovincial series of his era. He welcomes the mix of nationalities and the integration of the different styles of plays, feeling that it can be nothing but good for the progress and development of the game.

He concedes that one's first cap is something very special, be it for your province, country or for the Lions. Bill Mulcahy's first cap for Ireland came in very historic and momentous occasion, not just for himself, but for Ireland, as it was against Australia in 1958. Ireland won by 9 points to 6 in what was the country's first ever win over a touring side. In those days the Irish teams were picked usually on basis of a Final Trial between the Probables and Possibles. Bill was selected for the Probables in 1957, but failed to make the team and tried for the Possibles in 1958 and got in. Very few in those days were selected from the Possibles, so he was selected to line-up beside such icons of the game at the time as Tony O'Reilly, Noel Henderson, Dave Hewitt, Gordon Wood and Noel Murphy. J.A. Donaldson from Collegians in Belfast partnered him in the second row that day. Bill Mulcahy remembers the thrill of beating England, and recalls with a glint in his eye being captain in 1964 when he led Ireland to a famous 19 points to 5 win over England at Twickenham, a side led by the great Budge Rogers from Bedford. It was a day in which Ireland scored three great tries, two from Kevin Flynn and a third from Pat Casey, but more importantly, it was a day in which Ireland unleashed on the unsuspecting rugby world a young Cambridge University student from Belfast, a certain Cameron Michael Henderson Gibson. The young student that day gave a portent of what was to come with an outstanding display in his first game of what was to be an exceptional career at that level. Selection for the Lions followed quickly. The year after his Irish debut, he was one of ten Irish players selected under the captaincy of Ireland's Ronnie Dawson to tour Australia and New Zealand in 1959. The others were Gordon Wood, Sid Miller, Tony O'Reilly, Noel Murphy, David Hewitt, Mick English, and Niall Brophy with Andy Mulligan travelling as a replacement. On that Tour the Lions played 6 Tests with Mulcahy appearing in the first and last. Shortly after the first Test, he got injured in a mid-week match and he considers himself lucky not to have been sent home, which is the norm for injured players. He recovered and won his place back for the final Test in New Zealand. For the record the Lions won the two Tests in Australia and won one and lost three to the All Blacks. On being selected for the Lions in 1959, Bill Mulcahy recalled a very interesting anecdote. He was selected the year before doing his final medical exams in U.C.D. and it meant putting off his finals. His mother

who was now widowed was not at all enamoured with the idea of her would-be doctor giving priority to being a would-be Lion. Fr. Carroll, the Parish Priest in Rathkeale called on Mrs. Mulcahy to congratulate her on the great honour that was about to be conferred on her son with his selection for the touring team. He quickly sensed that she was less than impressed with the idea of her son deferring his exams in favour of playing rugby at the other side of the world. So he took the situation on hand and paid a visit to his Kilmallock counterpart, Dean Cornelius Mulcahy, the then Dean of the Diocese of Limerick and Bill's Uncle, who had now assumed a sort of patriarch role within the family. Dean Mulcahy intervened with his sister-in-law and convinced her of the merits and wisdom of his nephew's plans and secured her blessing. Bill recalls she had no interest in rugby, and believes that she attended one game in her lifetime and that out of a sense of duty. But Dean Mulcahy inserted one proviso for the Tour Down Under. On giving some pocket money for the Tour in the amount of £50, a lot of money at the time. He insisted that Bill during his stay would visit Dr. Daniel Mannix, a native of Charleville, the then primate in the See of Melbourne. Dr. Mannix, who was a staunch propagator and supporter of Irish Republicanism had not been to Ireland for a long time and so the young rugby player in the company of Mick English, Gordon Wood and Welshman, Roddy Evans fulfilled his promise to his uncle, and visited the Archbishop who is fondly remembered in his adopted Australia to this very day.

Further selection for the Lions followed in 1962, as part of an Irish sextet chosen, the others being Dave Hewitt, Niall Brophy, Noel Murphy, Sid Miller and Willie John McBride, this time to South Africa. Bill Mulcahy was to play in all four Tests on that Tour. He partnered Keith Rowlands from Wales in the second row in the first two and his friend and long time Irish second row partner, the great Willie John McBride in the other two.

Now a qualified and practising doctor, he continued to play international rugby until 1965. A formidable record by any standard, when asked what opponents he admired most, he singled out South African Avri Malan and All Black, the legendary Colin Meads. Of players that he played with, he had great admiration for Gerry Culliton, a Laois man with whom he played many times, and of course, the great Ballymena man Willie John McBride. All his interprovincial rugby was played with Leinster, that was by virtue of his being a student in U.C.D. Needless to say, Bill Mulcahy had a very distinguished career at club level and gave sterling service to Bohemians, U.C.D., and

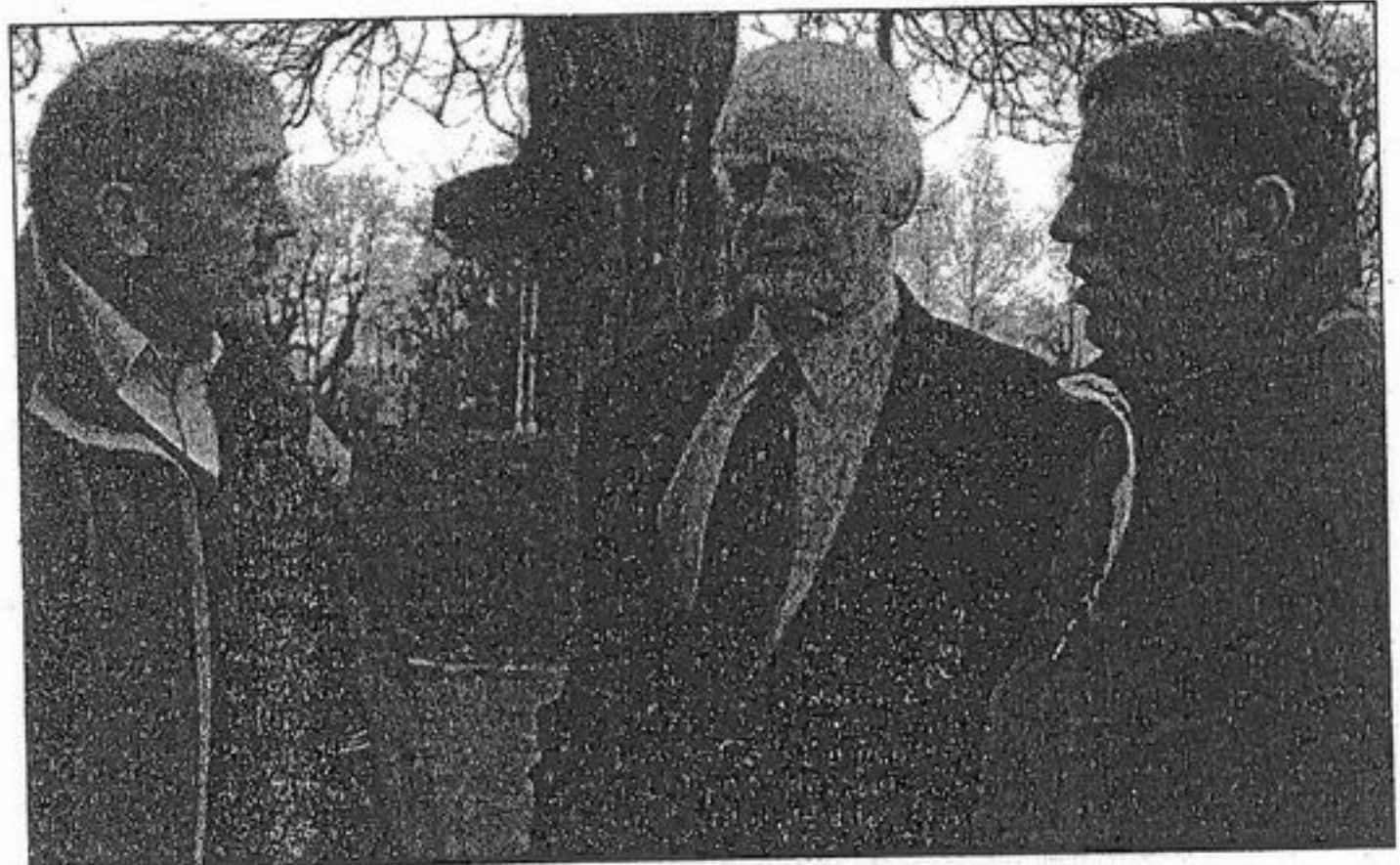


President of Bruff RFC David O'Keeffe welcomes rugby legend Bill Mulcahy to Killballyowen last Saturday.

Bective Rangers. He won an Under 20 medal with Bohemians before going to study medicine at U.C.D. with whom he had a very productive career, as it was during his time there that his representative career took off. He ruefully recalls the biggest disappointment in his career, when as part of the students team they lost the 1961 Leinster Senior Cup Final after a replay to Blackrock College. By 1962, he was practising in Limerick and was now plying his trade with Bohemians and helped them to Munster Senior Cup success in 1962, the last time that club got its hand on that then-much coveted piece of silverware. His international colleague Mick English was also on that side, as was Sean McHale from Ballina, later to win many caps in the Irish front row. On returning to Dublin, he joined Bective Rangers and saw out his playing career with them. His professional career took him through various hospitals and eventually to being the medical officer with Aer Lingus, where he spent many years. One aspect of the game that has changed with the advent of the professional era and that Bill Mulcahy greatly laments is the social side of

rugby. He feels the camaraderie that rugby was noted for together with the post match, get-togethers may be a thing of the past. He is adamant that this is not a change for the better but accepts that it is part and parcel of the game today with fitness regimes etc.

Now very much part of Skerries club, his son Billy was a leading player with the club for many years and must be considered extremely unlucky not to have won an Irish cap as a hooker. Almost four decades after the end of his playing career, Bill Mulcahy has lost none of his passion and love for the game of rugby. His enthusiasm is infectious. He devoutly follows his club and at Killballyowen Park last Saturday, he kicked and passed every ball with his team. On this Saturday a third generation of the Mulcahy family will trot out on to the green sward of Lansdowne Road in an Irish jersey, as Bill's grandson, Billy will be one of the mascots for the Irish team. A big man in physique, a gentle giant, a dedicated doctor, an outstanding rugby player, William A. Mulcahy, a truly great Irishman.



Chatting at Killballyowen Park last Saturday were (from left) Ger Malone, Bruff R.F.C. former Ireland and Lions great Bill Mulcahy and Pat Keogh, Bruff RFC



Gerry Culliton (left) and Willie John McBride (right), both players greatly admired by Mulcahy.

His full international record is as follows:

- 1958 v - Australia, England, Scotland Wales and France.
- 1959 v - England, Scotland, Wales and France.
- 1960 v - England, Scotland, Wales and South Africa.
- 1961 v - England, Scotland, Wales and South Africa.
- 1962 v - England, Scotland, Wales and France.
- 1963 v - France, England, Scotland, Wales and New Zealand.
- 1964 v - England, Scotland Wales and France.
- 1965 v - France, England, Scotland, Wales and South Africa.