

# THE BEST OF 2013

## TOP 30 MOMENTS OF THE LIMERICK SPORTING YEAR

### 1 MUNSTER HURLING FINAL

For the first time since 1996 Limerick were crowned Munster senior hurling champions. The scenes at the final whistle told the story as 17 years of heartbreak were swept aside in an emotional pitch invasion to watch Donal O'Grady lift the provincial trophy.

Making the occasion all the sweeter was the home venue in the Gaelic Grounds and indeed the fact that the minors had come from behind to secure a draw in the curtain-raiser.

And, what a performance it was to defeat Jimmy Barry Murphy's Cork.

"It's what dreams are made of," beamed victorious captain Donal O'Grady.

"It's sport and it's unbelievable - the hairs stood on the back of my head about 10-minutes to go. It's just great - we weren't going to leave it after us today," said the Granagh-Ballingarry man.

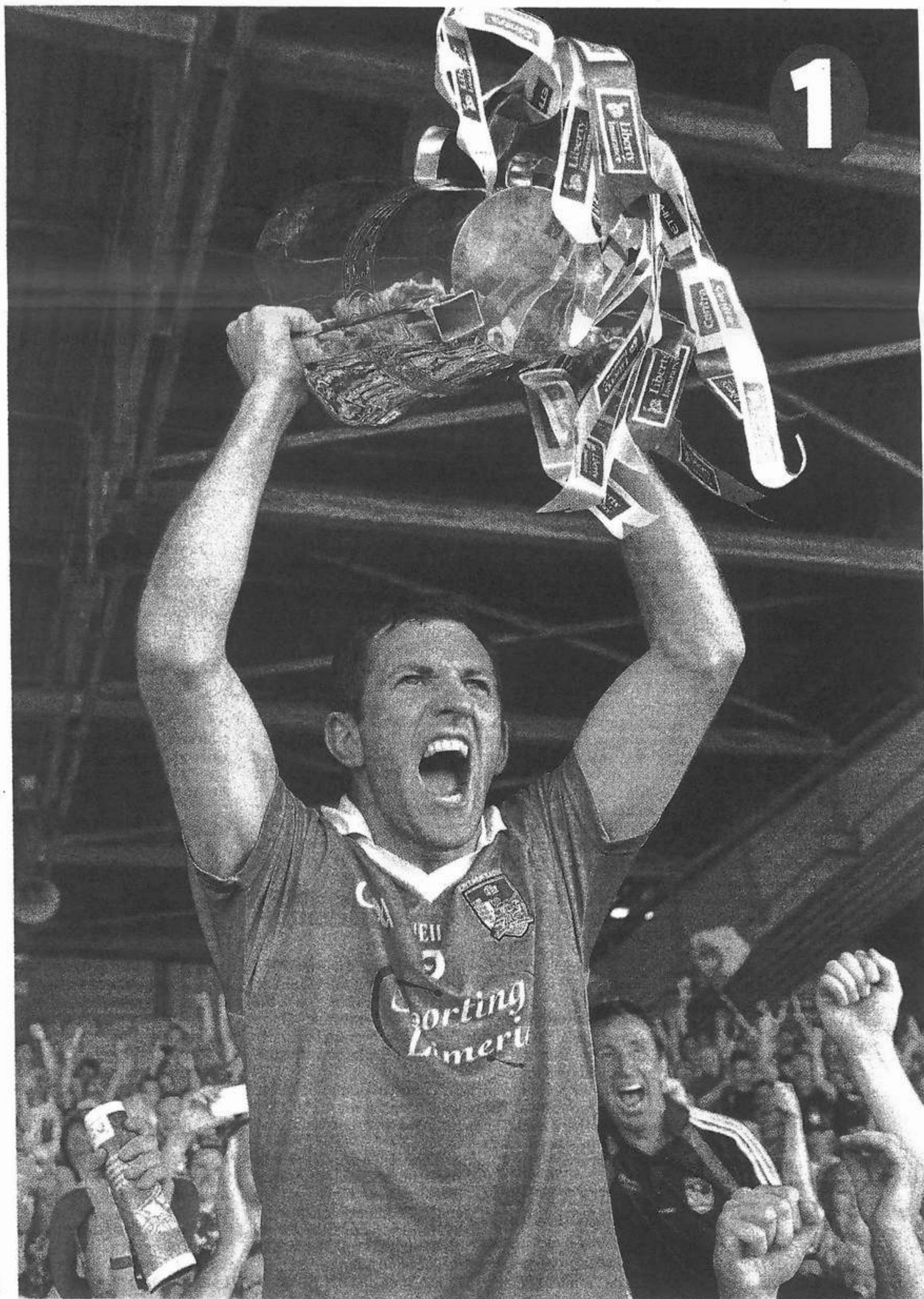
In the final the scoreline was 0-24 to 0-15.

Champions for the 19th time, and John Allen's men did it in style.

Backed by a majority of the 42,730 crowd, Limerick never really looked in trouble once they hit the front in the second half.

Cork had lost Patrick Horgan to a red card late in the first half.

The Rebels never recovered and were to score just five times in the second half as Limerick dominated to win by nine amid joyous scenes.



### 2 JT MCNAMARA DAY IN LIMERICK RACE-COURSE

The Limerick Charity Raceday, in support of jockeys John Thomas McNamara, from Croom, and Antrim's Jonjo Bright, which attracted 10,500 racegoers, has raised €809,614 for the Jockeys Emergency Fund to date.

The day was conceived just three months earlier when a small group came together to do something for the charity that is supporting the rehabilitation of Limerick jockey McNamara and Ulster horseman Bright, both of whom suffered catastrophic injuries in falls while riding over jumps earlier this year.

Top National Hunt and Flat jockeys from the United Kingdom and Ireland, including Tony McCoy, Richard Johnson, Ruby Walsh, Pat Smullen, Kieren Fallon and Johnny Murtagh gave up their time for their seriously-injured colleagues.

The highlight of the day's fundraising activity was a two-part auction which ran during and after racing. The silent auction raised approximately €25,000 from 60 lots ranging from racing yard visits to water-skiing lessons. In the auction after racing, €251,000 was raised for 32 lots. The top bid of €55,000 came for the set of plain pale grey racing silks, donated by Horse Racing Ireland.

"It's an unbelievable turn-out," trainer Aidan O'Brien said. "Everybody knows the dangers. Day in and day out, jockeys put their lives on the line for everybody's enjoyment. When anything happens, we all have to be here, to tell them how much we are behind them. Everybody stands together."

Limerick racecourse manager, Russell Ferris said: "In organising this raceday, the committee and I expected a lot of goodwill but we did not anticipate the scale and generosity of the response."

"The sense of camaraderie and common purpose in coming to the aid of John Thomas and Jonjo is truly breathtaking. Special thanks go to all the racegoers who came racing on that wonderful day, the jockeys who put on a great show

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and of course my colleagues on the Limerick Charity Raceday Committee for their time and effort in making the day happen.

"This figure exceeds all expectations and I've no doubt that the legacy of this day will bring in further contributions for a long time to come."

### 3 LIMERICK BEAT TIPP TO START THE SUMMER IN STYLE

The Munster final had a much bigger crowd, a much bigger pitch invasion and for the first time in 17 years, a Limerick captain raising the Munster trophy. But Sunday, June 9, was a very special day too.

Limerick came in under the radar, the early months of the year spent slumming it in Division 1B. They won all their group games but losing to Dublin in Thurles in the final was a huge blow. In the meantime, Tipp seemed to rebuilding nicely after their horrible season in 2012. Eamon O'Shea took over from Declan Ryan and they looked to be in good nick when going toe to toe with Kilkenny in a humdinger of a league final in Nowlan Park.

When they came to the Gaelic Grounds in June, Limerick were the 4/1 outsiders and the bookies reckoned that Tipp would win by at least six points. It didn't turn out that way though. Limerick started brilliantly and Seanie Tobin goal helped them to a 1-7 to 0-7 lead at the break. Tipp rallied at the start of the second half and half-time sub John O'Brien scored 1-3 to push them into a 1-13 to 1-9 lead with 20 minutes to go. Yet Limerick's response was impressive. And emphatic. Boosted by the arrival of Shane Dowling, Kevin Downes and Niall Moran off the bench, Limerick outscored Tipp by 0-9 to 0-2 in those final 20 minutes to run out 1-18 to 1-15 winners. Cue the first pitch invasion of the season, bedlam and a frantic Munster final countdown. Only about 16,000 were there to witness a wonderful game. Five weeks later that number had almost trebled.

"They are great scenes," said heroic goalkeeper Nickie Quaid afterwards. "This is unreal - I don't think the whole thing has sunk in yet. We are in a Munster final. We deserved this win - we haven't had too many big wins in Limerick in the last number of years. But there is no good winning this game if we don't drive it home in the Munster final."

### 4 MUNSTER MINOR FINAL REPLAY - TUESDAY, JULY 23

Just 10 days after fighting back from seven points down to secure a draw, Limerick dominated this replay to win a first

Munster minor hurling championship since 1984.

The final score was 1-20 to 4-8 as Brian Ryan's teenagers came of age.

From start to finish, Limerick were outstanding.

Key were personnel and positional switches made by management between the games.

Limerick raced from the traps and were 0-5 to no score ahead by the end of the opening quarter. In front of 6,532 on a Tuesday night in Thurles, the half-time score was 1-7 to 2-2 as Waterford found two goals to reignite the tie.

But Limerick were not for wilting and dominated most areas. They led 1-16 to 3-8 but then the Deise hit a fourth goal to level the game as the final whistle approached.

But Limerick's confidence didn't dwindle and Ronan Lynch, Pat Ryan and David Dempsey hit the winning scores in the final minutes.

"I thought beating Tipp was the best day of my life but today it is - coming out and seeing the crowd before and then going back in and coming out to see an even bigger crowd, it was just great," said attacking hero Cian Lynch. "From the start, I just knew we were going to win it but when they got those goals we maybe doubted ourselves but once we put up those points we knew we were on the home stretch."

### 5 HEINEKEN CUP QUARTER-FINAL - SUNDAY, APRIL 7

On a horrible Friday evening at the end of March, Munster made the trip to Glasgow for a RaboDirect PRO 12 game. Their league form had been patchy all season and they were losing ground on the top four. Glasgow were one of the competition's most consistent sides but Munster named a strong side as they looked to find form ahead of their mouth-watering quarter-final against Harlequins a week later. It was a contest for most of the game but Munster imploded late on and were tonked, 51-24. This less than a year after the Ospreys had hit them for 45 points in the Rabo semi-final.

We didn't give them a chance going to London the following week. We couldn't. But, inspired by Paul O'Connell returning to his best and Ronan O'Gara being prolific from the tee, Munster played from memory and won 18-12. The old dogs for the hard road. The high point of the season. A win to warm the heart.

### 6 LIMERICK FC RETURN TO PREMIER DIVISION

Limerick FC marked their return to the Premier Division

of the Airtricity League after 19 seasons out of the top flight by earning a precious point in a 0-0 draw with Cork City at a wet and blustery Thomond Park.

The lively Limerick side, featuring no fewer than six debutants, might well feel they did enough in the second half to claim all three points before a sizeable attendance of 3,578.

Limerick FC manager, Stuart Taylor said he was 'absolutely delighted' with his side's performance. "It was a good start. I was really pleased with the way the boys went about their jobs."

### 7 SOLWHIT WINS WORLD HURDLE IN CHELTENHAM

Limerick was celebrating its first win of the 2013 Cheltenham festival when Ballingarry-based trainer Charles Byrnes sent out Solwhit to take the Ladbrokes World Hurdle under jockey Paul Carberry.

The victory represented a sensational training performance from Byrnes who nursed the gelding back to full health having been off the track for almost two years before reappearing last December 31. To win a grade one after such an absence is virtually unheard of in the sport.

### 8 SARAH LAVIN - SILVER MEDAL IN EUROPEAN JUNIORS

Limerick athlete Sarah Lavin boosted her ever-growing reputation by claiming silver in the Women's 100m hurdles at the European Junior Championships in Italy in July.

Lavin, who has already beaten Derval O'Rourke's junior record, improved her best to take second place in the final in a time of 13.34, behind Switzerland's Noemi Zabaren in 13.17. France's Heloise Kane was third in 13.36.

She has plenty to target in the next couple of years but the Olympics in 2016 is well within her sights.

### 9 NA PIARSAIGH WIN MUNSTER CLUB TITLE

The Caherdavin men won their first ever Limerick SHC in 2011 and went all the way to the All-Ireland semi-final, where they lost to eventual winners Loughgiel Shamrocks in extra-time.

Their title defence never gathered pace in 2012, but they returned with renewed vigour in 2013.

They lost a group game to Doon, but that only appeared to refocus their minds and they ended the Limerick campaign with an impressive run of wins over Patrickswell, Ahane, Kilmallock and Adare.

But that just set them on

course for another tilt at the All-Ireland club, where they feel they have unfinished business.

Unlike 2011, Na Piarasaigh didn't have the element of surprise in the Munster club.

They went to Thurles and beat Tipp champions Loughmore-Castleiney and then booked a final spot with a semi-final win over Passage of Waterford.

The decider saw the Limerick city travel to Ennis to play the club champions of the All-Ireland winners, Clare.

Adding further intrigue was that the opponents were Sixmilebridge - the home club of Na Piarasaigh manager Sean Stack.

But the north Limerick city GAA club turned in one of their greatest ever performances to win by 18 points.

"It's very satisfying for all the work that we have done. You can see that all the things we have worked extremely hard on, came to fruition," said manager Sean Stack.

### 10 GREAT LIMERICK RUN

More than 10,000 people took part in the Barringtons Hospital Great Limerick Run, with thousands more lining the 26-mile route to support those taking part.

The winner of the men's race was Gary O'Hanlon, 39, from Dundalk, who finished in a time of 2.29.45 while Angela McCann, 42, from Clonmel Athletics club, won the women's race for the second year running in a time of 2.57.15.

The first Limerick person to finish was Mike Curley-Cunningham, 48, from Cappamore. "It's a great feeling, it was it was a bit breezy on the course but I got through it so I'm happy, there was great support," said Mike who has now run 20 marathons.

### 11 FEILE NA nGAEL IN LIMERICK

As the national U-14 hurling competition returned to Limerick for the first time since the mid-90s, a total of 40 Limerick hurling teams and 20 Limerick camogie teams were among over 150 teams that took part in the three day festival of underage hurling.

Limerick City sides St Patricks and the Model School were both crowned All-Ireland Feile na nGael champions.

St Patricks were the only Limerick winners from the six hurling divisions and five camogie divisions after a weekend of superb action in splendid sunshine.

In the handball section, pride of place goes to the Model School, who won the girls section of Division Three.



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### 12 CRESCENT COLLEGE WIN MUNSTER SENIOR CUP

Crescent College Comprehensive claimed the Munster Schools Cup for the first time since 1994 with a comprehensive 27-5 win over three-in-a-row seeking Rockwell College in Thomond Park.

The Limerick side scored two smashing tries, one in either half, from impressive centre JJ O'Neill and powerful back-row Diarmuid Dee. Out-half Gearoid Lyons added 17 points with the boot, turning in an exhibition of goal-kicking.

Crescent captain Lyons said: "I am over the moon. I cannot really describe how I am feeling. It is the best feeling I have ever had in my life. It's amazing."

"It is great to be part of such a great team. Thank God, we ended the drought at this level."

### 13 LIMERICK LADS ON LIONS TOUR

Two Limerick-based players Paul O'Connell and Conor Murray were part of the Lions squad which secured Test series glory in Australia this summer.

O'Connell, who ultimately had his playing time on tour cut short by injury, was taking part in his third Lions tour, while Murray was on his first.

Murray admitted his call-up to Warren Gatland's Lions squad had happened from quickly than many expected.

"It is crazy when you think about how quickly things have developed. It might have happened a bit quicker than some people would have expected," Murray said.

### 14 LOCAL GIRLS HELP IRELAND TO GRAND SLAM

The Irish team secured their first ever Six Nations Grand Slam victory in some style in March, edging out Italy 6-3 in a tense final match in Milan.

With eight members of the panel either hailing from Limerick or living and studying in the city or county - the win on St Patrick's Day sparked great celebrations locally and has inspired a new generation to take up the oval ball game.

The Grand Slam winning squad members include Limerick-based garda Niamh Briggs, her fellow Ireland and UL-Bohs teammates - Gillian Bourke from Ballyneety and Niamh Kavanagh, a former LIT student who now works in the college, Joy Neville from North Circular Road, Fiona Hayes from Caherdavin, Fiona Coghlan from Dublin who studied PE in UL, Laura Guest from Clonakilty who studied science education in UL, and Lynne Cantwell who studied sports science in UL.

### 15 YVONNE TRACY - RECORD CAP HOLDER

Limerick woman Yvonne Tracy reached a milestone in June when winning her 75th cap when the Republic of Ireland took on Austria at Tallaght.

In doing so, Tracy became only the fourth Irish female to make 75 senior caps for her country.

Yvonne Tracy said: "I'd probably be a lot closer to 100 if I hadn't lost a full two years with injuries but, even though I'm 32, it's still a goal of mine to keep playing for as long as my legs keep going. Having missed so much time through injury I really appreciate every game now and I can't wait for Tuesday's game against Austria."

### 16 MARY I MAKE FITZGIBBON CUP FINAL

Against all odds, Limerick's Mary Immaculate College reached their first ever Third Level Colleges senior hurling championship final.

In just their second ever Fitzgibbon Cup campaign and under the guidance of long serving manager Eamonn Cregan, Mary I were surprisingly the only Limerick representatives in the knockout stages with previous winners UL and LIT crashing out.

Mary I beat Dublin IT in the quarter-final and then Waterford IT in the semi-final.

Alas, they lost the final to UCC, who had Limerick club players; Willie Griffin (Adare), Adrian Breen (Na Piarasigh), Jack Ahern (Killeedy) and Brian Cleary (Knockainey) in their panel.

The local stars of the Mary I side were Declan Hannon (Adare), Robert O'Donnell (Pallasgreen), Lar Considine (Patrickswell), William Hickley (South Liberties).

### 17 LIMERICK FOOTBALLERS WIN NFL DIVISION 4

Limerick were crowned Division 4 National Football League champions for the second time in four years with a 0-16 to 1-11 win over Offaly.

Back in 2010 Limerick beat Waterford with late scores and this time round it was again late scores from the Treaty men that lifted the title in Croke Park.

From start to finish this final was played at a hectic pace. But for the opening quarter it was Limerick that were playing second fiddle as Offaly raced into a 1-4 to 0-1 lead after 12 minutes and it was Limerick that had the wind.

Offaly were held to just seven points in the remaining hour of football, while Limerick kicked 0-15.

In total 10-different Limerick players got on the scoresheet on a day when they also kicked 10-wides and took plenty other wrong options in front of goal.

And, all this was done without the services of Johnny McCarthy, Andy Lane and Ger Collins, who was absent from the named team due to injury.

Nonetheless the Limerick footballers made the most of just a fourth ever visit to GAA Headquarters

Offaly led on 58 minutes, 1-11 to 0-12, but that was their final score.

Stephen Lavin and Derry O'Connor tied up the game with five to play.

Eoghan O'Connor grabbed the lead and the insurance score came when Seamus O'Carroll sealed the win.

"That was a really tough game and just what we expected from Offaly - they had a lapse during the middle part of the league but really came on strong at the end so we expected a tough battle and that is what we got," said Mark O'Riordan, who was the only player to start all four games that the Limerick footballers have played in Croke Park in the past decade.

### 18 LIMERICK CAMOGIE TEAM MAKE ALL IRELAND FINAL

Joe Quaid's side made it all the way to Croke Park - the first time since 1980. But they were beaten by Galway's second string in the All-Ireland intermediate final. Limerick were looking to return to the senior ranks after a Division Two League Final win earlier in the year had seen them return to Division One of the league.

Limerick also won the Munster junior championship in 2013 and thus much expectation for 2014.

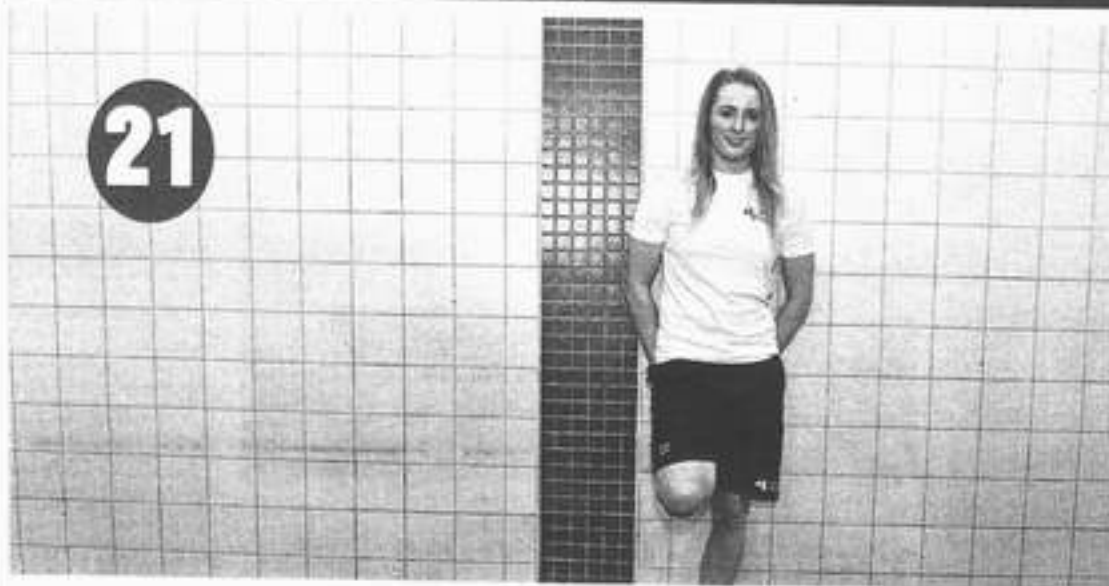
Although the championship run ended in defeat, it proved to be the most successful season since 2007 when Limerick were All-Ireland senior B champions.

"We came up short this year, but I made a promise to the players that I would get them to Croke Park. I should have promised them that we would win in Croke Park! But I promised them now that we will get back here next year and that we will win it and that we will be playing senior camogie in 2015," said manager Joe Quaid.

### 19 MUNSTER BEAT PERPIGNAN IN HEINEKEN CUP

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Munster moved five points clear at the top of Pool 6 after securing a dramatic one-point victory, 18-17, over USAP Perpignan at the Stade Alime Girat.

A stunning, last gasp try from replacement JJ Hanrahan helped Munster snatch victory from the jaws of defeat and take complete control of their pool.

Munster captain, Peter O'Mahony said: "Any game over here in France is tough, especially in a cauldron like this. We knew it would take something special to get a win and as happened it was a special performance from a team that wasn't playing particularly well."

## 20 LIMERICK BEAT DUBLIN IN NRL

Regular league games - by their nature - tend not to offer up too much in terms of glamour.

This one was a little different though. Playing in Croke Park meant it was a level up on your usual league fare and although the crowd was small (it was the first game of a double-header that also included the Dublin footballers playing Tyrone), it was a decent game. Limerick had been poor in their first two games against Carlow and Antrim and although they won both, they never looked convincing.

They weren't great for the first half of this game either and Dublin could have had the game-out of sight at the break. Instead Limerick hung in and were just one point down, 0-8 to 0-7, at the break. A Conor

McCormack goal helped Dublin into a 1-21 to 0-9 lead but Limerick responded well again. Graeme Mulcahy got a goal, Declan Hannon and Kevin Downes found their range and Limerick pulled clear to win 1-21 to 0-16.

The win set Limerick up to top Division 1B. It was their first win in Croke Park since August 2007. It didn't change their season but it was a good night nonetheless.

## 21 FIONA DOYLE - A SWIMMING SENSATION

Sallycurmin swimmer Fiona Doyle had a spring and summer to remember in the pool.

The 23-year-old claimed a stunning gold medal success in the 50 metres breaststroke at the Canadian National Championships and followed up by taking silver in the 100m breaststroke final at the World University Games in Kazan last month, setting a new Irish record in the process. It was Ireland's first medal in the pool at the event since 1991.

And the Canadian-based Doyle followed up by making two semi-finals, in both the 50m and 100m breaststroke at the World Swimming Championships in Barcelona.

## 22 LIMERICK MINORS BEAT TIPP

In front of 3,314 spectators, Limerick shocked the All-Ireland champions Tipperary in their home patch with a 1-17 to 0-17 win to book a Munster

final spot. The win came just weeks after the seniors also beat The Premier County.

The crucial score of the game arrived in the 53rd minute with Limerick holding a slender 0-16 to 0-15 lead. Sub Tom Morrissey made a terrific catch in front of goal and when he was fouled Roman Lynch stepped forward to blast the penalty to the net.

Lynch was to finish with 1-7, while David Dempsey hit 0-4 from play on a memorable night.

"I have been involved in underage teams before and these are as good as I have seen if not better than any team I have been involved with," beamed manager Brian Ryan after the semi-final win for the 4/1 outsiders.

## 23 MUNSTER BEAT LEINSTER IN RABO PRO 12

Munster ended a four-game losing run against arch rivals Leinster when emerging with a 19-15 victory in their RaboDirect PRO12 clash at Thomond Park in October.

The home side's win also deprived Leinster of the chance to achieve three successive wins on Munster soil for the first time since 1971.

Man-of-the-match Ian Keatley produced his most authoritative display in the Munster number 10 jersey to date, creating the game's only try for Keith Earls and reeling off five successful kicks from seven attempts for a 14-point tally.

## 24 ALL IRELAND HURLING SEMI-FINALS

This day on the greatest list? The senior team were well beaten by their closest neighbours, the minors robbed by technology.

But for the first time since 1940 Limerick were senior and minor Munster hurling champions. Heading to Croke Park that day the county was on an unbelievable high. Jones Road was a sea of green. Two Limerick teams playing in GAA Headquarters hasn't happened too often so, despite the losses and the end of two seasons, this was a significant day.

## 25 SAM BARRY - FIRST PROFESSIONAL TOURNAMENT WIN

December 7 will be a date to remember for the 21 year old Limerick city man.

Barry won the Qatar Futures event when beating Liam Beody of Great Britain in straight sets 2/6,6/4.

His first win on the pro-circuit gave him the ideal end of year rankings boost and he enters 2014 ranked 415 by the ATP.

Just twelve months ago the Limerick man was ranked 601.

The win in Qatar brought an end to a year that also saw the Limerick man play for Ireland in the Davis Cup as he steps into the shoes vacated by the retired Conor Niland.

## 26 CASTLETROY COLLEGE BEAT CRESCENT IN MUNSTER SCHOOLS JUNIOR CUP FINAL

There were scenes of wild celebration in Dooradoyle as Castletroy College won the Munster Schools Junior Cup for the second time, thanks to a 13-7 win over double-chasing Crescent College Comprehensive before a sizeable attendance.

Niall O'Shea and Darragh O'Neill scored a try each for Castletroy, while Connor Fleming kicked a penalty. Crescent College Comprehensive replied with an Anson Thai try which Conor McSweeney converted.

## 27 RICHMOND RFC GO SENIOR

Richmond won their third Munster Junior League Division 1 title this decade in February when beating Tralee 44-13 at Canal Bank to wrap up the crown with a game to go.

In April, Richmond played in the round robin qualifying league which also featured Tullamore, Monivea and Portadown. Wins over Monivea and Portadown and a defeat to Tullamore saw Richmond finish second in the group and a 28-23 play-off win over Clonakilty secured All-Ireland 2B status for the Canal Bank side.

## 28 CONNIE FINNAN ON DARTS GRAND PRIX

It's not too often that a Limerickman appears on Sky Sports in an individual sport. But in October of this year Connie Finnan, from Garryowen, recorded a 2-0 win over two-time finalist Terry Jenkins in the opening round of the partypoker.com World Grand Prix at the Citywest Hotel in Dublin.

The 32-year-old - ranked 74th in the world - was cheered on by his wife, daughter and six sisters but had to return to Shannon the next morning to work before returning to take on James Wade.

"I can't believe it - to win in front of the home crowd was absolutely unbelievable and I can do back to Limerick now with my head held high," said Finnan.

"To be just in the same practice room as these players is unreal for me and it's a dream come true to beat Terry."

He was narrowly beaten by James Wade in the next round but he already had a moment to remember.

## 29 OFFICIAL OPENING OF MARTINSTOWN

JP McManus availed of the opportunity of the official opening of the Staker Wallace GAA Grounds to mark the occasion of the 40th anniversary of Limerick's last All-Ireland senior hurling championship.

Both the Limerick and Kilkenny teams of 1973 were brought together once again and were guests of honour at a lavish dinner in clubhouse.

On the field, the game was also between Limerick and Kilkenny and many have credited the win for the home side as the confidence boost necessary before the Munster championship.

## 30 MUNSTER TRAINING BASE IN LIMERICK

A purpose-built, state-of-the-art training facility is to be put in place for the Munster rugby squad at the University of Limerick.

After many months of speculation - and many years during which the team were split into two training bases in Cork and Limerick - the news will come as a relief locally. It confirms Limerick's status as the headquarters of Munster rugby.

There had been rival bids from LIT and CIT, but in the end the outstanding facilities already on offer at UL and the plans to build the new centre won the day. It is expected to be fully operational by 2015.