

Champs join the heroes of '77 and '95



Then & Now

with Tom Aherne

LIMERICK camogie teams have enjoyed a very successful season, which culminated in All Ireland glory in Croke Park on Sunday September 14. Congratulations to the people involved in all their wins which return the Treaty County to another successful era.

It may be timely to recall the Limerick camogie team's initial appearance in Croke Park when they won their first national title in 1977.

They defeated Wexford by 2-7 to 3-1 to capture the Junior Championship after many years' endeavour.

It was certainly a joyous end to the many disappointments and frustrations over the 73 years when on several occasions they came so close before the breakthrough was achieved.

It was a dream realised for people such as Chris Ni Conaill (the first Limerick woman to become president of the Camogie Association) Eithne Neville, Peggy Duffy and many others who toiled unselfishly for camogie, in the county through good and bad times.

The teams were 12 a side at the time, and the following information about the team is taken from a publication at the time.

Helen Butler from Ballyagran was the goalkeeper who brought off a fine save in the second half.

Ann Meaney, a native of Cork, from the Ahane club, was full-back, and she played a major role in their success.

Liz Hayes from Bruff and the Ballyagran club was right-half-back.

Geraldine O'Brien from Bruree, and the Ballyagran club was centre-back and one of the stars in the final.

Margie Neville from the Croagh/Kilfinny club was left-half-back and a delightful ball player.

Bernadette O'Brien, a sister of Geraldine, from the Ballyagran club, was in the right centre-field position and her display in the final was her best ever.

Vera Mackey from the Ahane club was also in centre-field and her fast ground play proved highly effective.

Helen Mulcair was left centre-field, an U16 player from Croagh/Kilfinny, and a star of the future.

Bridgid Darcy from Patrickswell and the Ahane club was right-half-forward and a stylish and talented player.

Carrie Clancy, the captain, came from Ahane. Playing at centre-forward, she inspired her team-mates.

Pauline McCarthy, Ballybricken born and from the Ballyagran club, aged 17, was left-corner-forward and another rising star.

Breed Stokes from Croagh/Kilfinny was full-forward and the chief score getter.

Marion Doyle, a Carlow girl from the Croagh/Kilfinny club, was a substitute and she played in all games leading to the final. She played great camogie when drafted in at half time in Croke Park.

Kitty Ryan, substitute defender from Ahane, was a reliable and spirited player. Dolores O'Brien was substitute midfielder and a stylish ball player from the St Patrick's and Ahane clubs.

Ann Sheehy, substitute midfielder and a top class player, came from the Croagh/Kilfinny club.

Eithne Neville, who played with Croagh/Kilfinny and UCD, was the team trainer.

She won a senior All-Ireland medal with Dublin and was also the secretary of the Munster Council.

The selectors were David Clancy of Patrickswell, who was also the chairman of the County Camogie Board at the time, Vincent Hayes of Bruff, and father of Liz, and Eithne Neville.

It was a great day for captain Carrie Clancy, who celebrated 21 years of dedicated service in the county colours by leading the side to their historic victory.

She received the trophy from the president of the Camogie Association Agnes Purcell, (nee Hourigan from Ballingarry) a former Limerick player.

Since the Camogie Association was founded in 1904 only three Limerick captains have had the great honour of receiving a cup in Croke Park. In addition to Carrie, there was Helen Clifford, on behalf of the junior team in 1995, and now Fiona Hickey. Thirty-seven years after the 1977 win, Limerick are the All-Ireland Intermediate champions, and they can now set their sights on a senior title next year.

THE ALL IRELAND Wrenboy Competition has been held in Listowel since the 1950s and it is as popular today as it was in the early days when it was a novel event associated with the races.

It was started by the festival committee. Johnny Walsh was the first



Champions both: The 1977 Limerick camogie team who became All-Ireland champions and, below, a welcome home party last week for the current camogie queens



chairman and John B Keane was the first M.C.

The early competitions were mainly made up of local Kerry groups Killoccrim, Ennismore, Dirrah East, and Dirra West, and there was a special prize for the King of the Wrenboys. Killoccrim were the first to enter a competition at Listowel Races and they won first prize of £12 and a cup.

The prize money at present is very attractive, with all groups getting appearance fees. The rivalry was intense over the years, with groups from Meath, and Clare putting it up to the best from Kerry and Limerick.

The King was the leader of each

group and the best one from all the groups was awarded this title.

Jimmy Hennessy and Sonny Canavan were two of the early kings, and I first heard about the competition in John B Keane's Out and About Column in the Limerick Leader back in the 1960s.

He gave it great coverage each year and this added to its popularity as it attracted large crowds to the main square in the town.

He was a very funny and witty M.C. and he entertained the crowds during the breaks between the performing groups. Dan Keane and Michael Dowling followed suit in later years.

It is a great night's entertainment

aloft blazing into the night sky.

It sounds a bit crazy and would remind people of a victory celebration or the boys of Wexford going into battle at Vinegar Hill.

It is brilliant to watch the spiraling smoke and to smell the burning turf and to soak in the atmosphere.

I was alongside a few foreign visitors one year and they were astonished by this scene, of people dressed in goat skins, and crazy colours, with odd-shaped headgear, and beating bodhráns with quare-shaped sticks. One turned to the other and said: "Good gracious me! They must be a

tribe coming in from the jungle."

A group can vary in size but about 30 people, male and female, are needed to cover the programme that would have been rehearsed a number of times beforehand. The acts on stage mainly consist of traditional Irish music, step dancing, set dancing, songs and storytelling with a few funny incidents performed by the Amadan (fool) and a performance from the King.

He wears a special dress with a top hat and he carries an artificial Wren tied on to a little furze bush, and a blackthorn stick to direct operations on stage. Marks are awarded for all the different disciplines by the adjudicators and all the crowd remain on to hear the results often into the early hours of Saturday morning.

Limerick groups have a proud history of winning this competition, which is held usually on the third Friday night of September.

Carrigkerry have been very successful in the recent past winning eight titles. Askeaton, Shannon, Templeglantine, Tournafulla, Killeedy, Manister, and Athea in 1993 have all tasted success.

Paddy Faley marked Carrigkerry's win in 1999 in verse, and I will end with the first four lines.

*In Carrigkerry they all made merry,
When in a new record in history they
did enroll,
Three times in a row with their great
show,*

*They won the All Ireland wrenboys in
Listowel.*