

No. 184—MOSS COLBERT of Abbeyfeale

IT can truly be said of Moss Colbert that had he lived a few miles farther south he would have several All-Ireland football medals to his credit.

As a Limerick man he never got the opportunity of figuring with the football greats. Had he been born in the nearby "Kingdom," instead of in the Fealeside town, he would have the openings in plenty to play and even further embellish his acknowledged style and artistry at Gaelic football.

The versatile Limerick man — native of Abbeyfeale—as well as being a great footballer, was useful at other sports, particularly handball and hurling. Amongst his other accomplishments was the art of handling big football games as a referee of much prominence, whilst in the indoor sphere he figured with a lot of success as a billiards player.

ABBEYFEALE'S PART IN GAELIC FOOTBALL.

Gaelic football has held pride of place in Abbeyfeale down the long years since the G.A.A. was founded. The name and fame of Father Casey, the patriot priest of the parish in the early days of the Association, travelled the length and breadth of Ireland as symbolic of the new movement and what it meant to the youth of Ireland.

Abbeyfeale has the reputation of having contributed very substantially to the total of Irish missionaries fighting the battle for the Faith in far foreign fields, but it is also interesting to discover that there were nine Abbeyfeale men on the Limerick football team which won the American football championship in 1907.

That same year the patriot priest of Abbeyfeale died. The great Gael was mourned deeply, as an extract from his obituary demonstrates: "In many an Irish home whose roof tree he upheld, the silent tear will fall and the fervent prayer ascend for the noble heart who drove the rent thief like the wolf to lowlier lands, who truly fed the poor and solaced those in pain, who dared the prison for his people's rights and left his country better than he found it. He did his best, and left for other hands and better times a bright example and a clearer way to win weighing twelve stone, as a foot-

baller Moss was a two-footed, accurate brainy forward, whose lovely approach work was a treat to watch and a confusion to the best of defenders. Even his opponents could not help exclaiming "what a beauty," on occasions when he sent unstoppable balls to the net for a green flag majors to win a match almost on his own.

He shone in the company of many famous footballers, and by his crusading and his coaching, his own football ability and all-round sportsmanship helped a lot to revive the big ball code in the Shannonside county.

By SEAMUS O'CEALLAIGH

Moss Colbert was Limerick by birth but it was in Kerry, however, whilst a pupil at St. Michael's College, Listowel, that he first displayed the prowess that was later to mark him as one of Limerick's greatest football exponents.

While still a schoolboy, he wore the senior jersey for the local club at a period when their great rivals, Glin, were completing a remarkable spell, during which they captured seven county senior football and a junior football crown in a span of nine years. In that wonderful decade the Glin men were only ousted twice—in 1927 when a great Commercial's fifteen beat them on a re-play, and in Glin, at that; in 1932, when Abbeyfeale put them out of the Western representation.

AN INSPIRATION.

The latter success was an inspiration to the rising youth by the Feale, and when Moss Colbert joined the senior string in 1934, hopes were high of a long spell of Abbeyfeale supremacy, worthy successors and wearers of the Glin mantle.

This, it will be remembered, was also the period of great Limerick hurling mastery, with which the name of Ahane will always be so closely and so gloriously associated.

Parallel with their great hurling triumphs, the Ahane lads turned their attention to football, and to the surprise of all, qualified for the 1935 County Senior final, in which they were pitted against a much fancied Abbeyfeale fifteen. In fact, few gave Ahane a chance. However, it was a different story when the pair met at Rathkeale on October 4th, 1936—Ahane winning 3-2 to 1-1—the first of a five-in-a-row football successes that included another win over Abbeyfeale in 1933, this occasion on a re-play, 1-9 to 1-2, after the pair had figured in a drawn struggle in which they divided a meagre four points.

FIGURED WITH DISTINCTION.

Moss Colbert figured with distinction in those three games, in which the Mackeys and Jacky Power were so prominent for Ahane.

When Ahane were eventually defeated in 1940, Abbeyfeale looked set for the long delayed mastery spell. They were proud that evening of May 25th, 1941, when they registered a solitary point win over other old rivals, Knockane, 2-4 to 2-3, in the 1940 County final. However, the cup of victory was swept from their lips, when Knockane fought an objection and proved successful.

Unqualified success came the following year, when Treaty were beaten in a great final at Askeaton. A sweeter victory was the defeat of Knockane the next season.

A defeat that carried almost as much glory and glamour as a victory, and marked the peak of football interest in Limerick for many years was the second re-play with an up and coming Treaty-Sarsfields side for the 1946 title. A year later, Abbeyfeale won its last title to-date when they beat St. Patrick's in a great final at Adare, watched by the greatest crowd ever recorded for a club football game by the Shannon.

A BRAINY FORWARD.

An inter-county "certainty" with Limerick for a decade, Moss Colbert skippered the Shannonsiders on many occasions. Almost six feet tall, always very fit, and

baller Moss was a two-footed, accurate brainy forward, whose lovely approach work was a treat to watch and a confusion to the best of defenders. Even his opponents could not help exclaiming "what a beauty," on occasions when he sent unstoppable balls to the net for a green flag majors to win a match almost on his own.

He shone in the company of many famous footballers, and by his crusading and his coaching, his own football ability and all-round sportsmanship helped a lot to revive the big ball code in the Shannonside county.

When Moss moved to Cork City for a time towards the end of his football career he took a leading part in the revival of the famous Lees Football Club, who are present Cork champions — a happy omen for the All-Ireland title bid next Sunday week!

REFEREE OF MUCH ABILITY.

As his football activity declined, he came more and more into the limelight as a referee of much ability. The first games he handled were for the West Limerick Board but his capabilities were soon recognised elsewhere and there was one season when he must have refereed almost every County senior football final in Munster.

He handled Munster Championship and National League games in plenty, and in 1948 had charge of the Cavan-Louth All-Ireland Senior Football Championship semi-final. A few years ago he was referee of the international football final at Croke Park, in which New York triumphed over Cavan.

Acclaimed one of the best and most impartial referees in the country, he kept close to the ball all the time, was fast and alert in action but never spoiled a game by over use of the whistle.

USEFUL AT HANDBALL AND BILLIARDS.

Two footed in the kicking code, he was ambidextrous at handball, winning county honours in the early 'forties and later representing Limerick in the All-Ireland Championship series.

Billiards also came easy to him and he won a number of local tournaments.

Very promising as a hurler, he encouraged the game in Abbeyfeale and entered a team for the West Limerick Championships. They gave a few satisfying displays and it was a pity they eventually faded from the scene. Abbeyfeale should make another effort to propagate the caman code, now getting so popular in neighbouring Kerry.

Moss proved an efficient club secretary, good humoured and tireless. Now back in Abbeyfeale again, we hope to hear a lot more of him in the years ahead.