

# Great Limerick Athletes

(No. 63)—WILLIE HOUGH of Monagae

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(By SEAMUS O CEALLAIGH)

WHEN Limerick captured the 1918 All-Ireland senior hurling crown a long spell of ill-luck in the inter-county arena was broken, and the disappointments of twenty-one years rolled away in the glory of that late January day at Croke Park when the pride of Garryowen triumphed over the Model County men, 9-5 to 1-3.

It was a long stretch from the hectic November evening when Kilmahane beat Tullaroan, at Tipperary Town for Limerick's first hurling blue riband—that of 1897. During the intervening years great teams from Shamrocks, Castleconnel, Young Ireland, Cappamore, Caherline, Croom, Ballygarry, Fedamore, and Cloughaun had battled to get the Limerick name again on the All-Ireland roll, but not until Newcastle West won the 1917 County title in rather sensational fashion from a strongly fancied Young Ireland fifteen, did the luck turn, to give Shannonside the long overdue triumph, a fitting reward for years of devotion to the cause of the Gael.

Newcastle West's first move as County champions was to surrender their claim to the selection of the County team, and they nominated W. Hough, J. Ryan, T. Brennan, T. Humphries and D. Lanigan as a selection committee.

## GIVING YOUTH A CHANCE.

Willie Hough suggested to the new Committee that as the veteran players were given opportunity enough the time had come to put their trust in youth.

The team was re-constructed, the younger players getting preference in every case, and thus the fifteen which the Monagae had captained to victory in the 1918 All-Ireland final, was one of the youngest ever fielded by Limerick—and up to that actually ranked as the youngest combination ever to figure in an All-Ireland decider, their ages ranging from eighteen to twenty-seven years.

Limerick and Tipperary served rich fare in the semi-final of the Munster Senior Hurling Championship, played at the Markets Field on 7th July, 1918, and after a thrilling, closely contested struggle the game ended with honours even, 5-3 each.

In preparation for the re-play the Limerick team went to Foynes for special training, with the late Jim Dalton in charge.

Meantime, the British Government issued an order prohibiting the playing of all Gaelic games, except under permit from the R.I.C. The Central Council retaliated with an instruction that same be not applied for, and proclaimed August 4th a Gaelic Sunday, requesting that fixtures without permits be arranged all over Ireland for that day.

The response was magnificent—fifteen hundred contests were announced, Limerick being well to the fore with a large number of fixtures, at all of which large crowds were present.

## BIG ATTRACTION.

A big attraction at the Markets Field was the meeting of the great city rivals, Cloughaun and Young Ireland, supplemented by a fine junior clash between Shamrocks and Treaty. There was no interference from the authorities at any venue, and it was quite apparent that the British were beaten.

A fortnight later, the re-played Munster championship tie attracted a large crowd to the Cork Athletic Grounds where, after a splendid struggle, Limerick triumphed by a single point, 3-0 to 2-2.

The Munster Final was played at Thurles on 15th September, and resulted in an easy win for the Garryowen lads: Limerick, 11-3; Clare, 1-2.

At the Markets Field on 29th Sept., Limerick qualified for the All-Ireland decider by a great win over Galway.

In preparation for their All-Ire-

land Final bid, Limerick beat Cork, 8-0 to 3-0, at the Markets Field; and Dublin, 7-2 to 3-2, at Croke Park.

The final was played on the 26th January, 1919, when twelve thousand spectators saw Limerick early masters of the situation, the verdict being never in doubt. The victorious players were:—Willie Hough, captain (Monagae); Mick Murphy, goal; Denny Lanigan, Bob McConkey, Paddy McInerney, Willie Gleeson (Young Ireland), Paddy Kennedy, Dick Ryan (Pallas), Tom McGrath, Dan Troy, Mick Rochford (Cloughaun), Jimmy Humphries, Willie Ryan (Cappamore), Jack Keane (Castleconnel), Paddy Barry (Boher).

## PROUD DAY FOR LIMERICK.

It was a proud day for Limerick when Willie Hough bore the hurling cup in triumph from Croke Park, after being presented with it by Ald. Jim Nowlan, then President of the G.A.A. and the spotlight of Gaelic Ireland was on the ideal captain, who had obtained a wonderful influence over his men by the gentlest methods.

Willie Hough comes of a fine Gaelic stock, and in his young days saw plenty scientific and robust hurling in his native parish of Monagae. His father was an outstanding footballer and hurler, and his brothers all played hurling. Michael, who now resides in Dublin, figured with Limerick on several occasions.

Modest, unassuming and extremely reticent concerning his part in bringing Limerick back to the hurling limelight, it was only the knowledge that the recital of his deeds might help in the propagation of the games that induced him give me some details concerning his hurling days. And here is the story as I got it:

"When I was a school boy there were few, if any, school teams, and there were no school competitions. In those days, however, we often had games in both hurling and football with the neighbouring parishes, particularly Newcastle West, Tournafulla and Killeady.

"It was nothing strange to start out on foot on a Sunday, walk from five to ten miles, play a hard game, then walk home again, tired, weary, and particularly hungry.

## AT THE ZENITH OF THEIR GLORY.

"About that time, the Monagae team, of which T. D. Shanahan wrote so many beautiful verses, was at the zenith of their glory, and their wonderful feats on the field were an inspiration to us. What should we do but try and emulate them?"

"I generally played in centre-field. Rules were not too strict then, and tripping and holding, particularly in football, was much indulged in. But we got more fun out of these games than we did later from inter-county ones.

"In my first matches with Limerick I played centre field, then I was transferred to left full-back. Next I was placed centre-back and held that position from 1915 to 1926. I stood down then, but was recalled in 1929 and played full-back against Waterford, in their own field.

"There was a great hurling team in Monagae between the years 1900 and 1910. I was then too young to participate in their games, but I remember playing my first match with Monagae against Ballycormack at Castlemaison about 1910. It was a needle affair and I certainly got my baptism of fire on that occasion.

"I was entrusted with a 'seventy' which I dropped in front of the Ballygarry goal. One of our forwards doubled on it and raised the green flag. That was the signal for an altercation and the match ended there.

## CLUB RE-ESTABLISHED AROUND 1914.

"Shortly afterwards, Monagae

disbanded and the Club was not re-established until some time around 1914. Although we had then some excellent players, including the Shanahans, D. Greene and Jer Brouder, we were not good enough to win the championship.

"Numbers dwindled again after a few years and since we had not sufficient in our own parish to keep going the Club was disbanded, and four or five of our best players threw in their lot with Newcastle West. I played both hurling and football with Newcastle West for several years.

"In my young days I participated in a few sports gatherings but never won anything, except at a couple of cross road meetings where I was successful in the 440 yards. 'Carbery' once wrote of me: 'Willie Hough was not built for speed, but when hurling he had the knack of being always in the right place at the right time.'

## NEWSPAPER REPORT.

To get a correct picture of his early inter-county days I must interrupt the narrative to give an extract from a newspaper report of the period:

"Willie Hough came into real prominence as a hurler in 1913, when he was a student in Waterford. He captained the Geraldines (De La Salle) team that year and although there were two hundred students in the College he found it hard to get more than eighteen good players. However, some of them, like Hough, were exceptionally good, and for the first time in the history of the college his combination succeeded in annexing the county championship. And as a mark of appreciation of his leadership, the Monagae man was presented with a gold medal by the students.

"Hough later captained the Waterford team, which went down before the Toomevarra Greyhounds in the Munster championship after a great fight. Waterford fielded eight College and seven Waterford men and Toomevarra were then at the zenith of their glory. The 'Waterford Star,' commenting on the game, said:—'Never was a team better captained and never did a commander infuse more hope and spirit by sheer example than Hough. He was here, there, and everywhere—always on the ball—now playing tig with his opponents and anon slapping shots into the forwards with a frequency and accuracy that charmed those who could appreciate hurling at its best.'

## HIS OWN STORY.

Now to continue Willie's own story: "After leaving Waterford I spent portion of 1914 in Cork and played with the U.C.C. team, then called the Collegians. We had a splendid team, captained by a Monagae man, the late Dr. Jim Reidy. We got to the senior hurling semi-final but were beaten by Midleton. I was asked by the late J. J. Walsh, then Cork Chairman, to play for the Rebel County against my native Limerick but I did not feel like it.

"I returned home shortly afterwards, and in 1915 donned Limerick colours. My first really big match was in Dungarvan against Tipperary, which we were unlucky to lose.

"Probably the best player I met in my career was Jimmy Murphy of Horse and Jockey. When I played against him I was inexperienced, but I could never forget the warnings and orders I got prior to the match to mind Murphy at any cost. He was supposed to be Tipp's scoring machine. I trained hard for the match, and was in tip-top form. Jimmy Murphy scored one point in that hour, and I think I succeeded in subduing him fairly well. I have an idea that Bob McConkey, our own forward, was a better man than Murphy.

## THE TIPP. RUSH.

"Whenever we lined out against Tipperary, D. Lanigan and J. Keane, my half-back partners, always advised me spare myself during the first half, so as to be in readiness for the famous Tipp. rush, which generally came in the second half. I have one vivid recollection of an incident in the 1918 Munster Semi-final in Cork. We had drawn with them a month previously in Limerick. A few minutes from the end the Tipp. rush was initiated. The scores were level. I got possession of the ball. Two Tipp. forwards dived at me. I miraculously escaped them, passed the ball over the head of one of them, got possession again, and sent it soaring towards the Tipp. goal. Bobby McConkey was lying handy. He took a drop puck at the ball and stuck it in the net. Limerick won by that goal, and afterwards won the All-Ireland. This Munster Semi-final I regard as the greatest of the games in which I figured."

## MET SOME GREAT HURLERS.

Willie Hough met some grand hurlers in his time. When playing at mid-field he encountered such skilled exponents as Roddy Minogue (Tipperary) and Tim Nagle (Cork). As centre back he clashed with many scientific and experienced players, amongst them being Jimmy Murphy, Joe Nagle, J. J. Callanan, and Tom Shanahan of the Premier County; 'Balty' Ahern and R. O'Gorman of Cork; Lewy Halpin, Tom McGrath and 'Tull' Considine of Clare.

When I asked for his opinion of present-day players, he answered without hesitation: "The present-day players are quite good, but I think they do not train as consistently as we did. There were not so many counter-attractions in our time. We hurled all day on Sunday, if we had not a match to play. We were not sparing ourselves for dances or pictures. I notice a remarkable falling off in the physique of the present-day players, not in Limerick alone, but in the other counties as well. When we played for Limerick, each player usually had two hurleys exactly the same. We would not dream of selecting one from a pile of hurleys before the start of a match. It is very hard to get a suitable stick, and one should be accustomed to it before using it in an important match."

## VIEWS ON PRESENT-DAY HURLING.

I followed up with the question: "Is hurling as good now as it was then?" and he said: "Hurling may be more spectacular now than in my time. We went in more for ground play. Both my half-back partners, D. Lanigan and J. Keane, would delight your heart with their long touch line strokes. Some of the fields were hardly long enough for those two stalwarts, and then we had a wonderful opportunist in Willie Gleeson. Lanigan, Keane and I weighed 14st. 5lbs. each at the time we met Wexford in the All-Ireland Final. In that way we had a decided advantage over lighter players, and we always preferred to meet a lighter opponent, rather than heavy-weights like ourselves."

Willie Hough holds two All-Ireland medals, three Munster Championship souvenirs, two Limerick County trophies and numerous Thomond Feis and tournament medals.

To recall the many games in which he figured during his dozen active years in Limerick inter-county hurling would be to tell the story almost of the G.A.A. in the county during that period.

## ALSO A NOTED REFEREE.

He was also a noted referee, and had charge of many important matches, both hurling and football. He refereed an All-Ireland Hurling Semi-final between Kilkenny and Galway at Croke Park, besides numerous Munster Championship matches and National League football ties. His outstanding memory of his years with the whistle concerns an occasion when he was in control of an important game at Thurles. Let him tell about it:—"I got a reliable wristlet watch from Jack Keane. Luckily, I timed it with a watch one of my umpires had. Nearing the end of the first half, I noticed to my dismay that the watch had stopped. I was in a dilemma. At the first break in play I went up to the umpire to get the correct time. Spectators were wondering, and still are, I suppose, at my strange action on that occasion."

Willie Hough experienced all the rigours of the olden arena, and he can tell of the occasion when he cycled 29 miles to Limerick, played against Tipperary in an important game at the Markets Field, and cycled home again that night. In 1915, for a vital Munster Championship game at Dungarvan, he got a train from Newcastle West at 7 a.m., travelled until well after mid-day, played a hard game, and returned that same evening.

## HIS WORK ON THE MUNSTER COUNCIL.

In more recent times Willie Hough served Limerick well as one of the county representatives on the Munster Council, of which he is the respected treasurer for some years now. Under his careful guidance the affairs of the Council have prospered, and the substantial investments spread over the many fields in the province are only one of the many Gaelic activities that owe a deep debt to the sterling work of this big hearted and well beloved Gael.

No. 64—J. J. Bowles of Limerick City.