

# Great Limerick Athletes

## (No. 47)—Maurice Hourigan of Balingarry

(By SEAMUS O'CALLAIGH)

TO meet Maurice Hourigan at the commencement of his athletic career, it is necessary to contact the Balingarry Hurling Club and trace the history of that combination during some of the greatest years of its existence.

When the present century was very young we find first mention of Maurice as a member of the team, led by Captain Con O'Keeffe which played and beat Granagh at Kilfinny, in a match that was generally regarded as the starting point of a grand run of successes for the Garden Town. Others prominent in that success were Tom and Paddy Keating, Jim and Pat O'Grady, Jack O'Keeffe ("Savage") and Jack Hourigan.

This victory stimulated the Balingarry boys to greater deeds, but shortly they lost the able services of their gallant captain, who sought a new home and friends 'neath the sheltering folds of the stars and stripes.

Into the breach stepped Harry McDonnell of Fortwilliam, who, in a short time had a well trained and sturdy seventeen at his command. Matters went ahead under his leadership in fine style, victory after victory coming gloriously to the Western men.

### IN FOR COUNTY CHAMPIONSHIP HONOURS.

Soon they were in the thick of the fight for Co. Championship honours. Captain Harry got his men to fighting form. Kilfinny fell to his stroke, at Bruree, after a fierce contest, and shortly afterwards, Monegay, then a dashing lot, bowed to defeat decisively at Reen's Pike. That was a match worth witnessing—strength and stamina were with Balingarry, still their sturdy opponents made them go the whole way.

The final of the county was next on the agenda and after a good useful course of training, Balingarry faced the music at the Markets Field against Cappamore. The date was August 13th, 1905, and the following represented the West:—H. McDonnell, captain; Maurice and Jack Hourigan, Tom and Paddy Keating, Pat and Jim O'Grady, Davy and Pat Nunan, Jeremiah Cahill, Charles O'Connor, Jack Kiely, Joe Fitzgerald, Stephen ("Dan") O'Connell, Bill Hartigan, Jack Burke and Jack ("Savage") O'Keeffe.

The Balingarry contingent surprised Limerick—three long cars and about thirty side cars and traps pouring in their human freight to leave the Cappamore backers outnumbered three to one.

It was a terrific game, fought with grim determination. Cappamore broke away from the throw-in, and a wild rush, headed by the hero of the 1897 "All-Ireland"—John Hynes, saw the Western goals invaded, and one of the up-rights fell as the ball was driven to the net for a goal in the first minute of play. Balingarry rallied in fine fashion but never recovered from the effects of that electric opening, and were eventually beaten by a goal and two points.

### A YOUNG SEVENTEEN.

It was a sad day for the stalwarts from the craggy slopes of Knockferna, and interest died for some years, it being 1910 before a young seventeen again carried the colours to victory. The venue this time was Knockaderry, and Castle-mahon were beaten there by a substantial margin. This revived enthusiasm in the district, and in the next game, played at Castle-mahon, Monegay were well and truly disposed of.

Tom Keating was now elected captain, and with the championship once more the goal. Croagh were met and defeated in very satisfying fashion. When Ardpatrick were encountered on April 30th, 1911, defeat was once again Balingarry's portion. The County Board, however, ordered a re-play and the West boys won this easily, having eight goals to spare at the end. This victory gave Balingarry the

title of intermediate champions—an honour they share with very few, for this grade is not popular by the Shannon and only a couple of championships have been played in it.

The set of beautiful gold centred medals which Balingarry got for that victory were the first medals ever won by a parish combination, and right regally did Balingarry celebrate the occasion. The players were: Tom Keating, Maurice Hourigan, Jim and Pat O'Grady, Pat Keating, P. Condon, Maurice and Michael Quaide, C. O'Connor, Jack Kiely, Jack Burke, Jack Donoghue, Jim Cottrell, Dan Dunne (goal), D. Clancy, Jackie Hennessy.

### YEAR OF TRIUMPH.

1911 was certainly a year of triumph for the "Garden Town." Entering the fight for senior renown, Balingarry faced a great Croom side at Adare on May 14th, and won, 4-2 to 3-2. This was a fine achievement considering Croom included in their team stalwarts like Mick Feely, the brothers Mangan and Jack O'Shea, who were then in their heyday.

A fortnight later the Balingarry boys encountered the holders of the County crown—the far famed Young Ireland side and after a grand exhibition the "Learys," as the Balingarry lads were now nicknamed, emerged winners by the narrow margin of two points.

On September 10th, the rampant Western lads engaged another city team then at the peak of their hurling form—the Commercials—and beat them by three goals, to qualify for the senior County final against Fedamore.

The aftermath of the dispute with the Central Council over the venue for the 1911 All-Ireland final, in which Limerick hurlers conceded a walk over to Kilkenny, rather than play anywhere except in Cork, left matters Gaelic at a low ebb in Limerick for a long time.

Eventually, twelve months later, on 29th September, 1912, Balingarry faced Fedamore in the biggest task of their career. The Fedamore team boasted many grand hurling figures—Egan Clancy, Con Scanlan, Mick Harrington, Stephen Gleeson, Ned Treacy and Jack Clancy, and it is little wonder they were firm favourites.

### FIRST-CLASS SURPRISE.

Balingarry, however, created a first-class surprise by winning a great decider, 4-2 to 1-2. Careful and consistent training got the Western men to the top of the Gaelic ladder, and it is a real pity that owing to conditions prevailing at the time, and the delay in playing the championship they were deprived of the opportunity of representing the County.

Before passing from the successes Maurice Hourigan gained on the hurling field, it is only right that I should mention a great victory over a Kerry selection, made by Kilmoylay, on St. Patrick's Day, 1913, and the defeat of a strong North Cork pick at Dromcollogher, in August, 1913.

The greatest match Balingarry won was a Murphy Cup game against Young Irelands, played at Adare on September 24th, 1911. The margin of victory was two points, following a memorable struggle.

Balingarry lost their crown on November 9th, 1913, when Fedamore beat them in the County final. Without Jim O'Grady, who was on the injured list, and with Paddy O'Grady having to retire hurt after five minutes hurling, the "Garden Town" lads were at a big

disadvantage. The crippling blow came, however, twelve minutes from the end, when, following some hectic exchanges, Maurice Hourigan and C. Connors were sent to the line, and the "Garden Town" had to finish two players short. They were beaten, 4-4 to 2-2.

### MAURICE HOURIGAN'S ATHLETIC CAREER.

Maurice Hourigan continued with the hurlers until 1916, but his athletic doings were concentrated in the years from 1908 to 1912.

He was past the middle twenties when he made what, I think, was his first athletic appearance, at Adare sports on August 15th, 1908. On that occasion he finished second in the "half mile" to J. Simpson of Clarina. A fortnight later at Newcastle West, he was again second in the same event, D. M. O'Connell being the victor on this occasion.

These performances demonstrated his ability as a runner, and the following season he blossomed out as a first-class miler and half miler, winning a number of races in these events at meetings all over Munster.

Soon he discovered that his forte lay in the longer distances—in marathon races. As a marathon runner he was supreme in his day, always winning without the appearance of an effort.

Hourigan was a natural runner. He did not know what set training was but it must be said, however, that his preparation for long distance running was, entirely unknown to himself, ideal. He worked diligently in the open air in the home farm every day and his Sundays, when not interrupted by gruelling contests on the hurling field, were spent following the beagles over the hills and dales of West Limerick. Hourigan, a tall, well-set up man, was physically and constitutionally adapted to trying contests.

### FIRST RECORDED WINS.

His first recorded wins were at the Munster Championship Sports held at Tipperary on June 13th, 1909. On that occasion he was successful in the half mile, with T. Flynn, of Ballinamult, second, and in the mile, T. Crough, of Tipperary, being second.

On June 27th, at Kilmallock, he won the five miles flat event, W. McEniry being second and J. Hennessy, of Kilfinane, third. Two days later, at Listowel, he won the five miles flat championship of Ireland, T. Crough filling second position.

At Clonmel on July 11th he won one mile flat honours, and at Mal-low, a week later, was second to M. O'Callaghan, of Banteer, in a race for the four mile championship of Ireland.

At Elton on August 1st he won the mile and was second to a fellow townsman, W. McEniry, in the five miles. On September 12th, at Bruff, he dead-heated with J. J. Hennessy for top place in the one mile flat event. The same pair had a terrific tussle in the six mile road race at Kilfinane Sports the following Sunday, Hennessy filling second and Hourigan third place. And he finished the year with a second prize in a great road race from Rathluirc to Dromcollogher.

To Newcastle West, in 1911, we must travel for the only other mention I have in my scrap book of the Balingarry man. The officers of that great meeting, unfortunately curtailed owing to bad weather, were:—President, John McDonnell; Treasurers, E. Forde and M. Mulcahy; Hon. Secretary, J. Brouder; Financial Secretary,

James Geaney; Handicapper, J. A. Collins. Committee—M. Murphy, T.C.; G. Reidy, T.C.; T. Reidy, G. Forde, J. P. O'Connor, T. Ambrose, J. Roche, M. Mulcahy, T. O'Connell, W. Phelan, R. K. Sheehy, James Phelan, John Scanlan, T. Roche, P. Cregan, T. D. Cowper, M. Spring, M. Phelan and M. O'Dwyer.

### WONDERFUL TRIAL OF ENDURANCE.

The three miles flat championship of Munster, for which the Athletic Council presented a set of medals, was a wonderful trial of endurance, and scarcely a length divided first and second at the conclusion. Maurice finished first, with D. Murphy, Tullig, close on his heels.

From his friend and constant companion of athletic days—Mick Quaid—I have secured some details of his main achievements.

His first outing, according to Mick, was a three miles drag hunt, which he won.

Second in a road race from Rathluirc Station to Broadford, he was leading all the way, and passed the Sports Field and ran into the village of Broadford, and had to come back again and run two rounds of the Sports Field. This error cost him the laurels, for the second man was first in the gate and got the trophy. The distance on this occasion was 12 miles.

Quaid and Hourigan cycled to Elton the day he won the mile and was placed in the longer event, a distance of 20 Irish miles, and they cycled it home again that night.

Next morning, the first Monday in August, they cycled to Newcastle West to catch a special train for Abbeyfeale, where he won a five miles road race.

### TEN MILES CROSS-COUNTRY RACES.

Representing Limerick in a 10 miles cross-country race he finished third out of 120 competitors, at Dublin. Over the same distance, at Newcastle West, he filled second place, losing by inches to Tom Hales.

Maurice Hourigan distinguished himself on both the hurling and athletic fields, whilst his brother, John, was also a prominent player in the famous Balingarry "Irish Volunteer" hurling team that brought such honours to the district.

Another generation were later prominent in hurling and camogie circles, worthily upholding the honour of the "Little Town" in this respect.

No. 48—Jack McCarthy of Kilfinane.