

Great Limerick Athletes

(No. 53)—JOHN HYNES of Cappamore

(By SEAMUS O'CALLAIGH)

FIFTY-FIVE years ago next Friday, 20th November, seventeen men brought to Limerick its first All-Ireland hurling crown, the 1897 Championship title.

Lately, I met one of the few survivors of that great victory—eighty-years-old John Hynes of Cappamore, the man who scored the goal that put Limerick on top in the closing minutes of that epic game with Kilkenny—the start of a grand rivalry between Nore and Shannon that was to blossom forth in all its glory during the great days of the mid 'thirties, when the pair made new records for attendance and for sportsmanship at Croke Park.

When I recently visited the old veteran I was accompanied by an All-Ireland man of forty years later, who figured with his native Tipperary in the defeat of Kilkenny, at Killarney, in 1937, Jimmy Coffey, and by another good friend of the old hurler, John P. Crowley, who later very kindly supplied me with some of the data that was not available on the occasion of my visit.

John Hynes, who lives with his wife in a nice little white, slated house, in one of the principal Cappamore streets, celebrated his eightieth birthday on 22nd June last. Now, unfortunately blind and invalided, the old hurler is striving to make ends meet on a small pension that is entirely inadequate for even his frugal needs.

PLAYED BEFORE G.A.A. WAS FOUNDED.

Born almost a dozen years before the G.A.A. was founded, John played old-time hurling and football during his school days, with his schoolmates, on the roads and fields around his native district.

The best in the line of competition they rose to in those far-off days was a game between Long Street and Main Street, which John's side always won. Even then, the prowess of the young Hynes was recognised by his pals and team fellows, because he was acclaimed leader of his side.

In the crude work of the pioneers, with big awkward sticks as hurleys, and a ball half the size of a present day football, leg injuries were frequent, and John has many marks to show, telling of hectic struggles to get his side on top even before recognised rules were introduced to put some order into the play.

He played in every position on the field, but his main berth was full back, a selection that, in the order of things then, was supposed to indicate roughness and toughness, the attributes expected of the custodian of such an important place in the line-out.

DAYS OF THE TWENTY-ONE A SIDE.

In the days of the twenty-one a side when M. Looney was secretary of the newly formed Limerick County Board, Cappamore affiliated a club, mainly through the exertions of Rev. E. Hogan, who became chairman; Edward Ryan being vice-chairman; Larry McGrath treasurer and W. J. Ryan, secretary.

The name of this club was Araglin. A dispute over some District Council elections resulted in the appearance of a second club, called Erin's Hope, of which John Hayes was the organiser.

Both clubs affiliated to the Co. Board, and Araglin went to the semi-final of the 1888 county championship, losing to Murroe by a small margin. They later won a set of hurleys at Blackboy.

The two clubs fielded football teams and Erin's Hope proved more successful in this code, winning cups at Dromkeen and Castletown, also a picture of Parnell, who was, of course, one of the earliest patrons of the G.A.A.

Team mates of John Hynes in those days included Thomas ("Cooper") Ryan, who usually kept goal; James Butler, the captain of Araglin; Pat and John Leonard; "Coaching" O'Brien, M. Fogarty, John Godfrey, John Reddan, Pat Mackey, Matt O'Brien, Thomas and John Cummins, Bill Moroney, Dan Butler, Bill Garrett, Timmy and Michael McNamara, Denny Hayes and Michael Hilliard.

The Erin's Hope lasted longer than Araglin but eventually the members of both came together in a Cappamore team which, however, fell through completely in a few years.

Then, at eighteen, Hynes turned out with Boher, continuing with them for a few seasons, until

Cappamore were re-organised in 1896, with John as captain, under the seventeen aside rules, Spencer Lyons of Croom Castle being then Chairman of the County Board.

START OF HIS HURLING CAREER.

John, who never smoked, and who started his hurling with an old cabbage stump for a caman, quickly moved into championship class.

His first game against the Kilfinane he was to know so well in later years, was in the 1895 County hurling semi-final, which Boher won, 2-7 to 1-3.

He next figured with South Liberties against Thurles, at Cork-anree, which the Tipperary men won by a point, a last minute goal giving them victory in a game which "Liberties" dominated most of the hour.

In 1896, Paddy Lee, then manager of the Cappamore Creamery, revived the Cappamore Hurling Club and appointed John its captain. They got a field from William Fogarty, Portnard, and practised hard.

Their first match was against Kilfinane, and was fixed for Sheehan's Cross, where Kilfinane refused to play and Cappamore got a bloodless victory. They next met Caherline, at Dromkeen, where play was stopped when John Hynes made a goal from a touch puck, which the referee disallowed. A re-play followed at the Markets Field which Caherline won by a point. Later Shamrocks beat Caherline for County honours.

The city men picked John to help them in their Munster Championship test with Cork at Tipperary Town, a game which the Leesiders won narrowly.

For the next championship Cappamore got a walk-over from Ardpatrick, who refused to play at Knockaney. Victories over Shamrocks and Bruff followed and the final was reached, in which Kilfinane provided the opposition. It proved a terrific struggle waged at a great pace, which Kilfinane won 4-9 to 4-8, a decision that Cappamore hotly disputed, and John Hynes, to this day, maintains that scores disallowed them on that occasion should have been granted. The whole of Cappamore were very sore over the matter and when Kilfinane later sought the help of some of their opponents for the opening game in the Munster Championship it was refused.

MARCH AT LIMERICK RACECOURSE.

Kilfinane met Tulla (Clare) at Greenpark Racecourse, Limerick, on 19th June, 1898, and beat them 2-5 to 2-3, a victory that fired Limerick enthusiasm and helped to heal the breach, with the result that Kilfinane were able to call on Cappamore for the next encounter.

Blackrock were then engaged at Tipperary on September 25th, and Kilfinane won after a great game, 4-9 to 1-6. The Cappamore men on that selection were John Hynes, Pat Mulcahy, Johnny Condon and Pat Butler, with John Mulcahy and Denis Connelly also travelling as substitutes.

Tipperary Town on 20th November, 1898, witnessed a great muster of Limerick people who travelled to see the county contest its first ever All-Ireland final.

D. Grimes captained the team, which included other Kilfinane men, "Sean Og" Hanley, the two Flynns, two Finns, O'Brien, Brazil and Downes, besides Reidy and Cottrel of Ballingarry; Flood of Caherline, and Buskin of Croom, with the Cappamore men already mentioned.

It was a great game from the word "go" with some grand hurling in it and Kilkenny going splendidly. "Fox" Maher was in his prime and the Noresiders had other stars in the Graces, Lalors, Walsh, Dalton and Teehan.

Buskin and Hanley battled like giants and Hynes, at right-back, was a tower of strength in the Limerick defence. Kilkenny led off by scoring a point and then a goal, to which Limerick replied with a fine point by Brazill, who was as handy a hurler as you'd see any day. Kilkenny put on a point, to which Cottrell, the Limerick full-

forward, replied in like strain, and the teams rested: Kilkenny, 1-2 Limerick, 0-2.

It was Kilkenny everywhere when the Noresiders scored a goal following the restart. Limerick rallied, however, and a grand shot between the goal posts by Cottrell raised the excitement to a high level, which further increased as Brazill forced through for a nice point.

REST OF THE STORY.

I will let John Hynes himself tell the rest of the story:

"Feeling the blood of victory in our veins, we met them man for man in some wonderful hurling, and despite two further minor scores by Kilkenny we responded magnificently. Sean Og tore through the field, Pat O'Brien hurled like two men, and when Pat Butler brushed aside all opposition for a goal he showed us the way to the winning of our first All-Ireland.

"Ash splintered and men fell in shoulder to shoulder bouts as we pressed them hard, and to save their posts the Kilkenny backs gave a fifty. There were no seventies then, all fifties; and your opponent could stand seven yards away ready to charge. Sean Og walked up the field, while Pat Mulcahy stood ready to ward off the charging rival. The Kilfinane band that had travelled with the boys from the town struck up a bar of 'Let Erin Remember,' but you couldn't hear a thing with the cheering.

"Sean Og lifted the ball and missed it. Pat Mulcahy, however, jumped in, whipped it to the Kilkenny goalmouth and, as the Kilkenny goalkeeper brushed it aside to give another fifty, Limerick and Kilkenny men went through the posts and nearly over a little ditch at the back in one mad charge. Sean Og, somehow, felt nervous as the ball was brought back for the fifty and he told me take the puck. I saw I had my chance and made up my mind to take it at all cost.

"Kilkenny were leading by a point, so I said to myself a point was no use. Up in front of me walked Sean Og while the Kilkenny men waited for his puck. He just stepped past the ball. I lifted it and hit as clean a stroke as ever I hit in my life. It never touched man nor hurley until it crashed past the goalkeeper, and Limerick for the first time led with only a couple of minutes to go. No team in Ireland could hold us then, and as the ball was pucked out we swept it back and John Condon, one of our wing men, sent over a point that gave us victory by a clear goal. We beat Kilkenny later in the Croke Cup—to complete a great double—but naturally this win was not half as sweet as the one for the championship, which came to Limerick for the first time."

John Hynes, like many other of our Limerick hurlers of that period, visited London and played there for a short spell with the Desmonds, who were beaten in the British Championship and also met a heavy reverse when they travelled to Ireland for a game with one of the home teams.

ALWAYS A GOOD RUNNER.

Always deeply interested in athletics, John Hynes took a particular interest and pride in the doings of the Pallasgreen men, and can go back in his recollections to the days of the great Willie Real. Always a good runner, he attended every sports meeting for miles around but could never be induced to compete. Still keen on athletics, he takes pleasure in the fact that men like Bill Daly, Patrick Carmody and William Hanley are to the fore at the present time in the cross-country limelight to keep the name of Cappamore linked with the fame that the district boasted in days that are gone. Daly won the mile in the North Munster College Championships in 1952, and was runner-up for both the Munster and All-Ireland Colleges titles—the first three, in the latter, finishing inside the record previously set for the distance.

Handball and football were also favourite exercises, with John

Hynes, but both were merely indulged in as training for hurling, and he never took part in any competitions in them.

Hard work in bogs and fields, cutting turf and saving hay, kept him fit most of the year, and a little hurling practice in the evening was sufficient to ensure eye and hand in unison for the important games. Speed and courage he rates the important factors in a hurler, and he holds that the determined ground player is invariably a better proposition for a team than the stylist, who cannot back his fancy work with spirit and daring.

A great lover of greyhounds and a sound judge of a good one, John spent many happy days hunting the hares. A keen disciple of Isaac Walton, he often killed a salmon on the River Mulcair that flows by the village of Cappamore, a noted river for fishermen.

VIEWS ON PRESENT-DAY HURLERS.

John is disappointed in the Limerick hurlers of the present day, and considers the root of the trouble is too much stopping and rising of the ball instead of striking it as it comes.

Then the old veteran squared himself, and with real feeling expressed himself thus: "At the present day the hurlers would not walk half a mile without a motor. In my days I often walked twelve miles to play a match and walked back again afterwards. I'm afraid the boys of to-day are too lazy to walk to the field for a bit of training."

John tells a good story concerning a travelling experience of his hurling days. Castleconnell invited himself and Denis Connelly of Cappamore to play with them against another team, the match being fixed for Limerick. They agreed.

The night before the match they bought two pounds of chops, cheap then, at the butcher's stall in Cappamore. Then they went to D. Connelly's house, cooked it and did it justice.

They then started on the road, walking, with their hurleys and togs. At 2 a.m. they arrived at Mike O'Neill's "pub" in Boher, got a drink there, and continued along the road to Limerick.

They arrived at Owen Ryan's house in Pennywell shortly after dawn and sat on the steps there. When Owen got up he saw them, and knowing them well invited them to breakfast, which they followed with a couple of drinks. The pair then walked about until the Castleconnell team arrived, played the match which Castleconnell won, and walked the whole way back to Cappamore again. Is there a man in any game to-day that would do anything like that?

GRAND QUARTETTE.

That these exploits did no harm to those old veterans is evident from the fact that Denis Connelly is still working away at his trade as a carpenter, and Sean Hynes is still alert although invalided after many years of hard work. Pat Butler, of the '97 team, is also still to the good in Cappamore, whilst Pat Mulcahy now lives by Liffeside. In wishing this grand quartette many further years amongst us, we salute the memory of all the great men of their day and hope that the recalling of their deeds will help in some small way towards bringing back to Limerick the glory that once was hers in such abundance.

No. 54—Owen D. Coll of Bruree.