

GREAT LIMERICK SPORTSMEN

Ned Lawlor of St. Patrick's

(By SEAMUS O'CALLAGHAN)

THE St. Patrick's Club played its first match, as "Pennywell," on a historic occasion in the history of the Limerick G.A.A.

The date was March 21st, 1886, almost a year and a half after the founding of the Gaelic Athletic Association, but a very early stage in the development of hurling and football in Limerick.

The early stages of G.A.A. activity was mainly confined to athletic fields, and in this branch Limerick men were particularly prominent and figured with distinction, mainly in the weights and jumping events, setting standards in these which for years were numbered not only with the best of the home arena but of the world stadia also.

Hurling and football activity in the first year of the new G.A.A. was confined to the enterprise in the main of a few clubs, notably St. Michael's, Shamrocks, Crecora and South Liberties in hurling and the famed Commercials in football.

FIRST INTER-COUNTY CLUB MATCH.

Shamrocks, who were actually in existence two years before the foundation of the G.A.A., were the first Limerick hurling team to travel outside the County for a game. This they did in the early spring of 1886 and the venue chosen was Ballina, where they played a team from Killaloe, appropriately named the Kincoras. This pair made history for their meeting was the first inter-county club match played in Munster.

The Claremen won by a goal, and Kincora made the event an unforgettable one by the hospitable manner in which they received the Limerick lads, who were lavishly entertained after the game. Music and song whiled away the pleasant hours, and this first great social gathering between the Gaels from opposite sides of the Shannon nurtured a warm friendship that has weathered the passage of the years.

A return match was arranged for Rosbrien, which aroused unprecedented interest. The Clare contingent were accompanied by a splendid band, dressed in attractive uniforms, while the Boherbuoy Band, led by their popular bandmaster, the late Tom O'Brien, headed a great concourse from the City to the scene of battle.

THRILL-PACKED STRUGGLE.

It was a thrill packed struggle, again fought in true sporting spirit, and the scenes and excitement of the occasion left not alone a lasting impression but actually drove the populace hurling mad.

The Clare lads repeated the success of the Ballina game and by the exact same margin. They afterwards scored also at the festive board, where they were entertained on an elaborate scale.

An added attraction on the occasion of the Rosbrien match was the meeting of Commercials and Pennywell in football, which proved a tremendous game fought at a fast pace and very closely contested.

The Pennywell lads, encouraged by the fine display of that occasion, decided on forming a club and the result was the formation of St. Patrick's.

The Club was represented as such at the Special Convention of the G.A.A. held at Thurles on September 27th, 1886, at which a resolution was adopted declaring that persons playing under rugby or other non-Gaelic rules cannot be admitted as members of any branch of the G.A.A.

IN FIRST COUNTY SENIOR FOOTBALL CHAMPIONSHIP.

St. Patrick's took part in the first Limerick County Senior Football Championship, and again played in 1888 but went out rather easily in each, going down before St. John's in the opening round of the 1887 title fight, and losing to Nationals at the same stage the following year.

St. Patrick's again went out before St. John's in the first game of the 1889 senior football campaign, but the margin on this occasion was the odd point in seven, after a game in which St. Patrick's had a lot of the play but missed a few vital scoring opportunities.

The subsequent display of St. John's indicated the fact that St. Patrick's were gradually becoming a football force, for "John's" reached the County final, played at Derryknockane, and in which their opponents were the far famed Commercials, who had the first All-Ireland crown with a twenty-one which was drawn exclusively from their own club.

A splendid tussle for supremacy was spoiled by a dispute arising over a goal claimed by the Commercials and disputed by St. John's. The result was an unfinished match, the score standing at cessation of play; St. John's, 0-6; Commercials, 1-0 (disputed). A goal

had no equivalent in points at this period, so the Commercials' goal was a victory one, if upheld by the County Board. The latter did this, and so Commercials got the title.

A CHALLENGE.

Not satisfied, St. John's challenged the Commercials to prove their right to the title and the teams agreed to meet again at Derryknockane, with Maurice Moynihan of Tralee as referee. St. John's won 0-7 to 0-2, but Commercials remain official champions as this latter match was not recognised by the County Board. St. John's subsequently played the Clare champions, the William O'Briens of Kildysart, and beat them 0-4 to 0-2, at Ennis.

These events encouraged St. Patrick's, and their captain, Ned Lawlor, determined on a stiff course of training and a well-planned schedule of matches in preparation for the assault on the 1890 county crown.

Political troubles, however, upset his plans considerably and the impact of the "Parnell Split" had its effect on many clubs, dissension within the ranks causing the disbandment of many well-known combinations.

Ned succeeded in keeping St. Patrick's intact but his plan for a succession of games against leading teams was impossible of accomplishment in the prevailing circumstances.

TRAINED EARNESTLY.

However, the lads under his command trained earnestly and with determination to succeed they entered the 1890 campaign in very confident mood.

The success of their efforts was very pronounced and they had little difficulty in working their way to the final.

They had to wait for a while to find their opponents. St. John's and Commercials journeyed to Croom for their semi-final tie, and when the scores stood, Commercials, 0-2; St. John's, 0-1, a dispute arose and the match was not finished. The County Board ordered a replay, both teams to be allowed the scores made at the first meeting and this took place at Dromin. No score was made by either side on the occasion, so Commercials qualified to meet St. Patrick's.

To Dromin again the sides journeyed, and on June 1st, 1890, St. Patrick's won their first County crown—the seventieth anniversary of which success they will celebrate next year.

TERRIFIC STRUGGLE

It was a terrific struggle between powerful men in which earnestness and vigour made up for any lack of science and combination. Big strong defenders were not easily overcome, and in the crowded space with forty-two players operating tough and tenacious play was the only kind possible.

With only three scores in it the exchanges were unrelenting all the way, with enthusiasm at fever pitch all through a second half that was unforgettable for its wild headlong forward rushes and the do-or-die stand of stone wall back men. St. Patrick's won, 0-2 to 0-1, and so were the first side to take the senior football crown from the great Commercials, who had captured the 1887, 1888 and 1889 titles, and Munster and All-Ireland honours as well, in 1887.

THE TEAM

Ned Lawlor captained that great team, the other members of which were J. Troy, T. Reilly, J. Cross, M. Lawlor, P. Hayes, D. Kelleher, W. McMahon, M. Ryan, J. Scanlon, D. Brennan, T. Gough, J. Jordan, Andrew Keane, D. Duggan, P. Sheehan, J. Barton, P. Ryan, J. McMahon, J. Hynes and E. Ryan.

How St. Patrick's won the title again the following year, and their bid for the Munster crown will be told in the next article.

Ned Lawlor Of St. Patrick's

(CONCLUDED)

ST. PATRICK'S, as county champions, had the representation of the county in the 1890 All-Ireland senior football championship ties. Although provincial councils were not established at the period the competition was played on a provincial basis, and Limerick were drawn against Kerry in both hurling and football.

The games were fixed for Tralee on August 3, 1890, and a great crowd assembled for the play. For Kerry it proved a very satisfying day for they won both games with something to spare.

A BATTLE OF WITS.

St. Patrick's were opposed by the renowned Luane Rangers and it fell to the lot of Ned Lawlor to counter the wiles of the well-known athlete, J. P. O'Sullivan, of Killorglin. Between the pair it was a real battle of wits and their exchanges were the highlights of a game that held interest all the way, despite the fact that the Rangers won, 0.9 to nil. The football was typical old time stuff, with plenty of earnestness and enthusiasm, but lacking much of the science which has made Gaelic football such a popular game in recent times. The "Kingdom" lads were the heavier lot and were quicker to take the chances that offered. They, however, failed to get through to the net, a tribute to the tenacity of the Limerick defenders who broke many headlong charges in what would now be rated ruthless fashion.

THE KERRY HURLING WIN

The Kerry football win did not come as a great surprise, for the fame of the Killorglin lads had already spread throughout the province, but the success of the Kerry hurlers bordered on the sensational. Kilmoyley Robert Emmets beat South Liberties 1-6 to 0-1, a victory that was only the forerunner of the grand All-Ireland success achieved by the boys from Ballyduff the following year.

The referee of both Tralee games was Frank B. Dinneen, of Ballylanders, the only person ever to hold the two great posts in the G.A.A. of President and General Secretary. Later, he sold to the Association the sports ground at Jones's Road which is now Croke Park.

EFFECTS OF PARNELL SPLIT

The effects of the "Parnell split" took heavy toll of G.A.A. clubs between the completion of the 1890 championships and the commencement of those for the following year. A special convention of the Association held in the Pillar Room of the Rotunda, Dublin, on Wednesday, July 22, 1891, decided unanimously in favour of Mr. C. S. Parnell's leadership for the national movement, an action which had the effect of alienating the support of many members, with the result that in Limerick, as in other counties, the number of affiliated clubs decreased considerably, and those that remained were only able to carry on with the aid of some members of the disbanded clubs. The "split" proved a serious blow to the Association and resulted in the breaking up of many famous clubs.

The entries for the 1891 county championships reached an all time low level. Despite the lack of members, however, the competition proved a most exciting one in both hurling and football, and was played off in record time, attracting much public interest.

COUNTY FINALS

The County finals took place at Loughmore, Mungret, on Sunday, July 17, and were witnessed by a

big crowd.

The hurling took place first and saw Treaty capture their first county crown, doing so at the expense of South Liberties, whom they beat 2-1 to 1-0. The Thomondgate lads were assisted by seven members of the disbanded St. Michael's Club, and Jack Connors, a former Liberties goalkeeper, also lined out with them. South Liberties were aided by several members of the former Mungret Club.

When the footballers lined out, the County title holders, St. Patrick's, caused a surprise by including in their team a couple of the Treaty players who had just won the hurling championship. These included the late Dan McNeice, who was afterwards Secretary of the Limerick Harbour Board, and one of the very few who could claim to have won two Limerick senior championship medals on the same day—hurling and football.

FOUGHT AT A TERRIFIC PACE

St. Patrick's had again as their opponents the renowned Limerick Commercials, who had managed to retain the allegiance of the big bulk of their players.

The contest was a magnificent one, fought at a terrific pace, with both sides displaying great determination, energy and enthusiasm. A stonewall St. Patrick's defence was the big feature of the game and was mainly responsible for deciding the issue in "Saints" favour, 1-2 to 0-4.

Limerick teams failed to survive the opening round of the All-Ireland inter-county championship. In senior hurling Treaty met Ballyduff (Kerry) and won by a point, but Ballyduff objected on the grounds that time was up when the winning point was scored, and to the surprise of all the objection was upheld and a re-play ordered, which Ballyduff won. The Kerry-men afterwards became champions of Munster and later of Ireland—the only hurling title ever secured by the "Kingdom" Gaels.

In football, St. Patrick's were fixed to play Dungarvan (Waterford) and the match was arranged for Fermoy on a week day. The Limerick lads were unable to field a team and sought a Sunday fixture which was refused. They were then forced to concede a walk-over.

COUNTY CONVENTION

When the County Convention assembled at the Town Hall on February 3, 1892, Mr. J. Sheehy, Secretary, reported having written to 79 clubs in the county asking them to support the County Board and prevent disunion. Only 16 clubs had affiliated. The Convention decided to circularise all the clubs again and endeavour to reorganise them.

The effort failed, with the result that no county championships were organised in Limerick for the following three years—an unfortunate circumstance for the St. Patrick's lads, who looked well capable of holding on to the title for a considerable time, an opportunity which was denied them because of the political dissensions sweeping the country.

Limerick did not compete in the All-Ireland championships for 1892 or the few following years, and the G.A.A. had reached real low water mark by 1893, when only three counties (Dublin, Cork and Kerry) sent delegates to the annual congress at Thurles.

LIMERICK COUNTY BOARD RESURRECTED

The Limerick County Board was resurrected at a county convention

held on November 11, 1894, and within a short time playing field activities were in full swing again.

St. Patrick's, under the Presidency of Joseph Keane and with T. Carroll as Secretary, were not long in getting the bulk of the former players back on the active service list, and Ned Lawlor was again entrusted with the position of Captain.

The first outing was against St. John's, who were defeated after a close and interesting game. A challenge with Kilmurry followed, and this ended in a draw—1-3 each.

The Murphy Cups were inaugurated soon after the re-establishment of the County Board, and St. Patrick's, in their initial game in the football, had a good victory over Croom. They suffered their first defeat in many years in a Limerick competition when, at Bunnally, on March 29, 1896, they lost to Coonagh, 0-5 to 0-1, in the second round of the Murphy Cup.

THE FINAL

Despite this reverse, they succeeded in qualifying for the final of the Murphy Cup, which was played on the league system, and this decider took place on September 6, Commercials revenging their two big championship defeats, to win 2-6 to 1-2. When one realises that later the same year Commercials went on to take All-Ireland honours it takes much of the sting out of the "Saints" defeat.

It was the beginning of the end, however, for St. Patrick's. Many of the old stalwarts were beginning to feel the burden of the years, and with the retirement of such stars as Ned Lawlor, Mick ("Yank") Ryan, Andrew Keane and D. Duggan, the club eventually went out of existence, continuing so for many years, until a new generation arose to revive the old football traditions and follow in the glorious footsteps of men like Ned Lawlor, whose deeds on the football field are enshrined in the memories of those who had any association with the first days of triumph, when the G.A.A. was young.