

## No. 181—MICHAEL McKNIGHT of Kilcornan

WHEN Limerick hurlers embarked at Cobh on the s.s. "Manhattan" on Saturday, May 9th, 1936, for their tour of the United States, they were accompanied by Mr. Michael McKnight of Kilcornan, an enthusiastic admirer, who had decided on making the trip with the team to see them play against the best the New World had to put up in opposition.

On the following Monday, the sad news reached Limerick of the sudden passing of Mr. McKnight on board ship. It was conveyed in a message from Denny Lanigan, Secretary of Limerick County Board, expressing the deepest sympathy of the Limerick and Cavan teams on his unexpected death, an event that cast a gloom on the entire party travelling for the American tour.

Connected with the Gaelic Athletic Association from his early youth, Michael McKnight won the 1895 County Senior Hurling Championship with St. Michael's when they beat Boher Nationals 2-3 to 0-1 at Corkanree on August 18th of that year.

## HIS SUMMING UP OF THE GAME.

I remember discussing that game with him many years ago, and his final summing up of it was: "It was a bad match, one of the worst of that championship, and it was spoiled by frequent squabbles."

The St. Michael's players of the occasion were: P. Stapleton (captain), T. Hogan, J. Ryan, W. O'Connor, R. A. Gleeson, J. O'Sullivan, T. McMahon, P. Kelly, J. O'Brien, J. O'Donoghue, J. Heath, E. O'Dwyer, D. McKnight, M. McKnight, J. O'Driscoll, D. McNeice, T. Real.

He continued his membership of the once famous St. Michael's Club until its dissolution some years later, when he threw in his lot with another of the great clubs of the early G.A.A. days in Limerick—the renowned Commercials, whom he represented on the County Board for a number of years.

He figured prominently in the discussions at the 1908 and 1909 County Conventions, but following the latter he retired for some years from active participation in G.A.A. affairs.

## THE 1909 CONVENTION.

The 1909 Convention, held in the City Hall on Easter Monday, was a particularly interesting gathering, with Larry Roche, outgoing Chairman, presiding. Michael McKnight had as co-delegate representing Commercials Mr. James Hanrahan.

The Treasurer reported receipts for the preceding season as £190 19s. 5d., with disbursements £180 18s. 9d., leaving a profit on the year of £10 0s. 8d. The Board had cleared old debts of £30 and brought the distribution of medals up to date.

Larry Roche retired from the chair and was elected honorary President. Jim Riordan was elected the new chairman by 24 votes to 15 for Mr. W. Sheahan. Willie Naughton of Bruff was appointed Vice-Chairman; Charlie Holland, Secretary; Johnny McSweeney, Treasurer, and P. Markham, Registrar.

## NEW ORGANISATION.

Fedamore, who were suspended by Limerick County Board G.A.A. for refusing to play Claughaun in the 1915 County Senior Hurling Final, joined an organisation formed by the Kickham's Club in Dublin, and known as the "National Athletic Association of Gaelic Athletic Clubs."

The Fedamore lads entered the All-Ireland final under the auspices of the new organisation and this was played at Wexford Park on December 10th, 1916, before a moderate attendance, resulting: Fedamore (Limerick), 1-1; Castlebridge (Wexford), 0-1.

This success gained the N.A.G.A.C. certain adherents in Limerick and a County Championship was organised, amongst the teams competing being: Ballybricken, Nationals, Croom, Fedamore, South Liberties, O'Rahillys, Barnakyle, Sarsfields and Caherline.

## MICHAEL McKNIGHT AS REFEREE.

Michael McKnight lent his support to the new Association, and

he refereed the final of their championship, which was played at the Markets Field on December 2nd, 1917, resulting: South Liberties, 1-1; Croom, 1-0.

## By SEAMUS O'CEALLAIGH

Earlier, on September 2nd, 1917, Mr. McKnight had refereed the second All-Ireland final under N.A.G.A.C. auspices at the Markets Field, and in which Limerick beat Wexford, 5-2 to 1-1.

The Limerick players on that occasion were: T. Mangan, M. Mangan, P. Mangan, M. Mullane, J. O'Shea, M. Feely (Croom), J. Keane, J. Whelan, J. McNamara, D. O'Donnell (capt.), M. Harrington (Fedamore), Tom O'Grady, P. Keogh (Ballybricken), D. Mahon (South Liberties), J. Clune (Sarsfields).

The strength of Limerick hurling at the period can be judged from the fact that on the same day Limerick and Tipperary fought the Munster Senior Hurling Final at Cork Athletic Grounds, a match which ended in a draw of 3-4 all.

## A GREAT GAME.

Refereed by Willie Walsh of Waterford, this proved a great game, in which the lead changed hands several times. The Shannonside players were: P. Vaughan (capt.), J. Mackey, J. Carroll, J. Ryan, J. Keane (Castleconnell), S. Gleeson, W. Gleeson, D. Lanigan, P. McInerney (Young Ireland), P. Flaherty (Rathkeale), W. Hough (Newcastle West), P. Barry (Boher), R. Ryan, P. Kennedy (Pallas), W. Ryan (Cappamore).

At the annual Limerick Convention of the new Association, held at Finn's Hotel on February 23rd, 1918, Michael McKnight was elected President, with M. Kelly, Vice-President; M. Harrington, Treasurer, and William Saunders, Secretary. Progress was reported and a sound position revealed.

The second County Final of the N.A.G.A.C. was played at the Markets Field on September 22nd, 1918, and resulted: Croom, 3-3; South Liberties, 2-0. Mr. J. Saunders, Sarsfields H.C., refereed.

## BACK TO THE G.A.A.

Towards the end of the year, at a conference presided over by Rev. Stephen Connolly (afterwards P.P., Newcastle West) the clubs that had seceded from the G.A.A. decided on renewing their allegiance to that body.

A month later, on January 26th, 1919, Limerick won their second All-Ireland senior hurling title at Corke Park, by defeating Wexford 9-5 to 1-3. Michael McKnight was present to cheer Limerick to that success, and remained ever after a consistent and sincere supporter of the G.A.A.

I will conclude with some extracts from a special appreciation by a colleague, which appeared in the "Limerick Leader" following his death:

"People had scarcely given up talking about Michael McKnight's sporting decision to accompany the Limerick team to America, at his own expense of course, when the news arrived that he had died on board. It is one of the most painful tragedies of recent times. All his friends looked forward to meeting him when the tour was over to get his version of the games in America—how Mick Mackey, Paddy Clohessy, etc., adapted themselves to the American style of play.

## FAMILIAR FIGURE AT EVERY VENUE.

"He was as light hearted leaving Limerick, as when, in the old days, he donned a jersey for the St. Michael's H.C. or cheered the famous Commercials F.C. to victory. Since his childhood, when he played hurling in the "Mount" Field, to the day of his death, when he was accompanying the greatest team of all time on their American Tour, he never lost touch with the Gaelic pastimes. He could recall incidents in games played by his own "Home Rulers" against Croom or Crecora, or how the field craft of Commercials was instrumental in winning against

Arravale Rovers or Kilmallock. His was a familiar figure at every venue—Cork, Limerick, Roscrea, Thurles and Croke Park. He seldom missed an 'All-Ireland' and a Kerry-Kildare clash was as keenly enjoyed as a hurling final.

The smaller clubs, too, were not without his support. He helped to start one in his native parish and took a keen interest in their encounters. He believed there was good material in the parish teams, even though perhaps only graded "B" in the junior championships. It was characteristic of him to help out the 'under dog.' We can all follow and cheer a winning combination: it is much harder to try and build up a team from poor material.

## KEEN BUSINESS MAN.

"A keen business man, he built up a fine business in Limerick, and later on, one in Kilcornan, the district where he was born and reared. His loss to his family is almost irreparable and he will be sadly missed in the Gaelic circle.

"The local lads who could not travel to see every match will miss his vivid descriptions of clashes between the Limerick gladiators of the hurling arena and the best that could be pitted against them in Thurles or Cork. The present Limerick team played few matches which he did not attend and when arrangements were made to take them to America he decided to accompany them. A pity he did not survive. It would be the last big act in a life devoted to the Gaelic cause."