

# J. B. Hickey Of Kifinny

By SEAMUS O'CEALLAIGH

**HURLING** records under organised rules go back in the parish of Kifinny to the year 1886.

There is evidence, however, that much earlier the game held sway in the district. The origin of hurling goes back to the misty past of our nation's history but there is no evidence to show that earlier than the eighties it had been governed by any rules that would equalise the chances of participants in what afterwards became such a skillful test. Previously the only means of testing competitive superiority were the challenges of parishes or districts, and then, without adequate regard for equalising the number of opponents or even providing proper playing pitches.

## BRINGING "HOME" THE BALL

The most popular form of competition was what was called "At Home," when the contestants met in some central place between their respective home districts and the struggle began and continued until the ball was brought "home" or the mantle of darkness signalled "time up." Other goaling objectives were distant land marks.

Wonderful advancement has been made in many directions for testing skill and the physical powers of even horse as well as man. For instance, in those far-off days, to test the running and jumping abilities of racehorses, a distance steeple was invariably selected as the winning post, when the horse's prospect of winning depended very much on the weight the jockey happened to be. Hence the term "steeplechasing."

The method often employed in hurling contests which led to the development of scientific skill was when the practitioners met in "puck about," and two of the leading players would stand out and call man for man alternatively to their respective sides until the number present was exhausted, when improvised "goals" were erected and a clash begun.

## GREAT HURLING CHALLENGE

Tradition tells of a great hurling game of this nature in the Kifinny area almost a hundred years ago. The hurlers of West Limerick sent a challenge to a famous welder of the caman, named Donovan, who lived on the outskirts of the city, to play an "all home."

Donovan gathered his forces, and the challenge being accepted, they travelled practically all night for the town of Rathkeale, near where the ball was put rolling in a place known as the "Commons."

The struggle began, and it is on record that the toughest part of it took place in the Kifinny area, and continued until darkness obscured the ball, in the vicinity of Adare, which, being somewhat nearer the "home" of the city side, left them narrow victors.

The subject of our sketch this week, J. B. Hickey, was the guiding influence behind the moves to introduce hurling under G.A.A. rules into the parish of Kifinny.

For his work in this regard he had the honour of being appointed first President of the local club, which was called the St. Kiernan's Hurling Club.

**CLUB FOUNDED IN 1886**  
This club was founded in the year 1886, at which period J. Hickey already had the reputation of being one of the most active figures in the Gaelic revival in the county, which was amongst the foremost in the spread of Gaelic games and athletics.

"J. B." was even then past the youthful stage, but as one who had participated in the old "hurling home" the cult of the caman was very dear to him, and he held the most sacred of the older traditions of the game.

It was not surprising, then, that the sons of this old Gael should come dextrous wielders of the caman, figuring with distinction in all the early Kifinny teams.

The first team, which continued until 1893 and played many great games with the leading teams of the surrounding areas in the great flush of the hurling revival, included many who continued great enthusiasts of the game to the end of their days.

## MEMBERS OF TEAM

The members of that St. Kiernan's team deserve a remembrance here. They were: J. O'neagh (captain), P. Hickey (goal), J. Kiely, M. Toomey, P. Sheehy, T. Nash, J. Cowhey, M. Lynch, J. Cahill, M. Comhey, M. O'Brien, J. Quinn, P. Cowhey, E. Casey, M. O'Donoghue, W. Cussen, J. Haloran, P. O'Donoghue, Dick Nash, W. O'Brien, S. Long, T. Lynch.

A short break occurred during the worst period of the Paddy Split, and when the club was re-established it was under the name of the "Raparees."

In 1896 the Raparees were for their President Thomas Hickey, who was also the team captain. M. O'Kelly was the club Secretary.

It was in this year the made history for themselves by defeating such famous combinations as Fedamore, Rathkeale, Ingrete and Sarsfields, but unluckily went down to the well-known Ballingarry selection at a vital stage of the championships.

## DEBATED AT MA A FIRESIDE

This was a match, or rather series of matches, which evoked much interest, and was for years afterwards debated by many a fireside. It was a thrilling serial, actually, for it was only in the third contest that a winner was found—and then only by a very narrow margin, and with an element of luck into the bargain.

The first contest—a tight-packed and closely fought affair—all the hour—ended in a draw; the second was unfinished with Kifinny leading; and the third also ended with laurels level at full time. In an effort to decide the issue both teams agreed to play over an extra half hour, in the closing stages

which Ballingarry pulled the issue out of the fire by a very narrow margin.

## KILFINNY TEAM

The team that represented Kifinny in those memorable games were: T. Hickey (captain), M. Lynch (goal), W. Hannon, P. Toomey, W. O'Donoghue, P. Hickey, M. Kelly, M. O'Donoghue, J. Hickey, D. Hartigan, M. Burke, J. Fitzgibbon, W. O'Donnell, E. Burke, J. Morrissey, T. O'Dea, D. Ahern, J. Mangan.

Ballingarry later went under to Castleconnell in the Championship. Kifinny then challenged the Castleconnell lads for a set of jerseys, and after a thrilling game were only defeated in the last minute by a well-timed goal.

The next great Kifinny spell was in 1904, and J. B. Hickey again had his finger in this pie, playing an important role in the management of the side, besides continuing an active association through his son, who was one of the best players on the side.

## MOST SUCCESSFUL YEAR

Kifinny had a most successful year and beat many fancied sides before failing to Monegav in a unforgettable struggle. 1905 saw them continue their winning way, and a match they derived great satisfaction from was the one in which they revenged the defeat by Monegav of the previous season. In the next round, however, they met an unexpected reverse when they failed before their old Ballingarry rivals. The Kifinny team of the occasion was: E. Hartigan (captain), M. Lynch (goal), J. Carmody, M. Kelly, J. Hickey, M. Morrissey, J. Morrissey, M. Mangan, J. Kelly, E. Burke, M. Kelly, D. Ahern, T. Hannan, M. Lynch, T. Piggott, J. Cathrell, W. Burns.

That might be written the end of that story as far as Kifinny of the J. B. Hickey era was concerned, for the club went out of existence in 1908 and was not revived until Mick Neville got the lads to hurling action again in 1923. But the veteran Gael, first President of the Club, held his interest in G.A.A. affairs right to the end and remained an honoured link in a golden chain.