

## GREAT LIMERICK SPORTSMEN

# Paddy O'Brien ("Twenty") Of Clan Na Gael

By SEAMUS O'CEALLAIGH PART 1

ONE of the most controversial figures in the history of the G.A.A. by Shannonside was undoubtedly the subject of our sketch this week—Paddy O'Brien ("Twenty") of the Clan na Gael Club, who was first Chairman of Limerick County Board G.A.A.

The G.A.A. foundation was secretly arranged and supported by the suppressed but still powerful Irish Republican Brotherhood. A British proclamation decreed the I.R.B. illegal, but deportation of the leaders and other efforts to exterminate the organisation all proved futile.

Recruitment of new members was the main difficulty under the conditions obtaining, and the Supreme Council decided that if the Separatist tradition was to be maintained some method would have to be found of attracting the youth.

Thus was conceived the idea of launching an association for the propagation of Gaelic games, then in the discard, such association to be established on broad national lines and capable of attracting the youth of the country to its standard.

## REAL PURPOSE HAD TO BE HIDDEN

The I.R.B. as such could take no active part in launching the project, and the real purpose of the movement had to be hidden, in order to ensure the widest possible appeal to those it hoped to influence and attract to its ranks.

The I.R.B. laid its plans carefully, and prepared the ground for the foundation with extreme care. The success of the project was assured long before the Thurles meeting, at which an attendance of seven people was not very encouraging to the future of a national organisation, intended to tackle the heartbreaking task of reviving pursuits and pastimes that were almost completely forgotten in many parts of the country.

Behind the scenes, powerful forces were at work, however, and the G.A.A. was hardly a month in existence when clubs started to spring up everywhere, and that in spite of an almost freezing neglect on the part of the national Press, who completely ignored the new association.

## HOSTILITY OF FOREIGN FACTION

The most potent factor in the spread of the new movement was the hostility of the foreign faction which came very much into the open at an early stage in the life of the infant G.A.A.

This group made no secret of their determination to smash the G.A.A. — a circumstance which caused many nationally minded men, who might otherwise have remained aloof, to throw in their lot with the new National Athletic Association.

In Limerick this was responsible for the formation of the Clan na Gael Club, a group that left little impress on hurling or football fields, where their earnestness and enthusiasm failed to overcome the handicap of lack of natural stamina and prowess, so essential particularly in the early days, when there was only one grade, and big men ruled the roost.

Some members of the Clan team were past their prime as far as active participation on the playing fields were concerned, whilst others had suffered at the hands of the British and were ill fitted for the rigours of a stiff game under the primitive playing rules of the olden arena, when toughness counted more than skill and avoirdupois made its presence obvious.

## PADDY "TWENTY"

But the Clan had something else to offer the movement—it was a Gaelic spirit that was unsurpassed anywhere, and in Paddy O'Brien ("Twenty") they gave to Limerick a leader who typified all that was noble and best in the Ireland of his day.

Paddy O'Brien first hit the Gaelic limelight when he attended, as representing the Clan na Gael Club, a general meeting of the Association at Thurles on September 27th, 1886, at which many important decisions were made.

The other Limerick clubs present were South Liberties, League of the Cross, Shamrocks, Nationals, Treaty, Stames, Murroe, Castleconnell, Gaelic, Bicycle,

Ballylanders, Sarsfields, St. Mary's, St. Michael's and St. Patrick's.

In the course of revising the exciting rules of the Association, the President, Mr. Maurice Davin, said it was proposed to add a rule that persons playing under rugby or any other non Gaelic rules cannot be admitted as members of any branch of the G.A.A.

Mr. Michael Joyce (afterwards M.P.), who was a delegate from the St. Michael's Club, took exception to the proposed rule, inasmuch as athletes were allowed to play other games, such as cricket, under English rules.

## "OLD IRISH RULES"

The President said that the Association made no rules for cricket, and as regards the games they catered for, they were determined, in accordance with the spirit which had prompted the starting of the Association, that the games should be played under old Irish rules.

Mr. Paddy O'Brien said that the national nature of the movement must be emphasised, and if they were to abandon that the Association would cease to have the appeal it had for many of them.

Support for this viewpoint was expressed amongst others by the two Castleconnell representatives—Messrs. Anthony Mackey of Castleconnell, and Pat Hassett of Ahane, and the rule was then adopted.

A rule was also agreed to that only hurling, football, handball and athletic clubs, including gymnasiums, could be affiliated with the Association.

Some slight changes were made in the hurling rules, and the time of play fixed at one hour, unless otherwise arranged on the grounds with the consent of the opposing teams.

## MICHAEL CUSACK REPLACED AS HON. SECRETARY

It is interesting to note that this meeting appointed Mr. J. B. O'Reilly, Dublin, Hon. Secretary of the Association, in room of

Slan agus beannacht De agaibh go leir, a chairde Gaedheal!

Mr. Michael Cusack, who had been asked to resign at the previous general meeting of clubs, held in July 4th. Mr. O'Reilly was father of the late Mr. T. O'Reilly, whom Limerick Gaels will remember as the very active and efficient Secretary of the Cappamore Club up to the time of his death a few years ago.

That the G.A.A. had attracted all sections of the nationalist population to its standard was demonstrated during 1886, for in addition to the active support lent by Most. Rev. Dr. Croke, Charles Stewart Parnell and Michael Davitt as Patrons, we find Mr. John E. Redmond, M.P., helping the spread of the games in Wexford and assisting very materially to control the crowds at one of the first big Gaelic gatherings there.

## GREAT SPORTS CARNIVAL

That Limerick had responded in a magnificent way to the call of the G.A.A. was illustrated at one of the greatest sports carnivals held at the Markets Field, commencing on September 19th, so great were the entries and so big the interest aroused that three days were necessary to complete the programme, which was divided into sections: (a) athletics, (b) hurling, football and tug-o-war, (c) band contests.

The Commercial Club were chief movers in the organisation of this vast programme, but they had the wholehearted help and support of the other Limerick clubs. The Clan na Gael members were particularly active, a circumstance which brought more to public notice the great organising ability and fine national principles of their chief mentor, Paddy O'Brien.

The part the latter played at the Second Annual Convention of the G.A.A.; notable for the fine letter received from John O'Leary accepting the Patronage of the Association and for the many revisions made in the playing rules; and Paddy's subsequent appointment as Chairman of the first County Board established in Limerick, will be amongst the matters dealt with in the next article of this series.

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# Paddy O'Brien ("Twenty") Of Clan Na Gael

(By SEAMUS O'CEALLAIGH)

(CONTINUED)

PADDY O'Brien also made his presence felt at one of the most far reaching Conventions in the history of the G.A.A. — the second annual gathering of the rapidly growing organisation, held at Thurles on Monday, November 15th, 1886.

Paddy represented the Clan na Gael Club at this, the largest gathering so far, of the affiliated clubs. Almost all the Irish counties were represented for the first time, illustrating the spread of the Association. Other Limerick clubs at this Convention were South Liberties, St. Mary's, Nationals, St. John's, Ahane, Commercials, Ballylanders, Garryowen, Murroe, League of the Cross, Sarsfields, Castleconnell, Treaty Stone and Shamrocks.

## LETTER FROM FENIAN LEADER.

A very interesting letter was read at this Convention from the Fenian leader, Mr. John O'Leary, accepting the patronage of the Association, in the course of which he said: "There are many societies and associations in Ireland about which good Irishmen may perhaps fairly differ, but your Association seems to me one about which there can be no difference of opinion amongst right thinking and well-feeling people. The main object is to make our young Irishmen healthier and stronger, and to seek, by the attraction of manly Irish sports, to prevent young men from devoting their leisure time to less manly and possibly less moral pursuits.

"One word, however, of warning. In England there was some time ago a most complete cultivation of the body. Muscles were thought to be everything, and heart and brain were held of comparatively small account. I do not think that there is any danger that your hearts will go far astray, but you should take care that in feeding your muscles you do not starve, or, at least, imperfectly nourish your brains. In this, as in all matters that concern our national well-being, we can always get light and leading from the pages of our prophet and our guide, Thomas Davis:—

'Mind will rule and muscle yield,  
In Senate, ship and field;  
When we've skill our strength to  
yield,

Let us take our own again."

## CONSTITUTION AND REVISED RULES.

Three Limerickmen, Paddy O'Brien, Pat Hassett (Ahane), and Frank Dinneen (Ballylanders), played a major part in the work of this Convention, which had much to do with shaping the destinies of the G.A.A., for it drafted a constitution and also introduced revised rules for both hurling, football and handball. It also decided on the formation of County committees and on the organisation of All-Ireland Championships in both hurling and football.

It is interesting to study these early rules and to find so many that have remained ever since the basic laws on which the government of the G.A.A. revolves.

These include (a) that the Association be called the Gaelic Athletic Association for the preservation and cultivation of national pastimes; (b) that it shall consist of hurling, football, handball and athletic clubs, those clubs to pay an affiliation fee of ten shillings per year towards the funds of the Association; (c) that a Central Executive be appointed annually, consisting of a President, four Vice-Presidents, three Secretaries, one Record Secretary and a Treasurer; (d) that the annual Convention meet in Thurles on the 1st November each year to elect the Central Executive and consider any important questions with reference to the working of the Association; (e) that the Executive shall have power to disqualify clubs or individuals for breaches of the laws of the Association, and shall also have power

to reinstate clubs or individuals; (f) that the Association shall hold hurling, football and athletic championships annually; (g) that committees be elected in each county to decide on questions of affiliation of clubs in their respective counties, and arrange preliminary matches for hurling, handball and football championships, one delegate from each affiliated club in the County to have power to vote at the election of County Committees; (h) that should any member of a club be guilty of conduct liable to bring discredit on the Association, he shall be expelled; (i) that clubs may be formed in every parish, and that only one club can be in any parish without the consent of the County Committee, a club to have twenty-one members before it can be affiliated; (j) that any member of a club playing hurling, handball or football under other rules than those of the G.A.A. cannot be a member of any club affiliated to the Association; (k) that the G.A.A. shall not be used in any way to oppose any national movement which has the confidence and support of the leaders of the Irish people; (l) all dress material and other articles required in the games to be, as far as possible, of Irish manufacture.

Some of the hurling rules adopted at this gathering will be read with interest, and, maybe amazement.

## SIZE OF HURLING AND FOOTBALL GROUNDS.

For instance, the size of the hurling field was decided upon as 196 yards long by 140 yards broad, with an addendum "there was no objection to a larger ground." For football, however, the ground was smaller—140 yards by 84; which is the minimum for both codes now. The present hurling pitch cannot exceed 160 yards by 100 yards, so the fields of the early G.A.A. days were very much larger.

The number of players was laid down as "not less than 14 or more than 21 aside."

The scoring space consisted of goalposts 21 feet apart, with a cross bar 10½ feet from the ground (8 ft. now). Beside the goal posts side point posts were also provided. The match was decided by the greater number of goals, and where no goals were made, or where an equal number were scored, by the greater number of points.

The hurling ball should not be less than 4½ ins. or more than 5 ins. in diameter, and should weigh not less than 7 ozs. or more than 10 ozs. (The ball now can be as light as 3½ ounces).

The dress for hurling and football was laid down as "knee breeches and stockings and shoes or boots."

## INTERESTING PROVISION.

And here is an interesting provision: "a player should not catch, trip or push from behind, or bring his hurley intentionally in contact with another player. For each breach of this rule the referee was empowered to order the offender to stand aside during the whole or part of the balance of the game; and his side could not provide a substitute for the suspended player."

Limerick were one of the first counties to implement the decision of the Convention concerning the appointment of County Committees, and a meeting of the Limerick clubs was held in the City Hall, Limerick, on January 15th, 1887, at which Mr. Anthony Mackey, Castleconnell, presided.

It was unanimously decided to form a Limerick County Board, and the delegates were again unanimous in their choice of Chairman—Paddy O'Brien ("Twenty") being appointed to the post; with Mr. Michael Looney as Secretary.

The part Paddy O'Brien played in establishing the games in Limerick, and some lively opposition encountered, will be related in the next article.



## GREAT LIMERICK SPORTSMEN

# Paddy O'Brien ("Twenty") Of Clan Na Gael

(By SEAMUS O GEALLAIGH)

(CONTINUED)

THE new Limerick Board got down to work immediately, several meetings were held and county championships in both hurling and football were soon under way.

Paddy O'Brien, Anthony Mackey and Pat Hassett (Treasurer of the Central Council) were the Limerickmen present at the historic meeting at Wynne's Hotel, Dublin, on February 27th, 1887, at which the first All-Ireland Championship draws were made—incidentally, the only occasion an open draw was the method employed of deciding these competitions.

Only twelve counties entered teams, and both codes were drawn together, as under: Wicklow v. Clare, Wexford v. Galway, Dublin v. Tipperary, Cork v. Kilkenny, Waterford v. Louth, Limerick v. Meath.

## EXCLUSION OF R.I.C.

This meeting decided on excluding members of the R.I.C. from membership of the G.A.A.—“In consequence of their action towards the people throughout the country on almost every occasion that they have been brought into contact with them.”

It also passed a resolution emphasising the fact that the Association was non-political and that individual members of it were allowed perfect freedom of action in political matters.

This meeting, presided over by Mr. J. K. Bracken, of Kilmallock, one of the founder members in the absence of the President, Mr. Maurice Davin, made an order that no tournament of any kind could be permitted in a county without the sanction of the County Committee.

At the next meeting of the Executive, held at Cruise's Hotel, Limerick, on April 11th, the President objected to this regulation and contended that the Executive had no power to pass it.

## MR. DAVIN LEAVES IN PROTEST.

Several members, including Paddy O'Brien, maintained that the regulation was necessary if County Boards were to have proper control, and the meeting decided to take no action—Mr. Davin then vacating the chair and leaving in protest. He subsequently tendered his resignation.

The Limerick County Championships were played with commendable expedition, and some fine contests were witnessed in the course of the competitions, which attracted a fine entry in both codes.

The first senior hurling and senior football finals of Limerick County were held at the Grocers' Field on Sunday, July 17th, before the largest throng of people that had yet marked the popular interest in the Gaelic pastimes.

The football game was played first, the contestants being St. Michael's and Commercials. The teams had met before when the G.A.A. was but in its infancy, and the Commercials then scored a decided success. Since then Limerick Commercials had been the premier team in Munster, having preserved throughout an unbroken record in a series of games with the crack teams of the province.

## SOMETHING OF A SURPRISE.

It was consequently something of a surprise when St. Michael's won by five points and one forfeit point to one forfeit point for their opponents (what was then a forfeit point would be a fifty under present rules). M. Tuite, E. O'Dwyer, P. Stapleton, T. Prendergast and M. Danaher proved best for the winners, while Commercials got good service from Malachi O'Brien, Denis Corbett, John Hyland, Timothy Fitzgibbon and William J. Spain.

Commercials subsequently objected

to the constitution of the St. Michael's team, alleging that seven members of same had played rugby, and so Limerick County Board were confronted with the first objection lodged anywhere under the rule debarring rugby players, passed at the Executive meeting of September 27th, 1886, and earlier referred to.

## RE-PLAY ORDERED.

The County Board went thoroughly into the matter and decided against St. Michael's. They ordered a re-play and instructed that the offending players should be dropped. This duly took place, and Commercials won on this occasion, subsequently going on to make Gaelic football history by bringing to the City of Sarsfield the first All-Ireland senior football crown ever contested.

To return to the Grocers Field, and the County senior hurling final, this proved a dour struggle, in which disputes were frequent, and it lasted for almost three hours, because of many stoppages.

At half-time, the score stood: South Liberties, two points; Murroe, nil. Murroe equalised shortly after the resumption, but South Liberties forged ahead again with a well taken point. Nearing the end Murroe had the only goal of the game, a score which was hotly disputed by their opponents.

## REFEREE'S DECISION.

Paddy O'Brien, Chairman of the County Board, was the referee and he reserved his decision until later in the evening, when he awarded the goal and the match to Murroe, on the score: Murroe, 1 goal 2 points and 1 forfeit point; South Liberties, 3 points and 1 forfeit point.

Murroe were County champions, but their right to represent the County in the subsequent All-Ireland Championship ties was disputed by Castleconnell. The result was that when Limerick and Kilkenny were fixed to play in the All-Ireland semi-final two Limerick teams turned up—Murroe and their Castleconnell neighbours. Some members of the Executive tried to resolve the issue—a play-off between the pair on the morning of the game was even suggested—but no agreement on the rightful Limerick representative could be reached, and Tullaroan eventually had a bloodless victory—although two Limerick teams were in Dublin ready to play them.

## BIG TOTAL OF CLUBS.

By the end of 1887 the number of clubs in Limerick City and County had reached the remarkable total of ninety, and there was scarcely a parish in the area without at least one club.

In addition to the Championship contests important tournament ties were organised at Adare, Bruff, Kilmurry, Murroe, New Pallas, Oola and Knockane, as well as a few notable ones in the City.

South Liberties had some revenge for their championship defeat when they won out in the Kilmurry Tournament, defeating Castleconnell after a great game in the final.

## HUGE ATTENDANCE.

This contest drew a huge attendance and the greatest enthusiasm prevailed. Castleconnell sent a large contingent headed by a band. Good, fast hurling was the order all through a fine vigorous match, very evenly contested.

Treaty hurlers were winners of a big tournament played in the City. This attracted a great entry, including some leading Clare clubs, and proved an outstanding success.

The big County Board split, the emergence of two Limerick Boards, and the prominent part played by Paddy O'Brien and other Limerick delegates in the great "stormy" All-Ireland Congress at Thurles, will be amongst the matters dealt with in the next article.

# Paddy O'Brien ("Twenty") Of Clan Na Gael

(By SEAMUS O'CEALLAIGH)

(CONTINUED)

THE big majority of the Limerick clubs sent delegates to the annual convention held at the Courthouse, Thurles, in November, 1887, which was attended by the greatest gathering ever to attend an All-Ireland Congress, over eight hundred branches being represented.

This proved the most historic congress in G.A.A. annals, and was marked by incidents of unparalleled excitement.

There were many circumstances which invested the proceedings with unusual interest. The Executive had aroused a good deal of hostility because of its vigorous action in suspending clubs and individuals who had refused to obey its rulings. These suspended Gaels were naturally determined to overthrow the governing body at the very first opportunity, and were supported by strong articles which appeared in certain newspapers denouncing the administration.

## POLITICAL ELEMENT.

Many clubs deplored the withdrawal of Maurice Davin from the Presidency and blamed the Executive for his retirement. The expulsion of the R.I.C., though that body was then very unpopular with masses of people, was regarded by some as introducing the political element into what was claimed to be a purely athletic organisation.

The fact that men like P. N. Fitzgerald of Cork; Pat Hassett and Paddy O'Brien of Limerick; P. T. Hctor and J. Boyle O'Reilly of Dublin; who made no secret of their desire to wipe out the British connection in this country, were identified with the Association and gave the organisation a complexion which made many timorous people uneasy and aroused the hostility of a large number of clergymen.

Then again, the refusal of the Executive to accept the arbitration of Dr. Croke and Michael Davitt or any compromise in the dispute with the powerful "Freemen's Journal" Club, exposed the governing body to a good deal of criticism. And on top of all this, the Gaels of Tipperary, then the strongest county in the Association, had grievances of their own against the Executive.

## STRONG FORCES FOR AND AGAINST.

It may be stated that there never was a governing body against whom was arrayed so many influences, and, on the other hand it must be admitted that no governing body ever had behind it more loyal and enthusiastic supporters.

The strong nationalist views of the Executive, their vigorous action in crushing insubordination, and their earnest, if somewhat injudicious, efforts to maintain discipline, appealed to thousands of Gaels, and accounted for the fact that they were able to withstand the attacks of the most powerful critics and the most insidious foes.

Looking back now calmly on the work of the Executive, it must be admitted that the members of the governing body made some mistakes, but they were the mistakes of strong men with strong views, determined to make the Association what it is to-day—not only a powerful athletic body, but a great national organisation.

## "STORMY CONVENTION."

The first lively incident of what has become known in G.A.A. history as the "Stormy Convention," occurred as the delegates were filing into the meeting place. A number of suspended Gaels presented a joint demand for admission "for the purpose of personally appealing against the decisions of the Executive." This request was refused.

When the Convention was eventually called to order the delegates were packed like sardines, with every available inch of space occupied. The whole place was seething with excitement, and there were

all the elements of a lively meeting.

Mr. Maurice Davin did not attend, and the appointment of a Chairman to conduct the proceedings gave rise to a stormy debate which continued for almost two hours.

The name of P. N. Fitzgerald was put forward by Ald. Horgan of Cork, and seconded by P. T. Hctor.

## AN UPROAR.

Rev. John Scanlan, C.C., Nenagh, caused an uproar when he proposed the name of Major Kelly of Moycarkey, who was an expelled member of the Association. He said the body which professed to expel Major Kelly was now dead, and he had a very strong and valid reason for objecting to Mr. Fitzgerald taking the chair.

Paddy O'Brien supporting the nomination of P. N. Fitzgerald, said that the Association could not be too Irish, and they should have no one at its head except nationalists who were ready to die for their country.

A suggestion that Father Fenelly, Adm., Thurles (afterwards Archbishop of Cashel and Patron of the G.A.A.) take the chair until the President was appointed, was not accepted.

## HEAT AND THREATENING INCIDENTS.

Several other propositions were made, and considerable heat introduced, but it was evident that the majority of the delegates favoured the candidature of P. N. Fitzgerald, who eventually attempted to bring the meeting to business.

Father Scanlan persisted in his objection and said they were being watched from outside, and it would look questionable if Mr. Fitzgerald presided.

Mr. Fitzgerald said he knew he was being watched by the authorities, but that was no crime in his eyes, and it was purely from a non-political point that he participated in the proceedings that day. He regretted that their opening should be interfered with by one whose mission was to preach goodwill to all men.

Things got very threatening at this period, and with several delegates attempting to speak the utmost confusion prevailed. In the body of the Courthouse there were a series of altercations between delegates and cheering and counter-cheering. No blows were struck but sticks were wielded ominously, and things looked extremely dangerous.

## VOICE TAKEN.

Above the din the voice of Father Scanlan could be heard challenging the right of Mr. Fitzgerald to preside, and after further noisy scenes, the former ascended a table and appealed to all who did not agree with the appointment of Mr. Fitzgerald to follow him out of the meeting to another convention, where a reconstructed Association would be formed.

When order was restored somewhat, the appointment of Mr. E. M. Bennett of Newmarket-on-Fergus to the Presidency was proposed. The name of Mr. Maurice Davin was also put before the delegates.

Some delegates insisted that unauthorised persons had gained admission to the convention and maintained it was no longer representative. In the semi-darkness and amidst very great confusion a vote was taken, two hours after Father Scanlan and his supporters had left, and this resulted in the election of Mr. Bennett, by 316 votes to 210.

In the annual report it was stated that Limerick had over 90 clubs, the second highest of any county—Tipperary leading with 130, Cork were third with 70.

Prominent Limerick Gaels, who, with the county chairman, Paddy O'Brien, spoke at this historic convention were Pat Hassett and Anthony Mackey, Castleconnell; John Hurley, Ballysimon and Ed-

mund Cahill, Kiltely.

## SECOND CONVENTION.

In the meantime Father Scanlan and his supporters held their convention, and decided on inviting Dr. Croke to remain a patron of the G.A.A., "represented by the clubs assembled."

Dr. Croke had other views, however, and on November 22nd, he held a conference at the Palace, Thurles, with Michael Davitt and Maurice Davin, with the object of taking steps to reconstruct the Association. A special committee was formed for the purpose, and after a few meetings they issued a circular to all clubs announcing a special convention for Thurles on January 4th, 1888, "to reconstruct the Association on lines laid down by the Archbishop of Cashel." They also decreed the holding of County Conventions before that date to appoint delegates to the Thurles meeting, the basis of representation to be one delegate for every ten clubs in a county.

## FATHER EUGENE SHEEHY.

The Limerick Gaels met on December 30th, 1887, thirty-one clubs being represented, and re-elected Paddy O'Brien chairman, by 71 votes to 59 for Bob Coll. When the result was announced a number of delegates, led by Very Rev. Eugene Sheehy, P.P., left the meeting and held a second convention, at which they also selected delegates for the Thurles convention.

11/4/59



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(CONTINUED)

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**F**OLLOWING the intervention of Most Rev. Dr. Croke, the split which threatened the G.A.A. was healed at the special convention which assembled at Thurles on January 4th, 1888.

The new arrangement of representation previously agreed upon—one delegate for each ten affiliated clubs, gave Limerick nine representatives—and these included the controversial figures of the special Limerick County Convention—Paddy O'Brien and Very Rev. E. Sheehy, P.P.

The divisions which were so evident at the famous "Stormy Convention" did not re-appear at the new Congress, which was called for the express purpose of reconstructing the Association.

**UNRELENTING FIGHT.**

The "Stormy Convention" witnessed an unrelenting fight between the Physical Force Party and the Constitutionals for control of the Association.

This was not repeated at the reconstruction meeting for the very good reason that the Irish Republican Brotherhood, who originally sponsored the G.A.A. foundation, issued secret orders to all its members to withdraw from any contests for official posts rather than cause division in the ranks. The confidential circular they issued concluded: "This is not a time for division between any class of Irishmen. The G.A.A. should be open to all—an Irish nation should include all sections of Irishmen. To make independence easy Ireland requires the aid of all her sons."

In sharp contrast to the previous meeting this was a most friendly gathering, at which much useful work for the Association was transacted. A new constitution drawn up by Maurice Davin was approved, as well also a number of suggestions made by the Archbishop of Cashel, Most Rev. Dr. Croke.

That the Association was determined to continue on national lines was demonstrated by the unanimous adoption of a resolution proposed by Frank B. Dineen and seconded by Rev. Father Clancy (Clare) as follows: "That no member of the Constabulary including the Dublin Metropolitan Police be eligible for membership of any affiliated club, or be allowed to compete at any Gaelic sports."

**HONOUR ACCEPTED.**

It was also decided to invite Mr. William O'Brien to become a patron of the Association, and in accepting the honour Mr. O'Brien subsequently wrote: "Of your sympathy with the struggle against coercion I never entertained a moment's doubt, and, although I am most unwilling to increase the prominence which, undoubtedly the exigencies of the struggle has forced upon me for the moment, I cannot resist the voice of the young Gaelic athletes that they should add my name to those of their well wishers in any capacity they may choose."

The election of officers resulted in Maurice Davin's return to the position of President which he had resigned some months previously. R. J. Frewen, of Aherlow, was appointed Treasurer, and with William Prendergast of Clonmel elected Secretary, the three main posts in the organisation were held by Tipperary men. Very Rev. Eugene Sheehy, P.P., was elected Limerick representative on the Central Council—a body that included three other priests—Rev. C. Buckley (Cork), Rev. J. Concanon (Offaly) and Rev. J. McCarney (Monaghan).

Following this Convention the 1887 All-Ireland Hurling and Football Championships were proceeded with.

A crux arose in Limerick because of the split at the County Convention and this was responsible for the failure of Sarsfields County to participate in the first hurling championship. Actually two teams—Murroe and Castleconnell—representing the rival Boards, travelled to fulfil the engagement against Tullaroan (Kilkenny) but agreement could not be reached as to which was rightly entitled to participate, and the Noresiders got a walk-over.

**LIMERICK'S FIRST FOOTBALL CHAMPIONSHIP.**

By contrast, Limerick's participation in the football Championship was completely successful and they brought to the County the first Gaelic football championship ever decided under Gaelic rules.

The Commercial's were affiliated to the Board presided over by Paddy O'Brien, and their great All-Ireland triumph was one of the outstanding events in the history of that Board—gaining it a status and support that proved of great assistance in the subsequent

struggle for control.

Commercial's first football game in the All-Ireland series was against Dowdstown (Meath) and was played in Lord De Frenche's Park, where Commercial's won by 3-2 to 0-2. The gate receipts on the occasion were £210, exceptionally high judged by the standards of the time.

A notable feature of this game was the kicking of a goal from centre-field by Malachi O'Brien, whom old timers maintain was one of the greatest footballers the Association has produced. So impressed was Lord De Frenche with his performance that he invited him to lunch following the game.

In the second round, played at Clonturk Park, Dublin, where the gate receipts were £300, Commercial's and Kilmacow (Kilkenny) drew at 1-10 each after a magnificent display of full blooded football.

The pair met in the re-play at Bansha, where Commercial's won more readily than even their greatest supporters had anticipated.

This brought Commercial's to the All-Ireland semi-final, which was played at Bohermore, near Tipperary on March 11th, 1888. Two meetings were again necessary to decide this issue. The first was a hard fought and evenly matched contest but ended abruptly when a dispute arose. A re-play was agreed upon and in this Commercial's beat Templemore, 1-8 to 0-4.

**THE FINAL.**

The final between the Commercial's and Dundalk Young Irelands was played at Clonaskeagh, Dublin, on April 29th, 1888, before a fine attendance, the gate receipts amounting to well over £300.

The contest was fought out in fine, manly sporting spirit, and although the rivalry was very keen and the changes close and exciting the game was unmarred by any unpleasant incident.

Louth did a good deal of clever, hard work, and the Limerick play was characterised by a fine defence and spirited rushes. Dundalk, winning the toss played with the wind, and scored three points to their opponents' one before sides were changed. In the second half, however, grit and stamina were strangely in evidence from the Limerick camp, and the Commercial's forced the pace and achieved a great victory, amidst scenes of great rejoicing. The final score was: Commercial's, 1-4; Dundalk Young Irelands, 0-3.

The Limerick players were: Denis Corbett (goal), Timothy Fitzgibbon, William Gunning, R. Breen, John Hyland, Thomas McNamara, William J. Spain, Patrick J. Corbett, Michael Slattery, Jeremiah R. Kennedy, Michael Casey, James Mulqueen, Malachi O'Brien, Patrick Kelly, Timothy Kennedy, Philip Keating, W. Casey, Robert Normoyle, Patrick Reeves, Thomas Keating, T. McMahon. Strange enough, the captain was a non-player—Mr. Pat Treacy. Others to participate in some of the above mentioned contests were: Edward Nicholas, Edward Casey, Richard O'Brien, Thomas O'Loughlin and Thomas Lynch.

The novel method by which the dispute at the County Convention was eventually settled will be described in the next article.

PART 5  
18/4/1959

# GREAT LIMERICK SPORTSMEN

## Paddy O'Brien ("Twenty") Of Clan Na Gael

(CONTINUED)

(By SEAMUS O CEALLAIGH)

AFTER the incident at the County Convention of December 30th, 1887, when, following the re-election of Paddy O'Brien ("Twenty") to the chair (by 71 votes to 59 for Bob Coll), a number of delegates, led by Very Rev. Eugene Sheehy, P.P., withdrew, and held a meeting which formed a rival County Board, two Boards continued to function in Limerick, and each organised County Championships in hurling and football.

The question of the split amongst the Shannonside Gaels was discussed at a meeting of the Central Council held in Dublin on April 29th, 1888, and it was decided to get the winners under each body to play off for the County finals, and to summon a convention of Gaels with a view to bringing the division to a close.

### APPEALING GAMES.

This resulted in two games which were probably the most appealing in the many played during the early years of the G.A.A.

In hurling, South Liberties, as representing the O'Brien Board had as opponents, Murroe, who were affiliated to the break-away body; whilst, in football, Commercials represented the official Board and St. Michael's were the winners of the competition under the auspices of the Father Sheehy Board.

As the reader will understand, the coming together of such famous teams—the quartette had met the previous year and provided a succession of almost unending thrills: and under all the conflicting circumstances, created excitement bordering on sensation, and preparations for the great contests commenced immediately.

The venue selected was Croom, where elaborate precautions were taken to ensure that the games would be played in strict accordance with the rules. The Central Council appointed Mr. John Cullinane of Bansha, who was a power in himself, to act as referee.

The crowd was one of the greatest ever to see County Championship games, and several special trains ran from the city to accommodate the big numbers anxious to see the games.

### TRIBUTE TO CROOM.

Croom rose to the great occasion in magnificent fashion. So perfect were the field arrangements, well marshalled the record gathering of people, and so completely was order maintained, that the seed of popularity was sown for that historic venue, where superb arrangements, good order and fair play have ever remained characteristics when important issues are set there for decision.

Some years ago I got from a veteran Gael a vivid pen picture of that historic occasion. Here is how he described it:—

Under a blazing mid-day sun both teams lined up in the uniquely laid out field, neatly cut and rolled.

The Murroe team, wearing sparkling white shirts, looked as fine a picture of manhood as one could wish to see, while the South Liberties, wearing green and gold jerseys, although a much lighter team, did not take from the beauty of the picture which the dazzling sun left sparkling before the eager multitude.

The huge crowd were accommodated in very clever way by the capital device adopted by the orderlies on the field in directing the first five lines of spectators to lie, kneel or sit down.

Very Rev. T. Halpin, P.P., Donoughmore, who accompanied the Liberties and mounted on horseback, paraded up and down the margin between players and spectators at one side of the field, and Very Rev. Father Sheehy, who led the Murroe team on to the field, occupied a similar position on foot at the other side.

### REFEREE'S DETERMINATION

The first indication of the referee's determination to enforce his will was seen when, in no lady like fashion, he forced the world's champion weight thrower, Ned O'Grady, from a position which he had taken up.

After that incident the play opened. From the outset thrill followed thrill, the ball frequently travelling from end to end of the pitch without touching the ground, and players flinging themselves against each other like battering rams, while the clashing of ash sounded like a battle charge.

The spectators were kept spell-bound, and just as followers of the respective teams would be ready for an outburst, at what should appear an imminent score, back came the ball from the gallant defenders, to raise the frantic cheers of the other side, and so went on the historic game with grim determination and truly sporting behaviour to the interval, without any score being registered by either team.

When play was resumed it soon became evident that determination to achieve victory led to a keenness that called for the intervention of the referee, whose commanding influence obliged both sides to understand that they should play the game, and from that onward he had only to watch the ball.

### PLAYED FAST AND FURIOUS.

The play kept growing fast and furious and for twenty further minutes the teams were still as they started, with excitement intense. Two minutes more passed, and with the ball in Murroe ground the fortunes of war favoured the green and gold. Johnny Connell got possession, and like lightning passed to Con Sheehan, who, with a marvellous shot from an acute angle, scored a point immediately over the cross bar, amidst a frantic outburst of cheering, and a scene that baffled description. Hats, sticks, hurleys and handkerchiefs flying in the air were like an ominous shower over and around the pitch.

When the excitement subsided play resumed, and with only eight minutes remaining Murroe made superhuman efforts to score, but determination ruled supreme with the Liberties defence. It was a terrific tussle to the last stroke, when the referee's whistle was the signal for a scene of jubilation never to be forgotten — a triumph not alone for a great Liberties team, but for the regularly Constituted Board—that under Paddy O'Brien's Presidency.

The football came as something of an anti-climax. The pair were great rivals, and their meeting in the 1887 Final was one of the highlights of that year—and one of the hardest games Commercials played in the entire series, which included the matches which brought them the coveted honour of first All-Ireland senior football champions.

The Croom meeting proved a vigorous match of fast, open football, but Commercials early gained control and won readily, 2-8 to one point.

### AN ANTI-CLIMAX.

It was a disappointing ending to a great day, but the double triumph of the representatives of the "Old" Board, as most of the veteran Gaels remember it, put that body in the ascendant, and considerably strengthened the hand of Paddy O'Brien.

His re-election at the subsequent "unity" Convention, and the events which followed will be described in the concluding article.

Part 5



## GREAT LIMERICK SPORTSMEN

# Paddy O'Brien ("Twenty") Of Clan Na Gael

(CONTINUED)

(By SEAMUS O'CALLAIGH)

THE special Limerick Convention summoned by the Central Council, with the object of resolving the situation existing in the County because of the fact that two County Boards were claiming the right to function, assembled on June 11th, 1888, with Mr. R. J. Frewen, Treasurer of the Central Council, in the chair.

Almost every one of the ninety clubs in the county were represented at the Convention, in which much interest centred.

Despite pleas for unity, and the inspiration of the great success achieved by the Commercials in winning the first All-Ireland senior football title, it was evident from an early stage in the proceedings that the election of a chairman was going to be a trial of strength between the adherents of the rival Boards.

The name of Paddy O'Brien ("Twenty") was put forward as one who had held the position from the inception of the County Board, and as representing the clubs who had remained loyal to the properly constituted Board.

## THE I.R.B. IN THE BACKGROUND.

Paddy's political views were widely recognised as closely associated with if not actually reflecting the I.R.B. viewpoint, and he could certainly count on the loyal support of all elements inside the G.A.A., who were determined on making that body much more than a mere sporting organisation.

The Association had been founded at the behest of, and with the active connivance of the I.R.B., but circumstances at the time dictated the situation which made it imperative that the sponsors remain very much in the background. Their open association with the new movement would make it suspect and prevent the accomplishment of the ideal of uniting the young men in a great national organisation.

But the association had to be kept on the right national lines, particularly within the counties, and for that reason the I.R.B. laid great stress on the necessity of having men of strong national views manning its key posts.

## NOMINATION FOR THIRD TIME.

This was the background to the nomination for the third time of Paddy O'Brien for the position of County Chairman. His election on the first occasion had been unanimous. Twelve months later he was successful over one of the best known figures in the county and a powerful athlete, Bob Coll, by 71 votes to 59, but the supporters of the defeated nominee on that occasion took the unusual and unconstitutional course of forming another Board rather than submit to the jurisdiction of what then came to be known as the "Old" Board.

The supporters of the breakaway Board put against him on this occasion a very strong candidate in the person of Rev. Father Dunworth—a priest popular with the great majority of the clubs, and one who had not been involved in any of the controversies so widespread, and at times bitter, of the preceding months.

There was considerable discussion before a vote was taken, and the credentials of the assembled delegates were scrutinised following an allegation that some were present who were not members of the clubs they purported to represent.

Eventually everything was reported in order, and amidst much tension the delegates cast their votes. The result was a triumph for Paddy

O'Brien, who was returned County Chairman for the third successive time by 123 votes to 86 for Father Dunworth.

## PRIESTS AND OTHER DELEGATES WALK OUT.

That should have settled the issue but it did not. When the result was announced Very Rev. Eugene Sheehy, P.P., the chief architect of the breakaway Board, declared his supporters were not prepared to recognise the new Board, and at his suggestion a number of other priests and several club delegates walked out of the Convention.

The others carried on, and they appointed Mr. D. H. Liddy as Secretary to the County Board, and Mr. F. B. Dinneen, Handicapper for the County.

Shortly afterwards, Rev. Father O'Mahony, of Killeedy, submitted a long complaint to the Central Council regarding the constitution of the Convention, but the governing body after considering it decided that no action should be taken.

## NOTABLE YEAR FOR ATHLETICS.

This was a notable year for athletics in Limerick and Paddy O'Brien played a very active part in the work associated with the organisation of three great meetings that season at the Markets Field.

The first was under the auspices of the Commercials Club and saw some fine performances, which, however, paled to insignificance before the mighty deeds recorded at the fourth annual All-Ireland athletic championship at the Limerick venue on August 5th, 1888.

Dan Shanahan made a world's record with the running hop, step and jump, with the grand return of 50 ft. 0½ in.; whilst both Willie Real and Dr. J. C. Daly beat the existing world figures in putting the 56 lbs. with follow. The same pair were also close to the world's best at putting the 28 lbs. weight; whilst J. McCarthy, of Kilfinane, proved best all rounder at the meeting, drawing honours in the weights, sprints and jumps.

The County Board held a meeting a month later where the performances were again top class, with some exceptionally fine figures being recorded.

The Central Council a short time previously had accepted a suggestion from its President, Maurice Davin, ably backed by Michael Davitt, to send a team of picked hurlers and athletes to tour America and Canada. The object was to introduce the games of the Gael to the New World, and to forge a link with the exiles which would be of benefit to the G.A.A. in after years.

The strength of the Association in Limerick was reflected in the fact that seven of the fifty selected to make the trip were natives of Sarsfield's county. They were—Dr. J. C. Daly, Dromin; Willie Real, Pallas; Dan Shanahan, Kilfinane; Dan Godfrey, Murroe; Jack McCarthy, Michael and Jack Connery, of the Staker Wallace Club, Kilfinane.

**MADE A GREAT IMPRESSION.**  
The "invaders" made a great impression and set new American standards, particularly in the weight events. Unfortunate for Limerick, however, was the fact that the two McCarthys and Jack Connery remained in America.

When the next County Convention assembled, Paddy O'Brien, laden with laurels, intimated his intention of not contesting the chair again. Some grand tributes were paid to his remarkable work for the games in both city and county, and reference made to the fine organising ability he displayed in establishing the G.A.A. in Limerick on a sound basis, despite opposition which would have discouraged and disillusioned most men.

Although retired Paddy took a close interest in the affairs of the G.A.A. to the end of his days. His death in the early part of 1902 was a big loss to the still young Association, who mourned his passing as that of a father. That Paddy is not forgotten is best illustrated in the fact that a monument to his memory is shortly to be raised over his grave.

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