

Rothaí Móra an tSaoil – Baile Uí Bheacháin Abú

Eamon Ó Lochlainn

As we begin to face into 1995 some will look back and remember the feats of "Jack Charlton's Army" in the U.S.A. as the sporting highlight of 1994.

Here in the North West corner of County Clare there is another famous sporting highlight, that of the victorious "Willie Cahir's Army". The saga began on a sunny Saturday morning, 3rd October, with the boys from Gleann Eidhneach digging and storing the best Kerr Pinks in the Burren before they headed for Quilty later that afternoon to meet Cill Rois in the County Junior Championship Final.

As they got ready for the journey to Quilty with a feed of 'Kerr Pinks' and 'Pinnacle Well' water, little did they know of the drama the Indian Summer had in store for captain Pat McCarthy and his men.

On arrival in Quilty they surveyed the fine facilities of these recently developed grounds.

The setting sun over Mutton Island was later to herald a new chapter in the history of their club.

On the surface, however, Ballyvaughan's lowly position on the tree of success in the annals of Clare football was mirrored with the sight of the blank space where the team's name should have been. The first half seemed to confirm this state of anonymity with the Cill Rois boys leading by nine points to five, due mainly to fine performances from Michael Griffin and E. J. Murphy.

As the boys from Gleann Eidhneach looked towards Mutton Island for some inspiration, that first half seemed to confirm that the younger Ballyvaughan players were indeed just lambs for the slaughter. The start of the second half showed these younger players had other ideas, as James Flanagan began the task of reviving our hopes of winning a county final with his goal from the penalty spot.

As James stepped up a gear, the other younger players – Ivan Gannon, Mark Hayes and Kieran Linnane – were playing a new, vibrant tune for their supporters from the Valley of the Burren.

The joy of supporters of other small clubs at the final whistle was seen as they congratulated Ballyvaughan on gaining victory at last by 2-8 to 0-12. When the final whistle blew some of the Ballyvaughan supporters, although they saw Pat McCarthy proudly receive the cup from Robert Frost, still wondered if the club had actually won a county title.

These doubts were gradually dispelled on the journey home through Mickey Wilson's (Miltown) and Tom Mort's (Ennistymon).

For some supporters it was even necessary to return to Lisdoonvarna later that evening to confirm that Pat McCarthy had indeed received the cup, reminding our neighbours in Lisdoon

that the Phoenix had finally risen from its ashes in the Valley of the Burren.

Later in the month the team demonstrated its new self-confidence with their defeat of Ennistymon in the League semi-final at Corofin. Then it was back to Corofin for the County League final with Éire Óg (Ennis) on Saturday afternoon, 29th October.

The conditions were the very opposite to those which prevailed at Quilty. The swelling River Fergus at the edge of the Corofin pitch was testimony to the end of the Indian Summer which we had since the previous final at Quilty.

The boys from the Capital, seeing the damp conditions, as they were the stronger team, expected they would add another title to their list for 1994.

The first half saw the heavier Ennis team take control in the middle of the field. Because of this, Ballyvaughan could only muster one point to Éire Óg's four.

With even less scores in the second half, a marathon struggle was developing with both the opposition and the conditions combining to make score-taking an impossible task. Both goalmouths now resembled an ice rink scenario. With

Patrick O'Donoghue raising his game only to find the crossbar denying his best effort, it seemed there was no way back for Ballyvaughan in the fast-fading light.

Then in stepped Paul Irwin and, now realising it was impossible to catch the greasy ball, he punched it to the Éire Óg net for a goal worthy of winning any final.

Although Éire Óg came close to equalising, Paul's score paved the way for another historic victory with the final score of Ballyvaughan 1-3 to Éire Óg's 0-5.

If you believe that history is a series of circles, then Paul Irwin's goal completes one of those circles. Ballyvaughan's long sequence of losing finals began when Paul's grandfather, John, was playing for Ballyvaughan in the Senior County Final of 1917 with Miltown. John suffered a broken leg during the course of that Final. As medical facilities in those days were not as readily available as today, that game saw the end of John Irwin's playing career. His long and painful journey on the coast road to Ballyvaughan by horse and cart was in stark contrast to his grandson's victorious return with the MacNamara Cup as League Champions.

The O'Loughlen family has been involved with G.A.A. in Ballyvaughan for over 100 years. The great man himself, Michael Cusack, had close associations with the family. The memorable Silver Jubilee speech at Cusack Park, Ennis, by the late Peter J. O'Loughlen, T.D., is well documented. His brothers, Martin and Micko, were members of the 1917 football team. Also, the late Eamon was a well-known official and in later years Sean MacNeill O'Loughlen wore the Clare jersey with distinction. Members of his family, Peter, Neil and Anne Marie gave great service to their local club.

As seen from the photograph, Ballyvaughan's recent Junior victories are a source of great joy to Cathal O'Loughlen. Cathal's six sons all played with the club. On this victorious team John, a Captain with the Army stationed at the Curragh, gave sterling service. The Ballyvaughan jerseys are supplied by Cathal Óg O'Loughlen, Managing Director, Barclay Chemicals, Overseas Division.



Back row (left to right) – Edward, John and Mairtin O'Loughlen. Front row – Cathal and his wife Eileen and their daughter Eileen.

John Nilan

Ballyvaughan's club's secretary, John Nilan, celebrated his Silver Jubilee of involvement with his home club – Ballyvaughan in style when he was a member of the very successful Junior B League and Championship teams.

As a Garda, John has had many successes with Garda teams. But above all else he has been a wonderful custodian of the affairs of the local club. He is undoubtedly one of the people who laid the foundation for this year's success.

Playing at corner-forward in the final against Kilrush, John was involved in a vital move which resulted in the winning goal for Ballyvaughan.

John Nilan's success record is as follows:

County minor championship with Michael Cusack's (1976);

C.I.E. Inter-Depot All-Ireland (1978);

County Junior Football League, Ballyvaughan (1983);

Garda Inter-Divisional All-Ireland (1984);

Connacht/Ulster Garda Championship (1985);

Garda Inter-Divisional All-Ireland (runner-up) (1985);

North Clare Divisional Board Junior Championship (1991);

Connacht/Ulster Garda Football Championship (1992);

North Clare Divisional Board Junior Championship (1993); Galway Inter-Firm Division 1 Championship (1993);

Various, C.I.E., Garda and Club 7-a-sides over 18 years;

Junior B Championship and League – Ballyvaughan (1994).



John Nilan, with his wife Christina, proudly displays the Junior B Championship Cup won by his team, Ballyvaughan.



Relishing Ballyvaughan's first Championship title are left to right: Cathal O'Loughlen, team sponsor, Patsy Linnane, Gerard McNamara and David Fahy, trainer.



Kieran Linnane, Ballyvaughan's star goalkeeper pictured with his father and grandfather, Tommy, who won Senior Championship medals with Kilfenora in 1941 and 1950.