

# A LEGEND OF RORY FRAWLEY

"In those days", said my uncle, "we wore knicks down to our knees". He wasn't talking about the unlikely happening of drag shows but of a different kind of drag, literally, as grown men pummelled, pulled and plastered each other through the pitches of mud in Limerick inter-club rugby. My uncle has a gentle line in reminiscing, particularly when some visiting media man breathlessly discovers the fact that tough, spirited rugby is played in Limerick. It should be known that since long before the turn of the century such gamesmanship has been a feature of the city's life, a cultural by-product of a garrison town.

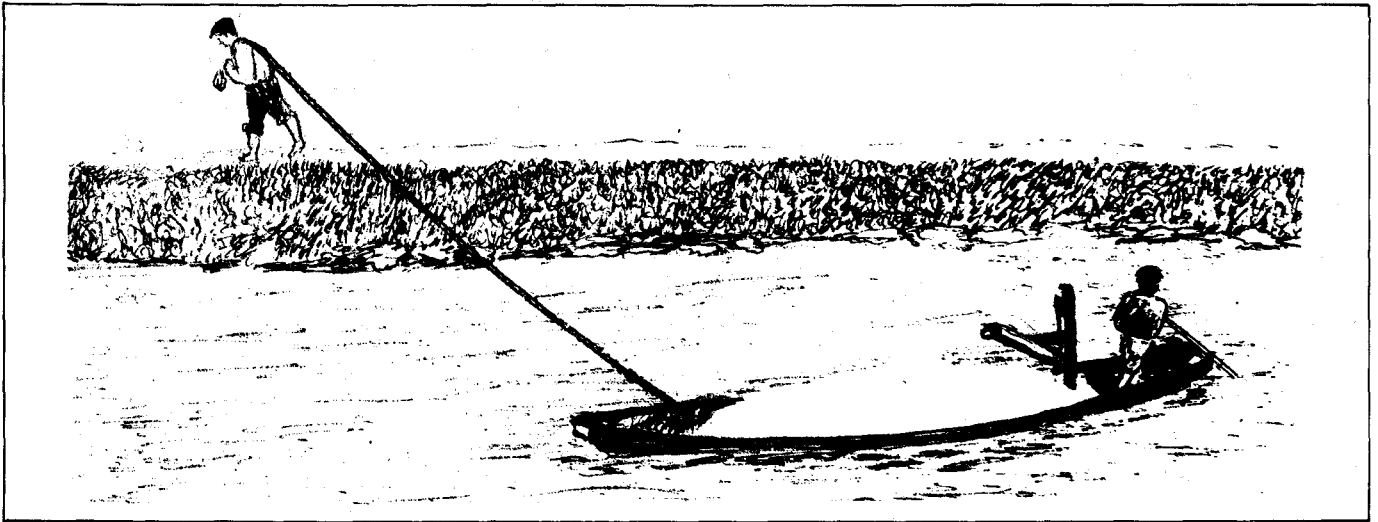
"One way we had of frightening visiting teams was to ask in the scrum: 'Has - taken his teeth out yet?' That player used to put his false teeth in the pocket of his knicks when the match began: when it was time to get tough, he slipped them out and handed them to a friend on the sideline, for safe-keeping." The handing-over of the teeth was the signal that the game was about to become earnest.

*by Kevin O'Connor*

the uncle would respond on cue to the troubled audience of Bective players:

"That was the time the old horse had to be kitted-out and it's leather dubbed and the brasses polished-up for an inspection by some of the Guinness bosses. And of course by this time the horse was so used to ambling lazily along the bank that it resisted madly when Frawley tried to tackle it up to the barge. It though it a bit of betrayal really, after all the years when Frawley had harnessed himself up and the two of them had made their way along the miles together."

"A ferocious tussle ensued, more in sadness than in anger, between Rory Frawley and the horse. Almost a



"Then I came up to Dublin to work in the Civil Service. Michael McInerney and I joined Bective Rangers on the same day - they were good sporting fellows, solicitors and professional men and that kind of thing. But we still had our Limerick loyalties, or rather our divided loyalties, for we would sometimes have to go down and play a Limerick side. Michael and I worked out a story to tell the Dublin players on the way down. Being from Dublin they were a little apprehensive about playing a Limerick side. So, to gratify that apprehension, Michael and I would tell each other stories of Limerick rugby, like the one about Rory Frawley and the Guinness horse..."

"Rory was one of Garryowen's forwards. He was a sandman, hauling sand from the Shannon, and worked on the same towpath along which the Guinness barges were pulled the last miles down through the canal locks from Killaloe into Limerick. His job was to lead the barge horse. Being Rory Frawley, he used his job for training - and he also got very fond of the old dray horse. Rory often fitted the harness over his shoulders and pulled the barge along himself, bent forward like a good prop forward... for ten miles a day he might do that, with the harness over his shoulders pulling the barge full of Guinness and thinking of the match the coming week-end. You might say he was a man happy in his work."

"And do you remember the time the Guinness directors wanted to cruise down through the canal on a barge?" Mac would prompt. "The time the horse wouldn't work",

wrestling match, with the Guinness directors and their ladies looking on. No holds barred, as they say. Frawley with an arm-lock on the dray's neck only for it to twist free and Frawley butting in again and the horse finally falling into the canal with a splash that rocked the barge..."

"That was Rory Frawley alright," Michael McInerney would say knowingly, and then he and my uncle wouldn't say much more as the train chugged towards Limerick Junction. Instead, they would concentrate on the smuts flying past the window, conscious of the brooding ruminations of their fellow Bective players, as they pondered on the likely opposition on the pitch at Thomond Park.

When they arrived in Limerick there would be a drink in a local hotel and likely as not, there would be some rugby supporters there, and maybe some of the players. And after the drinks had been served, one of the Bective players would casually ask the uncle: "You never finished the story. Whatever happened to the horse...?"

My uncle is a mild man, as I say, given to gentle reminiscences. With an air of mild surprise, savouring the froth from the glass between his lips, he would take mild pleasure in replying, "Oh, did I not tell you? Rory Frawley dived into the canal and pulled the dray horse out again. Then he pulled horse and barge from Killaloe to Limerick... You'll easily know him when you see him. A sturdy fella with rounded shoulders - and he'll be playing against us this afternoon..."