

MENTION of Bill O'Donoghue to the fore yet as one of the best hurling referees in Ireland—recalls nostalgic memories of two great hurling teams of the past—the far famed Young Ireland senior team of the 'twenties and early 'thirties, and a great Mungret side that graduated from school ranks, where they scored some thrilling "Limerick Leader" Cup successes, to one of the best junior teams of its day—giving Limerick a number of players who were to proudly wear the green and white through some memorable junior hurling campaigns.

Bill O'Donoghue first figured as a top-class hurler with Mungret, and in doing so followed in the footsteps of his father and uncles—the father, James, and one uncle, Michael, having helped the parish team to Shannonside hurling renown in the early years of the G.A.A.

HURLERS ALL.

That the next generation followed in distinguished hurling footsteps can best be judged from the fact that, in addition to Bill, four other sons of James O'Donoghue handled the caman with distinction in the red and white of Mungret and all of them, I think—Arthur, Johnnie, Mick, and Jimmie, at one time or other wore the Limerick jersey.

And five cousins—Paddy, Kevin, Joe, Jack, and Mick, also hit the high spots of hurling in Mungret colours in their day—so both sides of the pioneering O'Donoghues of early hurling days were represented on the teams that brought the parish such honours—county, provincial, and All-Ireland, in days that will be remembered for ever in the annals of hurling in the district.

I like to think of that Mungret team and reflect on the fact that but for the encouragement and enthusiasm of a grand schoolmaster with a deep-seated love of our native games, it might never have blossomed to the powerful force it later proved. It was a tragedy indeed, when that valuable Gaelic life was abruptly cut in a terrible road accident that robbed hurling of one of its stoutest pillars.

In the mid 'twenties this Mungret team, who were later to make such a name, first hit the hurling headlines as a school combination of almost unbeatable calibre. They made their own nearly of the "Limerick Leader" Cup and won it so often that it became all but a part of the school.

INVITED TO JOIN YOUNG IRELAND SENIOR TEAM.

Reared in a proud tradition, "blooded" in the excitement of hard schooling battles for hurling supremacy and early promoted to a place on the parish team, these were the preliminaries Bill O'Donoghue figured through, and with such distinction that the mentors of the famous Young Ireland senior team of the time began to sit up and take notice and eventually invited him wear the blue and gold jersey—an honour highly prized in hurling circles then.

That they had confidence in his ability was proved when the first call to the Young Ireland colours came for a match against the other glamour team of that time—the great Cloughaun. There were no bigger rivals than the city pair and their meetings never failed to attract a wildly excited crowd to the old Market Field. In fact, many veteran followers of hurling will say that the senior championship reached its zenith in those days, and demanded enthusiasm and self-sacrifice from players and supporters that has not been outmoded since.

Bill proved his worth in the hard school and came out of that first great clash against Cloughaun with enhanced reputation. He definitely "made the grade" against one of the toughest teams the championship has known and never looked back.

LONG LIST OF THRILL-PACKED ENCOUNTERS.

That initial baptism of fire was but the beginning of a long list of thrill packed encounters in the popular Young Ireland colours. All the big teams of the Limerick arena were met—Fedamore, of the many games that aroused interest everywhere where a hurley was known—great fighters and toughest of rivals; Kilfinane, Pallas, Rathkeale, Croom, Newcastle West—and then, Ahane, in the early days of their power, and progress to the points that made them such a hurling force in after years. And it has been one of the big regrets of some of the great men of that unforgettable hurling period that the "greats" of the late 'twenties—Cloughaun, Fedamore and Young Ireland, in particular, had passed their zenith when Ahane in all their glory came to add such lustre to the hurling scene.

The tall, young stripling of that first Cloughaun contact grew with the passing years into one of the stoutest half backs the Blue and Gold has known and had the added advantage of being able to switch from defence to attack with amazing rapidity—his scores from the side line being gems of hurling artistry and precision.

THREE COUNTY CHAMPIONSHIP MEDALS.

Three county championship medals he won with Young Ireland—1928, 1930 and 1932, and had the added distinction of playing against all the great teams of his time from the other hurling counties—Blackrock and St. Finbarr's of Cork, Toomevarra and Boherlahan (Tipperary), Newmarket-on-Fergus and Ennis (Clare), Erin's Own (Waterford), Dicksboro' (Kilkenny), Army Metro and Young Ireland's of Dublin and the Kerry county junior hurling side on a few occasions.

A prominent player, too, in the Green and White of Limerick for many seasons, Bill's most memorable game was in the 1933 All-Ireland final, against Kilkenny, when he was called upon to fill the vacancy created when Mick Ryan had to retire injured.

Faced with the task of "minding" the redoubtable "Lory" Meagher, he covered himself with glory, and it certainly was not Bill's fault that Limerick did not win that day. A report of that game described him: "A neat, fast player who could hurl with the best. Ball for ball he played the great Noresider. His hurling was sure, clean and brisk. He never missed an overhead ball and could cut along or off the ground with the best in the game."

GREAT PERFORMANCE IN LONDON.

On another occasion, in London, for the annual Whit Monday game, he gave a great performance against another famous Kilkenny caman wielder—Paddy Phelan.

Space does not permit reference to the many important tussles in which he figured for club and county so it must suffice to pick out a few at random as typical of the many.

One fortnight in 1928, he helped Young Ireland in three first rate engagements. On Oct. 7th, at Emly, they met and defeated Thurles Blues in the final of the local senior hurling tournament. A week later, at the Markets Field, they won a set of gold medals when defeating their old rivals, Cloughaun, 5-3 to 3-1, and were presented with the trophies by Rev. Father Redmond, O.S.A., who was then President of the Cloughaun Club, and the following Sunday they made the journey to Shanballymore, when

they lost to St. Finbarr's (Cork) 4-5 to 3-4, in a tournament game.

DEFEATED AHANE.

Young Ireland beat Rathkeale in the final of the 1928 county senior hurling championship. In the 1930 semi-final they met the up and coming Ahane lads and a great game was the outcome, the Blue and Gold eventually triumphing 5-4 to 5-2. Again they won county honours, beating a splendid Newcastle West fifteen on a replay in the final.

In 1931 Ahane turned the tables on the city men, and won 3-5 to 1-2, afterwards going on to win from Croom the first of their fifteen county senior hurling crowns.

Young Ireland, however, proved themselves still a big hurling force by winning the Sweet Afton Cup after an unforgettable tussle with Newmarket-on-Fergus, and later captured a splendid set of tournament medals when they beat Army Metro (Dublin) at the Markets Field, 3-3 to 2-3.

The first championship tussle of 1932 saw them drawn against the champions, Ahane. The blue and gold hit a purple patch that day and put out the title holders, 6-1 to 2-5, afterwards meeting and defeating Newcastle West in the county final.

It is interesting to note that in their three championship meetings from 1931 to 1933 the total scoring amounted to: Young Ireland, 12-7 (43 points), Ahane, 10-12 (42 pts.) indicating how closely matched they were.

VERY EFFICIENT AND SUCCESSFUL REFEREE.

Put out of active participation in the games through injury, Bill never lost his interest in hurling, and was soon making a name for himself as a very efficient and successful referee.

He understands players better than most officials and has the happy knack of getting over many difficulties without resort to strong measures. In fact it is very rarely that he has to put a player to the side-line.

Secret of his success is that he trains for an important game as earnestly as any of the participants, and is always up with the play to whistle the less noticed infringements.

His unforgettable refereeing memory is of the 1950 Munster Hurling Final between Cork and Tipperary at Killarney. With the playing space narrowing every second, as excited spectators encroached from all points in the closing stages, it took more than a cool head and some quick thinking to bring the game to a successful conclusion.