

No. 133—DR. DICK STOKES Of Oola

By SEAMUS O'CEALLAIGH

WHEN the name of Dr. Dick Stokes is mentioned in Limerick Gaelic circles, the fact that he was one of our greatest hurlers is not the first thought to come to mind. Rather, the memory comes crowding of his wonderful loyalty and the journeys he made—sometimes even from across the seas—to line out with Limerick.

And Dick never worried what kind of a team he turned out with. All the rest of the well-known players might be taking a day off—sometimes it was little better than a junior selection that were named to don the county jerseys, but Dr. Dick was always there. I was going to say “filling his accustomed place,” but sure he never minded where he played, and must have figured in almost every position since he first toggled off for his initial outing—as goal-keeper with the Doon C.B.S. side in a Dr. Harty Cup tie.

And, believe it or not, Dick did not do any hurling until he went to Doon, and he was then fifteen years of age. Football, of course, was the favourite pastime in Oola and Dick, at an early age, showed much promise with the big ball. But he quickly became adept with the caman—the secret of his quick rise to top rank in this code being the fact that he literally hurled morning, noon and night during his time in Doon—constant practice, that is the only sure road to caman mastery.

ON MUNSTER COLLEGES TEAM

Dick started, as already mentioned, “between the sticks,” but by 1938 he was starring at midfield to such effect that he was a reserve on the Munster Colleges team. Twelve months later he was partnering Vin Easton of Waterford in the All-Ireland Colleges final, and played a big part in bringing back the title to Munster.

The Limerick selectors also had their eyes on the up and coming star, and he wore the green and white in minor hurling and football ranks before the call to senior colours came in early 1940, when he was selected as a half forward on a team to play Cork in a tournament tussle. That was the start of an association with Shannonside hurling that gained lustre as

the years sped on — a long span reckoned by hurling standards, but all too short as far as Limerick was concerned.

Dick made an auspicious opening with Limerick. His first championship outing was against Waterford, at Killarney, and although the side gave a disappointing display they succeeded in forcing a division of the spoils.

THRILLING TUSSELE IN RE-PLAY

The re-play was at Clonmel and a much improved Limerick fifteen took the laurels after a thrilling tussle. The Munster title holders, Cork, who had lost the “All Ireland” by a solitary point in a thunderstorm the day second world war started (1939), were encountered in the Southern decider, and the star-studded Rebel County fifteen, after to prove their worth as the only hurling county ever to win four Blue Ribands in a row, were held to level scoring.

The second meeting with Cork, again at Thurles, was a thrill-packed affair full of colour and incident, and a great victory gave Limerick its eleventh Munster crown—and last of the senior line to date.

Galway was encountered in the semi-final and the men from the Corrib could not withstand the power and dash of Limerickmen, who were by now the subject of hurling discussion all over the country. The hurling deeds of stars like the peerless Mick Mackey, the unconquerable Paddy Scanlan, Paddy Ciohossy, Timmy Ryan, John Mackey, Paddy McMahon, Jack Power, Mick Kennedy and Jim Roche, were re-told at crossroads and firesides, and the knowing ones spoke of a fair haired half-forward that might one day eclipse them all — and that lad was Dick Stokes.

THE 1940 ALL-IRELAND FINAL

The 1940 All-Ireland final between Limerick and Kilkenny — despite wartime conditions — attracted the second biggest crowd in the history of hurling to that—49,260; the record being held by the same counties when 51,235 flocked to see them fight out the 1936 final. The 1940 tally was ten thousand more than saw Kilkenny beat Cork for the 1939 title—tri-

bute enough to the “pulling power” of a great Shannonside team, who won in gallant style.

Picked by Munster for their Railway Cup bid the following season, Dick Stokes was on the side that lost to Leinster, 2-5 to 2-4, after a grand game. Dick wore the Munster jersey until 1946, and in that spell made up for his initial disappointment, and himself played no mean part in winning the Cup five years running.

HIS PART IN U.C.D. HURLING.

Whilst a student at U.C.D. he helped the College lads in many engagements, and in 1943 was on the senior football side that won the County title. And a few years later he helped U.C.D. hurlers take the Dublin senior hurling championship of 1947 and 1948.

He helped the U.C.D. sides that won Sigerson Cup medals from 1944 to 1947, and gained Fitzgibbon Cup honours, also, in U.C.D. colours, the years 1941 and 1944.

And, maybe, the greatest honour paid him was in 1952—a dozen years after he won his All-Ireland medal—when the University selectors elected him captain of the Combined Universities side that played Ireland in the first hurling game of the series.

FLEW BACK FROM ENGLAND.

When Limerick qualified for the final of the 1946-7 National Hurling League Dick was in England, but that just did not matter. He had travelled from the farthest ends of Ireland to help his county in even the least important engagement, and so it was no surprise to find him flying home through fog and winter winds to take his place against Kilkenny and contribute materially to the Limerick success. And despite several months out of the game, he was one of the fittest, speediest, most accurate of the thirty men at Croke Park that evening.

FILLED ANOTHER ROLE.

In 1950 he filled another role for Limerick when he helped the footballers win the Munster Junior crown.

Many tributes have been paid the genial doctor during his long career, all showing the warm place he won in the affections of Gaelic Ireland.