



# Up-and-Under: Some Rugby Ties



One golden afternoon in the late spring of 1980 the train linking Cork's Glanmire Station and Limerick Junction was crowded by a singing, cheering, jubilant mass of people, varying in age from youngsters to near-octogenarians. Girls and boys, women and men had one aspect of dress in common – they wore scarves, rosettes and even hats of black-and-amber; and they were not shy to wear their hearts on their sleeves, as well. The young ruck-sacked American tourist and his girlfriend were bemused and puzzled by the gaiety of the happy, pulsating throng.

'What's happened?', the young traveller enquired of one elated elder. 'Why the celebrations?' 'It's Young Munsters, of course!', the man replied in the distinctive tones of Limerick, looking faintly surprised that anybody could be so unaware and out of touch. 'We won today, and we're in the final!'. Indeed they had and were, overwhelming the Cork opposition in a match at which visiting Limerick supporters were in a massive majority. And a few weeks later, on another sun-kissed afternoon at Thomond Park in Limerick, Young Munster went on to win the Munster Senior Cup for the first time in forty-two years, to crown an emotional sporting occasion which will never be

by Karl Johnston

forgotten by all those lucky enough to have been present on that wonderful late April afternoon.

Australian readers might care to note that Munster is one of four Irish provinces, the others being Connacht, Leinster and Ulster. The provinces have no administrative or political identity, apart from being historical and traditional entities. But, in rugby terms, each province forms a regional branch of the Irish Rugby Football Union. The four regions oppose each other every season in the Interprovincial Championship, play matches against visiting or overseas teams (of which more later) and provide players with a stepping stone to the national team. The IRFU administers the game in the entire island and the Irish team is chosen from players from both the Republic and Northern Ireland.

Cork is the capital city of Munster, the southern province, and fully justifies this title in terms of size, population, etc. But the rugby capital of Munster (and one of the great heartlands of the game in Ireland) is Limerick, home of the afore-mentioned Young Munster and other famous clubs, one of which – Garryowen – has given its name to the vocabulary of international rugby through the hoisted up-and-under kick.

With rugby journalists from all over the world, this writer was among the privileged who saw the inaugural World Cup competition in New Zealand and Australia last summer. To see this first global event was a memorable experience; to meet local colleagues was to meet again old friends; and to read the names in the Australian and All Blacks squads was to be given a reminder of the chain of history which links our countries.

In the Australian camp were names like Matt Burke and Mike Lynagh, in the New Zealand squad John Kirwan, Bernie McCahill, Sean Fitzpatrick, Kieran Crowley and John Gallagher, their London-born fullback, whose grandmother lives in Limerick. And here in Limerick, with the Grand Slam 1984 Australian team – regarded as one of the greatest to ever tour these islands – were players such as Ross Hanley, Tim Lane, Chris Roche and Ross Reynolds.

Almost a year on, memories of the World Cup quarter-finals and semi-finals at Ballymore in Brisbane and at the Sydney Concord Oval come crowding back. Most vivid in the mind's eye action replay is that magnificent semi-final between Australia and France. One special memory of this spectacular game stands out – the sight of the members of a local Sydney club, seated together in the row in front of the press box, rising in unison to applaud the French off the field at the end of it all, in



The 1950 Lions team, captained by Karl Mullen. Tom Clifford is at the far right of the back row.



Tom Clifford gets to grips with the Australian prop forward, Nick Shehadie.

a spontaneous gesture of sportsmanship.

And there are memories not connected directly with rugby. Like the pre-match barbeques at the Brisbane home of Margaret and John Reese, who had been the liaison man for the Ireland party on their 1979 tour of Australia. Or the breakers at Surfers' Paradise, unforgettable despite occasional flickering mental recollections of the film 'Jaws'. And there was the glory of the Opera House and the inevitable tour of Sydney Harbour, and my own personal pilgrimage to out-of-season Sydney Cricket Ground, to see the turf where once walked Bradman, Larwood, Millar and Lindwall and all the other gods who gave such joy to my cricketing youth.

Perhaps my deepest memory of Australia in 1987 is of the 7th June, the day when Ireland's World Cup campaign was brought to an abrupt halt by Andy Slack's superbly athletic Wallabies, master-minded by the voluble Alan Jones, the man that so many sports journalists and rugby establishment figures love to hate for the good

reason that he often speaks the truth. 'Today a rooster, tomorrow a feather duster', Jones had said a few years earlier. With the Irish team all but humiliated and already preparing for a homecoming certain to be somewhat less than euphoric, we knew exactly what he meant.

But then we thought of the hordes of young Irish at the Sydney Concord Oval that day. Thousands of them had completely filled one end of it, turning the terraces into an ocean of green, white and orange, holding aloft a forest of banners, many of them bearing devices strange indeed; like 'Hugo Scores Down Under', as indeed he did, when MacNeill, the indomitable Ireland fullback, raced in for one of Ireland's two tries, for him a record eighth in international rugby. And though Ireland was being badly whipped, those young supporters (yet another batch of their country's traditional export) didn't mind; they sang and chanted and waved their flags and cheered their team on louder and ever louder, even when the cause was well and truly lost, as it had been virtually right from the

start. And they kept it up long after the game had ended, too, boys and girls swaying together in the long bar areas under the stand, singing songs of joy and hope and home. Only a game? Don't you believe it, as the followers of the Limerick clubs, and the worshippers of the Wallabies, know well.

That night a group of us dined in a pleasant and atmospheric restaurant in Sydney's historic Rocks area, where, two centuries before, convicts from the First Fleet had been landed. The young man who waited at our table was a rugby enthusiast. When we stood up to leave, he sympathised with the Irish, and meant it. And we wished Australia good luck in their remaining World Cup games, and meant it as well. I wondered could his forebearers have come from Limerick; some day he deserves a trip to a Munster Senior Cup final at Thomond Park to see a contest of passion and no quarter, played before a knowledgeable and frenetic crowd, against the back-drop which takes in St. John's slender, dreaming spire and the ancient tower of St. Mary's Cathedral, rising above the streets of the old city.

Yet, the start of rugby in Limerick was slow enough. In 1867/68 Sir Charles Barrington of the family whose name is still indelibly linked with the city, was captain of Dublin University FC, founded in 1854 and generally regarded as the club where the game had its genesis in Ireland. He is acknowledged to have been one of the first to introduce the emergent game to the city, where the first club to be established was Limerick County, in 1876, Rathkeale (in west County Limerick) having two years earlier been represented at a meeting of what was then the Irish Football Union.

By the early 1880s the game was beginning to gain a foothold, and by 1886 Munster's premier competition, the Senior Cup, had begun. The Garryowen club was founded in 1884, and won the Munster Senior Cup for the first time in 1889, and retained it for the following six years. Garryowen is Limerick's oldest senior club. Shannon RFC also dates from 1884, but did not gain senior status until the season 1953/54. Of the other three Limerick clubs, Young Munster take seniority, dating its foundation to 1895; Bohemians came into being in 1922; and Old Crescent in 1947 (being accorded senior ranking five years later).

Through the 1880s sides from Britain and New Zealand had been visiting Australia, playing matches against New South Wales and Queensland. But these were often scratch teams, and though *Rothmans Rugby Yearbook* confers the touring party of 1888 with British Lions status, it was not at all representative, having been put together by two England Test cricketers, Alfred



Tom Clifford is chaired from Limerick Railway Station on his return from his triumphant Lions tour of New Zealand and Australia.

Shaw and Arthur Shrewsbury, and indeed not all its members were rugby footballers. All the tourists' matches were against State teams (for Australia's first international game was not played until 1899) and their visit was marred by the death of their captain, R.L. Seddon, who was drowned in a boating accident. Curiously, the co-organiser and manager of the touring party, Arthur Shrewsbury of Nottinghamshire (the Jack Hobbs of his day – he scored a total of 26,439 first-class runs, including 59 centuries), took his life at age 47 in 1903 because he feared that he was suffering from an incurable disease. But in the event, no Limerick – or indeed Irish players – were involved in that tour.

The first official British and Irish team to tour Australia arrived eleven years later, in 1899. It was the first – and the last – Lions' side to visit Australia only; subsequent tours were to include New Zealand on their itinerary, while the tours of 1977 and 1983 have been to New Zealand only. Three Irish players (none of them from Limerick) were included – E. Martelli (Dublin University), E.P. 'Blucher' Doran (Lansdowne) and Tom McGown (NIFC).

Australia won the first Test, played at Sydney on 24th June, 1899, in some style. 'The pace of our forwards killed them', commented H.A. Langley of the Australian committee afterwards. But the tourists won the four-Test series, and, according to John Griffiths in the **Phoenix Book of International Rugby**

**Records**, 'steadfast commitment to the passing game gave rugby in Australia a tremendous boost'.

The next Lions' side to tour Australia arrived in 1904 and was captained by 'Darkie' Bedell-Sivright, an experienced Scottish international. The side was managed by a player with the Irish-sounding name of A.B. O'Brien, a threequarter from Guy's Hospital, London. Three Irish players were in the party – C.D. Patterson and R.W. Edwards from the Malone club in Belfast and B.S. Massey (Hull and East Riding). Again Limerick was not represented.

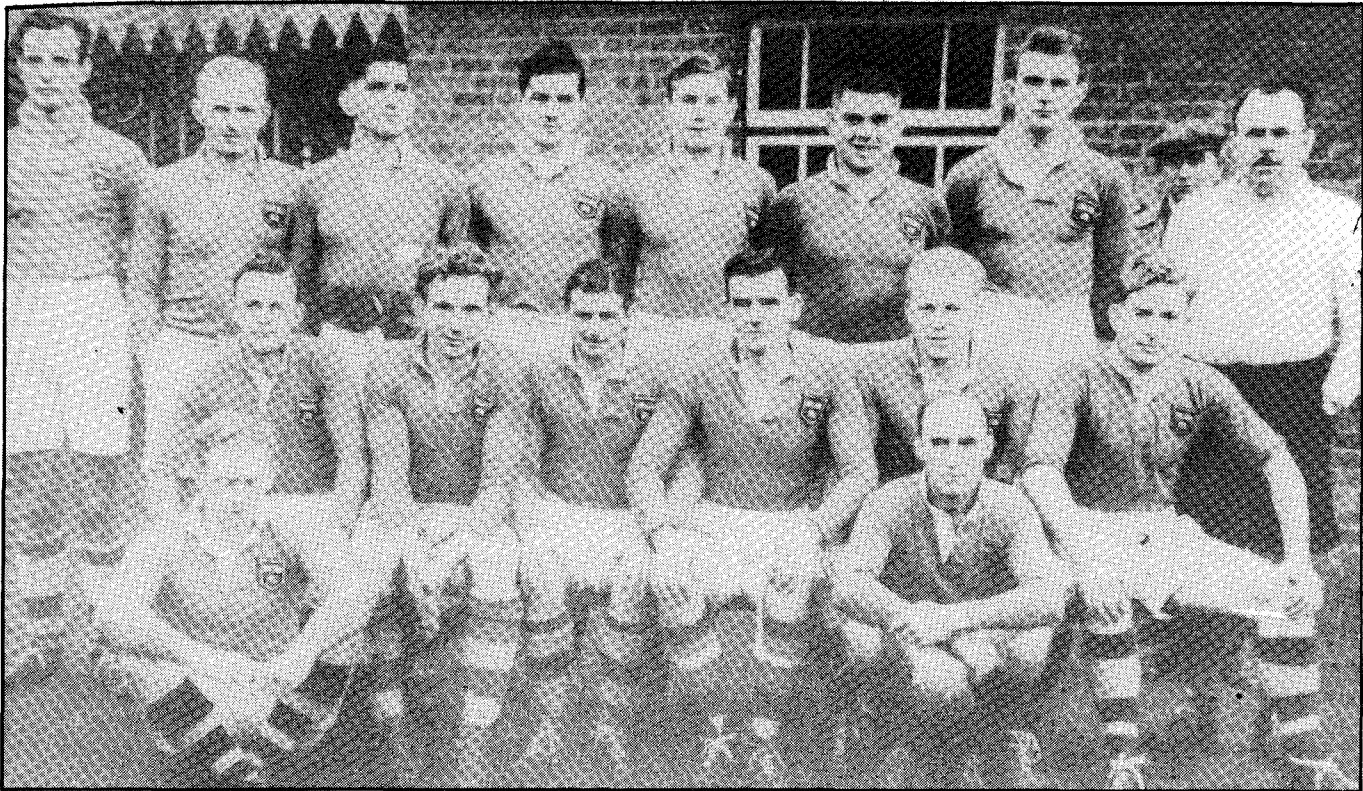
Four years later, in 1908, an Anglo-Welsh combined team toured Australasia, playing three Tests against New Zealand (but none in Australia), where they won seven of their nine games. The Irish and Scottish Rugby unions declined to support this tour. Later that year in the domestic season 1908/1909 the first Australian touring team arrived in Britain, playing in England and Wales only – the Irish and Scottish unions resenting the English RFU's attitude to the invitation to the Australians. This team became known as the Wallabies (though their shirts were blue and emblazoned with the Waratah, the NSW emblem) and interestingly, the captain was Dr H.M. ('Paddy') Moran.

With the Great War intervening, it was to be almost twenty years before rugby contact was resumed between Australia and these isles. But then, in

the season 1927/28, the team known as the Waratahs (drawn almost entirely from the Sydney suburbs) came on tour, under the captaincy of threequarter and former Scotland international A.C. ('Johnnie') Wallace. They played Ireland on 12th November at Lansdowne Road, the first meeting between the two countries, and won the game courtesy of a try by Wallace and a conversion kicked by out-half (first five-eighth) Tom Lawton. Right wing J.B. Gantry of Monkstown kicked Ireland's penalty goal; no Limerick players were in the side. In 1986 the Australian Rugby Union retrospectively granted international status to the games played by the Waratahs against the four home countries and France.

Three years later the Lions were back in Australia, losing by five points to six to Australia on 30th August in Sydney, the only Test played against the Wallabies. There were five Irish players in the touring party – Paul Murray (Wanderers), M.J. Dunne (Lansdowne), G.R. Beamish (Leicester and RAF), J.L. Farrell (Bective Rangers) and H. O'H. O'Neill (Queen's University Belfast). Once more, no Limerick player was selected on the touring team.

But twenty-seven years and another World War later came a notable Limerick breakthrough. The Third Wallabies toured Britain and Ireland in 1947/48 under the captaincy of Bill McLean, and played matches against both Ireland and Munster. On 6th December, 1947, the tourists defeated



This Munster team, beaten by a last minute Australian try at the Mardyke in 1947, contained six Limerick players: Paddy Reid, Jackie Staunton, Hugh de Lacy, Con Roche, Tom Reid and Tom Clifford.

Ireland by 16-3 at Lansdowne Road, a game in which Paddy Reid of Garryowen made his international debut, to become the first Limerick man to play against Australia. Reid, a centre, was a gifted player, who that year went on to share in Ireland's first Triple Crown win since 1899 and the only Grand Slam ever achieved by the country.

Three days later, at the Mardyke in Cork, Reid was one of six Limerick players in a Munster team which came within a whisker of succeeding where Ireland had failed; the others were his Garryowen clubmates Jackie Staunton, Hugh de Lacy, Con Roche and his cousin Tom Reid, as well as Tom Clifford, the mighty prop from the Young Munster Club. That day Australia scored two tries to one to win 6-5 (the try then being worth three points), but only a late rally, when one of their forwards, P.A. Hardcastle, forced his way for the winning score, saved them. Earlier, wing J.W.T. McBride had scored the tourists' first try. But in between those scores Reid, as if celebrating his call to Ireland's colours three days earlier, scored a try for Munster and converted it himself. Munster seemed headed for a famous victory until Hardcastle's late, match-winning effort.

Six of the team which had defeated Ireland lined out against Munster. They were - M.L. Howell (NSW) and J.W.T. McBride (NSW) in the backs, and R.E. McMaster (Queensland), E.H. Davis

(Victoria), D.H. Keller (NSW) and P.A. Hardcastle (NSW) in the pack; the team was captained by outhalf E.G. Broad (Queensland). Another member of the pack was Nick Shehadie (later to become a Knight and Lord mayor of Sydney), destined for an illustrious career as a rugby administrator, and manager of the Seventh Wallabies' tour of Britain and Ireland in 1981/82.

Tom Clifford is a living rugby legend in Limerick. Like Paddy Reid, he shared in an Irish Triple Crown victory, his turn coming in 1949 when Karl Mullen led the team to a second consecutive success, an achievement yet to be equalled. Mullen had the honour of leading the first post-War Lions in New Zealand and Australia, and to Clifford went the distinction of being the first Limerick Lion as he was chosen among the band of nine Irish players in the party.

By modern standards it was a very long tour; the party travelled by ship, and were away from home for nearly six months. Clifford loved every minute of it and had an excellent tour, playing in five of the six Tests, missing only the fourth in New Zealand. Thus, he played twice against Australia for the Lions - at Brisbane on 19th August, 1950, where the tourists won by 19-6, and at Sydney a week later on 26th August. This time the Lions won by 24-3; the five tries scored by the Lions that day still stands as their record number in an international game. Australian press reports of the day paid notable tributes to Clifford.

He was described as 'the virile Clifford' in a report of the Lions' victory (22-6) over New South Wales. A report of the Brisbane Test said: 'All the forwards played particularly well, and the best were Stephens (Rhys Stephens of Neath and Wales) and Clifford'. Another press report stated: ...'there were few better men than the captain Karl Mullen, Doug Hayward, John Robins and Tom Clifford'. Yet another journalistic testimonial said: 'Tom Clifford proved himself a tremendous scrummager, with a rare ability for going through from a line-out. He fitted in perfectly with his hooker and was one of those iron men who could keep going hammer-and-tongs, from start to finish in the most gruelling encounters. He and John Robins were the best props in the tourists' team'.

And a letter to the *Limerick Weekly Echo* from a compatriot also sung Clifford's praises. John McMahon, of Pondage, Via Upper Mount Beauty, Kiewa Valley, Victoria, and formerly of 4 Upper Catherine Street, Limerick, wrote: '... our old friend Tom Clifford of Young Munster fame caused quite a stir in rugby circles with his terrific touch-finding and kicking, also with his tough forward play. The first game between the Aussies and the British Isles took place in Brisbane. It was a very hard and tough forward battle and the brave Tom was in his element. Evidently, he likes it like that. It was a grand sight for myself and a couple of Limerick friends, since I was captain of

the first Young Munster team that Tom played on'.

In both Tests, Clifford came up against his old adversary, Nick Shehadie, against whom he had first played in Cork almost three years before. Shehadie played at lock in the first Test, and moved to prop in the second, a switch which brought the two into even closer contact! After his tour success, Clifford returned to a tremendous welcome. Wrote Barry Coughlan in his 1983 book, *The Irish Lions*: 'When Tom Clifford arrived home in Limerick after his lengthy trip, a crowd took to the streets to welcome him. Marching bands appeared and the Young Munster prop forward, who had brought fame to his club and city, was feted lavishly'.

Nearly eight years went by before rugby rivalry between Australia and Britain and Ireland was renewed. The fourth Wallabies were captained by Bob Davidson of New South Wales and were much less successful than their predecessors, losing all five international matches. But in an Irish context, the tour of 1957/58 can hardly be more important, for it marked Ireland's first-ever victory over a touring team while Munster became the first Irish province to draw with such a side.

On 18th January, 1958, in Dublin, Ireland won by 9-6. Australia had tries by wing R. Phelps (NSW) and outhalf Arthur Summons (NSW). The Irish had tied the scores with a try by Ronnie Dawson (later to captain the Lions) and a penalty goal by Cecil Pedlow. Then the young Irish centre, David Hewitt, playing in his first international, intercepted and sent Noel Henderson off on a long and thrilling run for the winning try. There were three Limerick players in the Irish side – fullback Paddy Berkery (London Irish), the late Gordon Wood (Garryowen) in the front row and in the second row, Bill 'Wigs' Mulcahy (UCD, Bective Rangers and Bohemians), also playing his first game for Ireland. Though born in Rathkeale, Co. Limerick, Mulcahy played all his inter-provincial rugby for Leinster.

Came 21st January, and the touring team had arrived in a near snow-bound Limerick. As Charles Mulqueen wrote in *The Carling Book of Munster Rugby*: '... the weather conditions ... will not be quickly forgotten, especially by the Australians, who made their headquarters in Cruise's Hotel, in the middle of a blizzard. None of them had witnessed this phenomenon previously, and they quickly became involved in running snowball matches with the locals'.

This was Australia's first visit to Limerick, and the first of only two occasions when they have played at the city's famous rugby ground, Thomond Park. In the event, it was not a great match, although it went down in the



The Rathkeale, Co. Limerick-born Bill Mulcahy (left), with Tony O'Reilly.

record books as an historic occasion for Munster. Right wing A.R. Morton (NSW) scored a try and Munster fullback Ray Hennessy (deputising for Berkery) landed a penalty goal to leave a 3-3 final scoreline. Seven Limerick players were involved – Mick English (Bohemians), shortly afterwards to be capped for Ireland as the successor to the great Jack Kyle, Gordon Wood (Garryowen), who captained the team, Dermot Geary (Bohemians), Tom Nesdale (Garryowen), Mick Spillane (Old Crescent), Martin O'Connell (Young Munster) and Tim McGrath (Garryowen).

Of the Australians, Bob Davidson, Terry Curley, S.W. White, N.M. Hughes and Nick Shehadie (all NSW) had played against Ireland. At outhalf against Munster that day was Ron Harvey (NSW), a brother of the renowned cricket star, Neil. A year later Mick English, Gordon Wood and Bill Mulcahy earned the distinction first bes-

towed on Tom Clifford in 1950 – they were all chosen on the Lions tour to New Zealand and Australia. Injury cut short English's tour, and, of the three, only Mulcahy played against Australia in the first Test at Brisbane, won by the Lions 17-6. Thus, Mulcahy is the last Limerick man to have played for the Lions against Australia; the city had no representatives on the touring sides of 1966 or 1971, the last time the Lions played Down Under.

Though a truly great player, Mulcahy was always regarded as rather short in stature for a lock forward. On tour he is said to have been described by a teammate as 'crouching in a private trench in the middle of a line-out!'. And the man himself, when asked how he would like to have the ball thrown to him said 'low and crooked'. But for all that he managed to get more 'ball' in the line-out, than many of the towering giants around him.

The Australians were disappointed



*This Munster team, captained by the Irish international and Lions prop forward, Gordon Wood, drew with the 1957 Australian touring side in the snow at Thomond Park, Limerick. The Munster team included seven Limerick players: Mick English, Dermot Geary, Tom Nesdale, Mick Spillane, Martin O'Connell, Tim McGrath and Gordon Wood.*

at the heavy defeats suffered in the two Tests they played against the 1959 Lions. But they had some excellent players in those sides, all the same, among them fullback Jim Lenehan, Arthur Summons and Peter Johnson, the hooker, who went on to become his country's most-capped player, lining out in 42 Tests in all.

Limerick had no direct interest in the Lions tour of 1966. But in season 1966/67, the Fifth Wallabies arrived in Britain and Ireland, and won much admiration for the quality of their incisive play, master-minded by an outstanding scrumhalf, Ken Catchpole, and his brilliant outhalf partner Phil Hawthorne, who kicked six drop goals in the five Tests, three of them against England at Twickenham.

But the side had mixed fortunes, and on 21st January, 1967, at Lansdowne Road lost to an Ireland side in which no Limerick players were included. However, history was to be made at Musgrave Park in Cork four days later when Munster became the first Irish province to defeat an overseas touring team, winning by 11-8. Four Limerick players – outhalf John Moroney (Garryowen), forwards Bennie O'Dowd (Bohemians) and Mick O'Callaghan (Young Munster) and scrumhalf Liam Hall, then at University College Cork, and later to move to Garryowen – were in the Munster team. Munster's points came from a try by Moroney and two penalty goals and a conversion from the great

Tom Kiernan. For Australia, John Brass kicked a penalty goal, Alan Cardy had a try, and P.F. Ryan converted it. Of that Australian team, Brass, Cardy, Cathchpole, R.B. Prosser and R.B. Heming (all of NSW) had been in the side which had lost to Ireland the previous Saturday.

Later that year Ireland became the first of the Five Nations to win a Test match away from home. On their short tour to Australia that year they beat the Wallabies at Sydney on 13th May by 11-5, in what was described as 'a dreary Test, dominated by unimaginative kicking'. Still, it was an historic day for Ireland, though sad to relate from the point of view of this narrative, there were no players from Limerick to share in the success!

The following year, 1968, Australia undertook a short tour of Ireland and Scotland only, with disappointing results, as they lost both Tests, and won only two of the five games, played. The team was led by Peter Johnson, and included that great scrumhalf John Hipwell, as well as the experienced John Brass. On the Irish part of the tour they had beaten the Irish Universities (15-3) at Musgrave Park Cork, when they went on to meet Ireland at Lansdowne Road on 26th October.

Two Limerick players – the versatile John Moroney and Jim Tydings – were on the wings for Ireland that day, Moroney contributing a conversion to Ireland's 10-3 victory. This was to be the sole appearance for Ireland of the

Young Munster winger, Tydings, though he was a fine player, strong and very fast. Outhalf J.P. Ballesty (NSW) kicked a penalty goal for Australia. Moroney and Tydings also played for the Combined Provinces side – Moroney this time at outhalf – in the Australians' first match, when the tourists lost by 3-9 at Ravenhill on 19th October.

As we have seen, Limerick was not represented on the Lions touring side to visit Australia in 1971. So it was not until the season 1975/76 that contact was resumed, with Hipwell back captaining the Sixth Wallabies. They had mixed fortunes but achieved their only international success of the tour against Ireland, winning by 20-10 on 17th January at Lansdowne Road. Once more Ireland crashed to defeat without the help of any Limerick men; but some satisfaction had been derived three days earlier at Musgrave Park when Munster went under by only two points (13-15) to the tourists.

Eight Limerick players were in the Munster team – Larry Moloney, Seamus Dennison, Tony Ward, Pat Whelan, Eddie Molloy and Shay Deering (all Garryowen, Deering captaining the side) and Gerry McLoughlin and Brendan Foley of Shannon. This was Ward's first game for Munster, and he contributed two penalty goals and a drop goal, while Deering scored a try. Fullback Paul McLean of Queensland landed three penalty goals and a con-



version for Australia, while J.R. Ryan (NSW) scored a try. Ward's near-miss conversion attempt of Deering's try would have given Munster a draw.

Since then rugby contact between Australia and Ireland (including of course Munster and Limerick) has been constant. The first Australian Schools side to tour these isles played the Irish Schools at Thomond Park on 18th December, 1977, winning a superb game by 12-10, the closest they came to defeat on an unbeaten tour. Included in that Irish side were current internationals Paul Dean, Mick Moylett (now a Shannon stalwart) and Philip Matthews. Australia included the three Ella brothers, Gary, Glen and Mark, as well as another future international, Mike Hawker.

And a little over a year later, in 1979, Ireland's most successful overseas tour ever brought victory in the two Tests against Australia. Limerick's sole representative on the winning sides (Brisbane 3rd June, 1979, won 27-12 and Sydney, 16th June, won 9-3) was tight head prop Gerry ('Locky') McLoughlin of Shannon, one of his native city's real characters. Three years later, McLoughlin scored a famous try for his country against England at Twickenham, as Ireland were en route for the Triple Crown. The pundits remarked on the great work of the Irish pack, who drove McLoughlin over. 'They didn't drive me over', said Locky. 'I pulled them over the line after me!'. Limerick's other players on that 1979 Australian tour were Tony Ward and Pat Whelan (both Garryowen) and Brendan Foley (Shannon) who failed to make the Test sides.

The Seventh Wallabies arrived in Britain and Ireland in the season 1981/82 and once again Ireland was the only one of the home countries to lose a Test, going under by 12-16 at Lansdowne Road on 21st November. Limerick's representatives were Tony Ward (restored at outhalf in the absence of Ollie Campbell) and Brendan Foley, reinstated to the second row after the 1979 tour. Ward kicked all Ireland's points with four penalty goals. In the Australian team were many players destined for great things in the 1980s, among them Roger Gould, Andy Slack, Mark Loane and Simon Poidevin. Michael O'Connor scored Australia's try, Gould had a drop goal, and Paul McLean kicked three penalty goals.

But four days earlier had come another great Munster triumph, as the province again defeated Australia at Musgrave Park, Cork. Admittedly, this was a much weaker side than that which beat Ireland; still it included Glen and Mark Ella, Peter Grigg, Brendan Moon, and Simon Poidevin. But Munster won easily (15-6), their top scorer being Tony Ward, with two penalty

goals, a drop goal and a conversion. Other Limerick players in that victorious side were Eugene Griffin (Garryowen), Pat Cross (Young Munster), Gerry McLoughlin, Brendan Foley and Colm Tucker, all of Shannon.

Tucker deserves a special mention, even if this was the only time he played against Australia. He was – and still is – an outstanding flanker and was most unfortunate (through a combination of injuries and poor selection) not to have won more than the three Ireland caps he has to his credit. But he showed his worth with the Lions in South Africa in 1980 when his superb form won him a place in the third and fourth Tests.



The great Australian outhalf Mark Ella relaxing with Philip Cox after a game.

Soon afterwards, of course, the controversial, voluble but astonishingly successful Alan Jones took over as Australia's coach. But before his reign – which ended earlier this year (today a rooster, tomorrow a feather duster?) – the Wallabies undertook a short tour in France in 1983, enjoying mixed fortunes. The following year, with 'Jonesy' in full cry, they were back, as Andrew Slack's Eighth Wallabies returned to win the Grand Slam, a feat achieved by one of the best (and in the eyes of many, the very best of all time) touring sides ever seen in this part of the world.

They had already annihilated England (19-3) at Twickenham when they arrived to play Ireland at Lansdowne Road exactly a week later. They were to meet what was then a very much new-look Ireland side, on the selection of which the new coach Mick Doyle (just as outspoken in his own way as Alan Jones) had exerted considerable influence. The team included five new caps, among them flanker Willie Sexton of Garryowen, the only Limerick player in the side.

In the event, Ireland gave the tourists what by their own admission was by far the hardest game of their four Tests. They won 16-9, ten of their points coming from the incomparable Mark Ella at outhalf (first five-eighths), who dropped two goals and also scored a gem of a try. Ella had scored a try against England already, and went on to score tries against Wales (28-9) and Australia (37-8), an unprecedented achievement and a record certain to stand for a very long time.

Writing on Mark Ella in the 1984 Ireland-Australia match programme, Jim Webster of the *Sydney Morning Herald* stated: 'Very seldom in a lifetime does

a player come along with the enormous, breath-taking skills of this man. One of twelve children, of whom two of his brothers (Glen and Gary) have also represented Australia, he is not only a great ambassador for the Aboriginal people, but a great sportsman. The scrumhalf Nick Farr-Jones tells of approaching Ella before this tour began and he asked him how he would like the ball passed to him, e.g. slightly ahead, or maybe a little to the side, or whatever. "Just toss it anywhere and I'll catch it", came the nonchalant reply. Not conceit, just a simple statement of fact', concluded Webster, and nobody who knows Ella, a Rugby Grand Master if ever there was one, will disagree.

On the following Wednesday the Australians lost to Ulster in Belfast, that province's first success against a touring team. The game was won for Ulster with a last-minute penalty goal, after that superb player, David Campese, had been somewhat controversially penalised for throwing the ball into touch. And on the following Saturday, 17th November, the tourists played Munster at Thomond Park, their sec-



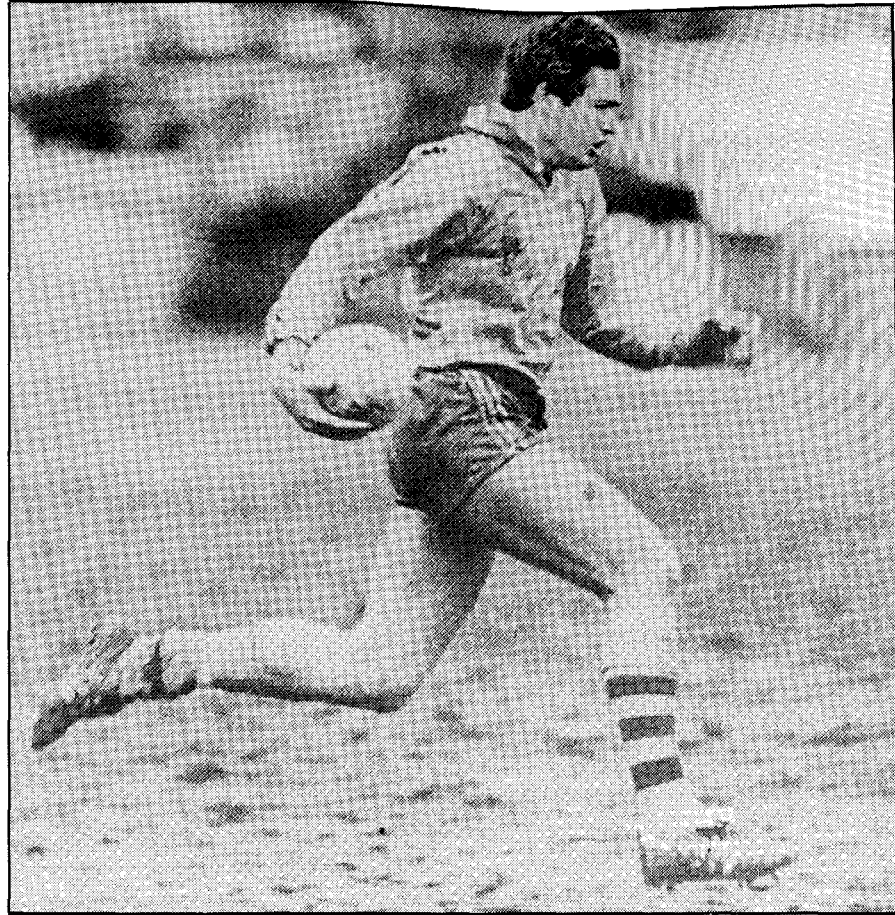
ond and last visit to Limerick. In the side, they had named ten of the team which had beaten Ireland on the previous Saturday. They were Andy Slack (no stranger himself to Irish rugby, with two seasons with Wanderers in Dublin behind him), Roger Gould, Nick Farr-Jones, with the dazzling Mark Ella as his partner, and, in the pack, Enrique Rodriguez, Tom Lawton, Steve Cutler, Simon Poidevin, Steve Tuynman and Steve Williams.

Unhappily, on that last visit to Limerick, the Australians saw little of the city, and even less of that Keeper Hill vista from the stand at Thomond Park. More or less impenetrable fog blanketed everything, making the events on the field of play a matter of conjecture for everybody. One visiting British pressman elected to stay on the Ballynanty side of the pitch to attempt to keep track of what was happening there; later, we all got together and compared notes.

But fog or no fog, there was no doubting the merit of Australia's victory by 31-19. The tourists had tries by Williams, Farr-Jones and Poidevin, while Gould kicked two conversions and five penalty goals. Tony Ward – now an honorary Limerick man, for he had returned to his native Dublin a few years previously – landed a conversion and three penalty goals, while Eddie O'Sullivan and John Barry scored tries. Apart from Ward, the Limerick players in action that foggy day were Willie Sexton and Eddie O'Sullivan (Garryowen), Ted Mulcahy (Bohemians) and Mick Moylett (Shannon).

That was the last time Munster and Australia met at senior level. But on 8th January, 1986, at Thomond Park, Munster Schools lost heavily (0-25) to the Australian Schools, having also lost in the first-ever such match (6-18) at Musgrave Park in Cork on 6th January, 1982. Since that memorable international at Thomond Park in late 1977, Ireland and Australia have met a further four times at schools' level in matches in which several Limerick boys have taken part. Australia have won each time – at Sydney, 1980 (10-7), at Donnybrook, Dublin, 1982 (24-0), at Ravehill, Belfast, 1986 (13-9) and at Sydney again in 1987 (20-11). This last defeat was the only loss suffered by the Irish Schools on their tour of Australia.

And so back to the Sydney Concord Oval on 7th June last and to a World Cup quarter-final in which Ireland were trounced (15-33). Limerick was marginally represented – Brian Spillane, Kerry-born, like Willie Sexton, but playing with Bohemians at the time – came on as a replacement early in the second half. Australia led 24-0 at halftime, Andy McIntyre, Brian Smith and Matt Burke scoring tries, with Mike Lynagh converting all three and kicking a penalty goal as well. Lynagh added



The outstanding Australian player, David Campese, in full flight.

another penalty goal in the second period and converted a second try by Burke. For Ireland, Hugo MacNeill scored a try, as did Michael Kiernan, who converted both and also landed a penalty goal.

'We won the second half!' said Ireland's coach Mick Doyle at the after-match press conference. Doyle was once a Garryowen player and those of us present were glad to note that, seemingly, he had acquired a Limerick sense of humour along the way, which enabled him to smile in the wake of such destruction. But in Limerick, despite the fierce rugby pride and passion, a sense of fun is never far away, and it always helps to keep matters in perspective.

In 1978, Munster won a famous victory at Thomond Park when they resoundingly defeated Graham Mourie's All Blacks, thereby becoming the first – and so far only – Irish team to beat New Zealand. Two years later, as we've seen, Young Munster won the Munster Senior Cup after a gap of forty-two years. To celebrate that win, Michael Crowe, a former senior rugby player and staunch supporter of the club, placed a huge blown-up photograph of an All Blacks team in his sports' shop window. The team was

pictured leaping in the air, just at the end of their famous 'Haka'. Crowe's caption read: 'New Zealanders rejoice at Young Munster's Cup victory'. And it was a victory that will be celebrated and savoured in Shannonside pubs, clubs and canteens for a long, long time.

Undoubtedly that defeat of the All Blacks was Munster's and Limerick's finest rugby hour. It is now part of local lore, just like all those epic tussles with Australia down the years. But the one lingering regret is that, in 1984, that pea-soup fog prevented Limerick rugby supporters (and that's most of the population) from getting a proper chance to watch Andy Slack's Eighth Wallabies in action – for many, the greatest touring side ever seen on this side of the world. But we know the Australians will be back to provide sterling opposition, great games, thrilling tries and many more memorable moments to add to Limerick's rugby history.

*A time will come, a time will come,  
When the people sit with a peaceful  
heart,  
Watching the beautiful, beautiful  
game,  
That is battle and service and sport  
and art.*