

No. 185—TOM O'SULLIVAN of Fedamore

HIGH tributes have been paid Fedamore-born Tom O'Sullivan on the very satisfactory manner of the handling of his first All-Ireland senior hurling final.

It is past history now that this most recent of Blue Riband hurling deciders was one of the greatest ever played, and well over eighty thousand spectators left Croke Park with a memory of unforgettable thrills and sportsmanship that must remain with them for the rest of their days.

After the players—thirty worthy sons of Cork and Wexford—no man played a greater part in making the game what it undoubtedly proved — an unending succession of hurling highlights—than referee Tom O'Sullivan, who mixed a sound knowledge of the rules and their application with a good dose of understandable commonsense.

This enabled him to keep the play under control every second of the hour without recourse to anything even remotely related to

an overuse of the whistle. He gave nine frees to Wexford and eleven to Cork in the whole course of one of the most unrelenting hurling games ever waged and left the rest to the spectators, who enjoyed to the full the almost unbroken spells, which did not fail to rouse even the most unemotional to an unexpected pitch of excitement and enthusiasm.

SOUVENIR FROM CENTRAL COUNCIL

Tom O'Sullivan got a beautiful gold medal from the Central Council, bearing busts of the Association's founders — Croke, Cusack, and Davin, and with a suitable inscription—a souvenir he will certainly treasure, but in addition he must have carried away a memory that will provide many spells of undiluted pleasure in the years that lie ahead, as he recalls the mighty men of Cork and Wexford, who gave hurling maybe its greatest hour that late September day in 1956.

I had a very special interest in Tom's handling of this game as I have followed his career with the whistle fairly closely since that mid-February day in 1949, when I had a part at a City Divisional Board meeting in inducing him referee his first game, after several other names had been turned down by the clubs concerned.

That match was a junior hurling tie between Ballysimon Faughs and Mental Hospital, played on February 27th, 1949, and he made such a success of it that he was selected a week later to "handle" the Dr. Harty Cup semi-final—a real thriller in which St. Flannan's beat Thurles C.B.S., 4-2 to 4-0. Of that game Tom remembers Jimmy Smith and V. Heachy

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starring for the Clare college, with Tony Wall all the time to the fore for the Tipperary lads.

HIGH QUALIFICATIONS

The factors that brought Tom to the fore then and since kept him there include absolute impartiality, complete command, quick thinking, firm action, fine understanding, and a zest for the job that makes him constantly anxious to improve his capacity for such duties.

I heard him once described as "fast, fit, fearless and fair," and that, I think, summed up in a few words many an opinion of him.

That he possesses the ordered mind can be judged from the methodical manner in which he has every detail of the 258 matches he has refereed since that early spring day in 1949 neatly entered in a little notebook, which suggests a wealth of experience and adaptability that is not easily surpassed.

A Fedamore man born and reared, he was amused at the recent suggestion in some papers that he had close Cork affiliations.

HIS ONLY CONNECTION WITH CORK

The only connection he ever had with Cork, he told me, was when, after joining the Army at the commencement of the Emergency, he did a two-months training course in the Rebel City.

From Limerick he later served in County Kerry, Shannon Airport and Clonmel, playing some of his first games with Traderee in the Clare junior hurling championship, later figuring with St. Mary's of Clonmel in South Tipperary championship ties.

He has little in the line of honours won on the hurling field, the clubs he assisted were mainly struggling ones, but he has an All-Army medal won as a reserve

with the Southern Command hurling team in 1947.

In Limerick since 1943, Tom was originally a driver with the Engineers, but in 1945 he spent six months in Dublin training for police work and since then has been attached to the Military Police section, in which he now holds the rank of Sergeant.

WORK FOR THE GAMES IN THE ARMY

Retiring from active playing service towards the end of 1947, he became Secretary of the 12th Battalion Club the following season, Chairman at the period was the late Lieut.-Col. J. P. Murphy, the well-known Cavan All-Ireland footballer—an ardent Gael, who insisted that the national games got their proper place in the National Army. Prominent members of the team at the period included Joe Keohane, Simon Deignan, Captain Clancy and Comdt. Jimmy O'Reilly. Tom was also appointed representative of the club on both the City and County Boards.

Although much of his time now is taken up with the whistle, Tom still maintains a deep interest in the development of the games in the Army, and retains his official connection with the 12th Battalion Club.

In constant demand for club ties, in Limerick and adjoining counties, he also regularly officiated at College games, whilst he has handled minor and junior All-Ireland ties, National League and Oireachtas games, and quite a number of important Munster championship matches.

He has confined his activities almost exclusively to hurling, and his little red book only contains one reference to football—a divisional minor final, in which he gave every satisfaction.

SECRET OF HIS SUCCESS AS A REFEREE

Pressed for the secret of his success with the whistle, he told me: "Once I go on the field I'm the boss. I never take dictation from players or side-line officials—too many of whom have the habit of complaining if they think they can get away with it."

Tom likes to have his own umpires; he has the same set of officials for almost every match, and he would be very slow to do a game in which officials were picked from the opposing teams—as occasionally happens.

He has nothing but praise for the new non-stop rule, but would like some arrangement whereby subs. coming on would be required to hand the referee a slip of paper giving their name, also the name of the player they are replacing. It is very difficult, he says, for the referee to take such particulars and still keep an eye on the play.

DISCIPLINE MUST BE ENFORCED

He never likes to have to put a player to the side-line but maintains that sometimes the referee is left with no other option. Discipline must be enforced and if a player offends a second time after being warned, or indulges in dangerous play, he can blame nobody only himself if he fails to finish the match.

Tom was fully conscious of the great honour conferred on him in being invited to handle the most important game of the hurling year. I met him just as he had finished a hard bout of training. "I always keep fully fit," he said. "It's hard to reckon what ground the active referee covers in the course of an hour but I'm sure it amounts to at least twice as much as any of the players. To control a game properly you must be up with the play at all times—that's the secret of good refereeing."