

Tony Reddin (1919-2015)

by Seamus J. King

Only one gift was presented at the funeral mass for Tony Reddin in St. Rynagh's Church, Banagher on March 4 and that was the hurley stick he used when winning the 1949, 1950 and 1951 All-Irelands. It was a fitting and complete presentation as it was offering to his Maker the symbol of the gift which Tony had received at birth and which he developed, honed and perfected during his hurling career.

It wasn't a particularly impressive looking hurley. Its narrow bás, cracked and hooped and mended following many exciting games contrasted with the ever-increasing, board-wide hurleys used by goalkeepers until the G.A.A. stepped in and limited the width to five inches.

The hurley was an extension of Tony's arm and he relied on his brilliant eyesight, allied to a wonderful agility, honed from hours practising against a rough stone wall, to be in position to stop the fastest moving shots that arrived in his goalmouth.

There were many examples of his great stopping ability but two come immediately to mind. The first was the North senior hurling final between Lorrha and Borrisoleigh in August 1948. Played in a downpour, the Borrisoleigh forwards did all in their power to best Reddin in the second half after trailing 4-3 to 0-3 at halftime. They bombarded the Lorrha goals in an unceasing barrage but Reddin was in defiant mood and saved right, left and centre, even on one occasion with his head. They did get through for goals twice but, had they gone for points they wouldn't have found themselves in arrears by 5-4 to 2-5 at the end.



The second occasion was at Killarney in July 1950 in the replay of the Cork-Tipperary Munster final. Many of the estimated 55,000 spectators encroached on to the field as the game reached its climax. Referee, Bill O'Donoghue of Limerick had to stop the match for ten minutes to clear the field but as soon as it resumed so did the encroachment. Any time the ball came into Reddin he was teased, barracked, even pushed. Not only was he in danger from missiles from around the goals but also from Cork forwards rushing in after a delivery in order to bury him in the net, which was the lot of goalkeepers before health and safety issues changed their plight from being in the eye of the storm to being a protected species. After the game angry Cork supporters sought Reddin out and he had to be rescued by friends and camouflaged in a clerical coat. There couldn't have been a more fitting tribute to the quality of his play.

Tony was a professional in the days hurlers paid much less attention to personal fitness and match preparation than is the case today. At his peak he was 5' 9" and never weighed more than eleven and a half stone. He trained as another might do for centrefield, running cross-country, jumping over hedges and ditches and he built up his arms to make him the strong player he became. He was no mere ball stopper but completed the act by clearing the ball. He was equally good on the right or left side. Probably his greatest ability was a sensitive touch allied with the tilting of the hurley's face at an angle which enabled him to kill even the fastest ball dead so that it rolled down the hurley into his hand.

Tony Reddin was born in Mullagh in 1919 and one of his cherished memories was winning a county under-14 medal in 1933. It was the only county medal he won. He played with Galway and Connaght before coming to work in Lorrha early in 1947.

The summer of 1947 was one of the wettest on record. Not a great time to come working in Lorrha but whatever about the work, Reddin put Lorrha on the hurling map and he made one proud to be from the place. He played a major part in helping the club to two county finals in 1948 and 1956. He also married Lorrha native, Maura Smith.

In the early sixties Reddin moved to Banagher, where he and Maura reared his family of three boys and six girls. He also got involved with St. Rynagh's G.A.A. Club and made it a force in Offaly hurling. The club contested the first All-Ireland Club final in 1970.

The three clubs, so much a part of Tony Reddin's life and to whose success he contributed so handsomely, were well represented at his funeral and formed a guard of honour that escorted him along the final section of the route to his grave in the historic cemetery of Bonachum in the parish of Lorrha. Ar dheis Dé go raibh a ainm.