

MILLENNIUM HURLING TEAM

DONAL O'BRIEN
Kickhams

JIM DEVITT
Cashel K.C.

TONY BRENNAN
Clonoulty /Rossmore

BILLY HAYES
Kickhams

PA FITZELL
Cashel K.C.

PADDY FURLONG
Kickhams

COLM BONNAR
Cashel K.C.

BILL O'DONNELL
Golden/Kilfeacle

JOHN FARRELL
Kickhams

NICKY ENGLISH
Lattin/Cullen

DECLAN RYAN
Clonoulty/Rossmore

DINNY RYAN
Sean Treacys

PAT FOX
Eire Og

CORMAC BONNAR
Cashel K.C.

GER O'NEILL
Cappawhite

Team Selectors: John Moloney (Galtee Rovers); Jimmy Hennessy (Kickhams);
Tom O'Donnell (Golden/Kilfeacle); Danny Morrissey (Kickhams) Jim Stapleton (Solohead).



Millennium Hurling Team

(Front l.-r.): Declan Ryan, Dinny Ryan, Con Hogan (Co. Chairman), Micheal Ó Muirchcheartaigh, James O'Donnell (West Chairman), Mrs. Vera O'Donnell (representing the late Bill O'Donnell), Mrs. Claire Furlong (representing the late Paddy Furlong), Mrs. Anne Mulcahy (representing the late Jim Devitt).
(Back l.-r.): Cormac Bonnar, Colm Bonnar, Pat Fox, Billy Hayes, James Brennan (representing the late Tony Brennan), John Farrell, Donal O'Brien, Ger O'Neill, Nicky English, Pa Fitzelle.

MILLENNIUM HURLING TEAM

DONAL O'BRIEN
Kickhams

JIM DEVITT
Cashel K.C.

TONY BRENNAN
Clonoulty/Rossmore

BILLY HAYES
Kickhams

PA FITZELL
Cashel K.C.

PADDY FURLONG
Kickhams

COLM BONNAR
Cashel K.C.

BILL O'DONNELL
Golden/Kilfeacle

JOHN FARRELL
Kickhams

NICKY ENGLISH
Lattin/Cullen

DECLAN RYAN
Clonoulty/Rossmore

DINNY RYAN
Sean Treacys

PAT FOX
Eire Og

CORMAC BONNAR
Cashel K.C.

GER O'NEILL
Cappawhite

Team Selectors: John Moloney (Galtee Rovers); Jimmy Hennessy (Kickhams); Tom O'Donnell (Golden/Kilfeacle); Danny Morrissey (Kickhams) Jim Stapleton (Solohead).



Millennium Hurling Team

(Front l.-r.): - Declan Ryan, Dinny Ryan, Con Hogan (Co. Chairman), Micheal Ó Muirchcheartaigh, James O'Donnell (West Chairman), Mrs. Vera O'Donnell (representing the late Bill O'Donnell), Mrs. Claire Furlong (representing the late Paddy Furlong), Mrs. Anne Mulcahy (representing the late Jim Devitt).
(Back l.-r.): - Cormac Bonnar, Colm Bonnar, Pat Fox, Billy Hayes, James Brennan (representing the late Tony Brennan), John Farrell, Donal O'Brien, Ger O'Neill, Nicky English, Pa Fitzelle.

WEST TIPPERARY MILLENNIUM TEAMS 1930 - 2000

by Seamus J. King

Hurling

Goalkeeper: Donal O'Brien, Kickhams

Donal O'Brien is referred to as the man with the perfect record. Played two, won two and then emigrated. There's a bit more to his story than that. He won his first All-Ireland as a minor in 1957. He was young enough the year after but was dropped in favour of Terry Moloney. He was sub-goalie but came on in one game as a forward.

Donal got his own back in 1961 when he displaced Moloney, who had suffered a knee injury, as senior goalkeeper. He had come to the selectors notice during 1960 with some fine displays for Kickhams. In that year he was understudy to Moloney as senior goalkeeper and won a Munster medal. He was to win further Munster medals in 1961 and 1962, as well as All-Ireland medals. He also won a National League medal in 1961.

He gave sterling service to the county during these two years. At the end of 1961 Culbaire had this to say about his year: 'O'Brien's part in this title win has been no small one and he should fill his responsible berth for the foreseeable future.' In the Munster final of that year, as one commentator described it, he erected a 'closed door' sign for the hour and made a few superb saves from Ring to keep a clean slate. He was equally impressive against Wexford in the 1962 final.

And so, after a mere six championship games, Donal O'Brien had two All-Ireland medals. Soon after his second All-Ireland the twenty-three year old emigrated to England and later to the U.S., a major loss to Tipperary hurling.

Right cornerback: Jim Devitt, Cashel King Cormacs

Jim Devitt's anticipation on the field of play was one of the most striking aspects of his remarkable hurling ability. Another quality many people admired was his fluent stickmanship. He could pull on a ball on either side and never miss. He perfected this skill in a ball-alley and he achieved such a level of perfection that he was always dead sure of connecting.

Jim was a small man. At the height of his hurling career he scaled 9-8 to 9-10. One day the car taking him to Galway stopped in Killinan to pick up John Maher. Mrs. Maher invited them in for tea and when she was introduced to Jim she exclaimed: 'Oh God! You're not going to play this child!' But his size never worried Jim because his speed, anticipation and hurling skills proved adequate compensations.

Born in 1921 he came to public notice in 1943 when he was spotted with Cashel against Eire Og, the eventual county champions. In the same year he won the All-Army final with the 7th Brigade of the Southern Command. He came on the county team for the Four County League in 1944 and was picked for the championship the following May. Within ten months he had won an All-Ireland and a Railway Cup. He was to win two more Railway Cup medals in 1948 and 1949, and a second All-Ireland in the latter year. He won two west medals in 1945 and 1948. Ill health brought a premature end to a fine hurling career.

Writing about the 1945 All-Ireland in the 1972 edition of *The Clash of the Ash*, the late Raymond Smith had this to say:

'I have always thought that if Devitt had come in a later era he would have been more widely acclaimed for his defensive qualities. But he was a delight to watch and if you looked for class in the corner or at wing back he had it certainly.'

Full-back: Tony Brennan, Clonoulty-Rossmore

'The team that can boast of a good fullback can afford to be weak in several other positions on the field. He is the keystone of the defence and on him rests the onus of protecting his goalie from encroaching forwards. He has the whole field before him and if he is a shrewd general he can do quite a lot to knit his defence into a workman-like unit. Tipperary has always been fortunate in the matter of good fullbacks. The present occupant of that most onerous of positions, Tony Brennan, is in the best traditions of Tipperary last line defenders.' A contemporary quote.

Tall and commanding strong and fearless, with sure hands and hurling brains to burn, this lithe, sinewy skipper filled the position with credit to himself, his parish and his county.

An outstanding athlete, he won All-Ireland minor medals in 1933 and 1934. He spent eight years in the army, during which time he played with Galway. Returning to Tipperary in 1945, he played centre forward and then full forward in the All-Ireland victory. He continued at full forward in 1946 and 1947 but reverted to fullback, the position he had played in as a minor, in 1949. He won three further All-Irelands in that position, giving sterling service in these victories.

For his outstanding displays in the position, Archbishop Kinane referred to him as 'Iron Curtain' Brennan, and very apt description of a player, regarded as one of the greatest fullbacks who ever played for the county.

Left corner-back: Billy Hayes, Kickhams

Billy's first glory was winning a west minor medal in 1951 and he followed this up with Munster and All-Ireland minor titles the following year. In the same year he captained Roscrea to a Leinster Colleges junior medal and was picked for Leinster in the colleges interprovincial series. He was young enough for minor in 1953 but illness interfered and prevented him from playing.

He graduated to senior ranks in 1954 and between then and 1960 won six west senior titles, missing out in 1957 when the combo team, St. Nicholas, in the west semi-final, ambushed Kickhams. He continued to play until 1962. In 1957 he was called up to the county, playing the league and winning a league medal. There was the added bonus of a trip to New York. However, he did not make the championship side in 1958.

Centre-back was his favourite position and virtually all his games were played there, where he cut a commanding figure.

Right halfback: Pa Fitzell, Cashel King Cormacs

Pa began to show his hurling skills in the early seventies. He was equally good at football and was on the Cashel county minor double team of 1974. He was captain of the hurling team that won again in 1975. The following year he played on the under-21 team, which was beaten, in a county final replay by Kilruane. He graduated to senior ranks in 1975 and was to play for nineteen seasons until his retirement in 1993. Six west titles were won and one county.

He played county minor for three years without success and was also three years on the county under-21 side. The lone success in the latter grade was in 1978 when he captained the team to a great victory over Cork in the Munster final but lost to Galway in a replayed All-Ireland. He was brought on the county senior panel in 1976 and remained on it until 1988. He was unfortunate to have departed before the All-Ireland was won. As it was he won two leagues, one Munster final and one Railway Cup. During his long service to club and county he maintained a high level of fitness. Virtually all his play was in the halfback line, either at centre or on the wing. He did start in the corner on one occasion and also played at centre field.

Centre-back: Paddy Furlong, Kickhams

A native of Ballintemple, near Dundrum and born in 1922, Paddy Furlong was a relatively latecomer to hurling prominence. He came to the notice of the county selectors in the county semi-final of 1947 when Borrisileigh defeated Kickhams. Even in defeat Paddy stood out and the 'Tipperary Star' in its report described him as 'probably the most impressive man of the thirty.' He was called up to the county colours for the league and slotted into the centre back position. He retained the position for the league and was there for the first round of the 1948 championship. Unfortunately it was an unhappy day for Tipperary. He continued to play in the following league, having a memorable game against Jack Lynch in one of the matches. According to Wintergreen 'he gave the Cork star neither space nor ease for one split second and this famous Cork forward will surely have cause to remember Knockavilla.'

Paddy was on for the 1949 championship right up to the All-Ireland final. An ankle injury before the day forced him to cry off the team. He played in the county final later in the year, when Kickhams lost out to Borrisileigh in their only senior county final appearance. But the injury hastened a premature retirement. He was holding his own with the best in the county at the time of his injury and there is no reason to believe he wouldn't have featured in the famous three-in-a-row All-Irelands.

As it was he won one All-Ireland and one national League medal. Colleagues of his speak of a strong, firm and determined hurler, who would never shirk the challenge.

Left halfback: Colm Bonnar, Cashel King Cormacs

Colm Bonnar's hurling record includes All-Ireland honours in four grades, senior, junior, under-21 and minor. When one adds National League medals, Railway Cup medals, an Oireachtas medal, a Fitzgibbon Cup and two All-Ireland Colleges B medals the record is even more impressive. On top of that he won an All-Star in 1988, partnering Goerge O'Connor at midfield. He played senior hurling for the county for twelve seasons.

As well as giving dedicated service to the county he was for years the backbone of the Cashel King Cormac's team. He made his debut with the senior team in 1981 and, including a stint with Dunhill, continued playing until 2000. During that period he won six Crosco Cups and five west championships. The highlight of his club career was winning the county final in 1991, after losing one to Holycross the previous year. Colm has an impressive list of honours to his credit but even more impressive is the complete commitment he has given to club and county over a quarter of a century. This made him the most valuable member of any team. He never gave less than his

all and his superb physical fitness ensured that most always he gave more than most. His solo runs and tackling were phenomenal. He was a player so full of courage that he never stood back from anything. On the other hand he was always a fair player and never had his name taken by a referee. His sense of position on the field of play was superb and his anticipation was uncanny.

Centre field: Bill O'Donnell, Golden Kilfeacle

Bill O'Donnell's playing career with Tipperary spanned the years 1934-1944. His reward of one All-Ireland in 1937 was rather meagre for so many years of service but it was a lean time for hurling in the county. It was the time of two debacles, the Cooney affair in 1938 and the Foot and Mouth disaster of 1941. IN the Munster final of that year, played in October after the All-Ireland was won by Cork, Bill had one of his finest displays. His play inspired his teammates and was a big factor in the victory. He marked Jack Lynch on that occasion and the latter had this to say of his performance: 'I'll never forget the 1941 match in Limerick as the late Bill O'Donnell ran rings about me.

A native of Golden his teaching profession took him to Anacarty in 1933. He played with Eire Og in their historic county final victory of 1943. He played an important role in that victory, according to the Tipperary Star: 'Four points up with eight minutes to go, Moycarkey looked all set to take another county title, but then like a flash, Bill O'Donnell secured possession in a sharp Eire Og attack and from twenty yards sent in a bullet-like shot that gave Jim Keeffe no chance. This was the turning point of a game that had abounded in thrills.'

He was a versatile hurler and his four Railway Cup medals indicate this quality quite astonishingly: in 1938 he played right corner-forward for Munster; two years later, in 1940, he had transferred the length of the field to left corner-back; in 1942 he captained Munster to success from full-forward; and finally, in 1943, he partnered Jack Lynch at midfield. He was many other things also, a referee, the 1941 All-Ireland, a writer, Divot in the Nationalist, a golfer, above all a gentleman and the best of company.

Centrefield: John Farrell, Kickhams

It's unlikely his record will ever be matched! John Farrell's record includes five west minor medals and twelve west senior medals. His career with Kickhams senior team spans twenty-five seasons, from 1946 to 1960. He won the first of his twelve senior medals in 1946 and the last in 1960. He was the only player to win all twelve during this golden age of Kickhams hurling.

When he started in 1946 he had still two years to run as a minor. In the following year his talent was recognised at county level when he played centre field for the team that won Munster and All-Ireland honours. He had as company on that team giants of the ash like John Doyle and Paddy Kenny.

While a minor he spent two years as a goalkeeper before moving out to his favourite position at centre field. It was mostly in the latter position he played at senior level and for years he gave sterling service to his club in that position. On a few occasions he played wing-forward and fill-forward.

He was a fast-striking player, moving the ball into the forward line in the shortest possible time. He was equally adept at striking it on the ground or in the air and had

perfected the art of doubling or pulling on the ball at an early stage. His dedication and commitment to his club was second to none and his selection on this team came as no surprise to anyone who watched him play.

Right half-forward: Nicky English, Lattin-Cullen

Nicky English is a class apart and is best illustrated by his selection on the Tipperary hurling team of the Millennium, the only modern player to win such recognition. However, it took a while for his genius to be recognised. Dropped from the county minor panel in 1979, he got his first taste of hurling glory in the All-Ireland minor victory of the following year. He followed up with an under-21 medal in 1981. His promotion to the senior side was rapid. He made his debut in the fall of 1981 when Tipperary defeated Offaly in a tournament game at Coventry. He continued to play until 1996.

The first half of the eighties was a lean period for the county and the breakthrough didn't come until 1987, having been preceded by a dismal defeat the previous year at Ennis, a game Nicky missed because of a punctured lung. In fact throughout his career he struggled against injuries. There was some consolation for the wilderness years when he won five Fitzgibbon Cup medals between 1981-1985. Eventually he was to win two senior All-Irelands, five Munster medals and two National Leagues. Probably the best register of his ability was his winning of the Texaco Hurler of the Year in 1989, and his six All-Star awards.

Any tribute to Nicky must include mention of his loyalty to his club. He was invited to play with other clubs but he stuck by his own and helped Lattin-Cullen to three county titles, two hurling and one football. For him his roots were important. Winning with his own was for him the highest thing he could achieve.

It's difficult to define his hurling genius. There's an elusive quality about it. His skill level was unique. He showed all the signs of endless practice with the hurley and sliotar from an early age. The hurley was an extension of his arm. He could strike with equal facility from right or left. He had marvellous feet, which allowed him to weave through the opposition side stepping and slipping a tackle. He was a good striker in the soccer sense of the word, very good to take a scoring opportunity. He was a versatile player, playing as a back for much of his earlier career, and latterly as a forward. He could be effective anywhere on the field.

Centre-forward: Declan Ryan, Clonoulty-Rossmore

Declan made the senior side in the fall of 1987 in the company of Michael Cleary and John Leahy. His first match was against Cork in Pairc Ui Chaoimh. His trophy collection parallels Tipperary since 1988, a league medal that year, Munster senior medals in '88, '89, '91, '93, further leagues in 1994, 1999 and 2001, as well as Oireachtas, South-East League and Railway Cup. The All-Star statuettes of 1988 and 1997 are prized possessions too as is the Cidona Award in the latter year. Special too is the under-21 All-Ireland in 1989, where he was captain. On the club scene too there are the two county finals of 1989 and 1997.

One close observer has this to say about him: 'A thoughtful centre-forward, always measuring and reading things, always seems to have a lot of time on the ball, a great man to play others into the game, as essential to the likes of Fox and English as they were to him, outstanding skill level, central to Tipperary for the past ten years.'

Babs, who found it difficult to communicate with Declan, had some very positive things to say about him: 'A fit Declan was the difference between winning and losing. We would not have won an All-Ireland without him. When we were in bits in midfield or at full forward, Declan rescued us. In the All-Ireland semi-final in 1991 we were gone, Declan came to the rescue and held us together. . . . His skill was incredible, his touch on the ball superb, his strength was sometimes awesome.'

The case rests.

Left half-forward: Dinny Ryan, Sean Treacy's

Pivot, writing in 'The Nationalist' after the 1971 All-Ireland, had this to say of Dinny Ryan: 'Little Dinny was a bundle of energy all through and gave Willie Murphy quite a time of it. The smile on his face when Ollie's hesitancy left him with an easy task to score our fifth goal had to be seen to be believed.' It was his finest moment.

It was the high point of Dinny's career. He played on with the county for the next two years but the famine was setting in and barring an Oireachtas medal, there was little further glory in the blue and gold of Tipperary.

Dinny's hurling rise paralleled the rise of Sean Treacy's, which came into existence in the sixties, uniting the regions of Hollyford, Kilcomon and Rearcross. 'Little Dinny' as he became affectionately known, may have been small in stature but he was big in heart. Combining a high degree of skill with a bold and daring approach to the game, he quickly became a key personality in Sean Treacy teams that brought a new passion to the sport.

While the blue and gold of Tipperary declined during the seventies, the blue and gold of Sean Treacy's hit a rich vein. The club dominated West Tipperary hurling in that period and Dinny was a leading personality during their golden years. Sean Treacys have won seven West Tipperary championships since the club was formed and Dinny was part of them all, being one of the few players to see the Sean Treacy era through from the sixties to the eighties.

Right corner-forward: Pat Fox, Eire Og

What strikes one most about the hurling career of Pat Fox is the versatility of the player. From corner back to midfield, from centre forward to corner-forward, he found a home in many positions on various county sides. Two years as a minor bore no fruit but he made up for the barrenness of these years with great riches at the under-21 level, three All-Irelands. A fourth might have been harvested in 1982 but for a shock defeat by Limerick in the first round.

He soon made it to senior ranks and his senior career spanned an impressive seventeen seasons, 1980 to 1996. During this period he won five Munster championships, two All-Irelands and two National Leagues. In the west he won two senior titles, in 1981 and 1986, as well as West and county intermediate medals in 1994. He has also got three All-Stars to his credit, 1987, 1989, and 1991. The latter year was probably his finest, when he reached the pinnacle of his awesome power, and was recognised with a Texaco Award. In the same year he won the Ballygowan Sportstar of the Year and the Tipperary Person of the Year award.

Pat was a tremendous ball player and had tremendous courage, which belied his size. Because of his size he had to be tremendously fit and this fit gave him the kind of

acceleration a corner-forward requires. His game depended so much on aggression and strength that he had to be at peak fitness to play his part fully. He was good under pressure as was seen in the Munster final at Thurles in 1987, when he pointed two late frees to win a reprieve. Going high to catch the ball and soloing at speed towards goal were other aspects of his exciting skill.

Fill-forward: Cormac Bonnar, Cashel King Cormacs

Cormac Bonnar's talent was first recognised in the mid seventies, when he won five west and three county minor medals with Cashel in hurling and football. He continued playing both codes at university level, being part of the Fitzgibbon and Sigerson sides at U.C.D., winning two hurling medals. He won medals in hurling and football at under-21 level as well.

He made his debut with the Cashel seniors in 1976 and between then and 1993, when he retired he won six west medals. The highlight of these years was the county title in 1991. He was drafted into the county panel in 1988 after making the decision to retire from hurling. The rest is history. Three Munster and two All-Ireland titles were won as well as two All-Stars. The full-forward line he filled with English and Fox was the most impressive in the modern game.

Nicknamed the 'gentle giant' and the 'Viking' there couldn't be such contrasting opinions of the same player. Cormac had a long and successful hurling history. During that period his level of fitness and his general athleticism were outstanding. His commitment to the team was always one hundred percent. His versatility on the field of play is reflected in the wide variety of positions he played in. During his greatest period, the five years he played at full forward on the county senior team, he was a key man in the team's success. He was a target man for the rest of the forward line. He showed the need for big men in any forward line to make space for those less well endowed and to distribute the ball. Cormac did these things excellently well and other forwards lived and flourished off him. He was above all a great team player.

Left corner-forward: Ger O'Neill, Cappawhite.

Ger O'Neill gave outstanding service to club and county over three decades. A dual player his ability was recognised in 1980 when he played wing-back on the county minor football team and won Munster and All-Ireland honours with the minor hurlers. Although injured going into the final against Wexford he contributed handsomely to the victory. The following year he was again successful, playing on the under-21 side, which won the title against Kilkenny. He contributed five points from play to that victory. A second All-Ireland was missed when Tipperary were beaten in the 1983 final.

Ger was part of the successful Cappawhite side that won their first west in 1983 after a lapse of 21 years. Two more titles were won in 1984 and 1985, and the highlight of this great period in Cappawhite hurling was victory in the county final of 1987. Ger, at full forward, was one of their chief scorers in the latter victory. In 1985 Ger made his county senior championship debut and for a number of years featured prominently in the selectors plans.

He continued with his club until 1998. His commitment and dedication to club and county has always been first class. His contribution on the field of play has always been significant and there's many the back that found more than a handful in this aggressive and skilful player from Cappawhite.