

Memories & Reflections

- TWENTY-FIVE YEARS LATER

by Seamus J. King

Twenty-five years on from what was probably the club's greatest year, Cashel King Cormac's are remembering the glorious year of 1991 when the senior hurlers climbed to the summit in winning the county senior hurling championship for the first time. They went on to take the Munster title and narrowly missed out on All-Ireland honours.

They were accompanied to county honours by the junior and under-21 teams, an achievement unmatched up to then by any club in the county. In fact, earlier in the year on January 13 to be exact, Cashel won another county final, albeit for 1990, when they defeated Commercials in the under-21 football championship final at Kilsheelan. Three players, Seanie Barron, Seanie O'Donoghue and Joe O'Leary, were members of all four panels giving them a unique personal distinction.

The senior success was the most celebrated because it was a first for the club. The King Cormac's reached the final the previous year only to lose out to Holycross-Ballycahill on a miserably wet day. Three earlier final appearances, in 1937, 1939 and 1940, also ended in defeat.

A Long Wait

So, when victory eventually came at the final hurdle in 1991 it was long-awaited, greatly savoured and much celebrated. In fact my memory is of outstanding occasions in O'Reilly's Pub, later O'Sullivan's, Chief's, Champion's, Penny Lane and currently McCarthy's. It was a wonderful pub for celebration, having three entrances to facilitate access on crowded occasions!

It was also a time of unprecedented support for the club with great crowds attending the games, plenty of financial sponsorship – Garveys Supervalu was proudly displayed on the jerseys - and support. The level of that support was reflected in the turnout for the club social after the 1991 victory when 330 sat down to dinner at Dundrum House Hotel. I remember the extensive display of silverware that night, all shining brightly following hours of work by Tricia Fitzell. Another memory from these years was the excitement of club president, Willie Ryan (T) as victory followed victory. He walked on air!

There were signs in 1988 that the hurling prospects of the club were improving. Although beaten ultimately by Borrisileigh in the county semi-final, Cashel's performance in the final quarter of that game, which produced goals from



Cashel King Cormac's club president, Willie Ryan (T), (the man with the cap), watching proceedings during the presentation of the cup at Cappawhite.

Peter Fitzell and Sean Slattery, gave the supporters hope that there was a future for the team and made the public look up at a new hurling force.

Another development that year was the success of the minors in winning the county championship. This was followed up in 1989 with a further success in that grade and, while the seniors stumbled and fell badly against Cappawhite in the West championship, there were a number of recruits from the minor sides, like Ailbe Bonnar, T.J. Connolly, Raymie Ryan, Timmy Moloney and Seanie O'Donoghue, who were bursting to get into the senior ranks.



M. Quinn (Referee) about to throw in the ball before the Munster Club final at Mitchelstown, December 1991. Cashel King Cormac's captain, Colm Bonnar, and Middleton captain, Ger Fitzgerald.

Outside Help

The following year, 1990, was a crucial one. There was the promise shown in 1988 and the influx of young talent from the minor champions. Something extra was required to drive the team to a higher level. This came with the appointment of Justin McCarthy as coach.

Justin brought to the team a number of very important things. Probably the first was an immense experience from years of managing not only club but county teams as well and the respect that this generated in the players. Then there was his total dedication to the cause of Cashel King Cormac's. The club became the only one that mattered to him and he thought about it and planned for it not only when he was in Leahy Park but when travelling to or away after a training session. There was also his totally professional approach, one aspect of which was his emphasis on how every hurley had to be an individual piece of equipment for each player and he spent many hours shaping and repairing hurleys to meet individual requirements. There were also his man-management skills which facilitated good individual rapport with each player. In fact the team became a family and Justin's family became part of that family.



The victorious Cashel King Cormac's panel of 1991

Back row, left to right: Seanie O'Donoghue, James O'Donoghue (RIP), Ramie Ryan, John Ryan, Pat O'Donoghue, John Grogan, Seanie Morrissey, Seanie Barron, Don Higgins, Joe Minogue; Middle row, left to right: Pa Fitzell, Willie Fitzell, Sean Slattery, Tommy Grogan, Ailbe Bonnar, Colm Bonnar (capt.), Cormac Bonnar, Conal Bonnar, Timmy Moloney; Front row, left to right: Joe O'Leary, Ger Slattery, Michael Perdue, Declan McGrath, Liam Devitt, T.J. Connolly, Tony Slattery, Peter Fitzell.

The result was that he developed the players not only into a better bunch of hurlers but into a better team as well. He raised the bar of their performances and the result was qualification for the 1990 county final.

Other Contributors

It would be an omission not to mention two other people who played a important part in the preparation of the team, Dinny Keating and Paddy Greaney. Dinny looked after Leahy Park and had it perfectly prepared for every training session, even to the extent of having tea in the dressing-rooms – the milk supplied by Tommy Moloney – after training sessions! He may be an unsung hero but anyone who remembers his many years of contribution to the park, will agree that any praise of him is well-deserved. Paddy's contribution was in another area. As well as being the club's greatest promotor of the County Draw with over one hundred subscribers, Paddy was the person who gave the team their supper in the splendid surroundings of the panelled Vincent O'Brien room in the Cashel Palace Hotel, a place not normally associated with hurling. This was an innovation inspired by Justin following the last training session before matches. The food was always top class and the place conducive to the pep talks given by the selectors, Brendan Bonnar, John Darmody and Aengus Ryan, as well as contributions from the players.

The rising graph of success was temporarily halted with defeat in the 1990 county final. This was a finely balanced game throughout. Holycross led by 0-6 to 0-4 at the interval on a day when the weather made good hurling difficult. In fact Tommy Grogan had the ball in the net eight minutes before half-time, only for the referee to call back the play for a foul on Jamesie O'Donoghue. With eight



Cashel King Cormac's first aid man, Pearse Bonnar, dispensing aid to son, Conal, with Justin McCarthy looking on.



Cashel King Cormac's, West senior hurling champions 1993

Back row, left to right: T.J. Connolly, Joe O'Leary, Donal Ryan, Pat O'Donoghue, John Ryan, Seanie O'Donoghue, Joe Minogue; Front row, left to right: Michael Butler, Ramie Ryan, Ailbe Bonnar, Colm Bonnar, Conal Bonnar, Cormac Bonnar, Willie Fitzell (capt.), Michael Perdue.

An Historic Document

John Ryan
Tony Slattery Pat O'Donoghue M. Perdue
Ray Ryan Pa Fitzelle Conall Boman
Colin B. W^{ms} Fitzelle
~~James O'D~~ T.G. Connolly John Grogan
T.Grogan Conmac B. Albe B
~~Jim Wogatz~~
D. W. Grath T. Moloney
~~S. Slattery~~ S. Barron B. Slattery
S. O'Donoghue Joe O'Leary Peter P
~~S. Slattery~~ Ger S. Saffery
D. Devitt D. Duggan
**Making cows eat
and calves suck**

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At the last meeting before the 1991 county final, the selectors and Justin McCarthy went into conclave in the Cashel Palace Hotel to pick the team. This piece of paper, supplied by Aengus Ryan from his job as office manager in O'Connors Vets, was used for writing out the team, and the handwriting was by Aengus.

minutes to play the sides were level but it was Holycross's, Tony Lanigan, who got the winning scores, three unanswered points in the final minutes.

Holycross had lost to Clonoulty-Rossmore in 1989 and the mantra was that a team had to lose one to win one. Would Cashel's time come in 1991?

A Team of Brothers

One of the contributory factors to the strength of the Cashel team in 1991 was its brotherly composition. Over half the panel, fifteen out of twenty-seven, was made up of bands of brothers. The Bonnars contributed Cormac, Colm, who was also captain, Conal and Ailbe. In mentioning them one has to include Pearse, the father of them all, who was the first aid man to the team and who was a familiar figure rushing in from the sideline – belying his years - with his case of aids for the injured. And, there was also Brendan, one of the three selectors, making it an overwhelming family affair, which was manifested in the sign erected on the Cahir entrance to the town: 'Welcome to Bonnar City!'. The other bands of brothers were the Fitzells, Pa, Peter and Willie, the Grogans, John and Tommy, the O'Donoghues, Pat, Jamesie (RIP) and Seanie, and the Slatterys, Tony, Ger and Sean. Needless to add the remaining twelve members of the panel, who included cousins T. J. Connolly and Raymie Ryan, also contributed significantly to the team's success.



Paddy Greaney, Tommy Grogan and Dinny Keating

Used to Success

Any reflection on this team has to question why it took so long to achieve success. Some of the panel had achieved county success as long ago as 1969, when Cashel under-13s won the county final in football and were beaten by Ballina in the hurling final with virtually the same panel of players. The



Cashel King Cormac supporters after county quarter-finals at Golden in 1991

Left to right: T.J. Connolly, Jim O'Leary, Brendan Bonnar, Denis Fitzgerald.

team included John and Tommy Grogan, Tony Slattery, Joe Minogue, Don Higgins, Brendan and Cormac Bonnar, Pa Fitzell. Guided by the coaching and management of Brother Noonan the club enjoyed further unprecedented success during the early seventies, culminating in successive county minor successes in 1974 and 1975. Progress stalled after that with West senior titles in 1975, 1976 and 1980 and, as mentioned above, in 1988, but no progression to county titles that the successes between 1969 and 1975 might have anticipated.

The victory over Holycross by 2-8 to 1-5 in 1991 final was belated then as the expectation created by the victories in 1969 and the years following was only then realised. However, these thoughts were far from the mind of Colm Bonnar, when he became the first Cashel player to receive the Dan Breen Cup from county chairman, Michael Maguire. Neither did they dim the excitement of Raymie Ryan, as he received the man-of-the-match award, his third time to be so honoured on county final day, having twice accepted similar honours following the minor deciders in 1988 and 1989.

Whenever players and supporters look back to the early nineties they remember a time when it was great to be alive, when the King Cormac's reached the summit and when it was such pleasure to follow them.



The management team in 1991

Back row, left to right: selectors, Jack Darmody, Aengus Ryan and Brendan Bonnar; front row, left to right: club chairman, Seamus J. King and coach, Justin McCarthy.



At the launch of Justin McCarthy's book 'Hooked, at Rochestown Park Hotel, Cork on April 22, 2002

Back row, left to right: Seamus J. King, John Grogan, John Ryan, Tommy Grogan, Raymie Ryan, Cormac Bonnar; Front row, left to right: Michael Perdue, Jack Darmody, Mattie Finnerty, Ger Slattery.