

North Tipp beat South Galway Twice in 1886



By Seamus J. King

One of Michael Cusack's efforts to promote the game of hurling soon after the foundation of the G.A.A. was an exhibition match in the Phoenix Park, Dublin on February 16, 1886.

Initially, it appears he intended to have the game played between a team of Dublin hurlers and a team from North Tipperary.

He wrote a letter to his good friend, Frank Moloney of Nenagh, in October 1885 proposing such a game. Later he changed his mind following his trip home to Carron, Co. Clare for the Christmas holidays. While there he met another friend, Dan Burke of Gort, and proposed to him that he pick a team from South Galway to oppose the men from North Tipperary.

The teams travelled to Dublin the day before. The North Tipperary contingent took the mid-day mail train from Nenagh, on single fares for the return journey, courtesy of the Great Southern and Western Railway. On arrival at Kingsbridge Station, they made their way to Broadstone Station to greet the South Galway team which was travelling from Gort. Cusack was also present, and the teams were conveyed to the Clarence Hotel.

The North Tipperary team had a number of practice matches in the lead-up to the game before the twenty-one were picked. These included James Hanly, Pat O'Meara, John Walsh (Nenagh), Dan Gleeson (capt.), Martin Gleeson, Pat McGrath, Martin Gleeson, Charles McSorley, Silvermines, Matt Costelloe, Pat Gleeson, Matt Hayes, Knigh, Patrick O'Meara, Pat O'Meara, Lorrha, John Ryan, Pat Guinnane, Pat Buckley, Youghalarra, Mike Grace, Pat Reidy, Pat O'Brien, Carrigtoher, John Kennedy, James Clarke, Ardcroney, James Brooder, Kilbarron.

Dan Burke, together with the Gort captain, Ned Treston, were chiefly responsible for picking the South Galway team. They decided to ask the Ardrahan team to join with Gort in picking the team because they had beaten Gort in a game in 1885. When Ardrahan demanded that they have a greater representation than Gort, Dan Burke would not agree and decided to omit Ardrahan hurlers from the team.

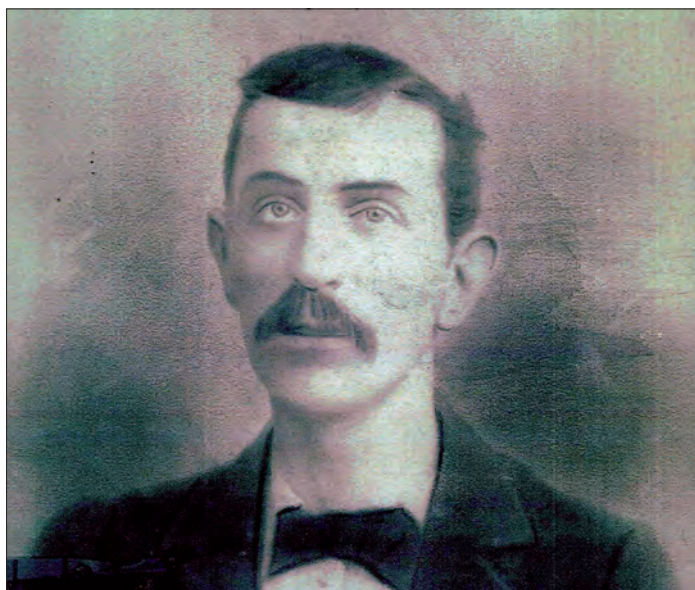
The team that was picked was as follows: Ned Treston (capt.) Thomas Keehan, Michael McCarthy (Gort), Pat Nestor, Martin Markham, Ned Healy, Roger Grealish, Michael Quinn, Michael Rock, Michael Connors, Michael Linnane, Thomas Kerins (Kilmacduogh), John Golden (Kiltartan) John Morgan, James Sexton, Freddy Kelly, John Treston, Pat Farrell, Michael Fitzgerald (Peterswell), Mike Lynskey (Kilbecanty) Martin Halloran (Tubber). The clubs held a meeting and had a practice match in Labane in preparation for the game in Dublin.

The Rules are Agreed

The teams had a meal in the Clarence Hotel. Following it, Cusack held a meeting with both sides in which the rules of the game were discussed and agreed. These were the days when most hurling rules were local and the new common set hadn't yet been widely accepted.

The next item to be discussed was the sliotar to be used. The Tipperary side introduced their sliotar, which was larger than that used in Galway, and it wasn't well-received by the Galway players. The latter were then invited to show theirs and it was only then they realised they had left it at home in Gort!

This was where the Galway captain stepped into the breach. Ned Treston was a saddler by trade and he decided to make the Galway ball. Before he retired for the night he made the cork core of the sliotar and waited until morning to find a harness maker to cover it with leather. As soon as businesses were open he did the rounds of the streets in the neighbourhood of the Clarence. There were quite a number of harness makers but five



Ned Treston, captain of the South Galway team defeated by North Tipperary in the Phoenix Park in 1886, and the man who made the Galway ball used in the second half of the match.

of them refused his request to cover the cork core with leather. The sixth man he came across said to him: 'Maybe you could do it yourself?' which Ned did. It was the forerunner of the modern sliotar, based on the design of the cupped hand.

The teams marched from the Clarence Hotel, four deep, with their hurleys on their shoulders to the Fifteen Acres in the Phoenix Park. According to Galway G.A.A. historian, Padraic Ó Laoi, 'The substitutes carried the goalposts.' The field was marked with the players' coats. There was no charge to see the game, which had been billed by Cusack as 'The Championship of Ireland'.

It was nearly three o'clock before the teams lined up with Cusack as referee. Before the game started Dan Burke objected that the Tipperary team wasn't properly dressed, as they wore neither shoes nor short pants. In the invitation to the teams Cusack had requested that the teams wear a distinctive dress. Cusack agreed with Burke that the Tipperary players were breaking the rules, yet he allowed them to play. The Galway men got a great reception when they stepped on to the field dressed with green caps, white jerseys, knickerbockers and shoes.

Only One Score

The Tipperary ball was used in the first half and the sides were level at halftime. The smaller Galway sliotar was used in the second half but it didn't do Galway any favours. Ten minutes from the end Charlie McSorley of the Silvermines scored a goal for Tipperary and the only score of the game gave them victory.

The Galway team suffered two injuries during the course of the game. About twenty minutes from the end their goalkeeper was injured and had to retire, as had another player on the team, with the result that Galway ended up with only nineteen players.

The team suffered another disadvantage. They had special knickerbockers made for the occasion to satisfy a request made by Cusack that they wear a distinctive dress. Dan Burke bought a roll of corduroy on special offer in Huban's drapery in Gort and had Pake Shaughnessy, a tailor in Church Street, make up the knickerbockers. His thread wasn't equal to the strain of the contest and many of the knickerbockers ripped, causing amusement and embarrassment!

The victorious side were presented with a silver cup, which Cusack had sponsored by Coster, Johnston & Co., Stationers, of Ormond Quay, Dublin, probably the first trophy to be sponsored for a G.A.A. game, and twenty-one silver medals.

In their reports on the game the newspapers paid tribute to the ground hurling of the Galway men, regarding them as superior to the Tipperary men on the ground. *The Freeman's Journal* went so far as to say 'the better team did not win.'

The North Tipperary team were given a torchlight procession on their return to Nenagh and about four thousand people turned up in front of the Castle Hotel to listen to Frank Moloney's address.

There was also a fine turnout at Gort to greet the defeated Galwegians. The Brass Band attended to welcome their heroes home. However, only four of the team arrived! The rest, unaware that there was a second station in Dublin, took the train from Kingsbridge instead of Broadstone and didn't discover their mistake until they reached Limerick Junction. They arrived home on Thursday!

Dissatisfaction with Result

There was further disappointment for the defeated team. Not very long after their return many of the neighbouring clubs began to grumble that the team that travelled to Dublin was in no way representative of South Galway. A letter from the secretary of the Craughwell and Ballamana Hurling Club appeared on February 21, stating that South Galway was not represented against North Tipperary, but Gort hurling club, which accepted the challenge without consulting the other clubs. He also sent a friendly challenge from the other clubs in South Galway to the victorious North Tipperary hurling club.

A reply from the Gort secretary appeared soon after. It claimed that the clubs were informed as early as the previous December, that a meeting of the clubs was held in Labane and a practice match had taken place, but that some of the clubs mentioned in the letter of February 21 had broken the agreement and had left Gort just seven days to make alternative arrangements.

North Tipperary took up the challenge issued by the Craughwell and Ballamana secretary. According to the *Nenagh Guardian* 'The Tipperary men, with their umpire, F. R. Maloney, left Nenagh on the forenoon of the 4th April, for the 'City of the Violated Treaty', to compete with the members of the Galway Team, who sent a challenge. Number One Limerick Brass Band met the Tipperary men on their arrival, and preceded them to the St. Michael's Temperance Society Rooms. After preparing for the contest both teams marched to a field at Ballinacurra, kindly given for the occasion by Mr. Thomas Hogan.'

The Galway side, made up predominantly of players from Craughwell and Ardrahan, with Peter Cawley of Craughwell as captain, arrived at Limerick by special train, accompanied by the Oranmore band. They were met at the station by St. Michael's club and conducted to the Temperance Rooms, where they met the Tipperary team.

Return Game at Limerick

The following account of the game is taken from the *Tuam News*. 'The field chosen for the match was the old racecourse of Ballinacurra and about 12,000 people* were present at the match, which began at 3.50 pm. Tipperary turned out in green and amber. Galway wore no costume, having only a green cap, some with white shirts and some with grey shirts and no stockings or shoes. The Galway men won the toss and played with the wind. The game was held up for fifteen minutes out of the forty over a dispute about some of the rules. Tipperary were better prepared than the Galway men as they wore sandals with rivets in the soles, which prevented them from slipping, whereas the Galway men hurled without boot or stocking and their rallying cry was 'Glory'. The ground was very slippery owing to the day being very wet. However, they worked like men determined to win. There were about 40 minutes in each half. The Tipperary men appeared to lose temper at times, on account of the stern opposition they received from the Galway boys, as they were nothing but boys in appearance, but they were men of spirit and pluck. When full time was called, there was no goal but Tipperary scored more points, seven in all.'

The Galway men came close to victory at one stage. Tom Callanan, whip forward on the team, chased a hopping ball into the goalmouth. The Tipperary goalie in running out to save, missed the ball and was carried on by his own impetus, leaving Tom in possession only a yard from the empty goal. Tom, in his eagerness to score, missed his footing and although he recovered and drew on the ball, the goalie had gained time to turn and desperately hooked the upraised hurley. The Tipperary backs then bore down on Tom, the ball was cleared and the game lost. Had the goal been scored it would have equalled any number of points and Galway would have been victors.

There are different versions of the final score. The above account gave it as 7 points to nil in favour of Tipperary. Another account gives it as 10-3. The *Nenagh Guardian* gives it as 15-1.

We don't have the North Tipperary team that turned out on the day. The South Galway team was as follows: Michael Mooney (captain), (Kilchreest), James Sylver, John Green, Pat Green, Martin Holland, Pat Dolan, Mike Grady, Mike Ford, Thomas Niland, Thomas Prendergast, Pat Diviney (Ardrahan), Matt Kelly, Bartley Callanan, Thomas Callanan, Thomas Healy, John Cannon, James Cannon (Craughwell), Pst Keely (Peterswell), John Diviney (Kilmacduagh), James Nolan (Kiltartan).

Referee: Mr. R. A. Gleeson.

After the match both teams were hospitably entertained by St. Michael's Temperance Society.

* The *Nenagh Guardian* account gave the figure of 30,000 present.



Picture taken during the visit of Peter Treston, grandson of Ned Treston, to Lár na Páirce. Left to right: Seamus J. King, Peter Treston, Liam Ó Donnchú and Cyril Farrell, who facilitated the visit. Peter Treston presented a formal portrait of his famous grandfather to the museum.