

The Year 2005 / 2006 "What a Year!"

Hurling 2005 - 2006

The Year 2005 / 2006 will long live in the memory of those interested in GAA within our Club and to many of our supporters near and far who travelled with the team and also to those supporters who could not be with us on our memorable roller coaster ride through the year which culminated in a glorious victory for the club on February 12th 2006.

It is always nice to look back at a year when you were successful on the domestic scene and relive some of the good times and try and learn from some of the not so good ones.

On the hurling front, the Junior Championship began with our meeting of Sarsfields in a splendid laid out Cloyne field on Saturday night June 18th. This game had a lot of expectation having been defeated by Sars in the 2004 Junior final. The game did not go according to our best-laid plans, as a hat trick of goals from seemingly non-threatening sideline balls was the difference in the end, when we ended up defeated by 4-10 to 1-9. In fairness to the players, the resolve shown by them during this game would pay dividends later on in the championship.

Given space to dwell on our defeat, the players looked at their own displays and were not happy with them. The advantage of the back door system now in operation is that we had time and an opportunity to right the wrongs that surfaced against Sars. The first round came on July 18th with our near neighbours, Castlemartyr, hoping to put one over on us while we were down. The improvement in play, the self-belief, and the rearranging of the team paid off when we again defeated them by 1-10 to 0-10 having been led at half time.

Next on the list of opponents were Midleton who proved to be one of the better teams we had faced so far. They were tenacious in attack and defended well all through the game. However, the game ended in a draw on the score of Fr. O'Neill's 3-11 to Midleton's 2-14. The replay took off where the drawn game ended with the first half evenly contested by both teams. Our lads seemed to be gaining with every game they played, and

so it was, as in the second half they took control of the game and ran out winners on the score 1-18 to 3-6.

This brought us to the semi-final of the East Cork Oil sponsored championship where we met Dungourney again in the semi-final. The 2004 game, played in Cloyne, turned out to be a one-man show when Ger O'Leary turned in a magnificent game to see us comfortably beat them. The 2005 semi-final, played in Ballynoe, turned out the same result but with more of our players doing themselves justice in their displays. The final score here was 1-15 to 1-5.

We now were in another East Cork final and were cautiously looking at the other semi-final where our other near neighbours, Russell Rovers, were meeting Erin's Own. Erin's Own emerged winners and the final was played on a very wet day in Killeagh. The game was preceded by the Junior 'B' county final where St. Ita's just beat Lisgoold by the skin of their teeth.

East Cork finals are hard to get to and harder to win. This one was no exception. Both goalies and defences were kept busy all through this game. Some might say we were lucky that the Erin's Own free taker was off form, but in cases like this, you make your own luck and this the whole panel did. There was not one player who shirked their responsibility that wet day and it paid off in the end when we won the Jamesy Kelleher cup again on the score 1-11 to 2-4.

When looking at this game, one has to look at the quality of training done under the guidance of Eric O'Driscoll, ably assisted by Robbie Dalton and Declan O'Regan so far that season. It is fair to say that no stone was left unturned in their preparation, from committee down to the support the team received.

County Trail:

Having been down the "county" road previously, the team management knew what lay ahead for the team and prepared them appropriately. The team had gelled well since that opening game in Cloyne and one could sense an air of confidence in their ability to furnish a result at any time of asking. So it was on to Fermoy, where the Duhallow representatives,

Freemount, tried to knock us off track. With John Flavin on fire from full forward, and the younger lads gaining in experience, we won this game on the score 4-14 to 0-10.

Shamrocks from Carrigdhoun were next on the agenda in the semi-final and this game in Páirc Uí Rinn turned out to be a bit of an anti-climax. All our players were going well and needed a testing game if they wanted to know their true worth as junior hurlers. This game did not live up to this expectation and the scoreline of 3-17 to 2-5 showed.

If East Corks are hard to come by, then no one needs to tell any of us how difficult it is to win a county junior title. Having been there before and suffered at the hands of Argideen Rangers and Ballinhassig, all concerned knew well that an extra human effort from everyone was required to get our hands on the coveted Johnny Quirke Cup.

County Junior Hurling Final 2005

November 19th 2005 will linger on the minds of everyone connected with the parish. From far and near they travelled to see the green and red of O'Neill's take the field in Páirc Uí Rinn for our third county final appearance against Avondhu champions, Kilworth. Having played Kilworth previously in challenge games, we knew that they were good hurlers and would give a good account of themselves.

The team led by Jer Holland had to play out of their skins to win this. Some of the scores on the night were sublime and Kilworth tested our back line on more than a few occasions. A man of the match display from left half back, Billy Murphy, set us on the road to victory. Who will forget the sense of achievement when Jer Holland lifted the Johnny Quirke Cup aloft over the hallowed turf of Páirc Uí Rinn? Anybody there on the night never will.

Munster Campaign:

The first game in this series was against Hospital/Herbertstown from Limerick on Sunday November 27th 2005. This game was played in Kilmallock on a wet and cold November day. Not an ideal day for the purist, and after a hard hour's hurling, O'Neill's did enough to win on the score 1-7 to 0-8.

Now our thoughts went to a Munster Final appearance against Tipperary representatives, Knockshegowna. This game was played on Sunday, December 4, and following an eight-point victory, we were crowned Munster Junior Hurling Champions at the Gaelic Grounds in Limerick.

The East Cork side laid the foundations for victory in the early stages with Eoin Conway's superb goal in the 12th minute putting them on their way. Ger O'Leary, Conway and Kieran Wall followed up with points to ease Fr O'Neill's into a 1-8 to 0-4 lead at the break.

Knockshegowna were given hope when Declan Costelloe pointed just after the restart, but their East Cork opponents never lost their grip on proceedings and pulled away for a comfortable victory.

2006 - "What's another Year!"

Hurling began for the lads early in 2006. No sooner had the turkey and ham digested and our lads were back on the training field preparing for a 2005 Under-21 final and preparing for an All-Ireland Junior semi-final. In the under-21, Fr. O'Neill's had accounted for Aghada in a quarter-final and Castlelyons in the semi-final. The final on Jan. 14th took place in the new field in Ballynoe. The team accounted well for themselves on the day. However, Watergrasshill had too much firepower up front for our lads and we were defeated in the end. The outlook for this team is very good with a very young age profile.

The All-Ireland semi-final pairing was Fr. O'Neill's v Castleblayney from Monaghan. These were a team which we knew very little about, as hurling in Ulster would not be very prominent. However, there are several good club teams in the province and any team that wins a provincial title must be respected. The line of 'C' registered cars on the road from not alone the parish, but several supporters from other clubs in East Cork, was very evident from early morning. The day was not particularly fine, days in the month of January seldom are, but the team had prepared in similar conditions and were well up for the challenge. The noise decibels in Dr. Cullen Park rose a few notches when Jer Holland led the team out onto the wet sod in Carlow on Sunday Jan. 29th. The game became a bit of an anti-climax when Eoin Conway and John Flavin among others had a major influence on the game. The

difference in the standard of hurling was becoming more evident as the game wore on and the mentors gave a few of the lads some experience of playing when they made some wise substitutions. The end result was a victory on the score 4-15 to 0-8.

Croke Park beckoned on Feb. 12th for an All-Ireland final against Carlow and Leinster champions, Erin's Own. Twice as many people travelled to the final as did all the year. Practically all households from the parish were represented in headquarters that day along with our growing number of fans from East Cork. Hotels, guesthouses, family relations and friends were called upon to house the crowd that descended on the capital on Saturday evening.

The buzz around Croke Park prior to the game was something to behold. From babies to parents, from grannies to granddads, sisters and brothers, all decked out in the colours of Green and Red. The game was one of the most hotly contested games, outside of the County Final against Kilworth, that the team had in their 15-month campaign. Eddie Holland had the honour of scoring the first point after 27 seconds. It was nip and tuck in the first half with a goal coming from Eoin Conway after Gary Doyle had goaled for Erin's Own. The half-time score stood at 1-8 to 1-4 in our favour.

The second half was again evenly contested but a man of the match display by Ger O'Leary sealed what was an historic occasion in the annals of the club by being crowned All-Ireland champions for 2006. Grown men and women, young men and women and children of all ages, wearing the green and red, embraced each other in scenes not likely to be ever seen in our lifetime again. Some of those in attendance were men who had played in previous Fr. O'Neill's teams that were unsuccessful in years gone by, shed a tear, and their lips quivered when spoken to. This is what it means to all involved in their club down through the years.

Jer Holland, in accepting the cup, spoke of the sacrifices of so many people who were instrumental in getting Fr. O'Neill's to Croke Park. You could sense the emotion filling the stand as he spoke and when he lifted the cup aloft, the shouts of the large attendance echoed around Croke

Park as if there were 80,000 people there. This was a moment in each of our own lives to savour.

The first Intermediate game, a first round of the O'Murchú Cup played by the club, was fixed for Sunday March 19th in Ahavine. The opposition here were Cobh and one of the biggest crowds at a league game was witnessed on that cold afternoon. No doubt a question that will come up at a table quiz sometime might be: who was the first O'Neill's player to score as an intermediate player with the club? Can you think back? Well, the honour went to Ger O'Leary who had that privilege when he struck a 40 metre free over the bar after 2 minutes of play. Fr. O'Neill's ran out winners on the score 2-10 to 0-09.

The league started against Ballymartle on Sunday April 2nd when we were brought back to terra firma after the earlier exploits. Playing into a very strong wind that day, Ballymartle had opened a 1-4 lead before John Flavin scored for us. The loss of Dick O'Neill at full back had a detrimental effect and Ballymartle went on the rampage ending the first half 5-6 to 0-3. The second half promised more but the gap was too much and we ended up losing on the score 5-8 to 0-9.

The following Sunday we were away to Duhallow side, Kanturk. This game was more evenly contested and the lads were getting used to playing at intermediate level. I suppose we forgot that there is a very large gap in the difference between junior and intermediate hurling. However, after a good hour's hurling, we were defeated by 3 points, 1-9 to 1-6.

Saturday April 15th brought our first points in the league when we defeated Ballygarvan at home. This game again played before a large home attendance showed that we were getting to grips with the more competitive edge in our play. We defeated Ballygarvan 6-15 to 0-20. This was a major boost to the lads who were fixed to play the first round of the championship on the May Bank Holiday.

Sunday April 23rd saw us take on Valley Rovers again at home. Valley Rovers are one of the more consistent teams in this grade and, having played exceptionally well, we were beaten by 4 points at the final whistle.

The next game was our maiden voyage in the championship. This game was against North Cork's Dromina and was played in Shanballymore on Saturday May 6th. This was a game we were all looking forward to. However, we were unfortunate in that we had to line out without three of our All-Ireland team: Ray O'Neill with a shoulder injury, Kieran Wall with a broken finger, and John Flavin who was sitting this game out on the sideline for a previous indiscretion. Robert Murphy had the first point and it was close all through the first half with the half-time score O'Neill's 0-5 to 1-4.

The second half looked more promising as the mentors rearranged the team. Ger Buckley, the Dromina goalie, definitely had his quota of Weetabix that morning as he brought off some excellent saves during the second half. These missed chances would eventually lead to our downfall and Dromina advanced to the next round on the score O'Neill's 0-10 to Dromina 3-8.

The scenic route beckoned for the lads and Nemo Rangers were the opposition having been beaten by Glen Rovers in a replay. This game was played in Cobh on Sunday June 18th. Nemo were the fancied team in this game and came to Cobh with some big names in their team. However, O'Neill's were not interested in their names and played some of their best hurling in the opening 20 minutes to open a 0-8 to 0-2 lead. Ger O'Leary finished Nemo off when his '65 went all the way to the back of the net in the 27th minute. The second half was played at an easier pace and Billy Murphy had an outstanding game at centre back. O'Neill's ran out winners on the score 1-18 to 2-2.

Páirc Uí Rinn was the venue for the 3rd round on Sunday July 2nd when we came face to face with Ballymartle again. Having been defeated by a big score in our league encounter and seeing how the team had improved as the championship went on, hopes were good for this game.

Ballymartle hurled with more vigour than we did on this occasion and the injury sustained by Jer Holland, who had to depart proceedings, did nothing to our game. We were always playing catch-up in this game and Ballymartle won on the score 0-9 to 1-15. Ballymartle eventually won out the competition.

Our Junior 'B' team took the field on the following Friday night in Ballynoe when they faced Castlelyons. This game, played on a glorious summer's evening, was notable in that both father and son, Luke (Snr.) and Luke (Jnr.) Swayne, not only lined out on the same team but side by side. Luke Snr. playing at full forward and Luke (Jnr.) in the corner. Castlelyons got a dream start arising out of some confusion in our back line when we conceded an easy goal. This gave them momentum that we never seemed to be able to counteract. However, our lads gave it their all and pegged back the lead on a number of occasions. Castlelyons, sensing the game going from them, continued to influence the game more. The score we really needed came too late and Castlelyons won on the score 2-08 to 2-11.

The Minor championship also started in July when we defeated Aghada in Cloyne by two points. This was a great game of hurling and Aghada were two points up at half-time but a goal by Mark Hayes midway through the second half, when the game was level, inspired his colleagues and for the remainder of the half, O'Neill's continued to impress against very strong opposition.

Shane Harrington, Tom Lawton with some long-range points, and with MI. Paul Bailey, Shane Donnelly, Barry Hayes, Robert and David Hyde and Gavin Murray among others excelling, the omens for this young team look promising.

This victory saw a semi-final against Sarsfields. This game was played in Lisgoold on Tuesday August 1st. As the game progressed, O'Neill's continued to pressure Sars and ran out winners. The final saw us meeting Carrig na bhFear in Lisgoold on Tuesday August 8th. Carrig were a far superior team to us on the night and it was unfortunate that the lads met a team like them on the night. Final score Fr. O'Neill's 0-4 Carrig na bhFear 2-13.

The under-21 hurlers played their first game in this competition on Tuesday September 12th when they defeated a fancied Aghada team in Castlemartyr by 1-15 to 2-10. This set up another game against rivals Carrig na bhFear in Cobh in the semi-final. Carrig again proved to be too strong for our lads who were short a few players on the night. Again, this is a very young team and success will eventually come their way.

2005 / 2006 will go down as one of the best years in the history of hurling in the club.

Football 2006

Our under-21 footballers were in action on March 25th when they played Lisgoold in the 1st round of the championship in Ballinacurra. This game was a one-sided affair from early on and the result was never in doubt as the score at half time was 1-9 to 0-0. The goal came from James Walsh and points from Eoin Mc., Podge, Shane Harrington and Robert Hyde. Lisgoold's first score came from Ciaran Cronin in the 38th minute but they had a massive hill to climb. Further goals from Luke Swayne, Eric Broderick and James Walsh put the game firmly out of Lisgoold's reach. Final score was 4-13 to 0-3.

This led us to another round where we met rivals Bride Rovers. Games involving Bride Rovers always bring out the best in both teams and this was no different. Again Eoin Mc., Podge and company were in flying form and this game was close up to the final few minutes when we defended well to secure a victory on the score 3-7 to 1-10.

Dungourney was the venue for our semi-final game against St. Catherine's on 21st April. Robert Murphy got the ball rolling early on with a beautiful point after 3 minutes of play. Shane Harrington is still having nightmares about the double chance he missed for the opening goal when the ball did everything but hop right for him. However, Shane turned things around after and was one of the more influential players on the night. Victory ensued here again on the score 1-8 to 0-3.

Unfortunately, hurling and junior football delayed the final of this competition, which meant this game was not played until October 7th. The opposition were again Carrig na bhFear and the venue was Lisgoold. Weather conditions were not good for this game but Carrig had a superior team on view that day and were worthy winners on the score 0-4 to 2-13.

The Minors had a very successful outing this year. In the league they had a good run of victories that resulted in a final appearance against Aghada. This game, played in Castlemartyr, was very competitive and

players like Gavin Murray, Luke Swayne, David and Robert Hyde, Shane Donnelly and John O'Driscoll were the leading lights in the game. The second half of this game was a very close affair and victory was dependent on the strength of the backs in the closing minutes of the game. Final score, Fr. O'Neill's 1-10 Aghada 0-9. Having won this final, a county campaign began with a game against Kilshanning in Kilshannig on Sunday Nov. 19th. They say goals win games and this was certainly true in this game as Kilshanning got the goals at crucial times. Nonetheless, this was a very good display from a young team and they cannot be faulted for the defeat.

The championship campaign for these lads began with a facile victory, 3-14 to 0-5, over Bride Rovers on 15th August. The semi-final game against Ballinacurra was a similar experience when they defeated them on the score 1-9 to 0-2. The final, played in Castlemartyr on August 29th, was a repeat of the league final against Aghada. Aghada were hurting from this defeat and were slightly tipped to overcome our lads on the night. The game from the throw-in was highly entertaining for the large attendance and both teams fiercely contested every ball. There was never more than a few points between the sides. There was a grand finale to the game when a late goal secured victory for the lads on the score 2-7 to 0-11. A first round county game against Kilmurray beckoned on 14th October in Killeagh. Kilmurray were the stronger team here and the fact that we were a much younger team didn't augur well for a victory. Unfortunately, defeat was our lot in this game on the score 1-7 to 0-15. The outlook for 2007 is very bright for this team, as the experience gained in completing the double will stand to the twelve players who are still underage next year.

Our Junior 'A' footballers began their campaign on St. Patrick's Day with a first round game in Rostellan. On a bitterly cold day, this game was not what would be called a classic but enough was done to secure victory. Eoin Conway got proceedings off with a point after 2 minutes and with scores scarce, any slip up would be punished. A penalty to Cobh was awarded in the latter part of the first half and Declan O'Shea showed why he is number 1 goalie in the division when he made an outstanding save. This was a serious let-off for the lads and they continued to grow in stature during the game. Eoin was on hand in the 38th minute for a

‘sneaky’ goal. He followed this with a point a minute later. However, Cobh were battling away and Dereck Barrett contributed three points to their cause. However, time ran out for them and O’Neill’s finished stronger on the score 1-6 to 0-7.

The quarter-final meeting was against Carrig na bhFear in Cobh on Saturday May 26th. Scores were hard to come by early on in this game but John Flavin shook off his man to score a brilliant goal after 18 minutes. Kieran Wall had another goal a minute later and Paul Murphy struck back with one for Carrig. Those in attendance wondered were they at another type of sport in that three goals were scored in three minutes!

During the second half, Eoin Conway suffered a leg injury and was replaced by the ever-dependable Shane Harrington. The final 10 minutes in this game were heart-stopping as both sides exchanged points in a close contest. Fortunately, John Flavin brought his scoring boots with him, as he scored what was one of the best points ever seen in this grade, when he pointed from the dressing room sideline. With the teams deadlocked at full time, Podge was the man to pop up and score the winning point. Victory on the score 3-8 to 3-7.

The semi-final was against near neighbours Cloyne. This game was fixed on numerous occasions but for one reason or another Cloyne could not find a suitable date to play. In the end, Cloyne gave a walkover. This was not the best preparation for any team going into a final but there were no dissenting voices in our camp.

The final was fixed for Lisgoold against Bride Rovers on a wet and miserable 29th October. This game was not for the purist, but what it lacked in skill it made up for in determination, passion and commitment. How a four-point lead was surrendered in a few seconds still beggars belief — but it happened.

Kieran Wall continued what he seemed to be doing all year — scoring goals. This goal came after four minutes and put us into a lead that we never relinquished until the 62nd minute. It was score for score all through the first half, while in the second half we opened a six-point lead.

Thoughts of being home and dry were soon quashed as Terry Broderick scored the all-important goal for the Rovers on the stroke of full time.

Extra time was called for and the Rovers scored first with another goal. However, for the remaining 16 minutes they were not allowed another score. Two points from Jer Holland, a point from the industrious John Flavin and a wonder goal from Robert Murphy with his first kick of the game, having replaced the injured Eric O'Driscoll, secured a joyous victory and the Jim Ryan Cup was welcomed back to the parish by captain Declan O'Shea.

Another trip into the county saw us meeting Cullen from Duhallow. This game, played in Kildorrery in glorious sunshine, again was played in a good sporting manner. Both sides led at different times and only a kick of a ball separated them at any stage of the game. A draw on the day was a fair result and a replay beckoned in Páirc Uí Rinn on the following Wednesday night.

This game ended in a cliffhanger and went right down to the wire. Fr. O'Neill's were looking for the equalising score and in fairness to the lads the 'timber' did not help on the night. O'Neill's tried everything — from daring runs from deep in defence by Ger O'Leary, Flav having a pot shot and Shane having a few near misses — but the score we so badly needed never came and we departed the scene on the score 1-5 to 0-9. However, the team played exceptionally well and can be well proud of being East Cork Champions.

There was plenty of excitement on the playing fields this past year for all supporters of the club. It must be said that each and every player played with the utmost respect for the jersey he wore during the year. All the players and mentors in the club deserve our thanks for the sacrifices they endured during the year. 2007 is only around the corner and the club are putting plans in place to continue where they left off in 2006. We have a lot to look forward to next year and with the number and quality of all our players available, another successful year beckons.