

PASSING OF A DOWN LEGEND

Patsy O'Hagan was truly one of the greats!

Golden jubilee celebrations can be wonderful occasions, especially if the celebrants are old enough to have been around for the original event.

For followers of Gaelic football across County Down and far beyond, the year 2010 was going to be a year of special celebration as Down recalled the historic events of fifty years ago when on that September Sunday in 1960, Kevin Mussen shook the hand of President DeValera and then lifted the Sam Maguire Cup aloft to the cheering thousands bedecked in red and black. Down had won the All Ireland Football Final – the first team from the six counties to do so.

It had been decided at central level that Down would host the Annual GAA Congress in recognition of that great occasion of fifty years ago. Under the chairmanship of Feargal McCormack the Congress committee announced that Down would stage an “iconic event” in conjunction with Congress to pay tribute to the heroes of that great team of 1960-61. Friday 16th April was the appointed date and plans were well advanced for the “Iconic Event” but when the day of celebration came one of the icons of that team would not be there.

A sense of deep sorrow and sadness spread across the county and much further afield, a month earlier on Sunday 14th march, when the news came through that Patsy O'Hagan had passed away at his home in Claregalway where he had set up home with his wife Kay over forty years earlier. Followers of the great All Ireland winning Down teams of the 1960 and 1961, and they came from all over Ireland, not just from Down, will remember Patsy as one of the great players of those teams.

His club football was played with Clonduff with whom he won a County Junior Championship with the Harps in 1956. A year later in May 1957 he made his first appearance at Croke Park when he played at centre half forward on the St Colman's team that lost to St Nathy's Ballaghaderreen in the Hogan Cup Final.

Speaking at the tribute night held in the Clonduff Clubrooms for Patsy and his Clonduff Colleague a few months previous, the great Micheál Ó Muircheartaigh paid tribute to Patsy's outstanding performance in that Hogan Cup Final.

After making his debut on the County Senior team in 1957 he was a permanent member of the team until injury ended his career in 1966, the year in which he captained Down to their sixth Ulster Championship title.

In an illustrious career, Patsy won six Ulster Senior Football championships, playing in a number of positions, All Ireland medals in 1960 at full forward and 1961 at wing half back, National League titles in 1960 and 1962 and a Railway Cup medal with Ulster playing at wing half back in 1966. Although no longer playing, he stayed involved and was a selector with the County team in 1967 and 1968.

It was soon after this that he took up employment in Galway where he made his home with his wife Kay. Patsy remained very much involved in the GAA in his adopted county and was a member of the Tuam team which lost the Galway County Final a year later. Patsy and Kay moved to a new house in

the village of Claregalway where he became a driving force in the local GAA Club, then a Hurling stronghold. His children played Football, Hurling and Camogie for the new club and today his grandson Danny Cummins is a member of the Galway Senior Football squad.

Patsy will always be remembered for his great games playing for Down in the Whitsun games at Wembley where he scored a hat-trick against Galway in May 1960. After that, of course, he went on to win All Ireland medals in 1960 and 1961 and toured America with the team in 1962. He enjoyed the reputation of being one of the most versatile players in the team having played at full forward and wing half back. The outstanding features of his game were his drop kick and his blocking skills.

It was in August 2009 that the Clonduff Club held a special tribute night for Patsy O'Hagan and Kevin Mussen – a function that was attended by most members of the Down teams of 1960 and 1961 along with players of the era from Offaly and Kerry, all of whom paid glowing tribute to Patsy's contribution to the success of the team. Patsy was predeceased by his wife Kay, a native of Banbridge, 18 months earlier.

Go ndéana Dia Trocaire ar anam!