

CAMOGIE IN KILREA

As chairman, I, on behalf of the Kilrea Camogie Club, would like to take this opportunity of congratulating the committee and members of the Padraig Pearse Gaelic Football Club on their fine achievement in preparing one of the finest football pitches in the country.

The Camogie Association, founded about 1904, although not affiliated to the G.A.A., nevertheless has the same ideals at heart and depends to a large extent on the football clubs for support and the use of their playing pitches which are always available for matches.

It is interesting to note that camogie in Kilrea was started about the same time as the Gaelic Football Club and the people mainly responsible were Willie McCotter, now in America, Willie Kennedy, Claragh, who was one of the founder members of the football Club and Annie McNally, now Mrs, Patrick McKendry of the Mullan.

Annie, who hails from Desertmartin was an ex-county player and it was no surprise when she was elected the first captain of the side on the same night that the late Paddy Dempsey was elected first captain of the football team.

It is understandable then that Camogie and football have had such close ties down through the years.



CAMOGIE COMMITTEE - Standing (left to right)-Sean McAlary and Aiden Loftus. Seated- Josephine McAlary Michael McCloskey and Kathleen Diamond.

Another staunch supporter in the club at that time was Master Magee who resided in Movanager and cycled each day to teach school at Magheramore on the Garvagh side of the parish. He has now retired and lives in Crossmaglen, Co. Armagh.

To raise money for the Club, dances were held in the Town Hall and money was always collected at the "gate". Mr. John Devlin, Coleraine St. kept the girls in good supply of sticks at the price of "ten bob" each.

The pitch was situated at Willie Kennedy's, half a mile from the town. For away matches the transport was provided by George Proctor, Denis McCotter and McKernan Taxis. The opposition were Greenlough, Rasharkin, Rosnashane and of course Lavey. Their very first match was against Lavey and no prizes for guessing the result — Lavey won.

The most memorable match of the lot, however, was against near neighbours Rosnashane. It is suggested that the match was never finished and for days afterwards the Kilrea girls still carried the marks of battle! Their colours were green skirts and white blouses and they were known as St. Bridgets. The members of that team were, as far as memory can recall, and using their maiden names —

MINA DARRAGH, ANNIE McNALLY, BERNIE McCOTTER, NANCY LARKIN, JOSIE LARKIN, ROSE LARKIN, LIZZIE McALEESE, BRIDIE McWILLIAMS, META BRADLEY, PEGGY DEMPSEY, KATHLEEN McFAUL, JOSIE McFAUL, ROSELLA DIAMOND, ANNIE GALLAGHER (Donegal), PHYLIS HENRY, MAUREEN HENRY, MARY BRIDGET RAINEY (D), ANNIE RAINEY ROSETTA RAINEY and ANNA DEMPSEY.

Trophies were hard to come by in those early days but the girls enjoyed the game and were always in demand at sports Sundays in the South Derry area. Thanks to them they planted the seed and much later on that seed was to flourish.

Not much more is heard about Camogie in Kilrea until the middle fifties when a new generation sprang up. Prominent among these were Mary McAlary, Mattie O'Kane, Maura O'Kane and Elish O'Kane who were all to represent their county. Other names of note were Bridie Donaghy, Roseela Quigg, Maureen Quigg, Josephine Darragh, Evon' Reilly, Bernadette McKay (D) and Ethna McKay. (Other names should be included but time to research was short).

Coming forward to 1961 — 62 we find more new faces joining the ranks such as Rose Rafferty, Ronnie Rafferty, now a nun, Hannah and Jeannie McGrath and others. Some of these were also to represent their county and it was a red letter day for them and indeed Derry when Derry defeated Antrim in an Ulster Final.

The big names in club camogie at this time were Greenlough, Dungiven, Glenullin and later Bellaghy.

About this time Kilrea met Greenlough in a county final and although they won the match they lost the cup owing to fielding an illegal player. They were, at least, carving a name for themselves in Derry Camogie.

Their colours were now changed to Blue blouses and Navy Gym frocks and to these stalwart ladies we have to be thankful for taking us into the seventies.

Camogie in the county declined at this time owing to the troubles and for the next few years things were just ticking over. Then just about 1975 onwards it began to happen and names like Carmel McKillen, Ann Curry, Maura O'Connell, Phylis O'Connell, Maura O'Kane, Ann O'Kane, Mary McAlary, Rosaleen McAlary, K. A. McGrath, Marie McKillen and Maureen Bradley saw the team change to their present colours of red and white. Into the side came a couple of immigrants — ex-Antrim

player Philomena McGrath, Josephine McAlary and Bridget Robb from Dunloy, Greenlough and Dungiven.

Young players like Kathleen Diamond, Sharon Loftus, the Dempsey sisters, Siobhan Annette and Mariad, Angela Morgan, Margaret McDonald, Dolores Madden, Patricia and Noleen McWilliams were making their presence felt and in 1977 came their big break. At Lavey the young 'Kilrea side held Bellaghy to a draw and in the replay they had to bow the knee. The cup, presented to the county Board by M/s B. Mullan and Sons was not to be theirs. The score that day in October was Bellaghy 4-0 Kilrea 2-0. The two goals were scored by Sharon Loftus and Philomena McGrath.

It was the following February at their Annual General Meeting that it was felt that this must be their year. The committee then was President Fr. M. F. Mullan C.C.; Chairman Michael McCloskey; Vice-chair Aiden Loftus; Secretary Siobhan Dempsey; Ass. Secretary Mrs. Sean McAlary; Treasurer Mrs. Philomena McGrath. Mr. Sean McAlary was left in charge of the minor and senior teams and two coaches were to take charge of an under twelve squad. These were Sharon Loftus and Ann Curry two very fine exponents of the game.

These three people did their work so well that it was no surprise to see the under 12 team and the senior team play on Bellaghy's beautiful pitch on an October Sunday. The under 12 in the play off for league honours and the senior team in the final of the Junior Championship.

Once again Lavey were the opposition but the Kilrea Cailine done their homework so well that at half-time the score was Kilrea 2-2 Lavey no score. The second half, like the first saw Kilrea in top form and although Lavey scored two very good goals at the start of the second half it was all one way traffic from then to the end, Kilrea winning 6-4 to 2-0. Referee for the match was Mrs. Elizabeth Crampsie secretary of the Co. Board, Kilrea scorers that day were Carmel O'Kane (3-1), K. Morgan (2-0), S. Loftus (1-1) and M. Bradley (0-2).

It would be most unfair to single out any Kilrea girl as the star player as they all played skillfully, backing up each others' play. We will be content therefore to say congratulations to —



DENISE McWILLIAMS, ANN CURRY, JOSEPHINE McALARY, KATHLEEN DIAMOND, ROSEMARY McCLOSKEY, NOLEEN McWILLIAMS, SHARON LOFTUS, ANNETTE DEMPSEY, ROSALEEN WALSH, MAUREEN BRADLEY, CARMEL O'KANF, KATHLEEN MORGAN, SIOBHAN DEMPSEY, BRIDGET BOYLE, BREIDGE DICKSON and MARIADE DEMPSEY

Needless to say the mini-bus and cavalcade of cars raised a terrible noise on the way home and did a victory tour of the "Diamond" — but then it was the first real county championship win to celebrate in Kilrea. The celebrations didn't stop there for a few weeks later a victory celebration concert was held in the Marian Hall. Between two and three hundred were entertained to tea and along with members of the Co. Board Mr. Brian McQuillan, chairman presented the cup to the captain Sharon Loftus and medals to all the team members. The under twelve team also received medals for the fine display they put in against neighbours Swatragh their game ended in a draw and as a fitting tribute the Co. Board decided that both teams should receive medals.

In the year 1978 the following girls from the Kilrea Club were to play for Loreto College and play in Croke Park. Kathleen Diamond, Bridget Boyle, Maureen and Patricia McWilliams but the proudest girl of Kilrea team was Sharon Loftus who represented Kilrea on the victorious Derry team who beat Cork in the All-Ireland Junior Final.

1979 has just started and the annual convention held. The elected committee reads: President Rev. Fr. M. Mullan; Chairman M. McCloskey; Vice-Chairman Sean McAlary; Secretary Mrs. Sean McAlary; Treasurer Mr. Aiden Loftus. More men are now joining the ranks of the Camogie Association and whether they be a hinderance or a help remains to be seen. Their first venture this year was to run a very successful Xmas party for the over fifties and roughly two hundred attended and were treated to a light meal and a concert. The playing season has just started and, as I said earlier the seed that was sown in 1943 has now started to Bloom.

We are indebted to the priests of the parish for the use of the Marian Hall; to our gallant band of supporters and to the Padraig Pearse Gaelic Football Club for the use of their wonderful pitch.

MICHAEL McCLOSKEY (Chairman