



Jim Carney

This Sporting Life

Hurling legend had mixed feelings about his three All-Ireland medals

IT'S remarkable to think that when Mick Gill and Tony Reddin became the first two Galway men to win three All-Ireland SHC medals apiece, five of the six medals they won between them brought no honour and glory to their native county.

Gill, from Ballinderreen, won the second and third of his three medals with Dublin, where he was working and living, and Mullagh man Reddin, regarded as one of the greatest goalkeepers of all time, earned his fame playing for the Tipperary three-in-a-row team of 1949-50-51.

Mick Gill represented Galway with pride and distinction in the 1923 Championship; he was a key man in the semi-final win over Kilkenny by 5-4 to 2-0, and by all accounts he gave an outstanding display in the 7-3 to 4-5 victory over Limerick in the final. Leonard McGrath and Bernie Gibbs were in sensational goal-scoring form for Galway in the final but from reading several match reports it was clear that goals flowed via Mick Gill – dominant in the middle third of the field – lobbing the ball into the Limerick goalmouth for McGrath and Gibbs to rattle the net.

That Championship, which started on May 20th 1923, wasn't finished until December 14th 1924 because Limerick refused to play their games until all Civil War prisoners were released.

The 1924 Championship started on May 4th and Galway weren't in action until November 23rd when they won their All-Ireland semi-final against Tipperary by 3-1 to 2-3. By then, Garda Mick Gill was playing his club hurling in Dublin. The Garda team was so strong, with other star names such as Pat ("Fowler") McInerney (Clare), Garrett Howard (Limerick) and Mattie Power (Kilkenny), that they won five Dublin SHC titles in a row, 1925-'29, captained in all those years by Mick Gill.

Unfortunately for Galway, while they had Gill's services for the semi-final and final of the long-delayed 1923 Championship he was a Dublin hurler for the 1924 campaign. They were entitled to claim him because he was living in Dublin at the time. It was called the "residency rule" and it wasn't changed until 1928. Back in '24 Gill was also under pressure to join the Metropolitans because he was playing for the Garda club in the Dublin County Championship. It would be worse for him, of course, if the year ended with a Galway vs Dublin All-Ireland final – and it did. Dublin won it, 5-3 to 2-6. They also won the 1927 final against Cork, with Mick Gill the victorious captain; it was his third All-Ireland SHC medal: one with Galway, two with Dublin.

He went on to play for the Ireland hurling team along with two other Galway legends, Mick Derivan and Mick King, against an Exiles team from the USA in the 1928 Tailteann Games at Croke Park and in 1929 he decided to emigrate to America but the Wall Street crash and the Great Depression made him change his mind. He played for Dublin in the 1930 All-Ireland final which they lost to Tipperary, and he



TWO GAA LEGENDS from Galway: Mattie McDonagh, winner of four All-Ireland SFC medals, pictured (in the mid-1960s) with Mick Gill.

then transferred back to the Ballinderreen club and again played county hurling for Galway. He died on September 21st 1980, one day short of his 81st birthday and two weeks after Joe Connolly led Galway to the county's second MacCarthy Cup victory.

He achieved a huge amount in an honours-laden career and is in the record books as the only GAA player to win two All-Ireland medals with two counties in the same year, but we know that Mick Gill had mixed feelings about playing against his former Galway team-mates in the 1924 All-Ireland final. He wrote about it in the 1966 Galway GAA Annual and this is a quote from that article: "After the 1923 final, I and fourteen other Galway hurlers were acclaimed as heroes, having taken the All-Ireland trophy and medals across the River Shannon for the first time, but for me that heroism was shortlived as far as some Galway followers were concerned." He then explained that after learning he could not play with Galway in the 1924 Championship because of the residency rule and the fact that he had played in the Dublin SHC, his choice was to play with Dublin or give up county hurling for one year and return to Galway for the 1925 Championship, on the promise of a job at St Brigid's Hospital, Ballinasloe; it had been organised for him by two prominent Galway GAA men. Mick decided to play for Dublin alongside some of his friends from the Garda hurling team; indeed nine of them won All-Ireland medals in 1927, with Gill their team captain.

Another quote had Mick telling it as he genuinely felt it, straight from the heart: "I can say without hesitation that if I had been playing for Galway in the 1924 All-Ireland final I honestly think they would have beaten Dublin and by keeping together they would also have been champions in 1925 and '26."



THREE All-Ireland SHC medals apiece were also won by (clockwise from top left) Tony Reddin, Noel Lane, Conor Hayes and Sylvie Linnane.

Later in the article he regretted, for Galway's sake, that two of the stars of the 1923 All-Ireland winning team, Staff Garvey and Bernie Gibbs, had emigrated and he also had this personal message for his old Galway comrades who might be reading his

article: "I salute you all."

* Three other Galway men also won three All-Ireland Senior Hurling Championship medals apiece (1980-87-88): Conor Hayes (Kiltormer), Sylvie Linnane (Gort) and Noel Lane (Ballinderreen).