



Jim Carney

This Sporting Life

The No. 6 jersey has iconic status in Galway hurling and football

AN ENDURING IMAGE in the proud history of Galway GAA is the No. 6 jersey. It has an exalted status for players excelling in such a pivotal position and Galway, traditionally a 'dual' county, has produced many outstanding centre half-backs in hurling and football.

As recently as last month, it was made manifest in a profound and emotional way when hurling hero Tony Keady was laid to eternal rest after his death at the early age of 53.

To Galway people all over the world, pride in their native county almost automatically includes an interest - from mild to passionate - in our sporting fortunes. Although it is thirty years since Tony Keady played hurling for his club Killimordaly and for Galway, his fame was not of the fleeting kind; he would forever be remembered as a brilliant player and a crowd favourite whose sparkling personality and *joie de vivre* endeared him to all who saw him play or had the pleasure of meeting him.

In a golden era for No. 6 excellence in inter-county hurling, the strong, stylish Keady performed at the same high level as Pat Delaney (Offaly), Tom Cashman (Cork), Ger Henderson (Kilkenny), Noel Sheehy (Tipperary), Seán Stack (Clare) and Dominic McKinley (Antrim).

Keady played in five All-Ireland SHC finals: 1985, '86, '87, '88 and 1990; he gave dynamic displays in the two finals that Galway won in that era, 1987 and '88, but he also played well in the other three finals. His Roll of Honour also included two National League medals; Texaco Hurler of the Year (1988), two All-Star awards (1986 and '88), two Railway Cup victories, an All-Ireland U-21 Championship medal in 1983, Galway and Connacht Club Championship medals in 1986, and two Vocational Schools inter-county medals.

He would've been proud of the key role played by centre half-back Gearóid McInerney in Galway's All-Ireland final victory over Waterford; the powerfully built Oranmore-Maree clubman is the son of Tony's old comrade in the renowned half-back line of the 1980s, Gerry Mac, as the left half-back from Kinvara was known and much loved.

A hero, too, was the lionhearted warrior from Mullagh who lined

out on the right of Keady, the peerless Peter Finnerty.

In the previous decade, which included Galway's National League title in 1975 and their appearance in the All-Ireland final that year and forcing a very good Wexford team to a replay in the 1976 semi-final, hurling followers all over the country greatly appreciated the brilliant skill and fieldcraft of a half-back line still talked about with huge respect and admiration: Joe McDonagh (R.I.P.), Seán Silke and Iggy Clarke. The Meelick-Eyrecourt man Silke was the quintessentially ideal No. 6, consistently excellent in his basic duties - covering, blocking, hooking and tackling - along with his mastery of positional play, and he was highly accomplished in his stickwork.

Army officers Jim Brophy (a Danesfort, Kilkenny man) and Jim Fives (a native of Tourin, Co Waterford) were top-class centre half-backs for Galway while based at Dún Uí Mhaoilfosa, Renmore and playing club hurling for An Chéad Cath. They were outstanding defenders in the full-back line too: Brophy in the 1940s and into the early 1950s, and Fives in the '50s when he switched from the No. 2 position to No. 6 and was highly effective.

Another man who made that switch with ease several times in the 1940s and '50s was Colum Corless from Kinvara. Johnny Molloy of Castlegar played at No. 6 in the 1953 and '55 All-Ireland finals (lost to Cork and Wexford, respectively); he died three weeks ago and his funeral took place on Tuesday, September 5th, two days after his county's All-Ireland triumph.

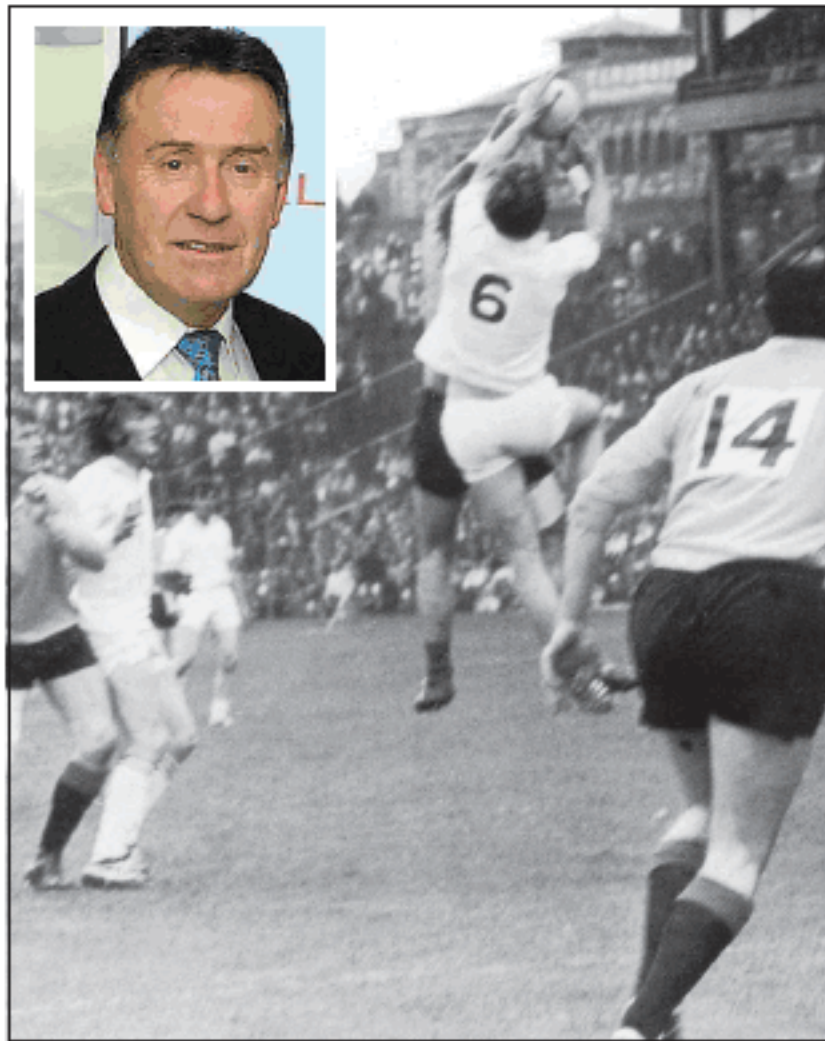
Gaelic football centre half-backs who excelled for Galway included Tom Molloy of Corofin in the 1920s, Tadhg McCarthy (a Kerry man based in Renmore Barracks with the Army) in the early 1930s, and another All-Ireland medal winner later in the decade, Bobby Beggs, a Dublin man working in Galway; Jack Mahon from Dunmore in the mid 1950s; the powerful Ballinasloe man Seán Meade in the Three-in-a-Row golden era; TJ Gilmore from Cortoon in the 1970s, Peter Lee in the early '80s and the men who wore No. 6 in two All-Ireland victories in more recent times: John Divilly (1998) and Tomás Mannion (2001).

One of my favourite players, on and off the football fields, was Tommy Joe Gilmore who wasn't



TONY KEADY on All-Ireland Final day 1988, with Peter Finnerty, Ollie Kilkenny, Sylvie Linnane and John Commins.

PHOTO: RAY RYAN



TJ GILMORE, pictured at the 2009 Galway Football Board function to mark 125 years of the GAA, and in action against Down in the 1971 All-Ireland semi-final victory at Croke Park.

lucky enough to win an All-Ireland SFC medal but it did not diminish, in any way, the worth of his massive contribution to Galway football and to his beloved club, Cortoon Shamrocks; nor the value of the lasting friendships he made inside and outside the county, or the respect and esteem in which

he is held by all who know him or ever watched him play football, especially when he was wearing the No. 6 jersey - the sky blue of Cortoon or the maroon of Galway.

For me, other great memories include the thrilling sight of Michael Coleman lifting Abbeyknockmoy hurlers, from the



SEÁN MEADE in action against Dublin in the 1963 All-Ireland SFC final.

No. 6 position, to County Cup glory in 1988; Ray Silke guiding Corofin footballers to an historic All-Ireland Club Championship title in '98 and his county six months later; and one of our greatest ever camogie players, Therése Maher, at her inspirational best in Galway's 2013 All-Ireland victory.