

When Rivulets Became a River



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The year 1979 was a momentous year in the history of Kilmacud Crokes football. Although senior status had been attained in 1977 by virtue of winning the Intermediate League, we had to wait until 1979 to debut in the Senior Championship – and what a debut it was...

Words of encouragement can inspire for a lifetime. Like many I was the recipient of such from Micheál De Burca, a local school master at St. Laurence's BNS. He would sometimes shout 'Sound Man Brendan!' across the field on which now stands the church of St. Laurence O' Toole. The catchphrase is from a 1960s TV commercial for Beamish Stout. You were being praised for a good catch or clearance and you felt ten feet tall. The street leagues he initiated were a highlight from childhood. The pride of Stillorgan, Goatstown, Sweet Briar Lane, Slieve Rua Drive, Woodley Park and so on would joust on sunny summer evenings. There was many a child of the sixties who received Micheál's praise and went on to feature in the rise of football in the Crokes. His was an object lesson to all of us future coaches in how to encourage children in sport.

But there were other smart moves from Micheál. In 1972 he finally persuaded Benburbs GAA Club to merge with Kilmacud Crokes thus

bringing John Sheridan and Charlie Farrell, amongst others, to the club along with the Red Hand of Ulster which adorns the club's coat-of-arms. The Cavan man John brought with him the love of Gaelic football with which that county is synonymous as well as endless energy and organisational ability. He was immediately installed as manager of the first team, in which position he would remain for many years.



The first adult football trophy won by the club

was the Division 3 Junior League in 1970. Club stalwarts such as Peter Ewing, Des Kiernan, Dinny McCudden, Sean Donnelly, Brian Pierce, Paul Colgan, Jody Sweeney and many others shared in a sweet triumph. Four minors featured, Sean McCarthy, Pat Duggan, Niall Kilroy, and Declan Carberry – the St. Laurence’s conveyor belt of talent was already moving smoothly. The future looked bright. For mentors Pat Sheridan, Larry Ryan and Frank Maguire this was a wonderful day. Football in the club was on the move.

Our ascent into Intermediate ranks in 1972 was unusual as it was not achieved on the field of play but in the boardroom. The County Board upgraded the team to Intermediate status because of the strength of our promising under – 21 team. This was a wise move if ever there was one. As history shows we were suitably encouraged by this ‘pat on the back.’

Returning to Kilmacud in 1974 after five years in boarding school, it was obvious to me that exciting things were afoot. Hurling was booming with the winning of the 1974 and 1976 Senior Championships. The indefatigable Frank Power was hurling trainer. During this golden era for hurling in the club some enthusiastic footballers would join with the hurlers in the winter training under Frank’s expert tutelage in the Old Hall at Glenalbyn and sometimes on the pitch as well. In time football would get its own fitness guru.

Hurling was thriving but football was gearing up. Slowly but surely the elements necessary to achieve ‘lift off’ were put into place. Outstanding mentors and organisers were at work and some exceptional graduates from the St. Laurence’s BNS academy were coming on stream to augment tried and trusted old-hands. Some of the hurling stars in time would help propel football to a higher plain – namely PJ Hough and Danny Ryan.

The road to our *annus mirabilis* was long and winding. But after all the training and setbacks the eventual success was all the sweeter – after all, nothing good in life ever comes easy. Our promising under-21 team unexpectedly lost by a point to Cuala in the championship semi-final of 1975. But they showed plenty of potential for us to be hopeful for the future.

A noteworthy milestone was reached with the winning of the Loving Cup in late 1975. Original cast members to the fore were mid-fielder

Barry Field who scored a goal, quicksilver corner forward Terry Maguire who notched 1-1 and goalkeeper Kevin McGowan who kept a clean sheet. This was a much treasured first adult football success for many of us young players including Dermot Maher and Gerry Collins. Also on the pitch giving their all were stalwarts Declan Carberry, PJ Hough, Des Kiernan, Dinny McCudden, Danny Ryan. Paul Colgan, Paddy Forde, Brian Pierce et al. That first Intermediate football trophy brought great joy and filled us with belief.

Cue the first of many celebrations and songs galore in the Old Hall at Glenalbyn. Regular artistes *The Liberties* warmed the crowd up with rousing ballads but our home grown talent sang till very late. A great night was had by all, but as Chairman Sean Donnelly reminded us there was more work to be done. The old house in those days really was the focal point in the social life of the team. Our cosy bar, where games were discussed, team selections dissected, songs sung and romances started is still much lamented. It was another time when the club, then much smaller, really was the heart of the community. Presiding over so many of these nights was our genial host, proud Galway and GAA man John Mitchell, manager of Glenalbyn House.

Senior status had seemed destined to arrive in 1976 but success was delayed another year as we lost the Intermediate Championship final. More grief would follow in the one point loss in the Intermediate Championship final at Parnell Park in the summer of 1977. The unfortunate broken leg suffered by talented youngster Paddy Ryan stunned us. Thankfully, redemption was near at hand.

Everything comes to those who wait. On a rain-swept October day in 1977 at Parnell Park, in the Intermediate League final we compensated fully for our previous under-achievements at that venue and attained senior status with a devastating display that brushed aside fancied St. Vincents. We powered home on a score line of 3-10 to 1-5. Sean Fox in goal was unflappable as the resolute full-backline of the flamboyant Kevin Moyles, high-fielder supreme Dermot Maher at full-back and ice-cool Paul Colgan excelled. In the half-backline Gerry Walsh 'clipped the wings of a once elusive opponent', PJ Hough was the rock-like defensive pivot and Matt Cahill popped up with a cheeky point. Midfielders Barry Field and Jerry Parr won the aerial battles and launched the ground offensive with a steady supply of ball to eager forwards.

**Kilmacud Crokes GAA Club
Intermediate Football Championship Winners 1978.**



Front Row l to r: J. Sheridan (Selector), K. Moyles, P. Ryan, P. Hogan, M. Cahill, G. Collins, G. Walsh (Capt), K. Ryan, G. Robinson, T. Lyons, B. Bonner, PJ Hough.
Back Row l to r: D. Twomey, N. Lynch, D. Maher, S. Fox, D. Ryan, P. Colgan, P. Forde, J. Parr, T. Coughlan, P. Lyons, B. Field, P. Hogan (Selector), C. Farrell (Selector).

Dual player Padraig Hogan at right-half forward put on an all-round *tour-de-force* from the off with selfless running, distributing and lethal finishing. Dom Toomey, with superb assists, laid on killer goals for the hard-working duo Danny Ryan and Gerry Collins. With the full-forward line Seamus Kelly, captain Paddy Forde and Tommy Coughlin operating at maximum capacity this was a great all-round attacking display.

This breakthrough had been earned the hard way and was the reward for perseverance, a tough training regime and considerable skill. Charmingly, *éminence gris* Micheál De Burca wrote an individual letter of thanks to all team members. For mentors Charlie Farrell, John Sheridan and Michael Carolan and supporters like Des Kiernan, Michael Walsh, Michael Maher and Davy Arnold this was a triumph to sing and dance about. No wonder the celebrations were mighty and musical. Gerry Collins rendered his party piece *Cotton Fields* backing himself on guitar. Jerry Parr sang *Sam Hall* and much more besides. Gerry Walsh played guitar expertly for all and sundry. Barry Field did

his unsurpassable *Bottler* routine, Phil Kiernan with soaring soprano voice, sang *The Rose of Tralee* and Pdraig Hogan performed the jigs and reels. And that was just for starters!

The joy and importance of that great day were immortalised in a match report penned by captain fantastic Paddy Forde which stayed pinned to the notice board for many a day. From the full-forward position former Monaghan inter-county star Paddy played with keen intelligence and unmatched vision. His team talks were always memorable and effective. The state of mind for playing football was described as 'Playing in a temper but never losing it' – a real nugget of wisdom. His image of a team being fifteen players combining seamlessly and playing selflessly for the greater good being akin to 'fifteen rivulets flowing into one river' was ingenious and summed up what team sport is all about. And how that river flowed from then on...

I well remember Pat Sheridan asking what it felt like to be a senior footballer. It meant a great deal to us but celebrations done, we set our eyes steadfastly on the road ahead. We had already embarked on a remarkable journey. In the process we won Division 3 and Division 2 Senior Football Leagues with 100% records. In 1978 we opted to play in the Intermediate Football Championship and duly beat Lucan Sarsfields comprehensively in the final. The scene was set for one of the truly great years in the history of Kilmacud Crokes football...1979.

After intensive preparation under player/trainer Jerry Parr, football's answer to the great Frank Power, we were fit and primed for our debut in the Senior Championship. Tempo was calibrated for the year with commanding performances in the league. As a result we approached our debut Senior Championship with confidence. Two comfortable early round victories left us with a quarter-final tie against Thomas Davis. For more fine-tuning, we played in the Dundalk Maytime Festival. One Sunday we played a Dublin League game in the morning, boarded a bus straight afterwards and headed to play in Dundalk. At that time there was a petrol shortage due to the oil crisis. When the bus failed to turn up for one of the games, the organisers had to guarantee us a fill of petrol or we would not travel. In the semi-final of the Maytime we beat Scotstown of Monaghan, then in the middle of a three-in-a-row of Ulster Club Championship wins. Playing exhilarating football we duly ran out easy winners to claim the Larry

McCrudden Cup. Our tally of 4-16 brooked no argument – we were a very potent outfit.

The Dublin Championship quarter-final against seasoned championship contenders Thomas Davis was exciting and enlivened with some sublime football from both teams. Our defence was subjected to a testing day but held out manfully. Pdraig Hogan played a ‘blinder’ with a personal tally of three goals and two points and corner-forward Tommy Lyons troubled the Thomas Davis rearguard throughout. Five great goals carved from superb approach work and lethal finishing extinguished the hopes of the formidable Tallaght men. We were flying. These were heady days indeed as Croke Park and Civil Service beckoned.

On the first Friday of June of 1979 we lined out with hopeful hearts and determined mind-set at Croke Park for the biggest game in the club’s football history – the semi-final of the Dublin Senior Football Championship in our first ever senior championship foray. Alas an experienced Civil Service team, well marshalled by Dublin star Pat O’Neill and Louth legend Benny Gaughran and a plethora of other intercounty luminaries somehow mugged us by a point. Ironically the game had started so well for us. We were a point up, virtually from the throw in, scored by yours truly left half-back Matt Cahill. A superb first-half goal from right-half forward the flying Brian Bonar put us in charge for most of the game. We were a goal to the good at half-time and everything seemed to be following the script.

In goal, Sean Fox was commanding as PJ Hough, Paul Colgan, Dermot Maher and Gerry Walsh stifled attacks with ease. Our mid-field of Jerry Parr and Gerry Collins patrolled with serious intent and our multi-talented forward sextet of Brian Bonar, Sean McCarthy, Pdraig Hogan, Tommy Lyons, Pat Duggan and Paddy Ryan took the fight to ‘Service’ to the very end. On this occasion the all important ‘rub of the green’ remained a stranger to us. Yet, it was only late on when we were caught, the equaliser coming from a decidedly unluckily conceded free fifty yards out on the touchline. ‘Service’ poached another point against the run of play in the closing minutes to nudge ahead for the first time. That was it – our dream thwarted by a solitary point.

That balmy evening remains etched in my memory. An agonising one-

point defeat but a very high standard had been set and a clear agenda to be the very best. It took a long time to realise what a massive achievement it was to have reached a Senior Championship semi-final in ultra-competitive Dublin at the very first attempt. Thankfully the next few months would keep us busy and bring joy, some sorrow and ultimately a measure of redemption.

Though bloodied we were unbowed. We boarded a bus on the following Sunday to play an important league match in Fingal against St. Maurs. The bus was packed with players, supporters young and old, 'what ifs' and 'might-have-beens'. The support shown to us was truly heart-warming as we faced into a tough game less than 48 hours after our 'Waterloo'. Although we won, this game is remembered more for the dreadful knee injury suffered by our young corner forward Tommy Lyons. No one will forget the poignant sight of Tommy being carried off on a makeshift stretcher – a door of the clubhouse.

On another fine Friday evening, this time in July of that same halcyon year, the home sward of Glenalbyn hosted a marvellous Senior League deciding game. Two unbeaten sides with 100% records, Ballymun Kickhams V Kilmacud Crokes. A young 'Mun team bristling with talent and led by the brilliant Barney Rock barn-stormed to a 6 point half-time lead. Within ten dream-like minutes of the restart Kilmacud were 7 points ahead. Ballymun came back strongly to get to within 2 points at the final whistle.

This was the first of many classic games between emerging giants of Dublin football and was laced with unforgettable fluent football from both sides. Talented Crokes forwards Brian Bonar, Paddy Ryan, Declan Carr and Tommy Coughlan demonstrated their full repertoire aided by the mature heads of Dom Twomey and Pat Duggan. *Cúl báire* Sean Fox was cool and resolute as ever. Defenders Paul Colgan, PJ Hough, Kevin Ryan, Gerry Walsh and Dublin player Dermot Maher stood firm in the frenetic finale. What a game it was. What a memorable game to have played in. The sing-song afterwards upstairs in the old Glenalbyn House involving both teams was just as memorable. You would not see that nowadays.

The sporting gods, who had played with and dashed our hopes in June, now smiled kindly upon us in the form of an invitation to play in the prestigious Garda Guinness All-Ireland Club Tournament. Only

eight elite clubs were invited each year, usually county champions and/or provincial and All-Ireland winners. Walsh Island of Offaly were our first opponents. Although we were facing county champions who were in the middle of a six-in-a-row of county championship wins, we saw them off.

Garda Guinness Tournament Winners.



*Front row l to r: Paddy Hogan (Mentor), M. Cahill, K. Ryan, Padraig Hogan, D. Ryan, D. Carr, P. Ryan, B. Bonnar, G. Walsh, D. O'Reilly, J. Sheridan (Manager).
Back row l to r: C. Farrell (Mentor), D. Twomey, P. Duggan, D. Maher, T. Coughlan, G. Collins, S. Fox, J. Parr, P. Colgan, PJ Hough, P. Ford, J. Gallagher, B. Field.
(Courtesy of Irish Photo Archive).*

Next up in the semi-final played at Mobhi Road were Nemo Rangers, serial Munster and All- Ireland Club Championship winners. They were reigning Garda Guinness champions. The rewards for the winners the previous year were gold watches. So confident were Nemo of another success that they requested the organisers to put up a different prize. Nemo had twelve Cork senior inter-county stars including Billy Morgan in goal, Frank Cogan and centre-forward Dinny Allen. What chance had Crokes?

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A classic game was served up with Crokes emerging two point winners. Centre-half back Danny Ryan curtailed Dinny's threat. Their private duel was a real ding-dong battle. Danny was rewarded with a call up from 'Heffo' to the Dublin panel but unfortunately injury prevented him from answering the call. Our defence was steadfast and our forwards delivered the key scores when most needed. Although four points down at half-time we showed our mettle in a dramatic second half to emerge victors. There were many heroes but the real hero was the team togetherness, their never-say-die attitude.

Iveagh Grounds hosted the final played on a wet October day. The Gardaí provided the marching band for the parade. This was a big deal alright and meant an awful lot to us. We were facing the reigning Leinster provincial champions, Summerhill of Meath yet we won with ease on a double score line of 2-16 to 1-8. Summerhill played well and put us under pressure at times but we held firm and our forwards unleashed their full weaponry of pace and finishing ability.

Our ever-dependable defence was unchanged for several years at this stage and starting with goalkeeper the alert Sean Fox, built the platform for our win. Right corner-back PJ Hough, one of our best ever dual players, gave not an inch away. The imperious Dermot Maher lorded his manor at full-back. Paul Colgan, prince of left corner-backs swept up as usual. Gerry Walsh at right half-back gave a masterclass with his uncanny reading of the game and faultless distribution. Captain Danny Ryan led by example in the middle. Mid-field firm of Jerry Parr and Gerry Collins dominated. Full-forward Pat Duggan had a most productive day, scoring 1-5 and Pádraig Hogan chipped in with 7 points. Adding their magic to our attacks were youthful guns Brian Bonar, Paddy Ryan and Declan Carr and stalwarts Tommy Coughlin and Dom Twomey. *Paterfamilias* himself Paddy Forde fittingly notched a neat cúilín. Barry Field, Kevin Ryan, John Gallagher and David O'Reilly, one of Micháel De Burca's prodigies also shared in that special day. This was a days of days not least for manager John Sheridan and mentors Paddy Hogan and Charlie Farrell. Once again this was a complete team performance. The river was in full spate.

The presentation ceremony was a very fine affair in the Garda Club, Harrington Street. We celebrated in style. A lovely gesture was the

presentation of the team photo to each of us and we all signed them for each other as a memento. Our prizes were radio-cassette recorders, not gold watches, sadly!

Over an approximate two and a half year period at senior level our Win/Loss/Draw record read 53 Wins, 2 Losses and 1 Draw. We were unofficial All-Ireland Club Champions to boot. Declan Downs of the *Sunday Independent* commented in an article entitled 'Gerry's Flyers', that we had set the 1979 Dublin Senior Football Championship alight. We had indeed. Kilmacud Crokes football had well and truly arrived.

While we were disappointed not to achieve all our ambitions in one year there was a lot of fun trying and perhaps it is truly sometimes better to travel hopefully than to arrive. It was not for the want of trying, preparation or obsession. We had players of great ability, some of whom had already played with Dublin with more to follow, but the team really was 'the thing'. Unselfish effort created the stage for the forwards' fireworks. Attractive open football which was great to watch was the trademark along with a high standard of sportmanship. Playing on such a successful and ground-breaking team was a privilege. We shared in some wonderful times.

Various factors were at play in the rise of Kilmacud Crokes as a football force. There was a happy fusion of committed mentors, administrators, supporters and a remarkable and committed group of players blessed with a blend of pace, super-fitness, ambition and talent.

To quote from Kipling's *If*

If you can fill the unforgiving minute
with sixty seconds' worth of distance run,
yours is the earth and everything that's in it,
and which is more you'll be a man, my son.

This team certainly did all that and more.

Many players, mentors and administrators are mentioned here and to those whose contributions to the cause I may have omitted – my sincere apologies. This article came to mind on hearing of the terminal illness of our late colleague Gerry Collins and is dedicated to his memory. Gerry was a stylish high-fetching mid-fielder and accurate kicker of the ball. His bravery in the face of illness and his



Gerry Collins.

commitment up to the very end to the cause of helping others kick the smoking habit, is an example to us all.

Well done Gerry, you ‘filled the unforgiving minute with sixty seconds’ worth of distance run’.

Ar dheis Dé go raibh a anam dílis.

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MATT CAHILL originally hails from Virginia Co. Cavan and now lives in Blackrock. Matt has had a life-long involvement in the GAA. He has been associated with Kilmacud Crokes as a player at all levels, as manager of various adult teams and as a mentor of juvenile teams on which his sons Robert and Matthew played. His interests include sport, music, singing, the Irish language and local history.

