

Ballyhale V.S. & The Dunnamaggin Connection

Ballyhale Vocational School opened in 1959. Vocational schools in this era had just a two year cycle. Up to 1973 hurling was organised on a county championship basis. Kilkenny qualified for the final of the first ever Inter-County Vocational Schools All-Ireland in 1961. Tommy Kehoe of Raheen, Dunnamaggin, was one of the stars of the team. The team was beaten narrowly by Limerick in the All-Ireland final. Michael Moore of Rogerstown was a valuable member of the County Vocational Schools team that won All-Ireland finals in 1973 and 1975. Tom Cahill of Danganbeg was a member of the 1973 panel, also.

Ballyhale Vocational School won County Championships in 1968 and in 1969. Joe Mackey of Rogerstown was captain of the '68 team and Malachy Hogan of Kilmoganny captained the '69 team. Along with the aforementioned, other Dunnamaggin players who were members of both teams were Brendan Noonan, Kilmoganny, and Liam Cuddihy, Kilree. Murty O' Keeffe, R.I.P., Kilree, was a member of the '68 team and Jimmy Walsh, Rathduff was a member of the '69 team. These Dunnamaggin players made a significant contribution to the winning of these County Championships.

The late 1960s saw big changes in schools, free education, school buses all made for an expanded school system. All vocational schools had at least a three year cycle up to Intermediate Certificate by 1969 and some had senior cycle status by 1971. Ballyhale as a smaller school had to wait until 1979 for its first Leaving Certificate class. All of these changes impacted on the way hurling was organised. The first Leinster individual Vocational Schools championships were played in 1973. 1974 saw Ballyhale make a major impact by winning the Leinster U-14 championship. This was the first of 3 wins at this age level in the 1970s. Dunnamaggin was represented in a very significant way by Johnny Murray of Kilmoganny in goal, Canice Mackey of Rogerstown at centre-back and Jimmy O' Shea of Kilree. Success continued in 1975, when Ballyhale, again, brought the U-14 honours back to Kilkenny. Banagher of Offaly was beaten by a single point in a hard-fought, low-scoring final played at Nowlan Park. Dunnamaggin again was very much to the fore, represented by Johnny Murray in goal; Johnny made a crucial save late in the game. From Danganbeg came John Murphy. John was very speedy with a great eye for a score, he had a great championship at centre-forward. John Wall from Currahill, Kilmoganny was at No.13 who had a knack of scoring goals. Pat Walsh of Kilree and Jody Reid of Kells also featured with this team.

With Johnstown, Mooncoin, Kilkenny and Thomastown all coming to the fore in the following years, Ballyhale had to look to the Inter-County Vocational Schools team for success. Canice Mackey won All-Irelands in 1976 against Galway and in 1977 against North Tipperary. John Murphy of Danganbeg was involved in 1977 when Kilkenny defeated North Tipperary and in 1978 when Kilkenny were defeated by North Tipperary after a replay.

In 1979 Ballyhale won a third U-14 Provincial title. This was a very skilful team. Rathdowney was well defeated in the final. Michael Moore of Kilmoganny played at full-back. Michael was never less than resolute. Pat (Joey) Murphy from Danganbeg played at midfield. Pat was very much in the mould of his older brother John and was a major figure on the team. Gerry Ryan who was a very

neat skilful hurler played at wing forward. Robert Doherty, then a 1st year and a defender by inclination played at left half-forward.

This era saw significant changes in how competitions were organised in Vocational schools. An Individual Schools Senior Hurling competition was organised on an All-Ireland basis for the first time in 1978. In 1980 the U-14 Provincial competition was replaced by an U-13 competition and an U-15 competition up to and including All-Ireland level. Ballyhale fielded teams at U-13 and U-15 levels in the early 80s but not at senior level until the mid 80s as numbers in the school were small (75 boys) . John Whelan from Kilmoganny, Eamon Murphy from Danganbeg and John Doherty R.I.P. from Dunnamggin played on school teams of this time and each would have been good enough to feature on teams of any era.

The mid to late 80s saw the revival of fortunes. Teams were now fielded at all levels. The first of the Fleming brothers from Kilmoganny, Richard, came in the mid 80s, to be followed later by Eoghan and Pat. From Kilmoganny also came Eamon Kennedy, Matthew O' Shea and his brother Dermot, Rory Byrne, Paul Whelan, brother of John, James Barry, Alan Byrne, brother of Rory; and Gerry Carroll came from Kells. This bunch provided a big impetus. Success first arrived in 1989 when U-15 and Senior Leinster finals were contested with the U-15s winning against Rathdowney and the seniors losing to Banagher. The U-15s had an easy game against Rathdowney in the Leinster final but it was a different matter in the All-Ireland semi-final against Gort who raced away into an early lead despite playing into a strong wind. The Ballyhale team clawed its way back into the game and in the end won by a narrow margin. Dermot O' Shea played very soundly at left half-back. Pat Fleming was magnificent at midfield - he was especially good at frees, getting points from all angles and distances. Matthew O' Shea played very well as he had all season. The team was captained by Paul Whelan from Kilmoganny who played at full-forward. Paul had a good eye for a score. The All-Ireland Final against Killenaule was played in Birr and ended on a score of 4-7 to 4-4, a three point win for Killenaule. Ballyhale never quite matched the pace set by the Tipperary side, despite this they never gave up and had Killenaule hanging on at the final whistle. Scorers for Ballyhale included, Matthew O' Shea 1-0, Pat Fleming 0-3 and Paul Whelan 0-1. Alan Byrne, James Barry and Gerry Carroll were subs on this team.

Greater school numbers were also reflected on the field of play so Ballyhale was finding it easier to field a senior team. 1989 saw their first major drive in this competition. While the team was well beaten by Banagher in the Leinster final, progress was made. Johnstown, who were U-15 All-Ireland champions in 1988, were defeated by Ballyhale on their way to the final. Eoghan Fleming had a great season on the half-back line and was to play himself on the county minor team later in the year. Eamon Kennedy played in the forward line and always played with courage and no little skill. Rory Byrne was a substitute on this team, displaying commitment and good humour. Other substitutes were Matthew O' Shea, Pat Fleming and Paul Whelan. Later in the year the County Kilkenny Vocational Schools team defeated Offaly by 3-11 to 1-14 in the All-Ireland Final. Eoghan Fleming played at centre-back and had the better of his tussle with John Troy.

Ballyhale were full of hope for the senior championship of 1990, after the good showing of U-15 and senior teams the previous season. Eoghan Fleming was at centre-back, Matthew O' Shea at corner-forward and Pat Fleming at full-forward. Banagher was again their downfall in the Leinster

final on a score of 2-13 to 2- 9. Later that year Pat Fleming played with the County Kilkenny Vocational Schools team that was defeated by Tipperary in the All-Ireland Final.

The 90s marked the arrival of two more O'Shea brothers from Kilmoganny, Fergal and Ken, three Moore brothers Paul, Brendan and Ken from Carrigetna, Kilmoganny, and Brendan Delahunty. Ken O'Shea, even at this early stage showed great promise. His brother Fergal, possibly not quite as interested in the game as his brothers, none the less possessed great determination, speed and skill when the occasion demanded. Paul Moore was the oldest of three brothers. They all had a great love of hurling. Paul was a very determined corner back with a great burst of pace and a lengthy clearance. Everyone in Ballyhale recalls a Leinster semi-final played in Durrow against Kilcormac when Paul came up from the backs to score an equalising point against the wind and the hill. Brendan Moore, his brother, made a very rich contribution to school life in Ballyhale on and off the field. Brendan could and did play in most positions on the field with equal success. Brendan, and Fergal O'Shea played in the Senior Leinster Final of 1996 against Mooncoin which Ballyhale lost. When Ken Moore arrived in Ballyhale in 1993 it was immediately obvious that he had a major hurling talent. Ken played at centre-forward on the Junior teams (U-15) of '96 and '97. Both of these teams contested Leinster Finals. Ken played a major part when Ballyhale won its first Senior title, against Johnstown in 1998. Ballyhale were to lose the All-Ireland semi-final against Athenry. Ken played on the County Kilkenny Vocational Schools teams of '96, '97 and '98. Every player brings their own unique qualities to the game and so it was with Brendan Delahunty. Brendan brought great courage and a never-say-die attitude to the game. Brendan played midfield in the Junior Leinster Final of '96 and finally got his medal as a forward on the senior team of '98. Dunnamaggin players have always blended in really well on Ballyhale V.S. school teams, invariably bringing skill and leadership. Long may it continue.

Joe Mackey