

THE GOOD SHIP FENNELLY RE-LAUNCHED

(And God Bless all who sail in her!)

After a short sabbatical, "Fennelly" - as he is endearingly called by all his players - is back amongst them. A sigh of relief of volcanic proportions was exhaled down Dunnamaggin way, when it became public knowledge that Brendan Fennelly was back on board the good ship, Dunnamaggin. He had crossed the border into Tipperary to ply his undoubted expertise with Mullinahone. That sojourn lasted for a year, but unfortunately for him and his "home" club, they had, in the interim, fallen from the heights that he was so instrumental in scaling.

He had come on the Dunnamaggin "stagecoach" in 1993 at the behest of the Juvenile committee. What a monumental decision that proved to be. His first "Dunna" experience was in a minor challenge against a star-studded James Stevens outfit. Though not one for making rash promises, he realised after that game, that there was a "nice bunch of players in situ", with a solid hard core of very good players. In brief, he saw talent. Fennelly is very strong on talent. On the evening in question, he saw youngsters like Tom Hickey, Paul Cahill, and Anthony Mc.Cormack standing up to the best that the City outfit could throw at them, and coming out smelling of roses. So started a "marriage" that was to remain the bedrock of future success for a club that had known little of such success.

Brendan himself was "bred in the purple" as far as hurling success was concerned. His C.V was impeccable with records there for all to marvel at. He had been a member of the victorious Kilkenny under-21 management team of 1990, and again in 1991.

He laid down the ground rules very early. The first major - and most significant - win was the Roinn "A" County Minor hurling title of 1993. After the initial shock of winning such a title, Dunnamaggin people suddenly realised that maybe, just maybe, they had an emerging hurling force that one day could bring honour and glory to the Parish.

Dunnamaggin is a peculiar Parish in a sense, given that it is divided into three segments. Brendan, however, made little of the task of unifying the three strands. As he says himself, he courted, and won the support of the parents of all the lads, and a very young bunch of lads they were. Once he had the respect of the parents, he knew he couldn't fail. The parents, for whom he expresses the greatest admiration, knew and appreciated what he was trying to do, and backed him one hundred percent.. A huge groundswell of goodwill towards the Club manifested itself all over the Parish, and Dunnamaggin dragged itself from obscurity towards the summit of County Senior Hurling. A long road, had still to be travelled. There were snares, and minefields to be encountered and overcome, but overcome they were.

The minor win of '93 was followed by the under-21 "B" title of the same year. Most of the successful minor team plus "a few stronger lads like the Laharts, Ryan and Ken" made up that under 21 team. Fennelly is honest enough to admit that he had his share of luck too. Whether it was luck or providence, it matters not a whit now. The minors of '93, with the under-21 lads of the same year, plus "seasoned campaigners" like Jimmy Dunne, John Fitzpatrick, Gerry and John Ryan were to take Dunnamaggin into the ionisphere of hurling immortality during the greater part of the last decade of the second millenium. Their trophy sideboards are full beyond the wildest dreams of the most optimistic Dunnamaggin supporter.

Brendan Fennelly cites off-the-field development as another example of Parish spirit and commitment. He sees the new club development as typical of the determined approach of Dunnamaggin people. They were ambitious. They viewed with a little jealousy, the achievements of other clubs around them who had their own pitches, and facilities. They wanted the same. Again the Parish knew what was wanted, and they went about getting it for their lads. They now have the finest arena that they could have hoped for, paid in full by money generated by their own efforts. That, he says, is the strength of the club. Everything is for the sake of the "little village". "With that kind of spirit, I couldn't fail."

Brendan is quick to acknowledge the help given to him by magnificent people like Malachy Hogan, Seamus Martin, and John Hayes. "They showed me a commendable loyalty. Even when I was wrong, they defended my right to be wrong. They showed great confidence in everything I ever did."

Brendan takes great pride in seeing his proteges wearing the black and amber and goes so far as to predict that young Noel Hickey will prove to be one of the great Kilkenny hurlers in the coming years.

Now that he is back, will his ambitions be any less than they were? In a word - No. He still has that competitive drive, and burning desire to succeed. He was a winner himself, and he has trained a lot of winners. In the words of the song, "Happy Days Are Here Again" could be wafting over the Dunnamaggin Parish night sky around the fall of the year.

Fennelly and his lads could make it all happen again.

Barrie Henriques.