

## **Athy Minor Champions 2008 – After 35 Year Wait!**

THE centenary history of Kildare GAA, compiled and written by Eoghan Corry and published in 1984, has been used as a comprehensive and invaluable source of information relating to our native games. But I am a bit confused, when following Athy Gaelic Football Club's success in the minor final last Saturday, I went looking for details of past victories.

Sunday's victory was hailed as the first in 35 years, yet the centenary book claims Raheens won the minor final of 1973. I also have a copy photograph before me showing the Athy minor winning team of 1966 but Sarsfields are recorded as the minor title winners that year. Confusion reigns upon confusion so I am unsure as to the local club's past record in the Kildare minor championship.

The only certainty is that Athy Minors triumphed in 1966 and again in 1973. The team of 42 years ago captained by Peter Dunne included Jimmy Byrne, Fran Bolger, Eddie Kelly, Pat Kinahan, Stephen Bolger, Dominic Timpson, Dick Reid, David Craig, Joe O'Sullivan, John Goulding, Martin Quinn, Albert Dunne, Tom Whelan and Paddy Byrne. Pat Kinahan played left corner back on the 1966 team and last Sunday his son Brian captained the Athy minor team.

The victorious Athy team of 1973 was captained by Shay Ryan, who sadly passed away only weeks ago. His team mates were Adrian Dunne, Tony Gibbons, Tom Cooney, Brian Redmond, Ger Clancy, Barry Ryan, Mick Fennelly, Kieran O'Doherty, Donie Lambe, Pat Rowan, Paul O'Flaherty, Andy McConville, John Robinson and Eamon Delahun. One of the stars of that team was Brendan Whelan who due to injury could not line out at the start of the final and his place was taken by Donie Lambe.

However, with 10 minutes to go Brendan went onto the field to replace Mick Fennelly and another sub used that day was John Murphy. John Robinson played an outstanding role in Athy's victory in 1973, scoring no less than 3 goals and 3 points, while Andy McConville kicked over 5 points.

Last Sunday's team was not expected to win against the more fancied Sarsfields side, but the red and white, led by their captain Brian Kinahan, proved the best team on the day. The headlines in the local newspapers told the story; Brilliant Athy blow away Sash and Historic Day for Athy as Minors cause untold delight. Memories of the golden days of the Athy club's supremacy on the football field were revived when the final whistle was blown.

Will the youngsters of 2008 turn out to be as good as the players of the past. Players such as Tommy Mulhall, George Comerford and 'Sapper' O'Neill, and in more recent years Mick Carolan, Denis Wynne and Danny Flood who brought glory to the Athy club. Sunday's victory has given a tremendous boost to the local club which has not enjoyed a lot of success in recent years.

1987 witnessed the club's last previous major success when the team, captained by Mick Fennelly, captured the senior championship title.

Interestingly the minor winning team of 1973 was to provide several players for the senior winning team panel 14 years later. These dual players included Adrian Dunne, Ger Clancy, Mick Fennelly, Brendan Whelan, Shay Ryan, Kieran O'Doherty and Tony Gibbons.

This year's winning minor team was managed by Mark Brophy, son of the late Tommy who for many years championed the cause of hurling in Athy. The players on the team were Paul Clynch, Alan Bowden, Joseph Kinahan, Tony Gibbons, Shane O'Brien, Conor Ronan, T.J. Clare, Danny O'Keeffe, David McGovern, Brian Kinahan, Cian Reynolds, Corey Moore, Liam McGovern, James Eaton and Daroch Mulhall. Shane Brophy came on as a sub during the game. The man of the match award went to Athy's young full forward James Eaton whose 3 point tally coupled with what the papers described as his superb 'showing for the ball' won him the game's highest award on the day.

One of the most courageous stories from the minor final related to Michael Keogh who turned 16 years of age earlier this month. A team member who played in previous rounds of the championship, he was a substitute for the County Final. Michael was diagnosed with Type 1 diabetes seven years ago and despite requiring several daily insulin injections he continues to play Gaelic football and soccer with considerable skill and courage.

The present minor team has links with the 1966 and the 1973 team.

As mentioned earlier the Kinahan family was represented on both teams, while cousin Joseph Kinahan adds further Kinahan family interest to the present team.

Tony Gibbons who played in the full back line in the 1973 minor final had the privilege of seeing his son and namesake Tony play in the full back line for this year's minor champions. The current committee club members, Colm Reynolds and Con Ronan, were represented on the minor team by their sons Cian and Conor, while T.J. Clare who played in the half back line is himself a member of the Club's management committee. Brothers Liam and David McGovern, sons of former Senior County player Sean McGovern, were also members of the winning minor team. Clearly traditional family involvement with the local club and with G.A.A. games in particular have been continued into the present generation.

Congratulations to everyone involved in the minor team's success and hopefully it may lead to further honours in the nottoo distant future. To round off this article I append some of the lines composed by Tim Clarke, the onetime long serving secretary of Kildare County Board who wrote a ballad to honour the Athy Club's senior winning team of 1942. His words for the opening stanza could well apply to the minors of 2008.