

Martin Treacy

- A Lifetime in the GAA

Barrie Henriques



He may not have had as many Celtic gongs in his back pocket as his contemporaries – in fact he could manage one in 1963 against Waterford – but Martin Treacy gave his all to his club, to his County, and continues to do so, as he signs in for his 47th year as the Bennettsbridge County Board representative. It has been a long time, and more than one flood has passed under the bridge that connects the County Board with the club family of the County.

The GAA has been his life. The fact that his lovely wife Teresa and all their family have known nothing else but the GAA way of life, has made Martin's unconditional involvement more palatable than for other men, whose family might not be as predisposed.

Be that as it may, but long before there was a Martin Treacy family, there was a Treacy family from Bennettsbridge who were stone daft on hurling and their native Bennettsbridge. The story of the Bennettsbridge Club has been told in every which way possible, and through every medium of communication.

Briefly, Martin Treacy became a member of the Ring Dazzlers, when it wasn't such an easy accomplishment. He had progressed from the encouragement, coaching, and character forming imbued into all of those most famous of Bennettsbridge hurlers by Mr Lyng, their schoolmaster. To this day, when mentioning the man's name, not one of the 'Bridge icons would ever say his name without the prefix, "Mr". You had to be good to get into such vaunted company. The famous 7-a-side Tournaments were popular at the time, and it is generally accepted that the 'Bridge were undeniably the best 7-a-side team in the land. They were also the best crowd-pulling hurling gig in town wherever they played.

In an interview recently in the 'Bridge, I was honoured to have conversation with Seamie Cleere, Mickey Kelly, Johnny McGovern, Martin Treacy, Liam Cleere and Dave De Loughry. During our talk, it was generally accepted that the 'Bridge team of their time opened more new Churches, Schools, and Fetes than any other team in the land. It was no surprise that crowds in excess of 15,000 would pay in to watch them play Cork's Glen Rovers, Thurles Sarsfields, Dublin's St. Vincents and the Faughs, Wexford's St. Aidans and Rathnure. They won enough suit lengths to last them into old age. They won gold watches to stock J.L.Ryans on High Street. They won everything, including eleven senior County Championships from '52 until '71.

"The only thing we didn't win", said Martin Treacy to me at the time, "was a Church. We built enough of them", he laughed. But when the dust settled, Martin Treacy didn't peg the hurl under the table, nor did his interest in his own Bennettsbridge wane one morsel.

"You had won everything worth competing for; you had travelled the Country and overseas with the County; you had nothing left to prove, so why didn't you pull up the armchair, stick on the slippers, and watch Tolka Row or the Late Late?"

"It's in your blood stream, and I just couldn't cut a vein and let it flow away. I knew nothing else except the GAA, so I thought that the natural progression for me, at any rate, was to get involved with trying to keep my club on the top of the hill".



Eoin Hennessy

Martin Treacy with former Bennettsbridge greats, Seamie Cleere, Dave Deloughry, Johnny McGovern, Liam Cleere and Mickey Kelly.

"You have been forty-seven years at the County Board. It was not always an easy place to come out on top. There were some very big hitters present. It was never easy to win, if you could even get time to put your point of view."

"There were some incredible men there when I took over from Mickey Kelly. Very able men like Mick O'Neill, Nicky Purcell, Johnny Ivory, Jim McKenna, Joe Walsh (Thomastown), Ned Curran (Urlingford), the great Jim Rice (O'Loughlins), Kieran Meally, and his father before him, Mick, Tom Ryan (Glenmore), Kevin Fennelly snr. and many more, and then to cap it all, we had the daddy of them all in Paddy Grace. What a tremendous character he was.

Grace was such a committed Kilkenny man, that he accepted nothing from anyone if it wasn't to Kilkenny's advantage. They dreaded him in Croke Park, and often I would hear Kevin Fennelly, or Nicky Purcell say that they used give him freedoms in Croke Park not afforded to anyone else, just to keep him happy. He was a great man; one of the greatest Kilkenny men of all time".

The County Board as he knew it has changed over the years. Time was when he went to county Conventions there could have been between four and five hundred delegates. Convention might have to start at 11am, and might not finish before 8o'c in the evening. "I often heard lads in those days pleading with the Chairman to speed up the Convention business, because they had to get home to do the milking. That time, the canvassing for positions was desperate. Now there is no canvassing, as all delegates are in position well before the Convention. Everybody knows who is going to get what position", he told us.

"Our County Board is one of the most professional in the Country in my opinion. We are the envy of most other Counties, but sometimes I think that there is very little inter-change between the County Board and the clubs. Some of the lads I talk to in the clubs will say that they have no say. They think they have a

point, and sure who am I to contradict them".

The burden on Clubs is getting heavier and heavier. They are fighting a battle to exist, which is about the best they can hope for.

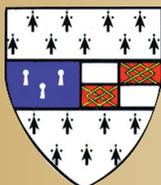
"We are a very professional County, but what worries me are the costs of running clubs. Clubs are on their own, getting very little help from any source. The cost of everything is on an upward spiral, and I don't know where it will finish. I would suspect that we will see the demise of some clubs within the next ten years. They have recourse to no outlet. They can't put a levy on anyone, like a County Board can put on levies. There are very few volunteers left. There is a small core of men doing everything in every club, and I wonder how long those lads will be prepared to continue. It's a worry, and no mistake. The interest in the organisation is still, thankfully on the upswing, but the number of people willing to work for the clubs is decreasing. Now how that is addressed is going to be a tricky operation. Its great that we are winning All Irelands, but that doesn't answer all of the questions", he said.

*His travels through the GAA road have been more than eventful. They brought him in contact with a wide collection of some tremendous human beings. He won and he lost, but he took success with the same modesty as he took on board set backs. Now one, if not THE senior godfather of the Kilkenny County Board, his contribution has been quite enormous, and continues in like vein with his beloved Bennettsbridge. Men like Martin Treacy have given much that has been so valuable in the ongoing development that is the greatest sporting organisation in the Country---
- Cumann Luthchleas Gael.*

*In the push for personal acclaim and office, the Martin Treacys of the GAA world should never be forgotten.
As many know, they have been.*

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