

Jimmy Smyth from famed Ruan

By: LIAM Ó DONNCHÚ

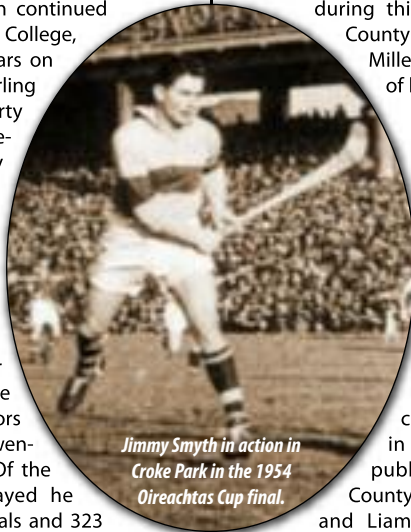
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MANY memories were evoked when news spread recently of the passing of Jimmy Smyth, the Clare hurling legend. Jimmy, from Ruan, was aged eighty-two and was without doubt the greatest hurler never to win an All-Ireland medal. He was once described by his close friend Christy Ring as 'the best hurler bar none'.

Jimmy attended Kells National School where his mother taught and then continued his education at St. Flannan's College, Ennis. He played for five years on the St. Flannan's senior hurling team, winning three Dr. Harty Cup medals and three All-Ireland Colleges' medals. Jimmy was of fine physique, powerfully strong and was blessed with a marvellous pair of hips. He had dashing speed, great ability to break a tackle and a bullet of a shot.

His inter-county career began at fourteen years of age lining out with the Clare minors and continued for the next twenty-three years at all levels. Of the 156 adult matches he played he scored an incredible 149 goals and 323 points. His record score of 6-4 in the Munster championship of 1953 still stands. One of his most outstanding performances was in the 1954 Oireachtas Final victory over Wexford – Mícheál Ó Muircheartaigh remarked that the goal he scored in this match was one of the greatest he ever saw – "He ploughed through several of them and had nothing in his mind but a goal".

Jimmy's performances for his county meant he was selected for Munster for twelve years, winning eight interprovincial medals, this, at a time when these competitions were second only to the championship in stature. He was also honoured by his selection on the Ireland team on six occasions



Jimmy Smyth in action in Croke Park in the 1954 Oireachtas Cup final.

during this period. Selection on both County and Provincial teams of the Millennium were further evidence of his great hurling ability.

Jimmy held an executive position at GAA headquarters, Croke Park, from 1964 until his retirement in 1988. He then went back to college, graduating with a degree in Philosophy followed by a Masters Degree from UL on "The Poems, Songs and Recitations of the GAA in Munster". Jimmy Smyth loved ballads and published his first collection, *Ballads of the Banner*, in 1998. He later helped to publish a similar collection for County Cork and with Séamus J. King and Liam Ó Donnchú he published

Tipperary's G.A.A. Ballads in 2000. His final collection, *In Praise of Heroes*, went on sale in 2007. For Jimmy, hurling was the people's game, while the ballad was the people's song.

Walking through Lár na Páirce, Thurles, this week, I stood and gazed at Jimmy's hurley and remembered –

*'For pulling on the flying ball or doubling in the air,
For sending raspers to the net or sailing o'er the bar,
He's the terror of each backline from Mooncoin to
Ardrahan-*

*The Banner County's hero, Jimmy Smyth from famed
Ruan!'*

Go dtuga Dia suaimhneas síorraí dá anam uasal.

Lár na Páirce welcomes donations of GAA Memorabilia. If you wish to donate or loan items to the museum contact – Seamus J. King, Lár na Páirce, Thurles or phone 062-61307. This Museum of Gaelic Games on Slievenamon Road, Thurles, offers much more besides and is open from 10-5 Mondays to Saturdays, and on big match days. Admission is €3 per adult, €8 per family. Tel: 0504-22702.