

# LEITRIM'S RETURN

Frank Brady



**TWO YEARS AGO** it looked as if the final curtain had come down on the Leitrim Football Club in New York, as a mass exodus of players had left the club unable to field a team for the 2015 season. It looked to be the final chapter for a club that had graced the playing fields of the Big Apple for more than a century with very commendable successes. However, Leitrim's absence did not sit well with some staunch Leitrim people. Paddy Gormley (Aughsheelin), a hard-core GAA man for nearly half a century, began to explore the possibility of reforming a club. Soon he was exchanging ideas with Seamus Clarke (Gortletteragh), the proprietor of JP Clarke's

premises, a welcoming haven for Leitrim-ites, on McLean Avenue in Yonkers. Seamus, a keen observer of events, as well as a successful businessman, and a great supporter of all things Leitrim, noted that there were plenty of Leitrim players in the locality who would be delighted to wear the Leitrim colors. Thus the seeds for a new club were sewn. Paddy Gormley was appointed Chairman, and he executed a master stroke in bringing in Sean Kelly as manager. The Dromahair man, highly regarded in GAA circles, and a former New York player, wasted no time in building a team. He persuaded the Drumkeerin quartet of Gary Cornyn, Dessie White, Alan Foley and

## ■ LEITRIM TEAM

**Back Row: Sean Kelly (manager) with nephew John, Alan Croghan, Sean Munnelly, Keith Boyle, Stephen Smith, Brian O'Connor, Brian Beirne, Niall O'Connor, John Conefrey Jr, Conor Reynolds, Fintan Brennan, Pdraig Gallagher, James Greene, Rory O'Neill & John Conefrey Sr.**  
**Front Row: Gary Cornyn, Rory Redican, Brian Mulvey, Alan Foley, Paul Ellis (Captain), Fergal Ellis, JP Kelly, Niall Acton & Declan Brennan**

Shaun Munnelly to dust off the boots and come out of retirement. Though they say you can't teach an old dog new tricks, these seasoned campaigners still had plenty of tricks in their arsenal to put any whippersnapper of a forward in his box.



■ The Leitrim team, management, and supporters celebrate their victory.

However, Munnely, in a bout of excessive exuberance, sustained an injury, as he zealously sought to shave milliseconds off his forty meters dash time. Though injury removed him from the physical fray, he was quickly co-opted as a selector by Sean Kelly. The managerial triumvirate was completed when John Conefrey Sr. (Aughavas) came on board. The Ellis brothers, Paul and Fergal (Fenagh) also switched their allegiance to Leitrim. Paul was entrusted with the captaincy, and showed an uncanny ability to land key scores under pressure, while Fergal was almost perpetual motion as he sortied from one end of the field to the other. John Conefrey Jr. was multi-tasking as he assumed the vice-captaincy and also the secretarial duties. The Redican sisters, Aisling and Sharon, daughters of Sean and Carmel, were doing their bit as they charmed a pair of players to declare for Leitrim, with their terms of endearment stipulating that they relinquish allegiances to the Royal and Kingdom counties. These ladies, with strong Aughavas and Kiltubrid roots, drive a hard bargain. Word is that they may be launching a ladies team next year. Cousin Rory also embraced the Leitrim colors. When the newly formed

team was at full strength, there were nineteen native born Leitrim players on board, representing twelve clubs from the native county. While a fully functioning team is the sine qua non of any club, vibrant support is essential to keep the team operating optimally. To that end Seamus Clarke and Carmel Redican (Aughavas) successfully organized the supporters club. The Leitrim faithful provided plenty of vocal support, while their trademark generosity ensured that the club was on a sound fiscal footing.

Leitrim got off to a flying start as they vanquished Armagh, Manhattan Gaels and Rockland, thus booking a place in the final of the preliminary knockout competition against Donegal. However, they were well beaten, but they rebounded quickly to record four impressive victories over Rockland,

■ A fine body of Leitrim men at the final. ( L.R. Sean Redican, Frank Dwyer, Damien Brennan, Paddy Gormley, Seamus Clarke & Pat Reynolds)



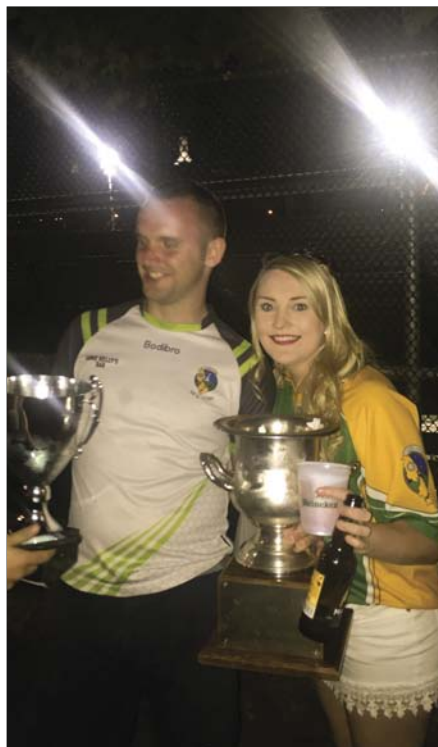


■ **Captain Paul Ellis hoists the cup.**

Armagh, Donegal and Manhattan Gaels, before going under to Monaghan. This defeat was of minimal significance as they steamrolled over St Raymond's to book a spot in the semi-final. Leitrim easily accounted for Rockland in the semi-final, 1-18 to 1-5, with Fergal Ellis (1-2), Keith Boyle (0-1), John Conefrey (0-1), Niall O'Connor (0-2), Conor Reynolds (0-3), Brian Mulvey (0-4), James Greene (0-2), and Paul Ellis (0-2) contributing to the impressive tally. Connor Reynolds was named Man of the Match. In the final, Leitrim faced St. Raymond's, who they had already vanquished earlier in the competition. They looked to be cruising comfortably as Leitrim led by 1-9 to 0-5, at the break. The goal came from Conor Reynolds after Pdraig Gallagher set him up, and Niall O'Connor, Paul Ellis along with Gallagher hit over multiple points. The lead was further extended upon resumption as James Greene scored after he latched on a delivery from

Paul Ellis. However, for the last twenty minutes Leitrim had to withstand a great comeback rally from St Raymond's. Crucial scores from Brian Mulvey, Pdraig Gallagher and Paul Ellis saw them safely over the line on a score of 2-13 to 1-14 as Alan Foley, Keith Boyle, Fergal Ellis, Declan Brennan and company shut down the scoring channels at the other end. Captain Paul Ellis was named Man of the Match. The Leitrim lineout was as follows: Brian Beirne (Sean O'Heslin's), Alan Foley (Drumkeerin), Keith Boyle (Aughnasheelin), Gary Cornyn (Drumkeerin); Fergal Ellis (0-1, Fenagh), Declan Brennan (Cloone), J.P. Kelly (Cavan); John Conefrey (Vice-Capt, Aughavas), Fintan Brennan (Cork); Brian Mulvey (0-1, Allen Gaels), Conor Reynolds (1-1, Annaduff), Niall O'Con-

■ **Manager Sean "Two Cups" Kelly gets a helping hand with his haul of trophies from Niamh Flanagan.**



■ **Staunch Leitrim Supporters Seamus Clarke and Sean Redican along with victorious captain Paul Ellis**

nor (0-2, Borrnacoola); Pdraig Gallagher (0-4, Gortletteragh), Paul Ellis, (Captain, 0-4, Fenagh), James Greene (1-0, Cavan). Subs: Stephen Smith (Carrigallen), Niall Acton (Galway), Brian O'Connor (Kerry), Alan McGarry (Gortletteragh), Rory Redican (New York), Dessie White (Drumkeerin). Cathal Mathews (Meath), Vinnie Kilraine (Mohill), Aaron Canning (Gortletteragh), Niall Croghan (Borrnacoola), Brian Fox (Cloone), Rory O'Neill (New York).

Management: Sean Kelly (Dromahair), Shaun Munnely (Drumkeerin), John Conefrey Sr. (Aughavas). Incidentally, it turned out to be a double celebration for Sean Kelly as he was a member of the Monaghan team that won the New York senior football championship immediately after Leitrim's victory. Next year Leitrim will move up to Intermediate ranks.

Frank Brady, a native of Manorhamilton, Leitrim Guardian Person of the Year 2015, has a long association with Leitrim football on both sides of the Atlantic, is the treasurer of the club, and also a sports journalist for the *Irish Echo*.