A tribute to Gerard Gallagher

Grainne Burns

Gerard died suddenly during a football match in Glenfarne

EVERY ONCE in a while, one individual will cross our path imprinting such an impact on our lives that can never be erased from our memory. Gerard Gallagher was one such individual. Without any awareness to himself, he had the capability of lightening up even the most darkest of days. Unfortunately, not in our lifetime, will we ever acquaint with another compared to Gerry, as he was known to his friends. The 11th of July 1999 will be long remembered in the history of Glenfarne GAA, the day on which we lost one of the greatest players and comrades ever to wear the infamous Black and White Jersey.

For two weeks previous to that Sunday, Glenfarne was still reeling in shock and sadness over the sudden and untimely death of young Enda McDermott RIP. The sense of despair and loss that was endured could not be captured in words. The Glenfarne footballers carried the burden of restoring some happiness to the community by undertaking the impossible challenge of defeating Aughavas in our first ever Senior Championship game! Even the most resilient of supporters could not believe their eyes as the young boys in Black and White recorded an historic victory. Gerry, especially, had a mission of his own that day, playing his heart and soul out to enlighten the broken heart of his girlfriend Marie whom was Enda's sister. Everyone now had looked towards the Glenfarne footballers for inspiration and encouragement to help overcome such a tragedy. Therefore, it was no surprise to see a large attendance in St Marys Park to watch Glenfarne take on the might of Allen Gaels.

The Kilty 'gang' arrived in their usual manner, joking and laughing among themselves as they joined their Glenfarne teammates in the dressing room. As Gerry sat in his usual corner of the room, he joined in on the 'traditional' mocking of one another, a method they adopted to settle their nerves before a big game. Placing the No. 5 Jersey over his head, he had felt the same pride as he did every time he wore the Black and White.

The game commenced with Glenfarne playing with all the determination and skill that they possessed against Aughavas. Nobody could have envisaged what was about to happen seventeen minutes into the game. As Gerry collapsed to the ground, we all just stood waiting, expecting him to rise again with that cheeky grin on his face urging the lads to continue the game. Despite vain attempts by Glenfarne physio, Sorcha Burns, nurses Catherine McDermott and Ann White and two Allen Gaels players, Charles McManus and Donnacha Lynch, there was nothing they or anybody could do. Their strength and courage will forever be remembered by everyone in the Glenfarne GAA circle. We had lost our heart that day, a void that is irreplaceable. The only consolation to us is that we know that Gerry died in the one place where he loved the most, with the most important people in his life and doing the one thing he treasured.

Gerry was a fanatic footballer which was clearly conveyed whenever he played with Glenfarne or indeed Manor Rangers. Every game, he showed such dedication and loyalty, always eager to do his best. To his fellow teammates, he was the one to whom we looked for encouragement and those vital scores when needed the most. His work-rate was exceptional, constantly creating chances for his teammates, always doing selfless work for others.

In his studies, Gerry was as dedicated and enthusiastic about his work as in any other task he challenged. In June, he had completed a diploma in Chemistry in Sligo IT. Following just two job interviews, he was offered a job in his chosen career in Dublin. Unfortunately, Gerry was never to discover that he was offered the position.

Gerry was very modest at heart, little did his team mates know that he was one of the top students in his class or little indeed did his college friends know that he was regarded as one of the most talented and committed players ever to play for Glenfarne. He was always so eager to help others, sacrificing much of his time to aid others in need.

The support and comfort that the Gallagher Family and Glenfarne GAA received from the Leitrim Clubs will be forever a consolation to them. Words cannot express our sincere gratitude to the Allen Gaels Club, who truly understand the loss we endured and their help will forever touch our hearts.

Gerry will never be replaced on the Glenfarne team, no one could even come close. Every time we wear the Black and White Jersey, we will fight for his dream and make him proud as he made us. May his gentle soul rest in peace with the other angels in heaven.