A Personal History of Old Christians

Having been commissioned on a Monday night to compile a history of the Club to be ready for printing on the following (Tuesday) night, I am left with no choice but to produce a few brief lines based on personal memories rather than a year by year account of the faltering steps of what is still a young G.A.A. Club. I would point out at the outset that it is entirely my own fault that I was landed with this job, I proposed at an earlier meeting that some record of the Club's history be produced in this program and the Old Christians motto is that if you have the audacity to propose something at a meeting you have no choice but to carry out the work yourself.

Old Christians won its only County Senior Championship in the year it was formed, i.e. 1962. In later years I decided it was the worst thing that could have happened because if you start at the top there is but one way to go after that. The team that won the football crown that year included in its ranks Bernie Hartigan, Pat Murphy, Seamus Cox and others who went on to represent Limerick in both hurling and football in later years. The growth of the Club in the next few years is etched in my memory as being linked to the progress of John Power. When I joined in 1963 he was on a bicycle, he graduated to a Honda and finally he managed the ultimate in transportation — an old Austin A40. The Club produced a Minor Hurling Team in 1965 that reached the County Final but never actually played in it, the reason being, if memory serves me right, that the C.B.S. School refused to release its Old Christians Harty Players (who made up half the team) and Doon took the title on a walkover. In 1966, however, the Club took both Minor County Titles. We actually won the Football Final twice, the County Board ordered a replay because one of our players was alleged to have been seen playing soccer on a specific day. (The ban was in force at the time). The player concerned, Michael Penny, swore this was not true, he was actually full back for Old Christians on the day in question. Among the officers of the Club at that time were: that man Power, that other man Ned Whelan, Mick Grace R.I.P., Joe Walshe and Joe Leonard.

In the mid and late sixties the Senior playing squad was evenly divided between a Dublin based squad (Pat Murphy, Seamus Cox, Jim Heelan etc.), and a Limerick based squad. As we rarely met except on the day of the Championship game it is perhaps easier to understand why we never progressed too often beyond the first round. As this writer was a member of the Limerick squad at that time I can confirm that our half of the team trained but I have to admit that we still could not match the endurance level of the Dublin squad when it came to the post match drinking sessions.

Into the Seventies and the Club set an outstanding record at under-age level — winning everything in sight including the historic Féile na nGael Championships, in Thurles in 1972. The man behind the Juvenile successes in the 70s included Willie Hurley, Bro. Cahill, Tim Sheehan, J. Power and N. Whelan. Unfortunately this run of success did not lead to further success at Senior level. The players as juveniles had a base at the C.B.S. and having left school drifted from the Club. Because of this, the Club lost many outstanding

players to other Clubs. No Club could afford to lose players of the caliber of the two Graces, Christy Campbell, Dave Tuohy etc., and hope to put out a winning combination of Senior players.

Finally we came to the Eighties and this present crop of players. Winning a Duggan Clup a couple of years ago was not something to get overly excited about, but that team saw the introduction to Senior ranks of youngsters like Pat Howard, Ray Kiely, Tim Sheehan, Ger Toomey and more who now form the basis of a side that is presently showing a lot of promise. These players have grown up together and have shown great loyalty and commitment to the Club at a time when their presence was sorely needed. I for one, feel that if this present team stay together, that the future of the Club is in safe hands. We are in our own grounds now at Punch Park and hopefully this will be a base for Championship success in the very near future. Old Christians may not have set the Limerick Scene alight since its inception but friendships have been formed over the years that will last forever and despite defeats that have left us despondent, the "crack" was always great, as it should be and as it will always be.

As I wrote at the outset, this effort is only a personal view of the past twenty three years, not a chronicle of the Club's progress and here are a few personal memories that will always stay with me.

Coming out of the Bruff Grounds after a defeat at the hands of South Liberties in the Senior Championship in the company of Ned and Mary Whelan, I overheard a spectator saying, "They are only a bunch of College Boys". The good Mary (I hope she'll forgive me for this) proceeded to wield her umbrella at the unfortunate man in such a manner that he was forced to defend himself desperately. I remember thinking that if we had used the hurleys in the same manner that we would have won comfortably!

In the dressing room at Kilmallock before a Championship quarter final in 1969 again against "Liberties", we were exhorted by our memories to "play only the ball" not to "retaliate" "Stay out of trouble" etc., etc. In the first ten minutes of the game, our three subs had been used and the following morning at least six of us were in the X-ray Department of Barrington's Hospital.

Finally a very personal memory. In a challenging game at Rathbane against a tough Tipperary team this writer attained a ferocious belt in the left knee which dislocated his kneecap. Anyone who has suffered this type of injury will know that it is accompanied by some pain and an inability to stand on one's two feet. John Power (himself) was medical orderly that day — he was also sole selector, sole supporter and linesman — and he rushed out to attend me. It was fairly obvious that I needed immediate surgery not to mention hospital treatment but the bold John had to keep in mind that the "subs" bench was empty. "Listen Mick", says he, "will you go into goals?"

Michael Keogh.