

Heroes from the Past

Every GAA fan, club and county has its heroes. Heroes are people who have accomplished remarkable things in their lifetime and are greatly admired and respected. Some have scored a winning goal or point. Some have club medals, some have county medals while others have All-Ireland medals. Some heroes might even have been manager of a winning team.

Down through the years the GAA has given Irish boys and girls thousands of role models and heroes. We have chosen just two, one hurler and one footballer. Mick O’Connell was a Kerry footballer while Jack Lynch was a Cork hurler and footballer. Both of these players are considered GAA heroes.

Mick O’Connell

Mick O’Connell was born on Valentia Island off the coast of County Kerry. Mick grew up on the island hearing about famous Kerry footballers and dreamed of one day becoming a footballer himself. As a young boy he played football at every opportunity, at school with his friends and classmates and at home with his brothers and neighbours.



Mick always tried to run a little faster, jump a little higher and practiced to make his left foot just as good as his right foot. His dedication paid off and in 1955 he was given an opportunity to play for the Kerry minor football team. The following year Mick got another lucky break and became a regular player on the Kerry senior team. Three years later, in 1959, Mick had reached his first All-Ireland final against Galway. On the day Mick had the great honour of captaining his team and when Kerry defeated Galway he lifted the Sam Maguire Cup in front of thousands of Kerry fans. However, in all the commotion and celebrations of winning Mick headed home to Valentia without ‘Sam’. Panic set in but a quick call to Croke Park and the cup was found on a table in the Kerry dressing room!

In later years Mick won another three All-Ireland medals with Kerry in 1962, 1969 and 1970. Throughout his playing career he trained rigorously for long hours in all sorts of weather perfecting his football skills and improving his fitness. He was unbeatable in the air, a master of the high catch and the most admired and graceful midfielder the game has ever known. Mick O’Connell was truly one of the first ‘superstars’ of gaelic football.

Jack Lynch

Jack Lynch was born in 1917 in Shandon Street, Cork City and as a child he spent his after school hours playing hurling in the old Cork Butter Market near his home. When it got too dark to see the small sliotar the young hurlers turned their attention to the larger gaelic football and on wet days they would play hurling in the cellar of a friend’s house! It was here in the streets of Cork City that Jack practiced the hurling and football skills that would see him become a famous dual player.



As Jack’s GAA skills developed he played his hurling with Glen Rovers GAA Club and his football with St. Nicholas’ GAA Club. In the 1930’s he featured on both the Cork minor hurling and football teams and eventually went on to become a star of the Cork senior hurling and football teams. Between the years of 1941 and 1946 Jack’s dedication and sporting talents on the GAA field were rewarded with a record six consecutive All-Ireland final wins. Between the years of 1941 and 1944 the Cork hurlers won a famous 4-in-a-row. In 1945 the Cork footballers defeated Cavan to lift the Sam Maguire Cup. In 1946 Jack won his sixth All-Ireland medal again in hurling when Cork defeated Kilkenny. To date Jack is the only man to ever play in and win six All-Ireland finals in-a-row.

As a GAA player Jack had amazing speed, strength and skill however many people remember him for his career off the GAA field. In later life Jack became a politician and served two terms as Taoiseach of Ireland from 1966 to 1973 and 1977 to 1979. Throughout his life Jack Lynch earned the respect of players, spectators, constituents and politicians alike.

Curriculum Links

History. Strand – Story. Strand Unit – Stories from the Lives of People in the Past.

History. Strand – Local Studies. Strand Unit – Games and Pastimes in the Past.

At the GAA Museum

View and count Jack Lynch’s medals.

Watch past All-Ireland finals at the GAA Museum Resource Centre.