

“I was in the Motor Cars now!”

Barrie Henriques talks with John Kinsella



HARD TO OPEN a profile on John Kinsella without reference to his battle with cancer over the past twelve years, compounded latterly with the added inconvenience of Parkinson's. But typical of the man, he has never for a fleeting moment, asked the question about his selection as a victim. "Sure somebody has to get it, so instead of saying why me, I would offer why not me as a compromise", he said to me some years ago. I have known him for a very long number of years, and irrespective of setbacks, I would have to state that he is primarily the most philosophical human being that it has ever been my pleasure to befriend.

John Kinsella, born, bred, weaned and reared in Bennettsbridge was given a natural gift of being "very handy" in whatever line of sport or entertainment he addressed. However there is no doubting that his first sporting love would have to be hurling.

"In truth, no young lad had an option if he needed to get outside the village", he laughed. "As youngsters we watched in utter envy and amazement as the star-studded Bennettsbridge lads piled into motors and headed for wherever - places that we as youngsters could only guess their geographical location". Eventually he made his way onto the 'Bridge minor team, with no great success at schools and club levels. In a phrase "We won nothin", according to my interviewee.

Bennettsbridge won the first ever under-21 County Title in 1968. It was the '67 Championship, and John Kinsella was the skipper, collecting the Jack Mulcahy Trophy, called after his first cousin. As a consequence Cork beat Kilkenny in Walsh Park in the 1968 All Ireland Final with Kinsella again at the helm. No major gongs thus far for the ambitious young Kinsella. But things would turn round in spades.

His first County senior medal arrived in 1966.

"I was in the motor cars now", he roared laughing.

He was swimming with the big lads. His first cousins, Paddy Moran, and Tony Kelly, were with him. His great icon was there too - John Mc Govern "Mc Govern made hurling look simple. My eyes would be like organ stops in the middle of my forehead at some of the things he could do with a hurl and ball. I revered the ground he walked on, and now I found myself on the same team - utter magic", he swooned.

John's Mother was one of four sisters (Murphys) who brought All Ireland winning players into the World - Paddy Moran, John Kinsella, Tony Kelly and Jack Mulcahy.

John Kinsella won three County senior Titles with the 'Bridge in '66, '67 and '71. He started as a wing back, progressed to midfield, onto wing forward, and finished at wing back.

Versatile or what?

"In '71 we prevented a super Johnstown team doing what would have ultimately been five-in-a-row, and that was some achievement. They were a super team at the time, unbeatable", he enthused. John is a very modest, self-deprecating if anything. His answer to his longevity on the Kilkenny team met with a "from '67 to '73, but more off it than on it".

For the '69 Final against Cork, Liam Byrne and John Kinsella were taken off the panel after

the Leinster Final. Why?

Get this. Because Kilkenny had to reduce the panel from 22 to 20. I can hear you saying already—Holy Jazus!, or an expletive of a similar hue. He was rather miffed!

He went playing soccer, and chasing the girls. He just loves dancing, and continues to the present day stepping across the ballroom floors of many dancehalls with Sheila, herself a brilliant ballroom dancer.

He married Sheila in '73. They had one son, Dan, and three daughters, Jackie, Gerri, and Owena. Gerri is a Downs Syndrome girl who keeps her Dad and Mam well set on the ground. Like all Downs children, Gerri is the focus of John and Sheila's existence, filling their every waking moment with joy, happiness, and true values - not forgetting their four grandchildren.

After the disappointment of the '69 Final, John came back into the fold for the '72 Final against Cork. He had previously won an Oireachtas medal against Clare in 1967, played in Croke Park. Let the record show that the terrier like Bennettsbridge man earned the admiration of the Kilkenny followers, as he bagged 1-2, and a Man-of-the-March Award from the *Kilkenny People*.

One of the great County highlights he remembers with bursting joy is when Paddy Grace told him that he was going in against Tipp in '67.

"It was a never to be forgotten moment. The crowd, the atmosphere, the thrill of being on a Kilkenny team that beat Tipp in a Final for the first time since 1922. You couldn't write the script", he beamed.

John played soccer - he "was handy" at that too - with Evergreen, and with East End United. He tried his hand at



John Kinsella shows his joy after the 1967 All Ireland victory over Tipperary

refereeing GAA games. “The lack of punctuality really peeved me off, so I turned to soccer. It was easier do those games, and anyway you wouldn’t get the same abuse”, he laughed.

Local Radio came on stream in Kilkenny, and John Kinsella, with his catch phrase, “a good day for the washing missus” endeared him to a huge listenership. There were housewives, and farmers hung on every word of meteorological info coming at them down the wires from the badly missed Radio Kilkenny. He did ten years with KCLR, but his services were terminated, much to his annoyance.

As I said, John Kinsella was “handy” at many sports. He is a slave to golf.

“I love it, and I enjoy the friendships that I have formed through the years. I have had great memories especially when we would go to places like Druids Glen, and the K Club for the Press launches of Irish Opens and Matchplays”, he said.

“Your sporting lifestyle so far has given you enormous pleasure, John, give me a few highlights?”

“In hurling of course, I would have to say coming on against Tipp, winning the County Final against an unbeatable and unbelievable Johnstown team, playing golf with my close friends in Callan, travelling on holiday overseas with the Radio Kilkenny crowd to Spain and Cyprus. That will do you”, he finished.

Still a Bennettsbridge man to the core, he involves himself with the Parish Choir,



With Family and Friends
L/R: Damien Grimes (son-in-law - son of Eamon Grimes, former Limerick star), Jim Treacy, Pat Lalor, Alowen Grimes (Granddaughter), Daniel Kinsella

the newly formed Folk Choir, and the Move 4 Parkinsons Choir in Kilkenny City, and other Community enterprises. He loves the hurling being played by the Kilkenny team of the last twelve years.

“We are indeed fortunate to be alive to witness the magical stuff these lads have provided. It would bring you back if you hadn’t gone too far”.

Would you change any element of your

existence so far John?

“Not one moment, although Sheila and myself have had our share, but we also had the help, only God knows from where, to challenge it. Otherwise, a resounding “No,” and with the help of God, a brilliantly professional medical team and very loyal friends, we will get some more. He spoke first and He will speak last”



KILKENNY - ALL IRELAND SH CHAMPIONS 1972

Back Row: Ned Byrne, Mick Crotty, Pa Dillon, Pat Henderson, Eddie Keher, Frank Cummins, Kieran Purcell
Front Row: Pat Lalor, Jim Treacy, Liam O'Brien, Noel Skehan (Capt.), Pat Delaney, John Kinsella, Eamon Morrissey.
(Missing from picture - Phil Larkin)

Photo Tom Brett