

## Waterford and Antrim down the years

By any conceivable yardstick Waterford and Antrim hurling rivalry over the years have been chiefly confined to the National League and until now the counties from extreme ends of the country haven't crossed camans at senior championship level, but they have encountered each other in each of the other hurling grades.

The first of these was in the Junior grade Home Final all of 78 years ago now ,when the Decies men proved successful on a facile winning score line of 6-7 to 0-3. Coincidentally, the Glensmen had to wait until much later - 1959 in fact - before winning their first Junior hurling title at the expense of Cork - 3-4 to 2-2. The records further reveal that Waterford and Antrim went another protracted period before meeting in the 1974 All-Ireland Under 21 hurling semi-final, when the Decies standard bearers, following a triumphant march through Munster, beat the Ulster opposition by a comprehensive 3-18 to 1-2 margin. The winners, who included Pat McGrath and Tom Casey in their ranks, later lost the final to Kilkenny by the minimum margin in Semple Stadium.

The last time the white & blue clashed with the saffron & white colours was in the 1992 All-Ireland minor hurling semi-final at Croke Park, where the Munster champions came out on top by a decisive 3-16 to 3-7 margin before losing somewhat disappointingly to Galway in the final. That particular under eighteen Decies combination included two players, Tom Feeney and Paul Flynn, who still play for the county seniors.

### National League Story

Of the twelve National Hurling League games played between Waterford and Antrim over the past three and half decades, the Munster county proved outright winners on eight occasions, one match was drawn (in 1971) and the Ulster side claimed victory on three occasions.

For the record, Waterford won in the league 3-10 to 1-5 in Ballycastle in November 1972 and the team that day was: Pat Flynn (Ballygunner), father of Paul, Peter Whelan (Portlaw), Paddy Coady (Erin's Own) (R.I.P.), Sonny Walsh (De La Salle) (R.I.P), Davey Duggan ( De La Salle), Seamus Hannon (Ballyduff), Pat McGrath (Mount Sion), father of Ken and Eoin, Andy Heffernan (Ferrybank), John Galvin (Portlaw), Jackie Whelan (Portlaw), John Kirwan ( Butlerstown), Martin Hickey (Portlaw), Stephen Greene (Mount Sion), Martin Kirwan (Butlerstown), Martin Geary (Mount Sion). Ten of that team fielded in the Home National Hurling Final against New York in September 1973 and won by 1-17 to 3-8.

### Centenary clash

In Centenary Year - 1984 - Waterford sustained what was described at the time as a humiliating League setback at the hands of Antrim at Walsh Park. It was around this time that hurling in the Decies had reached a very low ebb - earlier the same year they had surrendered Division 1 League status, losing play-off matches to both Laois and Galway. Things appeared to be

picking up a little when Waterford travelled to Belfast and accounted for Antrim by the minimum winning margin (3-12 to 3-11), in the Special Centenary Cup competition

Even gloomier days lay ahead as during the 1985/86 League season, Waterford slid further down the scale, competing in Division 3 of the League with the likes of Derry, Armagh, Kildare, Louth and Carlow. It was of course a short lived experience and within two years, the Decies hurlers were back in the top flight and have been competing there ever since.

## **Last meeting**

Just over fifteen months have sped by since Waterford and Antrim last crossed camans, when a League engagement brought a huge crowd to Fraher Field on March 9 of last year to see the home side record a handsome 3-29 to 3-10 victory over the Glensmen. The visitors on that occasion were greatly short-handed and the result was a whopping 3-29 to 3-10 win for the Decies colours.