

## Tom Cheasty's true grit shone through until the final whistle

By Bob Rockett

The news that Tom Cheasty had died was received with much sadness throughout the County and much further afield, by the survivors of the most glorious era in Waterford hurling.

Tom's contribution to those halcyon years is legendary and vividly recorded in the memories of witnesses. His speed in getting possession, weaving and swerving through opposing lines of defence were daring, exciting, and a joy to behold, creating panic in opposing teams and supporters.

When the chips were down we looked to Tom Cheasty to produce the effort that would provide the inspiration for team-mates to up their performance. In the 1959 All Ireland final his point near the end, having made his way through the Kilkenny rearguard, ignited the Déise resurgence that resulted in the goal that produced the draw. That score - referred to in the aftermath by sportswriters as 'Cheasty's point' - was rightly acclaimed as a watershed.

His moderate lifestyle ensured his ever-readiness for the farmer's working life and the sporting career he pursued with intensity.

Without the trimmings of television and media hype of today's sporting world, the situation was totally different back then: no managers, collective training was restricted, and preparation for games was low key. Hamstring problems were unheard of, the demands of everyday life, the lifting and bending of manual labour, was ample preparation for mind and body.

Also, local junior hurling and football fortunes had priority over what was happening on the inter-county scene. Tom was a Ballyduff Lower man and his mission was to elevate his Parish and his club's status in the county. The duels between players in neighbouring parishes who lined out together on county team duty were eagerly looked forward to. Temperatures would rise as opponents hatched plans to contain Tom Cheasty, often designed to extend his patience.

### Family Man

Tom Cheasty's contribution to the enjoyment of that era was a subject for nostalgic conversation among those assembled for his removal from WRH to St Patrick's Church, the Folly, on Saturday, August 11th last.

Tom was a quiet, almost shy man. He didn't thrive on being a celebrity. His social life was no different to those who shared his environment, going to the local dance halls, though he didn't drink or smoke. It wasn't his nature to project his exalted status. He was pleasant and jovial company.

When his hurling career was over, he married local girl Kathleen Kelly and settled down, having purchased a farm in Killure. He applied the same dedication to his home and family as he did to his sporting career.

A true family man, they got priority and were sustenance to each other when overtaken by grief on the untimely death of their daughter Siobhan - a tragedy almost coinciding with the diagnosis of the illness that was to eventually claim Tom.

His forbearance under the awful trauma of being informed that his spine had been corrupted was inspirational. His medical team, astounded by his bravery, positive attitude and extraordinary ability to tolerate pain, were concerned that Tom's adventurous spirit might overtax his body, which was now operating on auxiliary power.

Arriving home to his family encased in a frame, his every movement painful, called for extraordinary courage. Having to learn to walk again, he took up the challenge, and was always an optimist.

While still undergoing rehabilitation, one occasion, while waiting on a helper, he was unable to resist the temptation of a kango hammer, taking it up and having a go at using it as a possible means of restoring a little of his famous strength.

Providence

He appeared to be winning the battle, when a lesser man would have succumbed to the excruciating pain long before.

In recent months he featured in a TG4 'Laochra Gael' documentary, in which his personality had changed little. He was the usual calm, unaffected Tom Cheasty, humbly describing himself as a hurler that did a bit of farming.

His many fans were unaware of the battle he had been fighting over a number of years to regain a fraction of the power he'd displayed in his pomp.

It was fitting that providence 'it would appear' had a hand in his exit from this mortal existence, coming just before the All Ireland hurling semi-final against Limerick. The minute's silence in Croke Park, filled with eighty thousand spectators, was an edifying and eloquent tribute to a legend that had graced and electrified just such a gathering some four decades previously.

The family of Tom Cheasty will find much solace in the tributes paid during his obsequies to Tom, particularly by those he played with and against both at Parish and County level.

The rendering of 'Farewell lovely Déise' by Michael O'Regan brought down the curtain on his life.

For me, Tom Cheasty was comparable with the legendary Matt Donavan - 'Matt The Trasher' of Kickam's Classic 'Knocknagow.' He was a modest man, yet a genuine crowd puller in his glory days.

Meeting to say our goodbyes to a true great - amid handshakes between old friends that had not met for years, some propped up with stick or crutches - there was a tear in the eye and a lump in the throat as we paid personal tribute to a man who had made an impact on our passage through life.

We revere Tom Cheasty and cherish his memory for the joy he brought us.

We tender our deepest sympathy to his wife Kathleen, daughters Margaret, Catherine, son Geoffery, brother Edmond and other relatives and friends that mourn his passing.