

# EPIC ALL-IRELAND VICTORY

# A rollercoaster ride none of us will ever forget

## TONY EARNS PLACE AS ONE OF SPORT'S ALL-TIME GREATS

LONG before Sunday's convulsing afternoon of Croke Park wonder, Tony Kelly's reputation gleamed with the varnish of skyscraping achievement.

Still, Clare's lord of the Colosseum splashed onto the gable end of a championship summer, one that triggered wild shrieks of Banner rapture and wails of pulverising Rebel despair, belonged to another world of genius, a wonderland of brilliant, did-he-really-just-do-that absurdity.

This was the glorious intersection of hurling and high art, sport as symphony, as religious experience.

*This was Joyce transforming blank pages into Ulysses, Heaney making hope and history rhyme, Jack B Yeats at his easel depicting the Liffey Swim, Luke Kelly singing A Song For Ireland, U2 in studio conjuring The Joshua Tree to life.*

Or another Clare maker of music, the great Willie Clancy himself, drawing the kind of sound from his uilleann pipes that held a room under a holy spell.

Before our incredulous eyes, Kelly delivered a triumph of enlightenment.

### Diamond

It is hard to imagine an Irishman has ever excavated a diamond of such flawless beauty. The Ballyea bard composed a lyrical poem to life's infinite possibilities.

Something shimmering and unforgettable and enriching. An aesthetic feast — a treasure-house of goals and points so soaring and unlikely that they stimulated every microfibre of the senses.



ARTISTRY: James Joyce & Luke Kelly

### COMMENT

■ Roy CURTIS

It was as if Clare's helmsman-in-chief had steered his people back to that day in antiquity when the divinities unveiled the Cliffs of Moher.

Kelly gifted the Banner a second wonder of the world.

In his momentous 2006 essay 'Roger Federer As Religious Experience', the late David Foster Wallace attempts to convey his astonishment as he observes the grace and splendour of the tennis god at play.

"There are times, as you watch the young Swiss play, when the jaw drops and eyes protrude and sounds are made that bring spouses in from other rooms to see if you're okay."

*Foster Wallace might have had the crowning glory of Kelly's afternoon, the goal that channelled his inner Messi, a moment so perfect it felt like the apogee in the development of this thousands-year-old ancient code, with the following description of a Federer winner.*

"It was impossible. It was like something out of The Matrix. I don't know what sounds were involved, but my spouse says she hurried in and there was popcorn all over the couch and I was down on one knee and my eyeballs looked like novelty-shop eyeballs."

That's how it felt high in the Hogan Stand looking down upon Kelly dancing and weaving, a man, like Pythagoras blessed with an innate un-



AGONY AND ECSTASY: Contrasting emotions among Clare and Cork fans as Tony Kelly (left) ran the show



derstanding of angles.

Kelly's compare, the Hurler of the Year-elect and Harvard scholar Shane O'Donnell, harbours serious ambitions to pursue a career in astrophysics. Essentially to explore distant worlds as an astronaut.

Lining out with Kelly, a man from another planet, a figure apparently unburdened by human constraint, must be the equivalent of stepping into a NASA simulator and meeting an extra-terrestrial.

### Feast

In this hyper-regulatory age, it was something of a surprise no law had been drafted to ban the kind of sensory feast this All-Ireland final delivered.

This was sport as hallucinogenic thrill, a wild, captivating roller-coaster ride that none of us who were strapped in for the journey will ever forget.



HEROIC: Kelly played like sporting gods like Federer and Messi in their prime

Cork were truly magnificent. From Robert Downey's goal, running and running and running — imagine Forrest Gump only with a sliotar atop a hurl — covering the vast acreage from Hill 16 to Davin End, crowning the move with a lethal rifle shot.

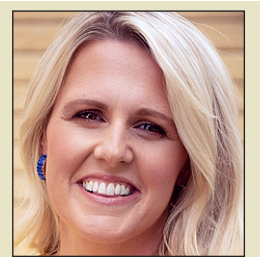
*To the resilience, the refusal to bend, the keeping-on even as big calls went against them in pursuit of an end to their 19-year exile from the top table.*

Only those without a heart could fail to share their sense of devastation.

The difference was that Clare had the most important piece on the chess board. Kelly was totemic, commanding the contest with the authority of a gold-braided officer on the battlefield.

This was Francis Ford Coppola delivering The Godfather Part II. Eleven years after becoming a teenage Hurler of the Year, Kelly wrote a sequel that was somehow even more impressive.

The rest of us, the mere mortals, drank in his heroic deeds, and gave thanks for this rare chance to gulp from the very cup of life.



BROTHER: Jacquie and (below) with Sean 'Memories of Sean will always stay'

SUNDAY Game presenter Jacquie Hurley has said memories of her late brother Sean will always be in her life.

Sean was tragically killed in a road traffic accident in 2011 at the age of 25, a devastating event that occurred while Jacquie was working on the news that night.

Despite the profound loss, she feels Sean's presence with her always.

"Seanie is with me, with us, forever" the sports host told the RTE Guide.

She believes that someone as significant as Sean doesn't simply fade away.

"You don't have somebody who was that important in your life



just fade away and forget about them.

"I feel that he guides us through so much. His presence is constantly there."

### Signs

The presenter often encounters signs that remind her of Sean, sharing: "There have been so many times that mum and dad had booked into a hotel and been given room number 109 [Sean's race number]."

## Final one in million

MORE than 1 million people watched the nail-biting All Ireland Hurling final on RTE — but the BBC refuse to release their ratings.

Clare's thrilling extra-time win over Cork in yesterday's All-Ireland Senior Hurling Championship Final in Croke Park pulled in massive viewing figures in Ireland.

According to RTE, an average of 1,037,000 tuned into The Sunday Game Live on RTE2 with another 9,000 watching on RTE2+1.

Television coverage peaked at 1,231,000 as the game reached its climax.