

Forged in cauldron of the MacRory

Eamon Donoghue

Barry Owens became one of the best full backs of his era after his baptism of fire with St Michael's

From 1999 to 2002 when St Michael's Enniskillen famously reached four MacRory Cup finals in a row, they laid the foundations for arguably Fermanagh's greatest ever team, not to mention unearthing one of the province's greatest ever full backs.

Before Barry Owens moved to the school for his final two years of study in 1999, playing under the tenure of Dominic Corrigan, who would bring him into the county senior panel as a selector in 2001, he had never even played in the full back position.

In fact, he was only starting in that 1999 MacRory Cup triumph because the regular full back was missing, forcing Corrigan to revise his options. But the result was that Corrigan discovered probably the most talented full back of his generation.

"I came into St Michael's in sixth year, myself and Marty McGrath, and I think the team we came in to had already been relatively successful at first year and all the way up.

"You see up here it's sixth and seventh year – so after fifth year you leave your high school and go on to your grammar school – so that's what brought us in.

"I played in two MacRory Cup finals, two of the four. Dom Corrigan was the PE teacher and he took us for MacRory Cup in the school and then he got involved for Fermanagh with John Maughan at the end of 2000 [as well as managing Fermanagh in 2003]

and he brought a lot of us through after that. I was straight in after school."

Owens may not have been a ready-made MacRory Cup star when he entered the school, but within five years of his senior schools debut, he was an established intercounty player and an All Star full back.

The early teams of the MacRory Cup 'four finals in a row' also contained Fermanagh's Marty McGrath, another All Star in 2004, the duo only the county's second and third ever All Star award winners.

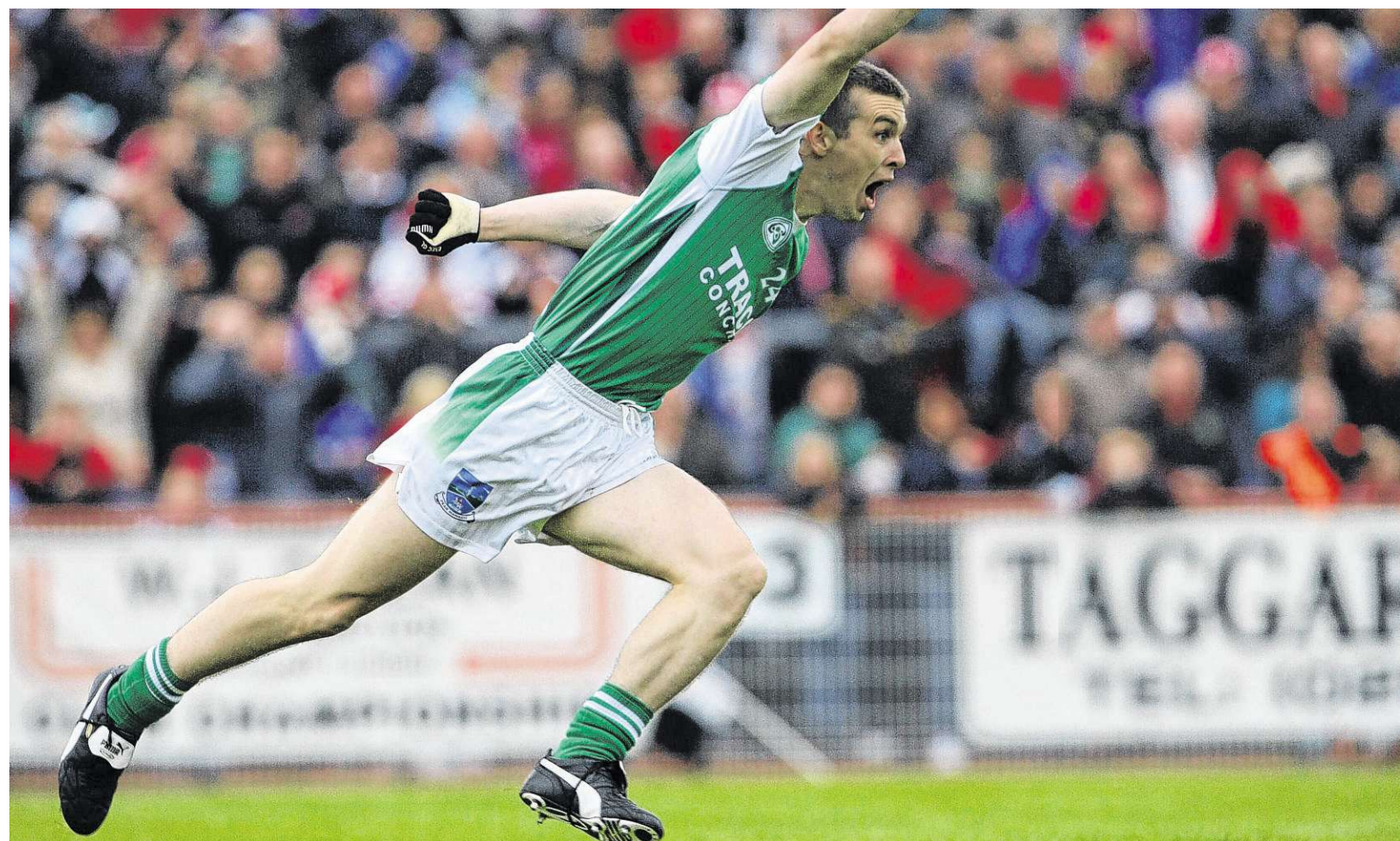
"Marty was midfield for two years for the school, I probably wasn't going to be starting for the team in '99, only the regular full back went away on holidays for a couple of weeks, his family went to Australia I think and I got my chance.

"I had only joined the Fermanagh minor panel at the time. For the club I would have played at midfield mostly and centre half back, I had never really played full back, so it was Dominic who started me off playing there – and it stuck."

Springboard
McGrath and Owens weren't the only two to use the experience of the MacRory Cup as a springboard for their future Fermanagh careers. Another key component of the Fermanagh team that took the 2004 qualifier series by storm, reaching the All-Ireland semi-final was Colm Bradley, while Shane McCabe also went on to represent the Erseniders for a number of years.

"When we arrived Colm Bradley was the star. He was the main man up front and I remember he kicked 2-3 or 2-4 in one of the MacRory Cup finals.

"The MacRory was probably a higher level than county minor was when we played. In the final in 2000 we were playing against the likes of Seán Cavanagh from Tyrone and Ronan Clarke and Malachy Mackin of Ar-



Football fixtures

Preliminary games to be played Wed 28th - Sat 31st January 2015

- (A) St Patrick's Magherav St Macartan's Monaghan
- (B) St Patrick's Academy v St Mary's Magherafelt
- (C) St Michael's Enniskillen v St Colman's Newry
- (D) St Patrick's Armagh v St Eunan's Letterkenny

Quarter-Finals to be played Wed 11th - Sunday 15th February 2015

- (1) St Patrick's Cavan v Winners of (D)
- (2) St Paul's Bessbrook v Winners of (C)
- (3) Abbey CBS v Omagh CBS
- (4) Winners of (A) v Winners of (B)

Semi-final: Friday/Saturday February 27th, 28th
Open draw

Final: March 17th

2002. In total, the school has reached 13 finals, while they have also appeared in two Hogan Cup finals, losing out in both 2002 and 2012. "Ulster is always very even. I suppose St Pat's Maghera are the main ones, but much like with the counties, any team can beat any other team and it does take a lot out of you winning Ulster. So that's why a lot of teams go on and get beaten in the Hogan Cup.

"When we won it in '99, we played Good Council of Wexford and they beat us by two points in the semi-final in Parnell Park. Rory Stafford was playing for them and they were a strong team."

Compete
"We lost then in 2000, and then 2001 was the year of the foot and mouth outbreak, so ourselves and Omagh shared it, but I was gone at that stage. The following year we won it again and went on to compete in the Hogan Cup, but again St Jarlath's beat them in the semi-final."
Fermanagh went on to become one



Barry Owens (main) celebrates scoring a goal for Fermanagh against Derry in the Ulster semi-final in 2008. Above right, St Patrick's win the MacRory Cup in 2009.

PHOTOGRAPH: OLIVER MCVEIGH /SPORTSFILE/RUSSELL PRITCHARD/INPHO

definitely a great time."

For Owens, though, with the game at his feet, his luck would turn sour on the injury front. Firstly heart surgery held him back for much of the Ulster championship in 2008, although he did appear with great effect during the latter stages of the campaign, displaying his versatility in the forward line.

Next he suffered a cruciate ligament injury, which ruled him out long term, while the final years were hampered with minor niggles before he retired after last summer's championship.

"There were a lot of lonely nights on the side of the pitch watching

the other lads training and me just doing my own bits of running, trying to keep my own bit of fitness going, but I enjoyed my time in it.

"My family was probably the main reason I left. My wife and I, we have been together through the whole lot, probably from the start of the MacRory Cup and I think we needed a bit of a break from the football for a while.

Good run

"Then I suppose with the injuries too, it was fantastic whenever I got a good run, but I only got back last March and I didn't really have time to give it to.

"When you're young, football is your life, you were just training, football, training, football and that's what it was and you know I suppose it was hard – but I actually find it hard to fill my time now after it all.

"But no, I think Pete McGrath [Fermanagh manager] knows it's time for the young players now."

Formidable big four get ready to rumble

St Paul's, holders St Pat's Maghera, Omagh, and St Pat's Cavan have big hopes of final glory

Following their league success in November, St Paul's Bessbrook may well be favourites for a first ever MacRory Cup title come March but nobody's taking their eyes off a St Patrick's Maghera side who have yet to show their full hand.

The 14-time champions are in pursuit of 'three-in-a-row', and a very average league campaign has been put down to the team being without a number of regulars due mainly to injuries, plus a number of their players being held back due to club and school hurling commitments.

Omagh CBS largely dominated the league; they went undefeated right up until the final where surprisingly they were quite comprehensively dismissed by St Paul's.

Finalists the year before last, St Paul's brand of attacking football, moving through the phases at pace, was displayed in all its glory during their 2-18 to 2-8 league final victory.

Their star player Jarlath Óg Burns, a two-time Ulster All Star like his father before him – former Armagh stalwart Jarlath snr, is a commanding midfielder with impressive high-fielding capabilities.

Along with Omagh, St Patrick's Cavan and Abbey CBS, St Paul's have qualified directly into the championship quarter-finals having finished either first or second in the two league pools of 13 schools.

St Patrick's Cavan won the Rannafast Cup two years ago, the equivalent of the southern provinces' 'junior' grade, and much of the same team make up the current senior panel.

They haven't reached a MacRory Cup since 1975 though, and haven't won a title since 1972.

Such is the draw this year, that if league form is anything to go by and St Pat's Maghera emerge at full strength then themselves, Omagh CBS, St Patrick's of Cavan and St Paul's, the four favourites for

many, appear well set for the semi-final spots.

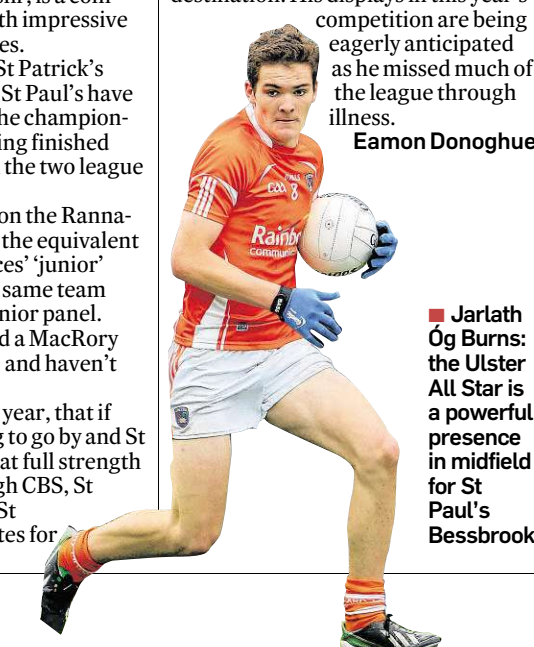
Yet in the year of the 93rd MacRory Cup and past that the 97th ever Ulster senior colleges title, none of the 12 teams in the competition can be disregarded. Such is the nature of Ulster football.

For instance, St Mary's Magherafelt boast the most 2015 Ulster All Stars, three of them, and they aren't necessarily amongst the teams earmarked for glory at this point of the year. However they clearly contain the potential to beat any team on their day.

As for the stars of the competition, where to start? St Patrick's Cavan's Thomas Galligan and centre half back Cian McManus are ones to watch, Enniskillen's Tyrone corner forward Lee Brennan is remarkably a three-time Ulster All Star and Pearse Óg McCrickard of St Colman's Newry is a talented dual player with a big future ahead of him.

St Patrick's Maghera carry within their ranks midfielder Conor Glass, arguably one of the most talented schools footballers nationwide.

In his third year starting on the school's senior team, which has reached consecutive All-Ireland finals, the rangy midfielder's performances to date have set him up for a career in the AFL where Hawthorn are reportedly the Derry youngster's destination. His displays in this year's competition are being eagerly anticipated as he missed much of the league through illness.



Eamon Donoghue

Jarlath Óg Burns: the Ulster All Star is a powerful presence in midfield for St Paul's Bessbrook

Squads

St Michael's Enniskillen

Coaches: Dominic Corrigan and assistants Enda Lyons and Gerry Donnelly
Captain: Lee Brennan
Squad: S McGullion, N Tierney, E Curran, J McCaffrey, E Drummm, C Cameron, M Courtney, C McGann, C Jones, L Jones, M McAloon, R McCaffrey, P Reynolds, C Copeland, G Fox, L Brennan, R Kelly, S Rooney, JJ O'Brien, K Kelly, N Clarke, L McDonagh, L Ryder, D McCarron, C Carney, E Kelly, C Goodwin

How school performed in 2014: Reached quarter final in 2014.

County players/Prospects: Lee Brennan three-time Ulster Colleges All Star and Tyrone U21 player. Keelan Kelly, Tyrone Minor player, eight Fermanagh and one Leitrim Minor players

St Patrick's Cavan

Coaches: Fr Kevin Fay, Finbar O'Reilly, Shane Fitzpatrick, Simon Fay
Captain: Cian McManus and Pierce Smith
Squad (* played last year): F O'Rourke, D

Cullivan, D Monaghan*, L Fortune, D Lunney, P O'Reilly, M McKenna*, B Conaty*, P Smith*, D Wilson, C McManus*, R O'Neill, S Smith, J Veale, D Kennedy, J Joe McGovern*, T Galligan*, D Brady*, T Edward Donohoe*, B Argue*, B Sheanon*, C Smith, C Reilly, S Moynagh, P Leddy, J Fitzpatrick, P Sweeney, F Carolan, K Leddy, T Keane, P Brady, S Fortune, B McKiernan, A Watters, K Donohoe
How school performed in 2014: Semi-Final of the MacRory Cup but lost out to St Pat's Maghera

County players/Prospects: Matthew McKenna, Ben Conaty, Pierce Smith, Thomas Galligan all Cavan U21s, 17 currently on Cavan minor panel and Cian McManus is Fermanagh minor

Abbey CBS

Coaches: Jody Gormley, Mark Grogan, Sean Gallagher, Tony McMahoon
Captain: Niall Rafferty
Squad (* played last year): L Byrne*, A Ryan, R Campbell, J Catterson, J Casey, C Cox, D Darragh, C Dillon, S Dobbin*, A Fearon, S Fegan*, R Fegan, J Kearney, T Looney, A

MacMahon, C Magill, O McCaffrey, T McConville, C McCoy*, K McEvoy*, J McEvoy, M McGeeney, A McGeeney Murray, R McGivern, C McKinney*, A Morgan*, P Murdock*, S Murdock, O O'Callaghan, J O'Laughlin, C O'Neill, F Quinn*, N Rafferty*, R Reel, J Rock, D Rooney, E Kelly
How school performed in 2014: Beaten in quarter final after a replay
County players/Prospects: Pearse Óg Mc Crickard (dual College All Star), four Down Minors. Five Armagh Minors including Oisín O'Neill in third year on team

St Patrick's Maghera

Coaches: Paul Hughes, Colum Lavery
Captain: Paul McNeill
Squad (* played last year): C McNeill*, M Lynch*, N McAtamney*, L O'Hara, J O'Kane, D Bradley, C Lowry*, C Glass*, J Doherty*, P Turner*, B Cassidy*, C McAllister*, S McGuigan*, S Downey*, M Mullan*, K Feeney*, E McGill*, M McClenaghan, D McPeake, G McLaughlin, C Mulholland, R Donnelly, R McElwee, C Darragh, P Kearney, F Kearney, P McNicholl, R McGillion, S Higgins, P Quigg, L Kieft, O McKeever, F Higgins, P McNeill*

St Colman's Newry

Coaches: Cathal Murray, Declan Mussen, Cormac Sweeney, Eamonn McEvoy
Captain: Oisín O'Neill
Squad (* played last year): C Monaghan, C Gordon*, C Farrell, C McGrath, D Murphy, J French*, D Loye, J Heaney*, M McAttee, C Monaghan*, N O'Hare, N Scullion, J Morgan*, N Murray, R Magill, J Sands, R Mc Greevy, R O'Neill, C O'Neill, R Garvey, M

How school performed in 2014: MacRory up winners – Hogan Cup finalists
County players/Prospects: Paul McNeill is on Slaughterneill club panel, dual player Eamon McGill, and Derry's Conor Glass

St Patrick's Armagh

Coaches: Matthew McGleenan, & Patrick Marley, Conor Hughes.
Captain: Conor Mc Nicholl
Squad (* played last year): C Mc Nicholl*, C Duffin*, T Mc Geary, K Muldoon, K Mc Connell, P Brecknell*, C Mc Geary, R Mc Cay, P Mc Geary, C Keenan, J Duffy, S Mc Partland*, B Mc Anenly, R Fields, C Cullen*, T O'Kane, G Conton, C Murphy*, G Mackin*, C Farrell, V Brady, P Mackle, A Fox, M Mc Gleenan, O Murphy, R Moore, J Rice, S Mc Keown, M Hosty, A Austin.

How school performed in 2014: Defeated by St Patrick's Academy Danganon in play off.
County players/Prospects: Conor Mc Nicholl, Conor Murphy, Connor Cullen, Ryan Fields, Vincent Brady all promising Armagh minors

Omagh CBS

Coaches: Kieran Donnelly & Fergal Quinn
Captain: James Darcy
Squad: T Clarke, M Corless, J Darcy, T Devine, C Donaghy, N Donnelly, C Furey, A Fullerton, R Gray, J Harkin, P Keyes, C McAnenly, M McBride, E McConnell, B McConnell, C McCormack, O McGinn, P McGirr, C McGlinchey, M McGlinn, A McGrath, R McKenna, T McNamee, A McSorley, C Moss, M Monaghan, E Murray, P O'Neill, E Rae, C Starrs, G Slane, P Teague, C Traynor

How school performed in 2014: Reached the MacRory Cup Final

County players/Prospects: James Darcy, Padraig McGirr, Eoghan Murray, Patrick O'Neill, Peter Teague, Conor Traynor

St Paul's Bessbrook

Coaches: Barry Shannon and John Rafferty
Captain: Cathal Boylan
Squad (* played last year): M Murphy, P Quinn, S Finnegan, C Boylan, K Mallon, C

Magennis, R Quinn, C Mc Donnell, N Quinn, F O Gribin, D Hanrahan, D Loye, P Mc Ardle, R Gaskin, F O'Rourke, N Canning, J Mc Keever, A Smith, J Og Burns, C Mc Conville, P Quinn, K Gilgallon, D O'Hagan, R Mc Sherry, M Mc Namee, M Mc Cabe, S Loye, J Durnin, O Carnegie, R Keenan, A Boyle, G Campbell, J Keenan, T Canning, S Conlon, S Hoey, J Mc Govern, G Mc Cann, C Mc Keown, T Rickard

How school performed in 2014: Beaten in first round

County players/Prospects: Jarlath Og Burns is Ulster Colleges All Star midfielder

St Mary's Magherafelt

Coaches: Kevin Brady and Eunan Conway
Captain: Niall Keenan
Squad (* played last year): E Gilmore*, M McElidowney, C Scullion, B McKinnis, D Coyle*, A McLavery*, M Rodgers, K Small, D Teague*, C Bradley, M Donnelly, N Keenan*, L Cassidy, E O'Kane, D Cassidy, P Burke, D McErlain, R O'Neill, D Carey, T O'Kane*, C Small*, R Donnelly, M McAllister, P Lagan*, C McGrogan, C Mullan-Young*

How school performed in 2014: beaten in the quarter finals by eventual winners St Patrick's, Maghera.

County players/Prospects: three players received Ulster Colleges All Star awards 2015 – Conor Small, Callum Mullan-Young and Niall Keenan. Five Derry minors and four Antrim minors

St Macartan's College, Letterkenny

Coaches: David McCague, Garrett Coyle and Fr. Stephen Joyce
Captain: David Tyrell
Squad: C Diver, P Diver, C O'Boyle, M Friel, C Cannon, C Callaghan, E O'Boyle, M Patton, P O'Malley, O Shields, C Kelly, R Mc Laughlin, R Dorrian, M Gallagher, D Mc Walters, R Carr, M Miller, C Morrison, M Stewart, P Mc Aleer, K Grant, S Mc Donagh, N Mc Elwaine, O'Hilly, J Mc Sharry, C Marley, N O'Donnell, C Maloney, C Mc Daid, C Planagan, S Halvey, A Deeney, C Boyce, D Harper.

How school performed in 2014: Winners of Ulster Mc Larnon Cup 2014

County players/Prospects: David Tyrell, Conall O'Boyle, Cormac Callaghan [Ulster Colleges All star 2014-15] and Sean

Daffan (St Eunan's Club county champions goalkeeper)

St Patrick's Dungannon

Coaches: Kevin Collins, Peter Herron, Ciaran Gourley
Captain: Fintan McClure
Squad (* played last year): C Donaghy*, E McAteer, C Lyons*, N Muldoon, J Devlin, R Teague, B Kennedy*, P Herron, M Quinn, P Molloy, C Kilpatrick*, L Mallon, C Campbell*, P Quinn, I Hendron, B Crealey, M Corrigan, S Corr, L Linden, A Loughran*, A Gavin, M McKernan*, S Loughran, L Rafferty*, C O'Hagan*, B Corrigan, R Lavery, S Litter, J Loughran, D Kerr, C Higgins*, D Jones, T Teague, F Mc Clure*, S Doran*

How school performed in 2014: Lost Semi final to Omagh CBS

County players/Prospects: Currently eight players involved with Tyrone minor panel and goalkeeper Caolan Donaghy of Armagh