

# Preface

Only thirteen counties have ever won an All-Ireland senior hurling championship. Three of those have won only a single title – and one of those ‘counties’ is actually the city of London. No county from Ulster has ever lifted the McCarthy Cup, though Antrim did valiantly reach the final twice. The last new county to etch its name on the roll of honour was Offaly, with its breakthrough title in 1981; before that the latest newcomer was Waterford, with its debut championship in 1948.

In the 130 years of the championship, legends have been forged, myths created and heroes feted. Yet the hurling story has primarily been painted in three combinations: black and amber, red and white, and blue and gold.

The pantheon of hurling heroes is mostly, but not exclusively, populated by proud residents from those three counties: Kilkenny, Cork and Tipperary. Since that inaugural 1887 championship, Cork, Kilkenny and Tipperary have won a startling total of eighty-five titles. Their battles, their triumphs and their defeats have become the stuff of hurling legend.

Three thousand years ago, hurling was as much a warrior’s code as a sport. It measured men as much against themselves as against their opponents. From Tullaroan to Thurles and from Croke Park to Páirc Uí Chaoimh, many will argue that hurling is still the measure of men. And heroes.