

Buckley, Din (Den) Joe

by Terry Clavin

Buckley, Din (Den) Joe (1919–2009), hurler, was born Denis Joseph Buckley at the family home in Roman Street, Cork city, on 19 March 1919, the sixth of eleven children of Timothy Buckley, shop assistant, and his wife Elizabeth (née Falvey). The working-class Blackpool district in which he grew up was a hurling stronghold, and his father and five of his brothers all hurled. Attending the nearby North Monastery secondary school, a renowned hurling nursery, he was selected for the school hurling and Gaelic football teams, winning a Harty Cup medal in hurling in 1937. He won minor county titles with his local Glen Rovers hurling club in 1936 and 1937, and was a substitute as Cork won the 1937 minor all-Ireland hurling title.

At first he played at either centre half-back or left half-back, later retreating in 1944 to the left corner-back position where he was at his best. A speedy and deceptively hardy but otherwise unspectacular hurler with a marked preference for sweetly first-timing the ball, he muffled opposing forwards through a mix of cunning and ruthlessness, belying his relative lack of height and heft with hard, if not to say rough, tackling. By 1938 he was on the Cork junior team that lost the all-Ireland junior final, and was playing senior hurling for Glen Rovers, who then dominated the Cork club scene. In October he made his senior inter-county debut for Cork and was a regular during the 1938/9 league campaign.

Missing out on the 1939 all-Ireland championship after being suspended for playing a junior soccer match, he re-established himself in the Cork senior team for the 1940 championship. A year later, he enlisted in the Irish army and served in the 31st battalion until 1945, as such regularly playing on army hurling teams while also participating in other sports, such as soccer, basketball and baseball. Buckley's stalwart defending was integral to Cork's then-unprecedented plundering of four successive hurling all-Irelands (1941–4), and led his celebrated Cork and Glen Rovers teammate Christy Ring (qv) to express relief at never having to confront him on the pitch. One of the nine Cork hurlers to play in all four finals, he derived the most satisfaction from his performance in the 1944 all-Ireland semi-final, as part of the full-back line that withstood an otherwise rampant Galway.

Buckley's career was defined for good and for ill by his rivalry with Limerick's Mick Mackey (qv), which began in compelling fashion when they clashed in two pulsating Munster championship encounters in 1940. He was considered the only defender capable of containing the powerfully built, hard-charging Mackey, then Ireland's outstanding hurler. Aside from the Munster championship, they were regularly pitted against each other in army hurling competitions. At first, their jousts were good-spirited: Mackey relished physical contests and stood Buckley a drink after one particularly ferocious tussle. In 1943, however, both men were sent off for brawling

during an exhibition game. Buckley considered it the most embarrassing moment of his career and was suspended for the Munster final as a result.

Further controversy ensued during a pivotal spell in the 1944 Munster final when Mackey soloed menacingly towards the Cork square. According to Mackey, he was wrongly denied a goal because Buckley threw his hurley at him and the referee blew prematurely for a free, which was sent wide. According to Buckley, he hand-tripped Mackey, whose momentary stumble prompted the referee's whistle and the Cork players relaxed, allowing Mackey to score the disallowed goal. Two years later, Buckley decisively eclipsed the ageing Mackey in the Munster final. After Cork lost the 1947 all-Ireland final to Kilkenny, Buckley retired from inter-county hurling, continuing with Glen Rovers until 1950. Although selected for the Cork panel in 1949, he never played for his county again.

He finished his career with five all-Irelands (1941–4 and 1946), two National Hurling League titles (1940–41) and four Munster medals (1942, 1944 and 1946–7). He won three Railway Cup medals for Munster (1941–3) as a substitute; his failure to get on the starting fifteen may have been due to the intensely political selection process and disapproval of his rugged, occasionally cynical, defending. With Glen Rovers, he won eight county medals (1938–41, 1944–5 and 1948–9), captaining his club to the 1944 triumph. He also played Gaelic football for Glen Rovers' sister club St Nicholas, winning a senior county medal in 1941.

The last surviving member of the Cork four-in-a-row team, he lived in Assumption Road, Cork city, and died unmarried on 8 October 2009 at St Finbarr's Hospital, Cork city. He was buried in St Catherine's cemetery, Kilcully. His older brother Connie 'Sonny' Buckley (1915–2009) also enjoyed a distinguished career in midfield and in the half-forward line for Glen Rovers and Cork, being the only player to participate in all of Glen Rovers' eight consecutive county championship wins (1933–41). A championship regular for Cork from 1936, he played on the losing side in the famous 'thunder and lightning' all-Ireland final of 1939 and retired from hurling upon captaining Cork to all-Ireland victory in 1941. Another brother, Jack, was a Glen Rovers regular for many years. Amongst them, the three brothers won twenty-four Cork senior hurling medals.

GRO (birth cert); *Cork Examiner*, 19 Apr. 1937; 17, 27 Oct., 5 Dec. 1938; 21 Oct. 1939; John P. Power, *A story of champions* (1941), 143; *Ir. Press*, 14 Aug. 1944; 12 Dec. 1952; 6 July 1971; Eamonn Andrews, *Honour to Cork* (1945); Seamus O'Ceallaigh and Sean Murphy, *The Mackey story* (1982), 238; Brendan Fullam, *Hurling giants* (1994), 30–34; Séamus J. King, *A history of hurling* (1996); Tim Horgan, *Christy Ring: hurling's greatest* (2007); *Ir. Times*, 28 Feb., 17 Oct. 2009; *Ir. Examiner*, 9 Oct. 2009; 11 July 2014; Henry Martin, *Mick Mackey: hurling legend*

in a troubled county (2011); *Sunday Times*, 10 July 2011; 'Denis Joseph (Din Joe) Buckley', Falvey: genealogy of the Falvey family, falvey.id.au/getperson.php?personID=I5671&tree=falvey (accessed May–June 2015)

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