

HARTFORD
GAELIC
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CLUB

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Opening Day at Gaelic Park, Canton

PAT FOLEY receives an award from **President, Joe McDonagh**

By Pat Foley

My introduction to the Gaelic sports scene in the U.S. came in early 1948 when Ed Kenny and I made the three hour train trip from Hartford to Boston, where we played for St. Columcilles. The team was made up of young American kids. The only one I remember is Clancy, who partnered me at centerfield. Who our opponents were I do not recall, but I believe we won by a narrow margin. I do recall the special treatment we received. It was the beginning of a special feeling I have for that city which continues to this day.

The years 1947 and 1948 marked the resurgence of Gaelic games in the U.S. Immigration had reopened for the first time in over twenty years and young people from Ireland flooded the big cities and many of the smaller east coast cities. The stars of yesterday, who had kept the game alive, withdrew as the younger talent increased. However, many U.S. born players continued to play, especially in football and proved they could compete with the best.

By 1950 there were organized leagues in Boston, New York, Chicago, Toronto and many other cities, also southern New England, where Hartford was one

of a five city league. Many obstacles had to be overcome during the early years. Leagues were poorly organized, rules were not enforced and travel was slow and tedious outside the big cities, but the biggest problem was finding suitable enclosed playing fields. New York was an exception having a dedicated playing ground in Gaelic Park. This was a temptation and many in the northeast played for New York teams in addition to their home team. The lure of playing in New York became even greater when in 1950 the New York Selected was admitted to the Irish National League and in a stunning surprise they took the title out of Ireland for the first time. Not many know that at least one third of that team were from Boston, Hartford and Pittsburgh.

Throughout the 50's and 60's the Hartford team proved it could compete with the best. It came out victorious in all three games against Chicago and had its share of victories over Boston teams in the American Board League. Yet, overall Hartford could boast of only moderate success. Some of the failure was due to the fact that many team members also played for New York teams, leaving the home team below full strength. It was in 1954, I believe, that Hartford won the New England title only to lose by one point to Toronto in the Regional playoff. They continued to compete, coming close a number of times, until finally, in 1967 (played in 1968) Hartford was crowned American League Champion.

If this account appears sterile it is because space does not allow for more detail. Some readers will remember the many epic struggles in Dilboy Field, Boston and in Chicago, Rochester, Montreal, Toronto and many other venues, I know we will. We will also remember the many life long friendships and mutual respect that developed between opposing players despite the hard knocks and injuries sustained in games where friendships are set aside and no quarter is given.