

The late Denis McCarthy

BY JOHN COLLINS

SINCE THE NEWS of the sad passing of Denis McCarthy broke last week there have been many fine tributes paid to the likeable St Clarets founder, reflecting on a life well lived and a man of high integrity.

However, it is my belief that it was in the things said about this man during his life, or should it be, the things not said about this man in his life, that tell the real story of Denis McCarthy.

I had the great privilege to know Denis from virtually the first day I arrived in London in 1985. He was the first London gael I met and without exception, the one I owe the most to and also the one I held the greatest respect for.

Throughout the time I knew him, I never once heard anyone question his intentions, his character or his honesty, truly the sign of a remarkable man.

Several people have had a telling influence on my sporting life in London, people like Johnny Frain, Frankie Gallagher, John "Dub" McCormack and Paddy Corscadden, but no one left

the type of hand-print on my time within the GAA in London as Denis did.

The influence that Denis had on my football career was massive and what little I did manage to achieve in the seventeen years I played football in the county, owed a great deal to him. He gave me many opportunities, opened many doors and always had a reassuring word to say when things went wrong and a word of congratulation on the occasions when things went right.

Firstly of course, he was my football manager for six years and the man who gave me a break into senior football at the age of 16 and helped me win my first Championship medal in 1989.

The year prior to that, he had been the man who had secured a place for me on the London Junior panel, a place that ultimately saw myself and twenty other London players run out in front of 65,000 people in Croke Park to play Meath in an All Ireland final, a honour far exceeding the modest talents of virtually all of us as players.

In 1987, in his role as Treasurer of the London

Minor Board, he was behind the organising of a once in a lifetime trip to New York for the London minor team, a trip that created great friendships among some of us players that last to this day.

When the time came in 1991 for me to leave St Clarets and join St Brendans, Denis wished me well, despite the fact that I was joining his club's closest rivals.

No doubt I am not alone in my sentiments towards Denis, merely lucky enough to be able to express them publicly.

When talking to London GAA President Bill Treacy recently, he told me that he was once asked to define a true Irish man. His definition was "a young man heading to training on a bike at 7 o'clock on a Tuesday evening, with his boots over the handle bars."

It's a certainty that Denis was that young Irish man for many years, whether it was in Dublin, Wicklow or London and the sad truth of his passing is that London and Ireland have lost one of their finest sons.

Despite his brilliance as player, probably the biggest

contribution Denis made to the GAA in London was the legacy of under-age players that he helped develop into senior footballers. On the Championship winning team of 1989, St Clarets had nine London born players on the starting fifteen. Players like Kevin Gilmartin, Paul Treanor, Tommy Quigley, the Lynott brothers and his own two sons, Denis and John, along with others such as Mark Mellett, Timmy Downey, Dermot Wallace, Paul Myers and John Carney were all products of the St Clarets production line that was supervised by Denis. Such a contribution ensured that St Clarets as a club survived when so many others foundered throughout the nineties.

When I was told of Denis' death I described him as "a real gentleman" and I was asked what did I mean by that?

"He just was" was my simple reply, the statement didn't need to be qualified any further.

Last year I ran an interview with Denis just prior to him receiving his "Lifetime Achievement Award" from



The late Denis McCarthy receiving his Lifetime Achievement Award from the Irish World in 2004

the Irish World.

When I met Denis the following week he thanked me for the piece I had penned.

"No, thank you" were my exact words back to him. All I had done was try to give back a small portion of what he had given to me.

However, there was much more to Denis than just his love of the GAA. He was a devoted family man, a hard worker, a guiding hand to many of the young men who came through his club and a genuine friend to so many.

To his wife Rose, sons Denis and John, daughters Sheila and Marie, along with his grandchildren and extended family, I would personally like to take this opportunity to express my sincerest sympathy to you on your loss.

To Denis himself, I would just like to say thank you for all you done for me and many more like me and may God bless you.

You were a good man, an honest man and a man that we were all proud to call friend.

May he rest in peace.