



Photo: Michael O'Dea—Class of 1952, His Daughter Caroline—Class of 1982,
His Grand Daughter Eva—1st Year 2017



*Tribute to
Mr. Kevin Kelleher
1921-2016*



Kevin Kelleher 1921-2016

An appreciation

Many years ago I went to pay my respects at the funeral of Kevin's father David Kelleher. I noticed a group of older men, lean and gaunt, some of them, but with the unmistakable frames of athletes. Eventually I realised who they were....the survivors of the great Dublin GAA teams of the earliest years of the 20th century with whom David won All Ireland medals in both codes. This was Kevin's sporting background and he treasured his father's medals all his life.

I first met Kevin in 1944 when we arrived in St. Conleth's College on the same day, he as a young teacher and I as a nine year old schoolboy.

War clouds covered Eastern Europe, the Italian peninsula and northern France as the Allies battled with the armies of the Reich and the Irish people survived on turf fires and bicycles.

He taught me for seven years and has been a friend for nearly seventy since. He was constant, straightforward and loyal throughout his life he had four great passions. First was his family, his beloved wife of 47 years, Pat and her daughter Ann now managing director of the school. When Pat became immobilised Kevin cared for her, finding time to buy produce and prepare meals while running a busy school.

His second passion was St. Conleth's, founded nearly eighty years ago by the late Bernard Sheppard as a small elite school for boys. It is now a thriving coeducational establishment which continues to contribute significantly to contemporary Irish life.

Kevin's life work was as principal and headmaster of St. Conleth's and generations of alumni remember him as always being available to present and past pupils alike as guide philosopher and friend.

His third great love was Rugby, personified by his club Lansdowne of which he was a lifelong member and always wore the distinctive striped socks when officiating as a referee which he did with style at every level, including 23 international appearances. He was distinguished by an uncanny sense of position and anticipation on the field and perhaps the best ever in those regards. He said to me once ".....There was no TMO in my day...you just had to be there. A bon mot indeed.

Lastly Kevin served on the schools section of the Leinster Branch IRFU from 1951 to 2007 assisted by such stalwarts as Fr. Noel Redmond and his helpmate Caleb Powell and backed up by the wonderful schools coaches they put in place a series of competitions and cups for the weaker schools which ended the unfortunate mismatches of heretofore.

One of Kevin's later engagements was with a New Zealand TV company who broadcast Colin Meads "This is your life" As the Rugby world well knows the big King Country man was dismissed by Kevin during an International at Murrayfield in 1967. Years later he appeared as a surprise guest after a 32 hour flight to Auckland and a "mystery" introduction. It is an interesting commentary on the nature of their game that Kevin and Meads became firm friends and remained so.

I too can claim that category and will miss him throughout the rest of my life.

Michael O'Dea November 2016