



Cork's Mark Coleman with a Fitzgerald hurley. Picture: Pádraic Ó Mícheálach

Innovation is keeping Fitzgerald Hurleys on the front foot

THIS year's championship marks the 20th year since Fitzgerald Hurleys was founded by Michael Fitzgerald.

Tucked away in the small village of Araglen, where North Cork meets the Tipperary and Waterford borders, the business has grown to the point where Covid-enforced lockdowns and the suspension of GAA hasn't knocked it off course.

Indeed, Fitzgerald Hurleys expanded into the online arena last winter, and is now sending hurleys around Ireland and internationally.

That kept the workshop ticking over in the early part of 2021, when hurling matches and training were on hold. Mark Coleman and Seamus Harnody have helped popularise their camies with teenagers and youngsters, with Niall O'Leary and Damien Cahalane among the other Rebels impressing recently with Fitzgerald Hurleys in their grasp.

"Key to this success is our customer focus," they explain on their website. "We take as much pride and care in supplying a child with their first hurley as we do when carving our tailor-made sticks for senior inter-county stars. That is why Fitzgerald Hurleys are a product that our customers trust, whether belting the ball on the local field or scoring a match-winning goal in the All-Ireland Championship."

With GAA club teams at underage and adult level back in league action since bank holiday Monday, they're cranking into overdrive now.

They recently rebranded their 'Lam-Hurl' as an 'Elite Hurl', the innovative model

HURLING
■ Eamonn Murphy

that Seamus Harnody utilised in his All-Star campaign in 2018. A piece of laminite is blended through the bas and this type of hurley allows Fitzgeralds to make full use of the ash tree.

Traditionally, hurleys are made from the bottom 1.3 metres of the ash tree, which is where the curved grain on the bas comes from. Ash die-back disease has impacted ash supplies Europe-wide, but the new hurley is made from ash higher up the tree.

In modern terms, it is a sustainable product and actually strengthens the bas, to provide a crisper and longer strike. They produced 500 of the original Lam-Hurley three years ago but they have become extremely popular, to the point where they cannot supply online orders for now.

That necessitates a trip to the Avonbeg hurling hall where that is 20 minutes' drive beyond Fermoy, but Michael Fitzgerald, Tadhg Browne, and the crew will make the time to shape the 'Elite Hurley' to anyone's needs.

If cracked or damaged, they can be repaired in the usual way, with glue, clamping, and building.

Innovation is all the rage in hurling now, with Torpey in Clare offering the Bambu hurley, made from bamboo instead of ash, and Mycro, based in Ballincollig, selling large volumes of the Bandon-produced Evolution stick. The Elite Hurl is along those lines, though closer to a regular camie, and it will be interesting to see how it takes off.



Fitzgerald Hurleys are open for business again in Araglen.



Munster's Denis Hurley during squad training, University of Limerick.

Picture: Diarmuid Greene / SPORTSHLE

Well matched for Hurley



RUGBY

Mark Woods

SUNDAY'S WELL have appointed former Munster player, Denis Hurley, who won a Heineken Cup against Toulouse in 2006, as their new head coach for the season.

The 36-years-old, who works with Rugby Players Ireland, has hit the ground running following the return to training last month.

"In the last couple of years I was living and working in Dublin and assistant coach with Blackrock College," he said. "My wife was expecting our second child so we decided to move back to Cork so be closer to grandparents."

"DCC and Sunday's Well were my dad's (Corry) clubs and I was looking to continue coaching without actually chasing it up."

"Frankie Moynihan and dad are friends for years and as the Well were looking for a coach it just evolved from there."

"I have a way of how I like to play the game and I want to see if guys can pick it up, but I don't want to over-complicate it either."

"Hopefully, my methods and bank of knowledge can attract players because I enjoy coaching and want to get the best out of people."

"The key is to get fellows to rock up so training on Tuesday and Thursday in the middle of winter will be happy to be there, as well as posting games at the weekend. If there is to be enjoyed and not seen as a chore."

Hurley links up with Denis Corridan, the Director of Rugby who has a Strength/Conditioning and physiotherapy background.

Josh Featherstone is working on defence and back play while Eleriah Roman oversees the scrums.

The Well are looking for another whose expertise is in the line out.

"We're back on the pitch again and have done a month's training at this stage."



Munster captain Denis Hurley with mascots Tristan O'Driscoll and Darragh Collins.

"There was no access to gyms during lockdown so fellows were doing stuff of their own."

"As I'm new to the group it was an opportunity to first meet up and then return to some bit of structure."

"It's all ball in hand conditioning and skill work as the moment and it gives me an opportunity to get know the lads, who also get to know what I am all about as well."

"It's enjoyable. Most evenings have been good weather-wise, apart from the odd wash-out, but the main thing is that fellows are back into a routine."

"It's a chance to get out of the house and meet-up with people again."

"It's great to see a bounce in people's step and that's what you want to get out of it, no matter what the sport."

"It's an opportunity to enjoy it all, breaking bread of the shabbies."

Club rugby is unsure of the new season's structure after last year was cut off the knees before it could even generate a head of steam.

"There are two formats on the table with the season looking like starting now in October."

"It will either be a full All-Ireland League season of home and away games

or like last year with the Community Series. Munster based, before Christmas then one round of games in the All-I.

"For us as a club, with three games up North, it's not easy to arrange a squad of players to travel with all the implications of Covid as well as the cost, too."

"It would make a lot more sense to play more rugby locally, particularly with the chance to generate more money with clubhouses opening up."

"We're only one club and the general feeling is that more want to have a complete series of All-I games."

The Well have retained most of their squad from last season's curtailed programme with a couple deciding to call time.

"Recruitment has been difficult and I think a lot of clubs are feeling the same."

"Work-wise, there seems to be a tendency towards Dublin, though we have a few new guys coming in, which is good."

A captain will be voted on by the squad in August. "Caoimh O'Brien has been captain for the last two seasons and he's been on the ball with everything so far."

Hurley's work involves negotiating with the IRFU on behalf of professional players, generating sponsorship and dealing with former players.