

CAREER A WAG-FREE ZONE



TRUE GREAT: Mick's skills as a manager led Kerry to eight All-Irelands and guided Wicklow to their best season ever this year



ALL MOD CONS: The dressing rooms are a far cry from what Mick was used to

THE MAGIC TOUCH

Pat, John Egan and Jack O'Shea as examples of tough men in their heyday, he pointed out: "I never heard a word about an injury from those lads - and if they had an injury it would be a serious one."

Mick's men were so tough they didn't use sports psychologists or even a physio, he revealed. "I once got a physio to give the team a rub but they were reluctant to get on to the table; now you can't get them off the tables!"

Nor is he impressed by newfangled techniques for getting players fit in between matches. "This game is not all about running or lifting weights. It's about playing with a ball. My approach is antiquated, so I'm told, but it works," he said. And Mick's magic has worked in Wicklow - they have just had their best season ever. Their humble HQ in Aughrim



LEGEND: Mick with Gerakline



is a world away from Croke Park's players' lounge, which looks like a nightclub VIP room. Mick shook his head in amazement, pointing out that he wouldn't let his lads near the bar.

The amazingly youthful-looking 73-year-old, who played up until the age of 50, revealed that he has stayed on top of his game because: "I never smoked a cigarette, never touched a drop of alcohol in my life. I do a bit of walking, plenty of Menuca honey, fresh veg and fish - we eat a lot of fish in Kerry, that's why we're all mad!"

Micko was outspoken about the new rule banning spectators from running on to

the pitch after a match. "I never saw anyone getting injured running on to the pitch. People will get crushed coming to these barriers. I'd let them on to the pitch. Win or lose, they want to be with their team," he argued.

As an ordinary Dub, any visit of mine to Croke Park would mean roughing it on Hill 16, which is the only part of the stadium not to have a canopy - or even seats. No wonder we Dubs are blue, I thought - it's the bleedin' cold!

Mick said it was true blue hard-ship in the old days.

Craic

"The fans were herded in like cattle," he said. But he added that he used to have the craic whenever Kerry played Dublin. "When I was coming in with the team I'd make a point of passing by Hill 16 - there was great banter. They used to shout at me: 'You bog-man, go back to Waterville!' I'd shout back: 'Go back to the jacks you jackeens!'"

"We always said we'd like to see Dublin in an All Ireland - every decade!" he added with a puckish grin.

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