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## Boss O'Rourke has a winning habit



By Jerome Quinn  
Presenter of Sunday Sportsound

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### Quiz time! What have Benny Tierney, Pascal Canavan, John Rafferty, Danny Quinn, Cathal Murray, Jarlath Burns and Seamus Downey got in common?

Answer: they were all on the star-studded 1989 Sigerson Cup winning team from the Ranch, aka St Mary's Belfast. It was an exceptional team, superbly drilled by coaches Peter Finn and Jim McKeever, way ahead of their time and way ahead of Maurice Fitzgerald's Cork side in the final played at Queen's, winning by 3-13 to 1-5.



Malachy O'Rourke has guided Fermanagh to the Ulster final

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I was fortunate enough to have been at pitchside to watch the demolition job, reporting for the Irish News, and was particularly impressed by the St Mary's defence as they continually beat their men to the ball.

And who was in there at right-corner-back? Why, it was none other than Malachy O'Rourke!

He may not have gone on to win Ulster and All-Ireland medals like many of his team-mates, but nearly two decades later he is on the verge of greatness with Fermanagh.

"Back in '89, I have to admit that I did not expect Malachy to come through as a top manager," recalls Cathal Murray, the St Mary's left half-back and now a highly-regarded coach at St Colman's Newry.

"He was a quiet lad and methodical in his approach, which was something we all picked up from our coaches. Jim McKeever was same as Malachy - quiet, methodical and controlled. He left an indelible mark on all of us." The former Derry great researched opposition teams in detail, which was difficult enough to do in the late 80s in college football. Preparation was key, along with positive thinking.



Pascal Canavan and Cathal Murray were St Mary's team-mates

"Jim was really the forerunner for sport psychologists in the way that he visualised what was going to happen in games and how we should approach each challenge," adds Pascal Canavan, who played in front of O'Rourke at right-half-back and remains a close friend through Errigal Ciaran.

Athletics coach Peter Finn took care of fitness levels, transferring techniques from his primary sport to ensure the St Mary's boys were in the best shape. SAQ (speed, agility, quickness) was unheard of in 1989 Gaelic football, except at the Ranch.

"Modern trainers like Martin McElkennon, Paddy Tally and Malachy would have taken a lot from Peter Finn's work in those days," reasons Cathal Murray.

"That goes some way to explaining 606: DEBATE

why this Fermanagh team is in prime condition, capable of breaking at speed, which is exactly what our St Mary's team was adept at doing. [Can Fermanagh win the final?](#)  
 "Malachy has developed into a seriously good coach. I know Paul McFlynn and the boys at the Loup have a great word for his coaching."

O'Rourke led the Loup to their first Derry title in 67 years before conquering Tyrone with Errigal Ciaran and then completing a trio of county titles with Cavan Gaels.

By the time Fermanagh came looking again in late 2007 - he had turned them down five years earlier - the Derrylin native knew the time was right.

"I still think I was right to say no in 2002 because I did not have enough experience.

"I would never think that I have a magic wand. I just think you have to create an environment where players are motivated, where they know they have to work hard and understand the sacrifices that have been made for them.

"It is about setting standards and putting everything in place for them to succeed."

McKeever and Finn would approve. The student has become the master.

**St Mary's 1989 Sigerson Cup winning team:** Benny Tierney, Malachy O'Rourke, Martin McNally, Pascal Canavan, John Rafferty, Danny Quinn, Cathal Murray, John Reihill, Jarlath Burns, Seamus Downey, Ollie Reel, Paddy Barton, Martin Houlahan, Fergal McCann, Iggy Gallagher.

**Managers:** Jim McKeever and Peter Finn.

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