

**Gaelic Games Allianz League**

**One step forward, two steps back as Mayo ponder 'reality check'**

Nature of the home hammering by Dublin a major embarrassment for Mayo camp

**KEITH DUGGAN**

"It's a small, small, small step," cautioned a pleased Jim Gavin on Saturday night as his Dublin players trooped back onto the team bus for a night drive to the capital. Perhaps, but Dublin's 2-18 to 0-10 win felt like a bigger regressive step for Mayo.

The results in Division One have been unpredictable but no team wants to flat-line when they are hosting Dublin in front of a bumper and highly expectant home crowd.

Nothing about Mayo's form suggested that a result like this was on the cards.

Pat Holmes declined the excuse of just hitting a low because of the busy March schedule but was also reluctant to go into the any specific analysis of why his side had been so comprehensively outplayed.

An obvious factor in the match was that Mayo's set-up gave Dublin the opportunity to tap into their high-octane attacking game in a way that they couldn't do against Tyrone or,

to a lesser extent, Donegal in Croke Park. Mayo came tantalisingly close to an All-Ireland win under James Horan without adopting the defensive cover of other counties and have continued in that vein under Pat Holmes and Noel Connelly.

**Special case**

But Saturday night's game may have done enough to convince the Mayo management that Dublin are a special case: you can't just go play ball against them. Their forward surges were frightening to behold –

and this was without Michael Dara Macauley at centre field.

"Mayo are one of the traditional sides and they play football the way that traditional

football is played," Jim Gavin responded. "Dublin are one of those teams too. In the league Mayo have been playing strong. . . they had a few injuries here today but they will be in the mix in this league and certainly in the championship."

That may well be true but Mayo, in their current carnation, are beyond a good showing in the championship. Winning the thing is all for the four-times Connacht champions.

It wasn't just the quality of Dublin's attack that was alarming for Mayo: it was the way in which their home superstructure was taken apart. The full back line and half-back line were stretched beyond communication point.

Aidan O'Shea was, as Holmes pointed out, moved from full forward to midfield after 15 minutes but even that failed to buy Mayo any influence in the middle of the field. They found it difficult to get ball to their inside forwards and most of that possession was to the corners, with the forwards chasing towards the sideline, backs to goal and at least two Dublin defenders tracking them down.

Having a team boss them like this was a new experience for Mayo: a stubborn consistency in imposing their game had become one of their defining traits. That was why what unfolded in Castlebar was so unsettling for the home support. Little wonder the Mayo players appeared so sombre leaving the



**“ They looked sharper and hungrier for the ball. A lot of our guys didn't get out of second gear tonight and you could see it.”**

ground. "It was all about Dublin tonight because they scored 2-18," said Lee Keegan minutes

after the defeat. "I can't really say anymore than that. It was a complete reality check for us tonight. They looked sharper and hungrier for the ball. A lot of our guys didn't get out of second gear tonight and you could see it. They were just fresher and sharper and it is really disappointing for the huge crowd that showed up in Castlebar.

**Very disappointing**

"I don't really have the words to sum up what happened. It is just very disappointing. . . I feel sorry for the fans. But that is Division One. No game is easy unfortunately. If it was, we would be in the final or semi-final every year. . .

"We have one against Donegal at home and then against

Cork. We have to look forward to those but we have to look back at tonight to see why we didn't do too well. We just have to fight back and hopefully get something out of the last few games. I am just bitterly disappointed tonight."

It is not about whether Mayo respond positively in their remaining league fixtures: they probably will do. What is more important is whether they deal with whatever gnawing doubts and fears which this lesson by Dublin may have left. If they thrash it all out and get to the root cause of why they were so helpless against one of their chief rivals for the All-Ireland title, then they may just be able to transform what was a scarring night into a valuable defeat.

**All-Ireland Club SFC Final**

**Ulster side face blitz from Corofin**

Slaughtneil without injured Bradley as they go into final with Galway champions

**Corofin v Slaughtneil**  
Croke Park, 4pm  
TG4

**SEÁN MORAN**

Corofin have been making waves since streaking away with a Galway championship they dominated to an almost worrying degree. The hype has proved prescient, as they have blitzed the field to date,



**■ Gary Sice: one of several on Corofin team with county experience**

They may have been outsiders in Derry but Slaughtneil players have plenty of experience playing in Croke Park between the county seniors, minors and manager Mickey Moran, one of the most practised coaches in the game whose familiarity with the stadium goes back more than 40 years.

They showed great durability in the semi-final when ambushed with as many goals – two – as they'd conceded in the entire Ulster campaign and county final.

They're up against a team this afternoon, however, who have been shooting the lights out over the same period – 14 goals in four matches – and are regarded as the best Corofin team in a long time, combining work-rate, movement and pace in the back eight with a genuine cutting edge up front.

**Monumental**

Although primarily a collective, Corofin feature a number of footballers with county experience, most notably Michael Lundy, Ian Burke and Gary Sice.

Slaughtneil have a monumental centrefield where Patsy Bradley and Paudie McGuigan rule the air. The Derry club have an excellent defence with Ireland international Chrissy McKaigue and captain Francis McEldowney calmly authoritative at the back, but for all that the view here is that they will struggle to outscore the fast-moving Galway team.

**All-Ireland Club SFC Paths to the final**

**Corofin**

**Galway SFC final:** Corofin 5-12, St Michael's 0-9.  
**Connacht semi-final:** Corofin 7-20, Aughawillan (Leit) 0-6.  
**Connacht final:** Corofin 2-13, Ballintubber (Mayo) 1-7.  
**All-Ireland q/f:** Corofin 0-9, Tir Connall Gaels (Lon) 0-2.  
**All-Ireland semi-final:** Corofin 1-14, St Vincent's (Dub) 1-9.

**Robert Emmets Slaughtneil**

**Derry SFC final:** Slaughtneil 1-8, Ballinderry 0-9.  
**Ulster quarter-final:** Slaughtneil 0-11, Cavan Gaels 0-9.  
**Ulster semi-final:** Slaughtneil 1-9, Clontibret (Mon) 0-7.  
**Ulster final:** Slaughtneil 1-10, Omagh (Tyrone) 1-9.  
**All-Ireland semi-final:** Slaughtneil 1-14, Austin Stacks (Kerry) 2-10.

**Gaelic Games News**



**GPA investigating treatment of Clare's O'Halloran and O'Connell**

Players' representative body will seek to speak to both parties in the dispute

**EAMON DONOGHUE**

The Gaelic Players' Association will be investigating the claimed "humiliating double-standard" treatment that two Clare hurlers claim they received from manager Davy Fitzgerald forcing them to depart the panel.

Davy O'Halloran and Nicky O'Connell, both All-Ireland senior winners in 2013 told *The Irish Times* on Saturday that they were isolated and humiliated by the punishment they received for a disciplinary breach, and infuriated that another senior member of the panel avoided the same treatment for what they deemed a more serious breach.

The GPA today confirmed to *The Irish Times* that they are currently investigating the matter, although they were unwilling to comment further.

So far it is believed that neither of the two players involved have been contacted by the GPA or the GAA or the Clare County Board.

On Saturday morning it was claimed by O'Halloran, man of the match in the 2013 All-Ireland U-21 final, that the punishment they received for being caught on a night out two days prior to a game included being denied access to the team changing rooms, being forced to tog out separately, being prevented from wearing the panel's gear to training and being

unable to be involved in matches or travel to them. No dialogue was allowed with other team-mates at sessions and the pair would be made to train alone in a corner of the pitch doing intensive physical work.

The pair claim they were only out because they were both injured and that they were not drinking.

**Consuming alcohol**  
Discipline guidelines issued to the panel at the start of the year ruled out the consumption of alcohol. These guidelines carried the consequence of punishment and/or expulsion.

O'Halloran said that when it emerged that another more senior member of the panel was caught by a selector consuming alcohol and that he was told no action would be taken, himself and O'Connell opted to refuse the draconian punishment.

**■ Clare boss Davy Fitzgerald on the sideline at Croke Park in 2013. He denies there was a double standard in the treatment of players.**

PHOTOGRAPH: MORGAN TREACY/INPHO

leaving and handed it to one of the team's joint captains to read out in the dressing room. The letter is then claimed to have been ripped up by Fitzgerald who did not read it out.

There was also a third player involved in the discipline breach and having joined the pair initially in their defiance of the treatment it is believed that he then changed his mind and accepted the treatment. He remains on the panel.

Clare manager Davy Fitzgerald denies there was a "double standard" in the treatment of players.

It is believed that the GPA will speak to both parties in the course of their investigation.

**All-Ireland Club SHC Final**

**Ballyhale's craft and experience can prove vital**

Star-studded Kilkenny champions no strangers to the demands of final day

**Ballyhale Shamrocks v Kilmallock**  
Croke Park, 2pm  
TG4

**SEÁN MORAN**

When a club team with a glittering cast like Ballyhale gets to finals they're always going to be short odds and this afternoon is no different with the Kilkenny champions heavily favoured to make it six titles at the top of the roll of honour.

Kilmallock are Limerick's first representatives in the final since they themselves contested the 1993 fixture. They have made marked progress since deposing county and provincial champions Na Piar-saigh in the Limerick final with a brace of impressive shoot-outs in Munster, even allowing for extra time, averaging 0-33 against the Cork and Clare champions.

**Athletic team**

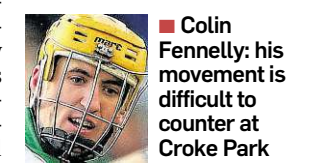
A strong, physical and athletic team, Kilmallock have showed a good capacity for long-range shooting. They have genuine pace in attack with Graeme Mulcahy capable of shaking up the final and his brother Jake top-scoring in the semi-final. County player Gavin O'Mahony has proved an excellent pivot for the forwards but there are reservations about the defence's mobility in the face of their opponents' star-studded attack.

There are other issues that will also weigh in Ballyhale's favour. They are a vastly more experienced team and well

versed in playing Croke Park, many of the players having lined out in 2007 and 2010.

This also means that they have previously navigated the winter break between provincial finals and the All-Ireland series.

Kilmallock manager Ger O'Loughlin has an excellent track record getting the best out of club teams, creating a strong central core and making them difficult to break down. He is likely to play a deep centrefield and try to limit the space for Ballyhale's for-



**■ Colin Fennelly: his movement is difficult to counter at Croke Park**

wards or at least congest the traffic but that won't be easy.

The Kilkenny champions have plenty of pace up front and can deploy it on the best surface in the country. Colin Fennelly's movement is difficult to counter and the half-forward line of Henry Shefflin, James Fitzpatrick and TJ Reid is formidable in craft, accuracy and quick thinking.

For all their quality Ballyhale were very lucky to escape from Kilmacmac in the Leinster final but they were more impressive in beating Gort in last month's semi-final.

If Kilmallock start well they can give themselves a chance. More likely, however, is that Ballyhale use their craft and the quick expanses of Croke Park to notch up another title.

**All-Ireland Club SHC Paths to the final**

**Ballyhale Shamrocks**

**Kilkenny SHC final:** Ballyhale 1-20, Clara 1-13.  
**Leinster semi-final:** Ballyhale 2-15, Kilmacud Crokes (Dub) 0-12.  
**Leinster final:** Ballyhale 0-21, Kilmacmac-Killougehy (Off) 1-14 (aet).  
**All-Ireland semi-final:** Ballyhale 2-17, Gort (Gal) 1-14.

**Kilmallock**

**Limerick SHC final:** Kilmallock 1-15, Na Piar-saigh 0-14.  
**Munster semi-final:** Kilmallock 3-22, Sarsfields (Cork) 3-20 (aet).  
**Munster final:** Kilmallock 1-32, Cratloe (Cork) 3-18 (aet).  
**All-Ireland semi-final:** Kilmallock 2-19, Portaferry (Down) 0-12.

**Briefs**

**International Rules**

**Ireland to host Australia at Croke Park on November 21st**

International Rules lives on after the GAA and AFL confirmed Ireland will host Australia in a one-Test series at Croke Park on November 21st.

The 2015 series follows last year's solitary Test Match in Perth which the hosts won 56-46.

GAA president Aogán Ó Fearghail said: "We are confident that the Irish public will turn out in large numbers to see the best of the two codes compete for the Cormac McAnallen Cup and we welcome Australia's commitment to the series and their decision to once again select All-Australian players for the game."  
GAA director general

Pádraic Duffy added: "We look forward to welcoming the visiting AFL delegation to Ireland and I've no doubt they will be afforded the same warm welcome as previous years as they prepare for what is sure to be a competitive Test."

"The success of last year's one-test series has prompted us to continue with this format for 2015 with a view to reigniting interest in the cross-code game in Ireland."

AFL chief executive Gillon McClachlan said: "Those players who may not be able to join us post-season will only be replaced by someone who has earned All Australian selection through his AFL career. . ."

**Gaelic Games**

**Corbett says injury may keep him sidelined**

Former Hurler of the Year Lar Corbett has cast major doubt on his summer championship participation.

The Thurles Sarsfields forward, who turned 34 yesterday, is struggling with a knee complaint and admits that he doesn't know "one way or another" whether he will be back in blue and gold this year. "The knee has been an ongoing problem. I honestly don't know one way or another."

"I'm doing a bit of work myself – that's just the way it is," said Corbett. "I'll have to see how it is over the next month. I'll know then."

**Cycling**

**Armstrong can ride tour route, says US anti-doping chief**

The anti-doping chief who compiled the dossier which led to Lance Armstrong's downfall has no objection to the American returning to the Tour de France route this summer.

US Anti-doping Agency chief executive Travis Tygart, whose 2012 report led to Armstrong being banned for life and stripped of his seven Tour de France titles, has no complaints that the 43-year-old intends to ride the Tour route.

Armstrong has told former England footballer Geoff Thomas that he will take part in his charity fundraising mission, riding the tour route one day ahead of the professional peloton.



**■ Travis Tygart: "that's outside the technical rules."**

Tygart said: "As long as it's not a sanctioned competition that falls under the rules, it's not a direct concern. That's outside the technical rules."

Ireland's Sam Bennett was eighth in yesterday's sixth stage of the Tirreno-Adriatico race behind Germany's Peter Sagan. Bennett is 122nd overall.

**Golf**

**Turkey pull out of Ryder Cup running**

Turkey have withdrawn their bid to stage the Ryder Cup in 2022, leaving five nations in the running ahead of inspection visits from tournament officials which begin this week.

In November the Turkish bid was reportedly withdrawn due to concerns over the number of trees which needed to be removed from the chosen course, only to be reinstated 24 hours later.

Germany's bid will be inspected today with visits to Spain and Italy scheduled for next week. Visits to Austria and Portugal will follow at a later date.

**Motor Sport**

**Ecclestone backs call to 'level up' Mercedes' engine advantage**

Formula One's commercial supremo Bernie Ecclestone has backed Red Bull's call for action to rein in Mercedes' engine advantage and make races more competitive after a one-sided start to the season. However, he played down talk of the former champions walking away from the sport.

"They are absolutely 100 per cent right," Ecclestone said when asked about Red Bull principal Christian Horner's statement that the governing FIA should apply an "equalisation mechanism" to narrow the gap. "There is a rule that I think [former president] Max [Mosley] put in when he was there that in the



**■ Bernie Ecclestone: Mercedes had done 'something magic'**

event . . . that a particular team or engine supplier did something magic – which Mercedes have done – the FIA can level up things. "They [Mercedes] have done a first-class job which everybody acknowledges. We need to . . . try and level things up a little bit," added the Briton.