

Leinster SFC Quarter-final



# Business as usual as Dublin flex their summer muscles

Outclassed Longford suffer a 27-point defeat as Jim Gavin's men win in a canter  
Predictable mismatch calls into question again the current championship format

Dublin	4-25
Longford	0-10



Malachy Clerkin at Croke Park

It is hard to know how bad these beatings will need to get before they become indefensible. Do Dublin need to win by 30 points? Thirty-five? Forty? The distance between what Longford can be and what Dublin are capable of is barely measurable in goals and points but by whatever metric you want to reach for, the two counties don't make sense as part of the same competition any more.

Then again, since when did the GAA have to make sense? The numbers here would make a FIFA executive blush. Dublin ran up as gaudy a score as they pleased and it was only general disinterest that stopped them piling another

dozen or more on top of it. For the fourth year in a row, they skipped through their Leinster quarter-final with a double-digit victory to show for their efforts at the end.

Under Jim Gavin, Dublin's average winning margin in the Leinster Championship has been a smooth 15.5 points.

Their first game out each summer has long since descended into an exercise in filling their boots – the last time any side got within a kick of a ball of them in a Leinster quarter-final was 2009 when Meath lost by only two points.

**Brave scientist**  
Of their starting 15 yesterday, only Stephen Cluxton has suffered the indignity of watching as a goal has been scored against them this early in the year – a Halley's Comet-style oddity that you need to go all the way back to 2005 and a Joe Sheridan drop-kick to see.

It would be the brave scientist who predicts the sighting of the next one.

Dublin won here just as easily as all and sundry knew they would. They were able to give championship debuts to David Byrne, John Small and Brian Fenton at full-back, centre-back and midfield respectively. Imagine that – the spine of their side made up of champi-

onship newbies and still they won by 27 points without a hair out of place.

In opposition, they found a Longford side that contained only one player in full-forward Brian Kavanagh who had made a championship appearance in Croke Park before. A few of Jack Sheedy's squad came out of the dressing-room in the hours before throw-in to take selfies at the side of the pitch. This was a wholly alien experience to them and they froze in the face of it.

Dublin were 1-5 to 0-0 up after eight minutes. They were 2-11 to 0-6 up after 25. They finished with 11 different scorers to Longford's four. They out-scored Longford by 2-14 to 0-8 in the first half and by 2-11 to 0-2 in the second. Longford's last score from play came in the 22nd minute.

Sheedy set his team up with

**By the numbers**

Dublin	Longford
4-25 (37)	0-10 (10)
+21 (33)	0-5 (5)
0-4 (4)	0-5 (5)
6	5
2	1
16	11
0	2
0	1
0	0
0	0
33,544	

six defenders, two midfielders and six attackers and Dublin duly swallowed their whole.

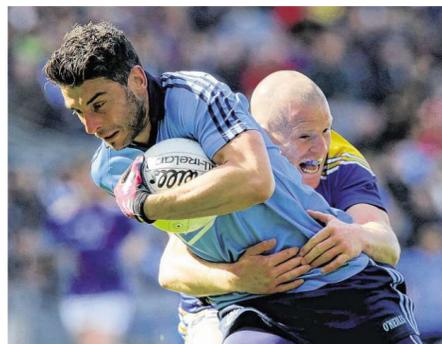
Whether through bravado or fidelity to tradition, he brushed off suggestions afterwards that he should have set his side up more defensively to give them a chance against such a fluid attacking outfit. As it was, all six Dublin forwards had scored by the 15th minute.

So be it, reckoned Sheedy.

**Spectator sport**  
"No," he replied when asked had he considered parking the bus. "No, don't believe in it. Don't like it. I think it's horrible to watch. As a spectator sport, it's called football so let's go play football to the best of our ability. If we had done that with our lads what would they have gained out of it? Very little.

"They got to experience playing against one of the best

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Top: Dublin's Paul Flynn scores a goal despite the efforts of Longford's Cian Farrelly and Dermot Brady. Above: Bernard Brogan is tackled by Dermot Brady. PHOTOGRAPHS: INPHO

teams in the country, suffered heavily against them, but putting 15 guys behind the ball was not going to improve how they play football. So no, I wouldn't have wanted to do it. And they wouldn't have wanted it either."

Quite what good a 27-point drumming is to the Longford players remains to be seen.

By going man-to-man here, they submitted before a ball was kicked. Consequently, we learned very little about Dublin's prospects for the sterner challenges that lie ahead.

They won here without Rory O'Carroll, Cian O'Sullivan and James McCarthy, all of whom are expected back for the semi-final on June 28th against either Laois or Kildare.

For what it's worth, Bernard Brogan looked extremely sharp against Longford's best defender Dermot Brady and Ciarán Kilkenny was moving with as

much menace as he ever has in a Dublin jersey.

But what it all means, we'll not find out for a month or two yet.

**DUBLIN:** 1 Stephen Cluxton, 2 Johnny Cooper, 3 David Byrne, 4 Philly McMahon (0-1), 5 Darren Daly, 6 John Small, 7 Jack McCaffrey, 8 Brian Fenton (0-1), 9 Denis Bastick, 10 Paul Flynn (1-3), 11 Ciarán Kilkenny (0-3), 12 Diarmuid Conolly (1-0), 13 Dean Rock (1-6, 0-2 free, 0-2 45), 14 Kevin McNamara (0-2), 15 Bernard Brogan (1-0). Subs: 23 Mick Fitzsimons for McMahon, half-time; 18 Tomás Brady (0-1) for Conolly, half-time; 25 Michael Darragh Macauley for Bastick, 46 mins; 17 Paddy Andrews (0-1) for Flynn, 52 mins; 24 Eric Lowndes (0-1) for Cooper, 56 mins; 19 Alan Brogan for Bernard Brogan, 61 mins  
**LONGFORD:** 1 Paddy Colm (0-1, 45); 2 Dermot Brady, 3 Barry O'Farrell, 4 Cian Farrelly, 5 Colm P'Smyth, 6 Barry Galleran, 7 Diarmuid Masterson, 8 Michael Quinn, 9 Kevin Diffley, 10 Rory Connor (0-3), 11 Ronan McEntire, 12 Peter Fay, 13 Barry McKeon, 14 Brian Kavanagh (0-5, 0-4 frees), 15 Ross McHenry, Subs: 24 Liam Conerton (0-1) for McKeon, 17 mins; 23 Dessie Reynolds for Diffley (black card), 28 mins; 21 Aidan Rowan for Smyth, 49 mins; 22 Pauric Gill for Connor, 53 mins; 17 Fergal Battram for Masterson, 58 mins; 19 Enda Williams for McHenry, 69 mins.  
**Referee:** Conor Lane (Cork)

Reaction

## It can't keep going on like this, insists Longford manager

Sheedy says review of championship format badly needed after 27-point loss



Ian O'Riordan at Croke Park

When championship football is no longer a game but death by lethal injection, when Dublin keep driving nail after nail into the coffin of their opposition, when there is no pleasure in it anymore and not any hope of things changing, then how much longer can it keep going on like this?

That's not a question easily answered, and yet if there is any lesson in Dublin's 27-point defeat of Longford – a record victory between the counties in the Leinster championship – then at least Jack Sheedy had the courage to say it: no, it can't keep going on like this.

The Longford manager, and former Dublin All-Ireland winner, clearly isn't arguing for arguments sake. He'd brought his team to Croke Park believing in the impossible, only for the impossible to become perfectly apparent – the only consolation being it could have been even worse.

"Any time you lose is never easy, but when you lose like that, to a team with that much superiority, it just shows the level of the gulf in standards," said Sheedy, who delivered this from a standing position inside the press conference room under the Hogan Stand.

"We came here, hoping, or expecting, to put on a real good performance, and they did, to a certainly extent, but were just steamrolled by a team at a hugely different level. And I don't see anyone taking Dublin to the wire at the moment.

"So, either take Dublin out of the Leinster championship, and leave it to the rest of us, or else there has to be a new format, it needs to be reviewed. Because who is going to get within 15 points of Dublin? Possibly Meath are the only team that are equipped to do that within Leinster.

"I think we have a fantastic game, a fantastic product, but we're losing people going to the games because it's not attractive, it's not interesting. There's nothing big there to come and watch, and it's disappointing because we've gone away from the traditional values of what the game was about. So I really think we really need to review it."

Jim Gavin, in his typically democratic view of these days, suggested any discussion on changes to the championship is for the off-season, Sheedy at least was open to that debate.

"I don't have the answer, but whatever way it's done, that it's attractive and that there's a progressive element to it. But coming here, for that, is of no great benefit to us or anybody else. I just think there's a lot of very smart people involved in the GAA across the board, from management up to the powers that be in Croke Park itself.

**Grasp the nettle**  
"Surely we can get all the heads together. If it's a company, an organisation, why can't we get all the heads together and look to improve it? Somebody needs to grasp the nettle and say let's sit down and make it because it's a fantastic sport. We have one of the best stadiums in the world let alone the country. Why don't we look at making it a better spectacle?"

There may well be better spectacles before the Leinster championship is done, although Sheedy wasn't predicting one. "Dublin will do that, or probably something close to it, whether it's Laois or Kildare the next day. There's a good chance they will. So the real test for Dublin will be in August, and this isn't even good preparation, because they need sterner tests, need a



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more balanced challenge, from other teams."

So to Gavin, who was never going to be anything less than calm with the outcome no matter how easy it proved for Dublin.

"We will take a lot from it," said Gavin. "We had not looked beyond this game, so nothing else has been discussed in the camp. We will talk about it tonight, of course, but until we had won it was not mentioned. We had a job to do and I am very satisfied that they did it."

Still, did the 27-point winning margin not beg the question of how much longer it can keep going on like this?

"We were just focused on getting the performance today. I'm in the middle of starting a campaign and my focus shifts to the next game."

## September Road Eamon Donoghue

### Longford and Tipp Not to be written off

A 27-point winning margin, 4-25 in total, you're right that's a big hurling score. The Dublin footballers equalled their biggest post-qualifier victory by absolutely dismantling a brave young Longford side on live television in Croke Park yesterday. Queue the championship reform talk, the "what purpose does it serve having these teams in the championship" discussion.

Last weekend Shane Curran claimed that it's hard to see what purpose London have in the All-Ireland series, let's not forget he played against London just once in championship football. That was in a slender one-point win in 2005.

Tipperary have shown with the the right structures put in place any county can in time develop top players and a competitive outfit. Their last championship meeting against Waterford 15 years ago was a three-point win, yesterday there were 22 points between the teams. Yes it's hard to see the appetite for football in Longford being wetted by that massacre, but surely it's every players' ambition to play against the best teams in GAA HQ. Nine years ago they lost by just two in their last meeting with Dublin, and beat their Under-21 team in 2013. Let's not write these counties off entirely.



### Twitter twaddle

- Marie Crowe @mariecrowe**  
Doubt there was much sledging in the Dub Longford game. Was so quiet in Croke we'd have heard it in the stand
- Dick Clerkin @dickclerkin8**  
It should be an every golfers bucket list to play Royal Co Down and if nothing else at least the 9th hole. #spectacular
- Colm Parkinson @Woolberto**  
Since I stopped playing with Laois Dublin has won 6 Leinster titles in 7 years. You do the maths
- Brian Murphy @BrianMurfie**  
#GAA avoiding embarrassing walkout by Dublin football fans by putting the more interesting Dubv Galway hurling match on as a curtain-raiser

### Finest forwards Meehan and Joyce inspire in first round

Class is permanent. Michael Meehan and Pádraic Joyce are two of the finest forwards of their respective generations and they showed exactly why during the first round of the Galway club senior football championship.

Injury forced Meehan to prematurely hang up his Galway jersey ahead of the 2014 season but the 31-year old still managed 1-4 for his club Caltra in their two-point loss against Shane Walsh's Kilkerrin-Clonberne last week.

Meehan was top scorer despite still being unable to fully train with his team; the former All-Ireland club winner notched four frees and a goal.

Word is that he's unable to partake in team sessions, he has his own individual training routine and he only plays in the championship games. It's clearly working, whatever it is he's doing.

Meehan was among the top five scorers in the entire first round of action, bettered still though by a certain 38-year-old Pádraic Joyce.



He managed 10 points in Killereerin's narrow loss to Leitrim, four points from play, and just one short of the county championship's top scorer so far, Shane Maughan.

The 17-year age gap with the Salthill/Knocknacarra youngster may have had something to do with that extra point.

Meehan said earlier in the year that

while his troublesome ankle was improving, he had gone under the knife for knee surgery last December.

He's constantly refused to outright rule himself out of an eventual intercounty return, saying his focus was on crawling "before I can walk before I can jog."

Where does 1-4 fit into that return schedule?

As for Joyce, the three-time All-Star was also instrumental as his club retained their senior status last year by the very skin of their teeth.

He scored 1-5 in that 2-10 to 0-11 win over Menlough in the relegation final last October.

Of the current Galway senior forwards Annaghdown's Damien Comer and St Michael's Eddie Hoare both notched six points, while Cortoon Shamrocks' Adrian Varley hit 1-3.

Every Galway fan must now be pondering whether Meehan and Joyce each have five or ten minutes in them against Mayo. If only says Kevin Walsh.