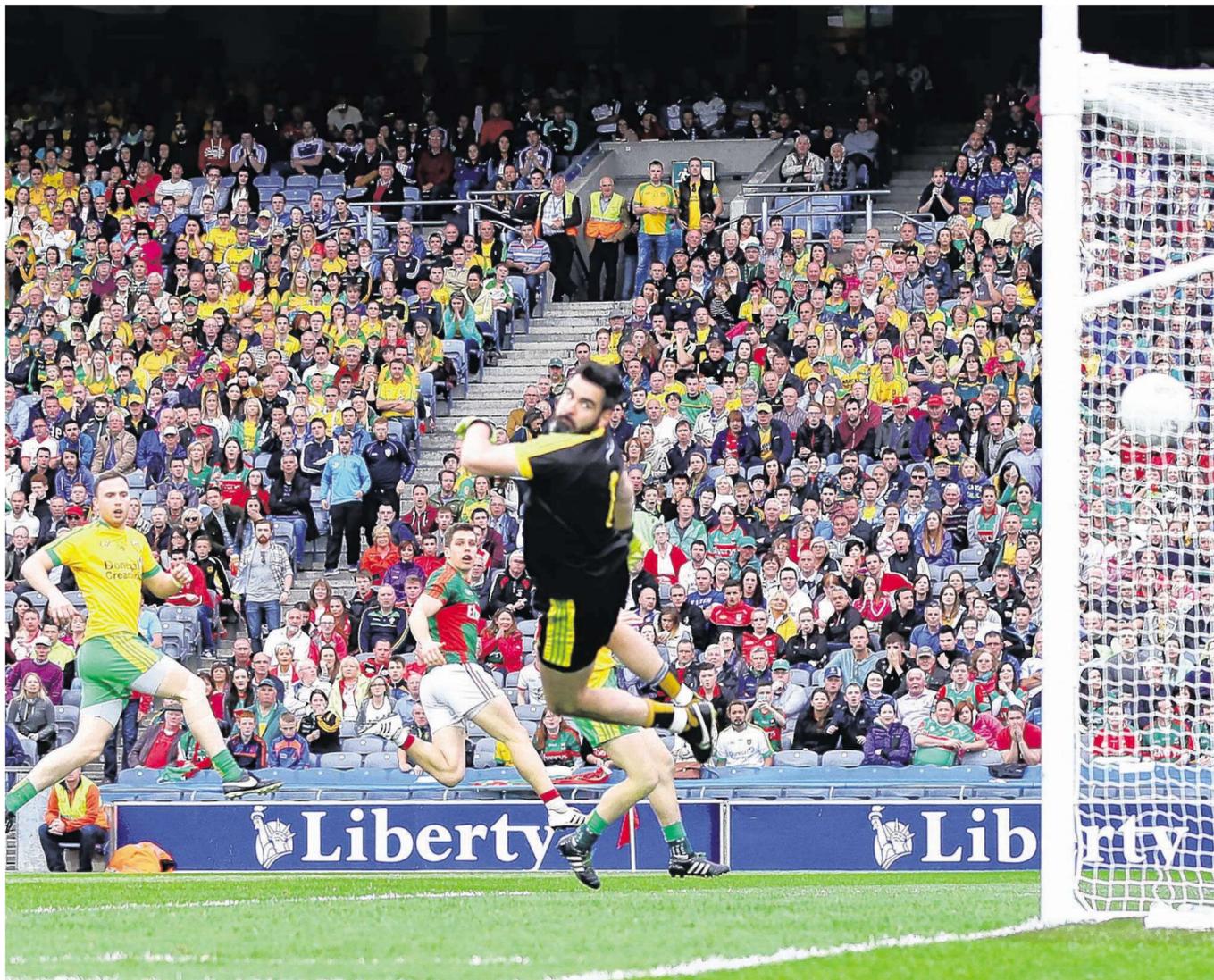


All-Ireland SFC Quarter-final



'The second goal and the couple of points probably killed it off'



Ian O'Riordan at Croke Park

Mayo's Keith Higgins is left to reflect on a 'satisfying' outing in Croke Park

"Who else do you want to be playing?" said Keith Higgins, throwing the question right back at us. So Mayo-Dublin comes to pass, certainly answering some prayers, if not providing the potentially scintillating contest the football championship has been crying out for.

To get there, Mayo didn't beat Donegal as much as chew them up and spit them out. Assuming they bring that same hunger and energy to Croke Park at the end of the month it could also be the game that defines the entire summer.

"It's definitely where you want to be," added Higgins, the Mayo captain realising that comes with several meanings. It's Mayo's fifth consecutive semi-final appearance, but will count for nothing if it doesn't all help in bringing them over the finish line towards the end of September.

"That just shows the level, we've been at, in the last few years. But, at the end of the day, no one remembers who plays in a semi-final."

Higgins used the word "satisfying" to describe Saturday's performance, realising too that for all the ease and composure with which they eliminated Donegal, it certainly wasn't perfect: "I don't know exactly how you'd describe it, to be honest. I just thought we did very well. I suppose it probably wasn't the prettiest of games, for a lot of it. We were solid enough at the back and when we went forward then, at the start of the second half, the second goal and the couple of points probably killed it off."

"We had a lot of chances then in the last 10 or 15 minutes, just didn't take them, but at the same time we didn't let them in for much either."

Trump card
Noel Connelly took his turn to offer the view from the sideline, the joint Mayo manager - along with Pat Holmes - using the word "energetic". There's also a fearlessness about the way Mayo are playing which may well be their trump card against Dublin.

"I thought the whole team worked really, really hard," said Connelly. "Donegal, to be fair, only had a week to recover from last weekend, and that didn't help, but I thought we were fresher throughout the field, and finished strong."

"We wouldn't be happy with the amount of chances we missed, in the second half, and that we could have killed the game off as a contest earlier than we did."

"But we learned during the league, that against the kind of system Donegal play, you need to be patient on the ball, switch direction when it needs to be switched. It's about being patient, waiting for the runners coming through and when they come, be clinical when they do appear."

Connelly admitted he hadn't given a moments thought to Dublin: "We've always taken it one game at a time. We know the calibre of team they are. We're under no illusions. They came to Castlebar in the league and gave us a whipping. They're very strong, throughout the park. We'll need to be very competitive; this performance, especially in the second half won't be good enough to overcome them."

For Donegal, the recent load of games clearly took some toll, and yet manager Rory Gallagher refused to use that as any excuse though Donegal's lethargy was visible all over the field.

"Ach, no, this is a fairly experienced Donegal team, so it wouldn't have been a major factor, no," said Gallagher, after his team slipped to an eight-point defeat.

"Ideally, you'd prefer less games, and we have been managing game to game a little, the last few weeks, with some players," added Gallagher, who did have a two-week break after the Ulster final defeat to Monaghan, but were out again in Croke Park, last Saturday against Galway.

"I certainly felt we'd recovered well since the Galway



“That just shows the level, we’ve been at, in the last few years. But, at the end of the day, no one remembers who plays in a semi-final”

Mayo bide time before springing telling punch



Seán Moran at Croke Park

Mayo	2-13
Donegal	0-11

The remorseless application of all they have picked up in four previous years on the road, losing by fine margins, and watching teams more or less their equal walking away with the most coveted piece of silverware in Mayo powered the Connacht champions into a fifth successive All-Ireland semi-final on Saturday evening in Croke Park.

There were abundant signs that Donegal were spent after a gruelling season with its attendant drain on resources but Mayo gave an impressive display.

Chief amongst the lessons learned has been the importance of goals and they managed to raise two perfectly-timed green flags and maintain a clean sheet at the other end.

Aidan O'Shea, whose new floating role has included enormously destructive periods at full forward, had edged the first

half of his battle with Neil McGee and the Donegal cover but the verdict went unanimous in injury-time when O'Shea took control of a dropping ball despite the presence of his marker and Mark McHugh and bulldozed through them before finishing precisely into the net to give Mayo an ominous looking four-point lead, 1-7 to 0-6.

Just after the break, Lee Keegan - thriving in the latitude granted by following Mark McHugh - floated in the decisive score.

Intelligent restraint
He insisted afterwards that the shot hadn't been an under-hit attempt at a point but, either way, the ball dipped over Paul Durcan and under the bar into the top right-hand corner of the net.

Few would argue that the flying wing back didn't deserve his 1-2 after a display of intelligent restraint and hard running, with captain Keith Higgins again showing his effectiveness by combining judgement and hot-to-handle acceleration, as the occasion demanded.

It was impressive to note how Mayo patiently ticked the various boxes necessary to deal with their opponents.

This was done with composure and focus - a defensive system cautious enough to keep the match within control in the early stages but prosecuted with enough counter-attacking vigour to turn the screw on a faltering Donegal.

Barry Moran was brought in

to provide the supplementary defensive cover and his screening played a role in limiting the damage done by Michael Murphy.

The Donegal captain was still his team's outstanding contributor. He may have been sited at full forward because of questionable fitness but from the first point in the sixth minute squeezed over from the right to give the Ulster side the lead for the only time in the match - it lasted just a minute - until the end he carried the principal threat to Mayo.

Moran's intelligence in the sweeping role was praised afterwards by joint-manager Noel Connelly and the big Castlebar centrefielder's commitment was evident all the way through until his forced departure with a blood injury incurred on the hour when throwing himself at Mark McHugh to block a goal chance.

Driving runs
Tom Parsons, tipped for defensive duties before the match, played an orthodox enough role - within the context of a thoroughly modern football contest - and was prominent, making himself available for driving runs and getting back to help out in defence - a deft tackle to dispossess Colm McFadden showing the range of his capabilities.

The third man in the centre-field triumvirate was the indefatigable Séamus O'Shea, whose appetite for work was complemented by some fine dis-

By the numbers

Mayo	Donegal
SCORES	
2-13	
FROM PLAY	0-11
3-11	0-6
FROM PLACED BALLS	
0-2	0-5
WIDES	
7	8
45s	
1	1
FREES CONCEDED	14
14	
YELLOW CARDS	3
2	
BLACK CARDS	0
1	
RED CARDS	0
1	
ATTENDANCE	61,784

5
Number of successive All-Ireland Senior Football Championship semi-finals Mayo have now reached

tribution - two terrific balls into his brother Aidan and Kevin McLoughlin yielding 1-1 just before half-time.

Donegal manager Rory Gallagher honestly refused to make an issue out of the wear-and-tear on his team but the impact was detectable. Frank McGlynn maintained the unstinting efforts of a titanic

season but the machine wasn't in full working order.

Karl Lacey didn't break down but his forays lacked the usual dynamism and at his best he would have been too sharp to commit the error of lofting a hand-pass across his own goal, inviting an alert McLoughlin to drift in and punch the ball over the bar.

In attack the best forward of their early season Patrick McBrierty demonstrated again that he's not fully right, struggling to get into the game and shooting another couple of wides without raising a flag.

Poor marksmanship
Eamon McGee lasted the course but Cillian O'Connor was very influential and but for a spell uncharacteristically poor marksmanship, would have finished with a lot more than three points.

Neil McGee had to retire injured with a hamstring tweak but then O'Shea's wrecking ball had swung and the Mayo colossus dropped back for much of the second half, leaving others to rotate the full-forward duties.

Mayo went into sleep mode for a quarter of the match: hitting a sequence of shots short into Durcan, O'Connor missing frees and a 45 - as well as over-cooking a hand-pass that prompted Donal Vaughan, for reasons best known to himself, to haul down the intercepting defender and earn a 53rd-minute black card from referee David Gough.

■ Mayo's Lee Keegan scores a goal past Donegal goalkeeper Paul Durcan during the All-Ireland SFC quarter-final. PHOTOGRAPH: CATHAL NOONAN/INPHO

During this lull in activity Mayo at least conceded no more than one point themselves and so prevented any fundamental weakening of their position but it will give Connelly and Pat Holmes plenty to bark about at the video review.

Other concerns will include the injury to an abductor muscle that caused goalkeeper David Clarke to withdraw at half-time and a red card for Kevin Keane, which ended the briefest of stints on the field after about three minutes.

So, another semi-final on the horizon and Dublin won't entirely welcome the sight of what's coming.

MAYO: 10 Clarke; 4K Higgins (0-1); 2G Cafferkey; 6T Dunne; 5L Keegan (1-2); 3D Vaughan; 7D Boyle; 9S O'Shea; 21B Moran; 10D O'Connor; 9T Parsons; 15D Doherty (0-3); 14C O'Connor (0-3, two frees); 11A O'Shea (1-0); 12K McLoughlin (0-2); Subs: 19 Chris Barrett for Cunniffe (32 mins); 16 Rob Hennelly for Clarke (half-time); 20 Patrick Durcan for Vaughan (54 mins, black card); 13 Andy Moran (0-1) for Barry Moran (61 mins); 26 Alan Freeman (0-1) for Séamus O'Shea (65 mins); 17 Kevin Keane for Cafferkey (70 min). **DONEGAL:** 1P Durcan; 2P McGrath; 3N McGee; 4E McGee; 5R McHugh; 6K Lacey; 7F McLynn; 8N Gallagher; 10D McNallais; 19C Toye (0-1); 21M McFadden; 12M McHugh; 13P McBrearty; 14M Murphy (0-6, four frees, one 45); 15C McFadden; Subs: 9 Martin McInerney for Toye (half-time); 17 Anthony Thompson (0-1) for Neil McGee (38 mins); 23 Leo McLoone (0-1) for McNallais (40 mins). Referee: David Gough (Meath)

September Road

Eamon Donoghue



What Monaghan can learn from Tyrone

How bitterly disappointing for Monaghan - Ulster champions yet their season ultimately ended by an Ulster team.

After the joy that followed the win in Clones, could that buzz have anti-climaxed any more than it did on Saturday?

Seeing teams emerging from the qualifiers to slay their respective provincial king pins in the All-Ireland series has been a regular occurrence in the hurling championship of late and it's not entirely unusual in the latter stages of the football championship either. But does a result such as this put a further dent into the reputation of the provincial tournaments considering this was just the quarter-final stage? Think Cork/Kerry down the years

in the semi-finals. Armagh and Tyrone is the other obvious example - that was bad enough but it just doesn't happen in quarter finals.

Of the last 20 provincial winners in the senior football championship only two have lost their quarter-final games - and guess who they are?

Yes Monaghan are the only side of those provincial champions to go on and lose a quarter final. And they've done it twice now. Worse still they've lost to Ulster opposition both times - both times against Tyrone. No doubt the draw has been hard on them, Tyrone twice and Dublin in the last three summers, but perhaps Monaghan are putting too much



of an emphasis on their Ulster campaign? Ultimately the big teams arrive in the knockout rounds and, of four Ulster teams in the last eight, now only Tyrone survive. What does that tell us?

Twitter twaddle

Ist thought this morning - was I too harsh on Tiernan McCann in commentary yesterday. Having watched it again I probably wasn't harsh enough

David McIntyre @DaveMcIntyreNT
Tiernan McCann should be embarrassed tonight winning is one thing but being a coward to have a man sent off is sad. #onlyaopinion
Conor.mortimer @Conmort

Ya'd have to love Aidan O'Shea, some beast!
Richie Hogan @richiehogan8

After Aidan O'Shea's goal I think it's obvious now that there must have been some kind of nuclear accident in Breaffy #aidansmash #mayogaa
neil symons @nasymons

Ultimate heroes set the bar high for each other but can they both keep up

Surely if you were to piece together your ultimate footballer, the final product wouldn't be too far off an Aidan O'Shea (inset) or Michael Murphy.

Last Saturday we got to see two of the finest players of their generations take the field, in the latest chapter of an unspoken rivalry.

Is it any surprise that given the size, strength, mobility and footballing skill of the two that both players were on the radar of every college in the country as highly talented county minors, Murphy choose DCU though, as O'Shea opted, or had to settle, for city rivals DIT. Either way there was bad blood from the start, both were set on out-doing the other.

Incredibly as established senior inter-county footballers they led their fresher teams against one another in 2010, one game between the colleges attracted the attention of AFL scouts, such was the

level of their performances. O'Shea would end that year with the All-Ireland, although Murphy would respond with Sigerson glory a year later beating DIT along the way. His Mayo counterpart would soon equal that feat in 2013.

Nestled between those was the small matter of a senior inter-county All-Ireland for which Murphy was the hero.

Between them, O'Shea at just 25 and Murphy now 26, they've already won a senior All-Ireland, nine provincial titles, three All Stars, a young footballer of the year, four Railway Cup titles, two Sigerson titles, a national football league, two club championships, six International rules series. Murphy was last year's four captain and he was a former young footballer of the year.

No doubt they've set the benchmark for one another - the question now is can O'Shea continue to follow the script.

