

All-Ireland SFC semi-final

O'Shea has more to offer Mayo than an aerial threat



Eamonn Donoghue Statistics

The midfielder turned full-forward has several strings to his bow

Aidan O'Shea may be a natural midfielder-turned-full-forward – but he has shown this summer that he has a lot more to offer than a plain aerial threat.

In fact, while his goal against Donegal in the All-Ireland quarter-final may have seen him out of the field and subsequently shrug off the attentions of three defenders, O'Shea got his hands on the ball around the square just the once over the 70 minutes.

Moreover, he won just three of the seven balls kicked in between him and Donegal's All Star defender Neil McGee during the first half, faring far better with ball that was hopped in front of him or floated for him to run on to than those which were hit in hope from further afield. Like most natural midfielders, the big Breaffy man steps his way under a high ball, rather than stationing himself deeper inside and leaning back or twisting his marker.

There still remains plenty of confusion over the role in which he actually occupies though. O'Shea spent 75 per cent of the match against Donegal operating as an orthodox full-forward. He was available for long direct ball, diagonal ball, but particularly for ball played outside of him on his left facing out the field.

It's no surprise the left-footer made most of his runs into his favourite right corner/half forward pocket, turning and teeing himself up for efforts or more often than not lay-offs on his more comfortable side.

Deeper role

The throw-ins at the start of each half were the only times in which O'Shea actually contested a ball around the middle third – and while he remained in a deeper role for the opening two minutes after the first throw-in, he would return to the forward line practically until the final quarter.

Then from the 53rd minute onwards he came back to make

nine of his 15 involvements outside of Donegal's own 45. Minus the two throw-ins, and that's almost 70 per cent of his "midfield" play coming when Mayo were closing the game out. So essentially, it's safe to say O'Shea is now Mayo's full-forward.

While being well shackled by McGee for much of that first half, a performance for which the teak-tough defender earned little credit (before being replaced in the second half due to an injury), O'Shea still played a part in five of the eight Mayo scores before the interval. His distribution via the handpass and short footpass, and his ability to draw frees, highlights the strings in his bow beyond an ability to catch and carry.

A goal per game

So far this championship, O'Shea has scored 4-5 in three championship games, and 1-8 during seven rounds of the league. That averages out at a goal per game for 2015. And in truth the raising of a green flag, or several, is the biggest threat the 6ft 4in and 15 stone attacker has in his armoury.



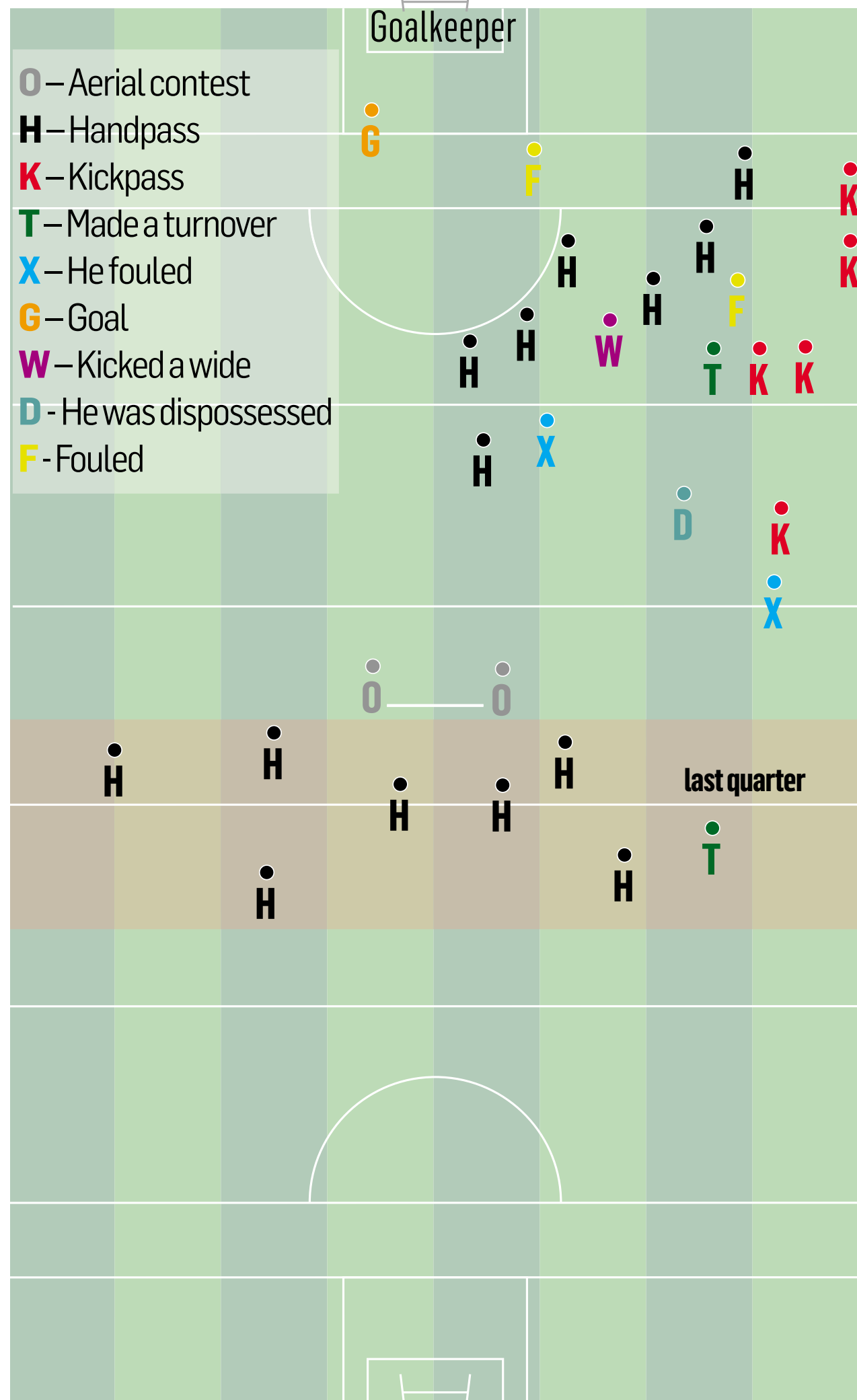
O'Shea has scored 4-5 in three championship games, and 1-8 during seven rounds of the league. That averages a goal per game for 2015

O'Shea has never been the most prolific of scorers; he has 8-16 since making his championship bow against New York in 2009. All of 7-10 of that arrived in his debut season and this summer combined – both of which he predominantly operated in the inside line.

Last summer, while fluctuating between a midfield and more advanced role, O'Shea also managed the crucial goal against Cork in the All-Ireland quarter-final. His average score per game in championship football is 0-1 per game, while during the summers of 2009 and 2015 that rises to 1-1 – again highlighting his goalscoring threat whilst playing as a forward.

Yet if McGee was a tough marker, the Mayo full-forward

Aidan O'Shea versus Donegal



will get little more respite this weekend. O'Shea started at full-forward in the league defeat to Dublin last March and failed to score with Rory O'Carroll at full-back for Dublin – the man he will no doubt come up against again this Sunday.

O'Shea has actually failed to score in his two championship games against Dublin so far, but has 0-5 in seven league games. Although he's unlikely to have occupied the inside line

Previous duels

O'Carroll will have learnt from previous duels against a similar opponent in Donegal's Michael Murphy. Murphy, who would be very similar to O'Shea in terms of his physique as well as his positional flexibility, has scored 1-4 from play in three games up against the Dublin defender (two senior and the Under-21 All-Ireland final). Although by all accounts he competed well on each occasion.

Mayo are unlikely to view the 2013 All Star defender as that aerially suspect so as to pepper him with an avalanche of high balls like they did to Sligo in the Connacht final. But whatever way they play it their talisman will be able to adapt.

The Connacht champions are by no means entirely reliant on O'Shea: they have averaged

over eight different scorers per game so far this summer, while the ever-reliable Cillian O'Connor has 1-19 in three games.

O'Shea's physical presence is no doubt freeing up the talents of O'Connor and co, and his own goal threat has helped Mayo to an average tally of 3-18 per game – but his ability to pick a pass, off load in the tackle and time his runs into the space shows that he's far from just an edge of the square target man.

News

Barry-Murphy pushes decision into future

Cork manager inducted into the Hall of Fame along with Dublin legend Keaveney

SEÁN MORAN

As one of the two new inductees – along with Dublin footballer Jimmy Keaveney – into the GAA Museum's Hall of Fame Jimmy Barry-Murphy was immediately faced with a more contemporary issue: what were his intentions as Cork hurling manager after four years in charge?

"I'm not going to think about that now. I'm going to enjoy myself here today. I haven't even thought about it since [the All-Ireland quarter-final defeat by Galway].

"The club championships are on and I honestly haven't thought about it since the match in Thurles that day. As far as I'm concerned, I'm still manager as of now anyway."

Holder of six All-Ireland medals, one football and five hurling, as well as seven All Stars, Barry-Murphy also managed Cork to an All-Ireland in 1999 during his first stint in charge of the county. He gave his reaction to being inducted.

"I didn't expect it to be honest, whether they are trying to give me a message I'm not sure.

It's a lovely honour and it is a fantastic amenity when you look and see all the medals.

"Mick Mackey's medals are there, Jimmy Doyle, Christy Ring, Jack Lynch. It is a great exhibition and it is lovely to be part of it and to have my memoirabilia there it is a tremendous honour for me and my family. It is very much appreciated."

Black card He was asked about the recent All-Ireland semi-final between Cork's conquerors and Tipperary, won thrillingly by Galway, or more specifically whether he felt the black card could be imported into hurling from football to counter fouls like the deliberate taking down of Tipp's Séamus Callanan, which prevented a goal scoring opportunity in return for a penalty that went over the bar.

Sceptical about the black card, Barry-Murphy said that he believed the issue should nonetheless be addressed but by the introduction of a sin bin, which was trialled some years ago and not adopted by the GAA.

"I've been saying it for

years," he replied. "I think a great opportunity was missed when the sin bin was removed. I thought that was a great idea and I think in rugby it's been a phenomenal success and I always thought, rather than having the black card, that would have been a better road to go down. Put a fella in the bin for 10 minutes. Then you'd sit and suffer."

"We see it in the big rugby games, whereby a team lose a better idea than any of those and I'd love to see it introduced in both hurling and football."

He also believes that the penalty needs to be looked at again. It was amended last year partly because of the success of Barry-Murphy's goalkeeper Anthony Nash in lifting the ball 20 metres out but not striking it until far closer to goal.

The ball must now be struck from the 20-metre line but with only the goalkeeper on the line. Two penalties failed to result in goals in the Galway-Tipperary match.

"When Seamus Callanan was pulled down at the last second, it's a great goal chance... the onus has to be given back to the team who were penalised if it's a goal-scoring opportunity."

Famous success Jimmy Keaveney came out of retirement at the request of Kevin Heffernan in 1974 and went on to become one of the key players in the county's famous successes of the era, which included three All-Ireland titles in four years. He was also the Texaco Footballer of the Year in 1976 and '77.

He said that the Hall of Fame induction made him feel "very honoured but as I said earlier I'm also very embarrassed" given "the great players I played with and against".

Hurling remains his favourite sport though and he pointed out that he had represented Dublin at each level of hurling before he went on to wear the county jersey for the footballers at the same grade.

Modern football doesn't appeal to him as much and he believes that hand passing needs to be restricted.

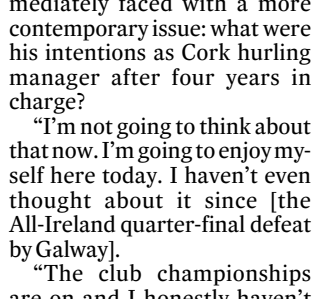
"They're really going to have to curtail that hand pass. The

"I think a great opportunity was missed when the sin bin was removed"

name of the game is football and I guarantee if you were to analyse the intercounty game there'd be around three players who'd come off the field at the end and they wouldn't have kicked the ball."

In the run-up to Sunday's big match at Croke Park for Keaveney's successors against Mayo, he is confident but not complacent.

"They haven't been tested in Leinster and the big test is coming up on Sunday. But in saying that, they're experienced players with a good manager and he'll be able to talk to them. I hope everything works out but I think it's theirs to lose."



Jimmy Barry-Murphy: still to make up his mind on job as Cork manager

Comment

Arlene Crampsie



Provincial contests at heart of GAA's enduring appeal

After Kerry's victory over Tyrone, one feature of the All-Ireland final has been confirmed: despite the back-door system, once again two provincial champions will go head-to-head for the Sam Maguire Cup. However, there has been a lot of discussion over recent weeks (as there is almost annually at this point) over the viability of provincial championships given the gap between the country's top football teams and the rest.

The increasing differential between Dublin and the rest in recent Leinster championships has led to cries for the splitting of Dublin, reallocation of resources and introduction of a two-tier system that would end provincial championships. This call has been reinforced by the continued strength of Mayo in Connacht and Cork/Kerry in Munster.

More competitive

The rationale espoused is the need for more competitive games to maintain spectator interest and pride in the players of lesser teams. These are valid concerns, but they ignore one aspect that has been key to the success of the GAA since its inception – the importance of place identity.

Sports geographer John Bale discusses how, apart from war, sport provides one of the few opportunities for territories to pit themselves against one another in open conflict. Other geographers have examined the role played by place-based sports teams in creating and evolving attachment to local places.

Success by those teams increase supporters' pride in their locality, and lead to the creation of place-based memories that form part of the social, collective memory of local areas.

The success of the GAA has been pitting places against places, be they clubs, counties or provinces. An open draw or tiered competition would still allow for that – this is what happens in the National League and back-door qualifiers – but one only has to compare attendances at the final rounds of either of the aforementioned competitions and the provincial championship finals to establish where the heart of the average GAA supporter lies.

The 2015 Division One and Two finals of the National Football League took place as a double-header in Croke Park, watched by 31,548 people, while the final round of the 2015 qualifiers saw just 25,665 watch Tyrone play Sligo and Donegal take on Galway. In comparison, the lowest attendance at any 2015 provincial final was in Connacht, where a questionable choice of venue saw Dr Hyde Park sell out its 23,000 capacity well in advance. The Ulster final also saw a sell-out of Clones, with an official attendance just shy of 32,000.

Munster replay

The drawn Munster final attracted 35,000, with the replay recording 32,233, while Leinster's clash of Dublin and Westmeath was witnessed by almost 48,000.

The attraction of the provincial championships is based in both history and geography – rivalries that have evolved as teams in specific territories repeatedly meet and play one another, the memory of feted one-off upsets that have become part of the collective and social memory within and between counties and Irish people's strong identification with their province.

People identify as being from Ulster, Munster, Connacht and Leinster, albeit to differing degrees, and with the exception of the bitterness of local rivalries, people support their fellow provincial teams once their own team has been knocked out of the championship.

The demise of the Railway Cup competitions has been utilised as a rod with which to beat provincial loyalty – this is an unfair comparison. Interviewing participants in the GAA oral history project it became clear the reasons for the demise of the Railway Cup's appeal were twofold. First, it lost its key St Patrick's Day date to the club championships and second, technology

rendered it less attractive. In bygone days the Railway Cup was one of the few opportunities for spectators to see top players from counties outside their own province and in particular to see the best players from the weaker counties. Today, we can watch our heroes at any time of the day or year thanks to the development of both television and the internet.

No set location

Then there is the fact that there is no set weekend or location to plan a trip in advance to the inter-provincial games. For 2015 we know they are on December 5th and 6th, but even now there is still no location decided, time set or referee confirmed.

So when it comes to the football championship place-based loyalties and rivalries have been key to its continued success and ability to enthral.

Rivalries increase where borders or territories are shared. Similarly, the province is sufficiently small to offer the opportunity for shocks, surprises and turnarounds in fortunes that can lead to coveted silverware that is simply beyond reach in a national context.

As a result each new championship season is greeted with excitement and anticipation by players and supporters across the country. Would reaching the final of a two- or three tier competition have the same sense of pride or achievement? Would it engender the same excitement among spectators or the



It is doubtful that any form-based championship could engender the excitement, anticipation and sheer interest that the provincial championship does

players themselves? These place-based considerations are at the heart of the GAA and are also the reason why splitting Dublin into two smaller entities has been so staunchly resisted to date.

Great teams

We are undoubtedly in a period of great teams in the football championship. As of this year both Dublin and Mayo have won five provincial football championships in a row, but this is not unusual. Kerry have won eight Munster titles in a row on two occasions, Mayo themselves won 12 provincial titles from the 1930s to the mid 1950s.

If the powers that then existed had decided to end the provincial championships, we would never have had victories for Sligo in 1975 and 2007 and Leitrim in 1994, nor would Longford have won their only title in 1968.

How would these unpredictable, unique results ever occur if teams were seeded before the championship starts? Would Donegal have ever won the 2012 All-Ireland if they were seeded based on their population, access to resources and form in 2010 or if they had not had their 2011 Ulster title to build on? Would Offaly have derailed the Kerry five-in-a-row bid if they had not had the boost and belief brought by successive provincial championship victories?

The provincial championship is by no means perfect, but it is doubtful that any form-based championship could really engender the excitement, anticipation and sheer interest that the start of each provincial championship does in the media, players and spectators alike.

It is on the field of play that place-based rivalries bred through generations re-emerge in the quest for that elusive provincial title and glory for an entire county.

Dr Arlene Crampsie lectures in UCD school of geography