

Analysis

John O’Keeffe



Composure up front gives Kerry the edge – but expect the unexpected

Not even the best forensic scientists could sift through this All-Ireland final and be certain of arriving at irresistible conclusions. Kerry and Dublin are two evenly matched football teams, potent in attack but perhaps also a little vulnerable in defence.

There are lots of variables to consider, but I expect something unexpected: what about Tommy Walsh? We haven’t seen much of him this year, but he may well be the little trick that Eamonn Fitzmaurice is hiding up his sleeve.

Kieran Donaghy not starting for Kerry is surprising, although not entirely unexpected. Clearly, Fitzmaurice is preparing to play a more massed defence, with probably just four forwards up front. He’ll want those forwards to be more mobile, to play with pace on the break, and Paul Geaney fits that role.

Donaghy is still an excellent option off the bench but Geaney brings a different dynamic. He’s a brilliant finisher, and somebody who invites the quicker, lower ball which Dublin won’t like.

Obvious losses
Kerry’s changes in defence are certainly unexpected, but my understanding is that Paul Murphy (hip) and Marc Ó Sé (hamstring) are both nursing injuries; they are obvious losses. Fionn Fitzgerald and Aidan O’Mahony would have been better coming off the bench, so this does weaken Kerry’s starting line-up.

He’s been excellent all year in the sweeping role, his pace helping to limit the opposition’s goalscoring threat. His role won’t be easily filled if his hamstring gives up, because from midfield up Kerry have marginally better players, who appear more composed when creating and taking scoring opportunities. And that’s the main reason why they’re more likely to win.

Four weeks without a game is a slight worry for Kerry. Dublin are definitely well served by that second game against Mayo. They learned a lot from the first game, and put it into practice. They set out to play the game at a high tempo, and kept it up relentlessly – starting with Stephen Cluxton’s kick-outs. And they were well able to sustain it until the finish, helped by the players who came off the bench.

Last 10 minutes
Mayo just couldn’t live with them going into the last 10 minutes – the same thing that happened to Kerry in the 2013 semi-final. Still, Diarmuid Connolly, Paul Flynn and Dean Rock hardly featured in that replay and they’ll need to step up for Dublin to have any chance of winning.

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tackling team, but they just ran out of steam. Mayo were loose in their marking as well, when you look at the room Andrews, Brogan and Ciarán Kilkenny enjoyed, and you can expect Kerry’s man-marking to be a lot closer.

The Cluxton factor has been analysed to death, although one thing is certain: Kerry will definitely put pressure on his kick-outs, definitely press the Dublin full-back line, to stop that short ball. Kerry will also adopt a type of zonal defence, spread out across the half-back line. That will put some pressure on Cluxton to kick the ball at least over 30 yards. It requires huge energy and concentration from players like James O’Donoghue and Johnny Buckley. Dublin are masters of freeing a player up, and Kerry simply can’t allow that. Connolly and Flynn can come

from deep, or Cluxton can also target the wings. Because the last place he will kick the ball is down on David Moran and Anthony Maher.

Still, Kerry will not be sitting back on the Dublin kick-outs. Kerry will also favour the aerial contest, while Dublin will be trying to make it the opposite. Everyone knows the cliché that goals win matches, and in this game it will certainly prove true. The question is, who can conjure up more of them? Dublin are not so dependent on Brogan and I feel they are more adept at giving that extra pass to create goals. But I feel Kerry, marginally, have the greater goal threat, through the Gooch, O’Donoghue and Paul Geaney.

Physical stakes
Neither team will back down in the physical stakes, which will put discipline to the test. The black card is there to deal with that, and no one wants to get black-carded in an All-Ireland final. A lot will depend on the interpretation of the tackle.

Both benches look equally strong. Could Kevin McManamon come back to haunt Kerry again? Alan Brogan has a very shrewd head. So I see both benches being emptied, well before the finish, as both teams look to sustain the pace. Dublin will set the pace, and it’s essential for Kerry to stay with it, but again it’s from midfield up where this game will be won, and why Kerry will win it.

Interview Denis Mahony

Captain’s log: the voyage that foundered before Dublin discovered the route forward



Seán Moran
GAA correspondent

Sixty years may have elapsed but certain things remain the same as Dublin again find Kerry impeding their progress



It’s all of 60 years since Denis Mahony captained Dublin in the 1955 All-Ireland final against Kerry. Now 88, he sits in the chair and remembers, occasionally digressing or ruminating with laughter at something particularly amusing. On the table there is a scattering of memorabilia: photographs including one of the team, poised for action on that afternoon in September ’55. You don’t need a shot of hyperbole to talk about it as the most influential All-Ireland in history.

It attracted a then record crowd of 87,102, surpassed only once since, and marked the advent of a Dublin team born and bred in the city. They were tactically and technically innovative and convinced their time had come even against Kerry. The clash captivated the country and became a prologue to the counties’ legendary encounters in the 1970s and beyond.

“Danno Mahony, a fine leader, is a tireless worker and can afford to come up and help his half-backs on demand,” wrote PD Mehinan in these pages of the Dublin corner back. “I roamed a bit but Peter O’Reilly (Dublin trainer in the 1950s) kept me in the bloody corner,” remembers the player himself.

Defeat that day was all the more crushing for being unexpected. Kevin Heffernan said that it “formed a large part of what I became as a person”.

He wasn’t the only one devastated. “We all were,” says Mahony. “I had to go to the back of the Cusack Stand to congratulate the Kerry team and I came out crying. You put so much into it and you know...” He trails off: “That’s sport.”

Sporting obsession

The whole project started 10 years previously. Denis Mahony grew up in Glasnevin, his house backing onto Cremore Cricket Club. It was his first sporting obsession, morning to night. But he attended O’Connell’s School where he met lifelong friends – Ollie Freaney, Nicky Maher and Jim Lavin – and, as enduringly, football.

The re-orientation was complete when Monsignor Fitzpatrick, who ran the juvenile section for the emerging St Vincents club, came calling and cricket disappeared into the backfield.

“We trained very hard because we’d no money and there was three nights training so we went to five. That was the fun. We were all knocking around together anyway.”

Mahony was so close with Freaney and Maher that the three of them and their wives would go on honeymoon together. They also traced the same steps into Dublin’s new age from the minor All-Ireland of 1945 through the growing influence of Vincents and the club’s drive to make the county team one of native Dubliners.

The club had 14 players, Mahony and his friends included, on the Dublin side that won the league in 1953, beating All-Ireland champions Cavan in the final.

If there was a problem it was in a growing perception that Dublin were a bit mercurial: good for the league, and very stylish for such times of the year, but not so much for the championship.

Nineteen-fifty-five would be different. The league was won again, also against that year’s All-Ireland holders – Meath – but this time they stayed on course for the championship. It was the 20-point trimming of the same opponents in the Leinster final that spelled out the change of gear in Dublin.

The strange repetition of history has seen Dublin drawing All-Ireland semi-finals with

Mayo at 30-year intervals – and so far losing the final to Kerry – since 1955.

“Mayo had a great team,” according to Mahony. “They had Seán Flanagan, the Flying Doc (Pádraig Carney) and Tom Langan (a Team of the Millennium laureate). Lavin played full back and I was corner back and we decided we’d share Langan between the two of us.”

It took a difficult free on a wet day from Maher to send the match to a replay, which Dublin won but life was about to get complicated for Denis Mahony.

“I didn’t feel too well the night of the replay and I went to the doctor on the Monday morning and he knew right away and he says to me, ‘you have appendicitis’.

‘Through stress’

“Ah Jaysus, don’t do this to me. One more week and I’ll be in an All-Ireland final. He sent me into Professor Tom O’Neill in Patrick Dun’s hospital. He had a look at me and said that’s come about through stress. I was captain and had meetings and all that sort of stuff.”

“His medicine was, ‘go away and don’t see anyone and don’t appear in public and I’ll let you play’. He booked me into the Bon Secours in a private room except with a Christian Brother. I was there for the week and I was

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“I didn’t have it out at that stage. We kept quiet until some fella on the *Evening Press* got a message on the lower corridor that I was upstairs so it all leaked.”

“This matron came to me and said ‘I’ll have to ask you to leave’. There’s a group of people who have come up and left a load of fruit and potatoes. The lads on the docks – the real Dubs – they were after knocking it off, off the boats and bringing them up for the captain.

“That was the mood in the city. There was a lot of fun. I played in the match and it must have affected me but I played another match the following week and played an absolute blinder. I checked myself in the following Monday.”

Unlike many of his team-mates, Mahony retired before the All-Ireland was eventually won, in 1958. “I knew I was finished,” he says. “No-one asked me to stay so I knew. I got the message. The time had come.”

There was however a post-script. Freed from the commitment of playing, Denis Mahony became chair of the county board in time for the 1958 All-Ireland. He immediately elevated conditions for the players. Post-match catering was switched from a cellar in Barry’s Hotel to the Gresham but there were other matters to be addressed.

“Parnell Park had to be overhauled. We built O’Toole Park. At the opening Kevin Boland, the Lord have mercy on him, was the Minister for Defence at the time. He was a real Dub – if there was a good fight, he’d be in the middle of it.”

■ Denis Mahony, who captained the Dublin side that were beaten by Kerry in the 1955 All-Ireland senior football final, with memorabilia from that historic championship run.

PHOTOGRAPH: DARA MAC DÓNAILL/THE IRISH TIMES

Boland knew that Dublin were short an important player for the pitch-opening match.

‘No sign’

“Snitchy (Ferguson, Dublin All-Ireland medalist) lived in Clonee and there was no sign of him. The Minister started the speech: as Gaelic, as Béarla – as everything else! – and it was raining. It went for well over half an hour and I was saying, ‘come on, come on’. ‘Oh no, no,’ says he. ‘Snitchy’s not here yet’.”

He didn’t stay around too much longer. “I did four years and they wanted me to stay on but I did a runner.”

Denis Mahony will watch this weekend’s renewal of the ancient rivalry from afar, as he spends time in Portugal at this stage of the year. “They’re blessed they got the two teams they got in this year’s final. I hope it’s a classic.”

He knows though, better than anyone, that it’s not always that straightforward.

Preview

Kerry in search of two in a row

All-Ireland MFC
Kerry v Tipperary
Croke Park, 1.15
TG4

EAMON DONOGHUE

When Kerry and Tipperary meet in this Sunday’s All-Ireland minor final it will only be the third time since the competition began in 1929 that two counties from the same province will face-off in the decider. It will also be the first time two Munster teams meet with the Tom Markham Cup at stake.

Kerry are in search of back-to-back minor and senior All-Irelands. Prior to 2014 they had not managed to win the two grades since 1980, but good underage teams often arrive like buses, and after 20 years without a minor triumph Kerry are in search of two in a row.

For Tipperary they harboured double dreams of their own for much of 2015 but after their defeat in the minor hurling final to Galway two weeks ago their minds are now firmly focused on securing the football title.

These two have met already, of course. Back in July Kerry won the Munster final 2-14 to 1-11.

Tipperary actually dominated the second period of that game, ditching their sweeper system, and have since gone on a run in which they have defeated Connacht champions Galway and Leinster champions Kildare.

Provincial decider

The Premier County were also without Stephen Quirke, all 6ft 4in of him, during that provincial decider. He has now recovered from a knee injury and came on against Kildare.

While Quirke will add to Charlie McGeever’s options around the middle, their go-to men are in the inside line – top scorer Jack Kennedy and Alan Tynan.

Tynan, a star of the county’s hurling team as well as a talented rugby player (he won the Senior Cup with Roscrea this year), was to the fore in the wins over Galway, when he scored 1-5, and Kildare.

Full-forward Brian McGrath is another dual star set to play a major role this weekend. A younger brother of senior Tipperary hurler Noel, he and Tynan make up two of the eight dual players on the team.

Their manager McGreever is a Donegal native turned Clonmel local and he will be hoping that the hurt of two weeks ago can drive on his team to what would be only a third minor title.

Such is the abundance of talent at Jack O’Connor’s disposal that Kerry have just two players remaining from last year’s winning 15. One of those is Mark O’Connor, who makes his return from injury.

This could be a historic weekend for the Kingdom, even by their standards.

KERRY: B Courtney, D Brosnan, J Foley, T O’Sullivan, J Morgan, A Barry, G White, M O’Connor (capt), JMF Foley, B O’Searaichin, S O’Shea, B Barrett, MFoley, B Sweeney, C Geaney.
TIPPERARY: C Manton, T Fitzgerald, J Skehan, T Lowry, D Owens (capt), L Fahy, E Moloney, J Kennedy, T Nolan, A Buckley, A Tynan, C English, S Quirke, B McGrath, B Martin.