

Dublin v Kerry Opinion



It'll be physical and we should all be a bit more grown up about it

**Darragh Ó Sé**

This carry-on of pretending either team is whiter than white is a nonsense

Let's get something out of the way from the start. The league final tomorrow is going to be physical, you can bet your life on that.

I have no problem with that at all – and I wouldn't imagine for a second that either team has the slightest issue. People need to get over themselves when it comes to what kind of sport football is.

All this fainting and swooning and harking back to the old days when everything was supposed to be more pure would melt your brain.

Kerry and Dublin played games in the 1970s that were absolute bloodbaths where marksmen were laid down and fellas didn't talk to each other for years afterwards. There was a game in New York that the old greats still talk about as if it was

a warzone. And yet we're supposed to get teary-eyed for the rare old times! Please.

This carry-on of pretending that either team is whiter than white is a nonsense. They will both try to stop the opposition any way they can. Kerry will target Dublin players, Dublin will target Kerry players. The least we can do watching on from the sidelines is be a bit grown up about it.

Full of beans
It's actually fairly easy to judge the mood in Kerry this week as we head to Croke Park. Sometimes we go up there full of beans and ready to teach the Dubs a thing or two, sometimes we keep our powder dry and don't say too much because we know we're in for a rough day.

This time, though, it's straightforward enough. We haven't honestly got a clue one way or the other.

Kerry could be an up-and-coming force or they could be in trouble. We don't know. The league has been so hit and miss that it has left us completely unsure of our ground down here. The only thing I could say and be reasonably sure of is that they're lucky to be in a league final and haven't played well enough to deserve to be there.

That said, I don't buy this argument that I've heard in a few places that this is a game Kerry would have liked to avoid.

Anyone who thinks that knows nothing about what it's like to be in an intercounty set-up at this time of year.

They're big time.

Snap your hand off

Think of all the other top teams around the country who have no decent game now for months. They'll be heading off on training camps and playing A v B games from now until June or July or even August before they meet any real challenge. Wouldn't they snap your hand off for a test like this?

the ground. They looked totally uninterested in the whole thing, which you'd never expect from a Tyrone team.

There wasn't even a row in them. Normally between Kerry and Tyrone, there'd always be a bit of baggage or a bit of a racket some way.

But there was nothing last Sunday. Kerry had them put away inside the first 20 minutes at will. Tyrone played two sweepers in the second half – and them supposed to be chasing the game! I couldn't work it out at all.

The worst of it was that it meant that Kerry had played badly in Cavan the week before but couldn't tell whether or not they'd learned anything from it because Tyrone put up such a poor show. So as I say, we're heading to Dublin not really knowing what the story is with it.

That said, I don't buy this argument that I've heard in a few places that this is a game Kerry would have liked to avoid. Anyone who thinks that knows nothing about what it's like to be in an intercounty set-up at this time of year.

They're big time.

Snap your hand off

Think of all the other top teams around the country who have no decent game now for months. They'll be heading off on training camps and playing A v B games from now until June or July or even August before they meet any real challenge. Wouldn't they snap your hand off for a test like this?

As much as it pains me to say it, Kerry aren't really on the radar of those Dublin players at the minute. That's not how it works when you're at the level they are

rything at them. See what works. More importantly, find out what doesn't work. The trophy doesn't really matter – Kerry and Dublin have plenty of trophies. But the game itself matters big time.

At the minute, when I look at Dublin, I see a team that has a five- or six-point headstart every time they play in Croke Park. I don't mean that as in it's a home venue – people would want to stop cribbing about that stuff fairly soon as well. No, what I mean is there isn't a pitch in the country that plays

as fast or where the sod is as good or as clean as in Croke Park. That suits the Dubs down to the ground because they're fast, athletic and relentless. It's a pitch built for the best team and they're the best team.

So although Kerry should have come out on top in Tralee a few weeks ago, I find it hard to see this as a similar chance to beat them.

If the Dubs were going to be caught in the course of this league, I always felt it was going to be in a provincial ground like Tralee or Clones or above in Donegal, places where conditions would have neutralised their advantages a small bit.

Great comfort
This game can be very simple sometimes. If you were picking a team with the best 15 players in the country at the moment, you'd have seven or eight Dubs on it. I was lucky enough to play on a team in the noughties that you could have said the same for and there's a great comfort in it.

You never have to worry about whether your team is going to perform. You know. And you know above all that you have to match the performances of the players around you.

Nobody is going into a game thinking the have to paper over the cracks or they have to cover off the weak link. Instead, every player is full sure that everyone else will meet a certain standard and he has to meet them or he'll be gone.

What Jim Gavin has as a re-

Dublin's Ciarán Kilkenny with Kieran Donaghy of Kerry during last August's All-Ireland semi-final at Croke Park. PHOTOGRAPH: DONALL FARMER/INPHO

sult is a dogfight to make the team now. Look at the players he's gone through the league either without or with only a game here and there. Jonny Cooper hasn't been seen yet. Diarmuid Connolly has less than half a game played. James McCarthy, Jack McCaffrey, Bernard Brogan and Paul Flynn have a couple of games each. Cormac Costello won them an All-Ireland title and isn't in the mix yet.

As much as it pains me to say it, Kerry aren't really on the radar of those Dublin players at the minute. That's not how it works when you're at the level they are.

Those players are concerned with one thing and one thing only – getting a place in the team for the championship. Brogan isn't going into the game thinking about what Kerry player will be marking him.

He's going in thinking about what Dublin player he has to keep at arm's length.

So Kerry have no choice here. They have to go to Croke Park and tear into the Dubs. They have to make them worry about external opposition for once, shake them out of the comfort zone of competing against themselves. If they can do that, it will be a day well spent.

Previews

Kildare can finally put one over on Galway

Tomorrow

AFL Division Two final
Galway v Kildare

Croke Park, 2pm, TG4

SEÁN MORAN

The counties met a week ago in one of those slightly false encounters where just one of the teams were fully engaged, Kildare having already been promoted. Cian O'Neill announced 13 changes to the team that did surprisingly well in Salthill, losing by a point.

Some allowances can be made for Galway, who weren't at full strength and who looked afflicted by anxiety as they strove to avoid defeat and copperfasten their own return to Division One. That's done and both teams can focus on the prospect of ticking a long-empty box.

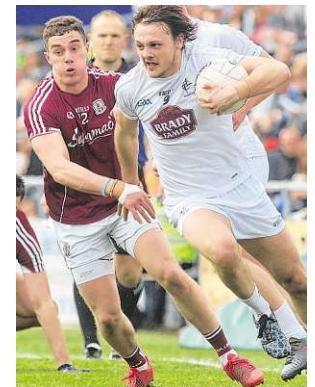
Galway's winless streak at Croke Park is nearly 16 years old but it pales in comparison with Kildare having to go back 32 years to February 1985 for their last league or championship win over Galway – on a day when Larry Tompkins scored 1-5.

Kildare are another yo-yo county, having gone from Division One to Three and back again in successive seasons whereas Galway have been loitering in this tier for six seasons.

Galway have it in them to do well on a big pitch with a good surface, given the form of Walsh – who at last is delivering on his potential with the pace of team-mates like Eamonn Brannigan. Kildare though look steadier, better balanced between defence and attack and with the exception of Niall Flynn (out with appendicitis) they have a full hand, the confidence and athleticism to land some silverware.

the counter-attacking breaks of the wing backs, especially Johnny Duane. Their defence will back to full strength this weekend and a man marker for Walsh will probably be organised given that his direct opponent is likely to be opposing captain Eoin Doyle, who plays a deeper role in front of his full backs.

Galway's excessive caution in Salthill a week ago was presumably influenced by their defensive shortcomings in a couple of matches and they will remain mindful of what happened last August when they took the field as favourites.


Kildare's Paschal Connell and Eamonn Brannigan of Galway in action last week

ites against Tipperary in the All-Ireland quarter-finals.

Galway have it in them to do well on a big pitch with a good surface, given the form of Walsh – who at last is delivering on his potential with the pace of team-mates like Eamonn Brannigan. Kildare though look steadier, better balanced between defence and attack and with the exception of Niall Flynn (out with appendicitis) they have a full hand, the confidence and athleticism to land some silverware.

Tipp likely to come out on top

Today

AFL Division 3 final
Louth v Tipperary

Croke Park, 5pm, TG4

Louth have been some story in this league and have completed a four-year cycle of dropping from Division Two to Four and now back again in successive seasons. Their watershed match was beating their final opponents in Thurles with some great second-half shooting.

Last week's second defeat, by Sligo, came after promotion had been secured and was with essentially a second team.

For a team favoured for promotion after last year's championship exploits, Tipp have made heavy work of attaining that target – Michael Quinlan's decisive goal in Armagh came with just seconds of injury-time left – but manager Liam Kearns can point to injuries and schedule disruption as mitigating factors. The main task completed for both teams, they can relax into this but looked at over a period Tipperary have shown the greater aptitude for playing at a higher level and having played so well in Croke Park in last year's championship they look the more likely winners.

SEÁN MORAN

Westmeath have the momentum

Today

AFL Division Four final
Westmeath v Wexford

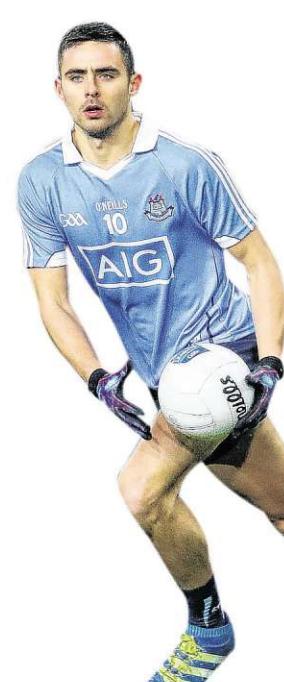
Croke Park, 3pm, TG4

record the highest points total in the division and thrashed a below-strength Wexford after the latter had sealed promotion.

Whether Séamus McEnaney's policy of experimenting in the last two matches will work in terms of giving players game-time remains to be seen. With Monaghan, he won one and lost one of the league finals his teams contested. Westmeath have plenty of Croke Park finals experience in recent years and with John Heslin and Ger Egan in form their momentum to date can do the rest.

SEÁN MORAN

League 2017 Unearthing new talent



Eamon Donoghue

Bragging rights and silverware aside, when the 2017 season is done with, the national football league will be looked back on in terms of the fresh talent uncovered.

Dublin, as All-Ireland champions, and Kerry as arguably their main rivals at the top table, have very few openings in their championship squads. Come September however, the addition of one or two extra players could prove the difference in claiming Sam Maguire.

Brian Fenton's impact in 2015 being the case and point. Dublin allowed their development squad to compete in, and ultimately win, the pre-season O'Byrne Cup competition in January; and the find of that competition was Niall Scully (left).

Equally impressive operating in

the half back line as in the half forward line, Scully is cool and clever in his use of possession, hardworking and with pace to burn.

The Templeogue Synge Street man, who was in the half forward line for both the All-Ireland-winning minor Dublin team in 2012, and Under-21 team in 2014, picked up the man of the match awards in the O'Byrne Cup semi-final and final.

Consecutive award
He followed that up with a third consecutive award in the league opener against Cavan, and has continued to impress in starting every game as Dublin reached Sunday's league decider.

Another graduate of those successful minor and Under-21 teams is Conor McHugh. The Na Fianna clubman caught the eye as DCU won the Sigerson Cup in 2015, and he scored 1-3 in the league win over Mayo.

That was one of four starts he made in Dublin's seven games, and along with Cormac Costello and Con O'Callaghan (after the Under-21 championship is completed) he is one of the county's most exciting attacking prospects.

Ciarán Reddin is another to come through the ranks with an Under-21 All-Ireland, only he won his in 2012. The St Maura player captained the O'Byrne Cup-winning team, kicking three points in the final against Louth.

He has been involved in extended panels and made appearances in recent years, but in the last two league games he has put his hand up like never before.

Four points from play (albeit one of them being very dubious) in two matches from midfield, he may not be the most combative or all-action midfielders, but he is assured in possession, has a fine engine and he offers a scoring

threat. He's certainly earned himself another opportunity.

As for Kerry, they have had a lot more chances to younger players in the league. No surprise after three minor All-Irelands, and four Munster in a row.

The likes of Kevin McCarthy, younger brother of former stalwart Mike, and Adrian Spillane have been given plenty of game time, although it's the elusive Jack Savage (right) who has really stood out.

The Kerins O'Rahilly clubman was brought into the panel ahead of last year's All-Ireland quarter-final, but given his chance at 13 early on this season, he has excelled a lot of purists.

A classy operator at centre forward for the Kerry minor and Under-21 teams, the 21-year-old scored 0-10 in the 2013 Munster minor final win over Tipperary.

In some of his point-taking, his movement in creating space and evading tackles, he has shown

why he is so highly rated in Kerry. To keep his place when the full pack is available though, he will need to show it more often.

Probably the find of the league for the Kingdom though is Jack Barry. He formed a cool midfield partnership with fellow Kerry man Barry O'Sullivan for UCD in the Sigerson Cup, and he has built on that by starting five league games for the Kingdom, and featuring in the other two.

Discipline and focus
Barry is a strong ball carrier, he can kick points at full tilt and he is a nice fielder, but he impressed most in his marking of Dublin's Fenton in the draw in Tralee last month.

The man from the Na Gaeil club could yet be called upon to repeat the trick once or twice more before the year is out.

A minor in 2012, Barry has stiff competition for places around the middle, but he offers a

different option and looks like one who will improve.

Roman Shanahan mightn't have commanded the winter headlines of Barry or Savage, but he has been quietly consolidating his place in Kerry's defence.

He has started six games during the league, at corner back in all but one. The Austin Stack defender can also operate in the half back line.

Shanahan had never played for Kerry at any grade but he was given his chance in the McGrath Cup earlier in the season, and has quietly gone about his task with some gritty displays.

A tidy solid defender, he's being rewarded for club form and looks to be very much in Eamonn Fitzmaurice's plans.

