

# Sports Tuesday

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## O'Neill happy Hogan is 'keen' to play for Ireland

International soccer  
Emmet Malone: page 23

### Championship 2017

## Jim McGuinness



# Huge prize of legacy at stake for final four

Like many people around the world, I watched the closing act of Usain Bolt's career with that peculiar feeling you have when any great athlete or team leaves the stage.

I am not an avid athletics fan but Bolt is one of those sports people who transcends their sport and engages people in an instinctive way. He was there in the background, winning races and breaking records with such effortless ease that it made you feel as if he would always be there.

Of course, that's not how it works. The arrow of time keeps on moving. And at the weekend, Bolt the sprinter was suddenly gone. It got me thinking about the upcoming All-Ireland semi-finals. I feel as if the country is waiting for these games and has been all summer.

Dublin-Tyrone, in particular, has the potential to be very explosive and competitive, which is not an environment Dublin have experienced much in recent years. Any All-Ireland semi-final is a big occasion but this game is unique because of the evolution of both teams over the past five years.

They are both chasing something special which could bring about a really intense, aggressive and relentless game of football. And I kept wondering what this means to the teams and managers now that they are in the final days of preparation. The word that kept coming into my head is: legacy.

Dublin are going for three All-Ireland titles in a row. They haven't lost a championship game since 2014 and a lot has changed in the game – and the world – since then. Now, they are narrowing in on two games to achieve this rare, rare feat. It would place them on the same plateau as Kevin Heffernan's team and their Kerry rivals of the 1970s. So clearly the stakes are very high for them.

Tyrone are looking to make a new breakthrough. But, then, Mickey Harte has won three All-Irelands with separate Tyrone teams in addition to seven Ulster titles. So if Tyrone win the next two games, it places their time under Harte in that rarefied place as well. Ever since Mickey Harte took over, Tyrone football has lived through an extraordinary period and this summer is the latest example of that.

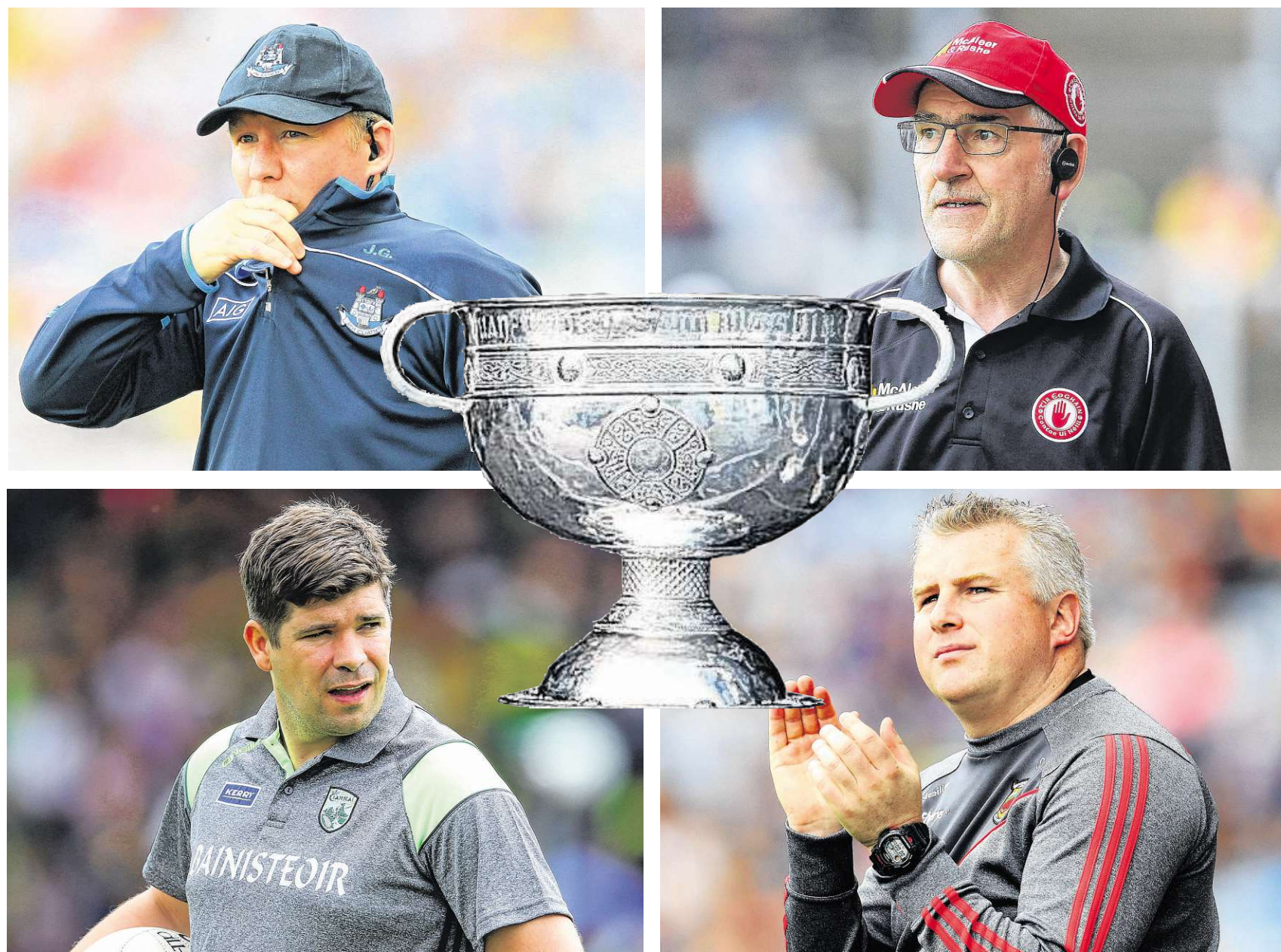
### More emotion

One of the reasons that the GAA summer is so special is that the supporters live through the days almost as intensely as the players. They expend as much and in some instances more emotion than the players they follow.

I have this enduring memory of the Donegal boys trying to livestream Bolt's 100 metres in the London Olympics in 2012 while we were on the bus home on the night of the Kerry quarter-final. Everyone wanted to be in touch with this moment when the fastest man in the world did his thing.

We were hurtling through mid-Ulster that night, trying to leave our own mark. It was easy to forget, at that moment, that Bolt's time or unrivalled majesty was temporary. I thought about that night again watching Bolt losing his final race after pulling up injured in London this weekend. It wasn't the dream ending but his legacy had been set in stone by then and he had left his sport in a better place during a period when it badly needed a star.

There is a book out on the All-Blacks called *Legacy* and it is essentially about leaving the jersey in a better place. Their



■ Jim Gavin, Mickey Harte, Eamonn Fitzmaurice and Stephen Rochford. "For Kerry, Mayo, Dublin and Tyrone, the next three weeks will shape their legacy. It's a tricky thing to deal with."  
PHOTOGRAPHS: INPHO

now and ground themselves and continue to project into the future. It is a very valuable ability to possess because I think a lot of other people go with the flow and just keep on moving with the water without really thinking about where it is carrying them.

It doesn't have to be an extraordinary or crowd-pleasing achievement that creates one's legacy. It could be a father or an aunt or a mother who put so much into their family and those around them that their worth is felt long after they are gone. That's a hugely significant legacy. And we see this in sport all the time; that feeling which teams and athletes grapple with and try to gauge as they go. It comes down to that question: What is left of you when you are gone?

### Greatest teams

It is fine lines and it is, of course, dictated by results in a way that sometimes can disguise the true legacy of a team. Winning this All-Ireland would be the crowning glory for Tyrone because their great team has come and gone. So if Mickey Harte can get this new team over the line, it would be an extraordinary achievement for him and everyone involved. If Dublin win, they will stamp their place as one of the very greatest teams in GAA history. If Kerry win, then it becomes a different narrative in that they responded to the ferocity of the Dublin challenge and enhanced Kerry's legacy as the pre-eminent football county.

And Mayo are a classic example of a team that leaves a legacy regardless of the end result. Here they are: back in the last four after being written off several times this summer. They have won five provincial championships and kept getting knocked down. How many other teams would have the fortitude they have shown? I would suggest that there are very few. If they don't win, I feel their legacy should be that they had simply nothing left to give and it wasn't quite enough. And there is no shame in that.

The pre-season forecast was for a Kerry-Dublin final. But it wouldn't surprise me to see Mayo in the final. And it wouldn't surprise me to see Tyrone in the final. My gut is telling me that there is the potential for huge, huge drama in both games. I think both games could provide fireworks. There is not a lot between the teams on the field of play. We have seen that much.

What we can't see is how the players in each team are thinking right now. I remember sitting with a friend one night – late one night – and whatever we were chatting about, he said: "If we only had hindsight at the time".

It still makes me laugh when I hear him saying it but the odd thing is that in sport, you can have that hindsight. If you can understand the consequences of where you are at as you move through the defining days of your sporting life, it can put you in a deeper and a stronger place when you need it most.

That may make the difference as the teams turn the bend for home. It is about who can see the end line most clearly.

big improvisation, under Graham Henry, was involving the players with huge levels of leadership and autonomy.

I am not sure how many coaches would have the capacity to extend that kind of responsibility to his or her players. It marked a shift from the manager to a dual-leadership model. He tried to create an environment where it was intellectually stimulating for the players.

And it makes sense: there is nobody more intelligent or with more craft knowledge of the sport than the players themselves. The big boundary for New Zealand is that no individual is bigger than the All-Blacks culture. The jersey is sacred. You have that jersey for a period of time and then you pass it on. And you could see that in Sonny Bill Williams' reaction on the bench after he was red-carded in the Lions game. He was distraught.

New Zealand have a legacy of winning going back over a century, really, so they place a huge degree of importance in the idea of continuity as the legacy. The players pass through. The jersey and the culture and therefore the team is a constant.

There are countless examples of legacy in sport and the idea is relevant now that we have reached the last four of the All-Ireland. For Kerry, Mayo, Dublin and Tyrone, the next three weeks will shape their legacy. It's a tricky thing to deal with because it is about attending to the lasting relevance of your time playing while

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getting on with the hectic day-to-day nature of competition.

When we took over in Donegal in 2011, we had a 19-year losing gap to deal with. But for us it wasn't really about winning or losing at the beginning. It was just about trying to create a team that the people of Donegal could be proud of. And also being true to ourselves in terms of giving everything we had in our bodies at training every night. In a way, it was very simple stuff. But it wasn't easy to achieve. I believe that you don't have to win to achieve your absolute best.

Sometimes when you are watching a team unfold, you don't fully comprehend what you are looking at. When Usain Bolt was in his prime, did we fully appreciate what we were watching as he won time and time again?

On a more localised level, there was probably a time when we in Donegal felt that Colm McFadden and Christy Toyne and Rory Kavanagh would be there forever. Again, that is not how it works. Athletes and players disappear. And it is only when the players – and the teams – disappear that this concept of legacy kicks in. You either leave one or you don't.

### Huge honesty

I talk a lot with players one-to-one now. It's a constant question. What will your legacy be?

A professional footballer can leave the game now with a lot of money in the bank and be financially secure but they can feel very empty if they haven't fulfilled themselves in the game. When they start answering questions like this, they ultimately all want to wrap their career dry. To squeeze every last ounce of it. If you do that, then you have achieved a lot. I feel that those Donegal lads felt that: they couldn't have got much more out of it. I think that is their legacy.

For me, personally, legacy is a different thing. It is about being part of something that is bigger than yourself. That's what legacy means to me now. If you can bring a group of people together and the core values are strong and there is a huge honesty and purity to what you are trying to achieve and you have setbacks and you develop and grow and experience success and failure together, all of that is much

bigger than yourself. That is what you carry with you.

So when you sit back at 34 years of age and your sporting career is over, you think about the people you played with and the times that you had and how that makes you feel.

If Mayo win the All-Ireland in September, their legacy will be that they never gave up until they won it. If they don't their legacy will be that they didn't get over the line. That's a hard view and I don't think that it is fully fair. For real football people, this Mayo team will also be remembered for never giving up and not quite getting there. But for the masses, the perspective will probably be slightly colder and harder; they couldn't do it.

The key for me is the capacity of the Mayo players to realise this now.

For an athlete or a ball player, one of the most important things they can do is to have a vision of their legacy at the back of their minds as they move through their career. It is a very difficult thing to accomplish because sport – and particularly team sport – is about constant movement. There is very little opportunity for reflection. It is always about the next game.

But players and teams have to question themselves as they move through those weeks and seasons. How far can we push this? What do we want to achieve?

Every so often I encounter people who have that ability to stop themselves in their tracks all the time in the here and

### All-Ireland SFC Semi-final

## Kerry captain Buckley braced for meeting with battle-hardened Mayo

Kingdom have played three games this summer – their rivals seven

### Kerry v Mayo

Croke Park, Sunday, 3.30pm  
Live on RTE 2 and Sky Sports Arena

### EMAMON DONOGHUE

Despite being in-season since the last weekend of January 2016, Johnny Buckley comes into Sunday's clash with Mayo short on match practice.

Buckley played league and championship with Kerry last

year; then into county, provincial, and All-Ireland club championship with Dr Crokes; and then back into the Kerry fold this spring. Which brings him to Sunday's semi-final against Mayo.

Despite his Dr Crokes clubmate Fionn Fitzgerald playing in the league final victory against Dublin – after their club All-Ireland success in March – Buckley opted to instead rest a lingering knee injury and ensure that he was 100 per cent for this year's championship.

He returned to action for their Munster opener against Clare.

"If you look at our lads this year, it's been fairly full on. They [Crokes] got a chance during the summer to maybe take a week or two off, but that was

about it. As players we are always looking to play matches and enjoy that side of it, but if it was a thing that those [club] competitions could finish with in the year, it would be great.

### Biggest game

"For our club season this year, you are playing 13 weeks in a row and you have that break over Christmas. Then you are playing two games in three months basically, so there's no easy answer to it."

Yet despite all that time in preparation for club and then county; Buckley, Fitzgerald and all his Kerry team-mates are going into the biggest game of their year having played only three intercounty championship games this summer. Meanwhile their opponents

Mayo have played seven, with two of them going to extra time and Buckley believes the extra miles on the clock might serve Stephen Rochford's side well.

He said: "As players and all the rest of it you would love more games each year and Mayo definitely have that this year in the route they've taken and there's definitely advantages to it."

### Match sharpness

"You've games to analyse and areas to improve on and you can go out the next week and improve on it. I suppose their graph is definitely on the way up and they have that backing of match sharpness and fitness that I'm sure they're going to bring." Sunday is a rerun of the fix-

ture in 2014, when the Kingdom edged Mayo in a controversial semi-final replay in the Gaelic Grounds, Limerick – before going on to claim Sam Maguire.



■ Johnny Buckley: I suppose their [Mayo's] graph is definitely on the way up"

"It was a very unique football match in that it was played in that stadium... we had played there before but the atmosphere was definitely something different to what you were used to. I suppose the game and the

physicality of the game fed into that, and it was just one of those occasions where it was a roller-coaster and thinking that 'we're out, job done, that's the end of the road'.

"We were pipped and then you were chasing back and Jonathan Lyne came on and kicked two monster points and it was just one of them days that was great to be involved in."

### Bitterness

A physical encounter indeed, with both teams clashing in a melee in the closing stages, so should we expect that bit of bitterness to carry through?

"I wouldn't say so, it was two teams going at it and just two teams trying to get one over on the other and trying to pip it. I wouldn't say it added any bitter-

ness, it was just that bit of competition. It's a natural thing when you are playing at high stakes."

The stakes have risen this year for Buckley, with him captaining the Kingdom – although his club commitments delayed him from fulfilling that role until recently.

But has this made the role harder? "Not really. It would have been great to be involved at the end of the league but after that there is that lull. You have the county championship, it's not your training on a Tuesday, Thursday, weekend with Kerry. It's slightly different.

"So when you came back into full-on championship training when the club scene was over, it

was about fitting in that [captaincy], with getting back on the field at that stage. It wasn't a huge thing and it wasn't any extra pressure really."

He may have missed out on lifting the league title, but Sam Maguire is still within his reach. While Kerry's eight-point win last time out was comfortable, Galway still carved out four clear goal chances – suggesting there is still plenty to be worked on.

"It's well documented, Galway having those goal-scoring chances. In fairness to Brian [Kelly] he made some great saves, but looking back on that it's definitely something we need to tidy up on. We know the next day that performance won't do against Mayo."