

Report



# Galway show true grit to win battle of endurance



**Seán Moran**  
at Croke Park

Galway	0-26
Waterford	2-17

Winners showed the composure that had sustained them all year to take key scores

For all of the years they flashed into finals and didn't quite sustain the dazzle, Galway hurlers won the county's fifth All-Ireland hurling title in a battle of endurance.

They didn't sweep to victory and never quite shook the challenge of a determined Waterford whose dogged pursuit flagged only in the last 10 minutes. But they absorbed misfortune, drove on through their mistakes and finally showed the composure that had sustained them all year to take the vital scores and in the end see off opponents, who would have taken them down had they not raised their game in the final quarter. It was all the more gratefully

received for that struggle on an emotional afternoon when a round of applause rippled through the capacity crowd in the sixth minute to commemorate centre back Tony Keady, star of Galway's previous win in 1988, who died suddenly last month and afterwards, winning captain David Burke invoked the memory of 2012 finalist Niall Donohoe whose suicide a year later had shaken the county.

Had they lost, this would have been a typical Galway final with its early promise dissolving into demoralising error but by winning, Micheál Donohue's team finally delivered what the county had been ferreting waiting for: a team that after 29 years and six finals was different. That could not be irrefutably demonstrated until the Liam MacCarthy had been lifted and with it the doubts and uncertainties of three decades.

**Strengths**

The new champions played only sporadically to their strengths. The decision to erect Johnny Glynn as a skyscraper in an already high-rise landscape didn't really pay off apart from winning an early throw-up and providing the assist for a Joe Canning point.

Galway didn't help him by withdrawing and lumping hopeful ball in on top of him the only effect of which was to boost the vigilant Tadhg de Búrca's possession stats and eventually he was replaced by Niall Burke. He had played his part in softening

up Waterford, though, and in the closing quarter fatigue became an issue for them.

Early on it didn't look as if the match would get that far as a viable contest. Galway's pace, precision and movement threatened to turn the final into a sequel of 2008: four up in four minutes and nine points scored by the 14th, the only thing detaining them at that point was a careless goal, conceded to Kevin Moran, courtesy of an empty corridor down the left wing as spare defender Aidan Harte was caught by the run.

Worse followed just before the half hour when a long, dropping ball from Kieran Bennett, designed to empower his brother Shane, ran through to Colm Callanan in the Galway goal harmlessly, thought the capacity crowd but it ended up in the net and Waterford were just a point behind after all their opponents' hard work, 2-4 to 0-10. A minute later Pauric Mahony had levelled it.

The laser accuracy of their shooting wavered after Galway had looked very much in business with five different players accounting for their first five scores. But play settled and the menacing glow from their attack dimmed. Conor Whelan was well marked by Noel Connors and although the young corner forward worked relentlessly he didn't get into the sort of positions to run up a score.

In other battles between the key players, Waterford's ran out of steam as the match wore on. Jamie Barron was replaced

**By the numbers**

	Galway	Waterford
Full-time score	0-26	2-17
Half-time	0-12	0-10
Wides	6	11
From play	0-19	2-9
Frees conceded	14	11
Yellow cards	3	1
Red cards	0	0
Attendance	82,300	

with five minutes to go after a phenomenal season had extended into the first half but faded afterwards. They had to mobilise Maurice Shanahan earlier than expected when Shane Bennett took a knock as early as the 23rd minute.

Their chief rain maker Austin Gleeson never got into the match and shot wides when the team needed scores at the end, from a line ball and a long-range free. He sparked occasionally, at one stage bumping, Gearóid McInerney over the line in the 24th minute but there would be no seizing the day as in the semi-final.

Conversely Canning was immense, impeccable from dead ball on a day when such accuracy was really needed, he also won crucial ball at the end of the match and provided sublime lay-offs, one a pass from the left that switched direction out to the right corner, but both Jason Flynn and Conor Cooney were wide – the team's only

such lapses in the second half.

By half-time, though, with Galway just a point ahead, 0-14 to 2-7, it was possible to speculate that maybe they had shot their bolt despite such clear-cut superiority.

Just after the break, Shanahan almost filched a goal off three attendant defenders and there were times when outnumbered Waterford attackers managed to pick up scraps from ball broken by the defence, Daithi Burke especially, but not secured.

**Trouble**

Galway looked to be sinking further into trouble when falling behind, albeit by just a point, on three consecutive occasions between the 43rd and 47th minutes but then the cavalry arrived.

It had been a consensus negotiating position that Waterford's bench would bring more oomph to their game but in the event it was the Leinster champions who got more from their changes.

Niall Burke burst into the match in the 43rd minute, getting fouled on his first possession, creating a pointed free for

**Galway's Conor Whelan and Jonathan Glynn battle with Waterford's Noel Connors and Barry Coughlan during yesterday's All-Ireland final at Croke Park.**

PHOTOGRAPH: CATHAL NOONAN/INPHO

Canning, shooting two points and being fouled again for a critical 70th-minute free, which pushed the margin back out to four.

In four minutes between the 48th and 52nd, Galway re-asserted control of the match. Four points, including Burke's plus a Canning free and another from the prolific David Burke, conjured a three-point lead, 0-21 to 2-12.

Another Galway replacement Flynn also scored twice and Conor Cooney slung a miracle point over his shoulder as he fell in the 62nd minute.

They kept Waterford at arm's length but the lead dipped to three a couple of times to excite hopes of deliverance for Derek McGrath's men.

By now though the Westerners had a grip on the match that wouldn't be loosened.

## Player ratings

Bylan O'Riordan

- Colm Callanan (Kinvara)**  
6 Won't look back fondly on misjudging Kieran Bennett's rangy shot, allowing the ball to slip into the net, and he'll feel he might have got closer to Kevin Moran's goal. Did everything else asked of him.
- Adrian Tuohy (Beagh)**  
7 Held the fort and wrestled with Shane Bennett who retired early. Tuohy was tidy and effective and reliable from then on. There at the death too as Waterford hunted for a late goal, calmly conceding nothing.
- Daithi Burke (Turloughmore)**  
9 Powerful and steady and inspiring in equal measure, helping keep Jake Dillon scoreless and never found out of position. His ownership of full back this season is a central reason why Galway are champions.
- John Hansbury (Rahoon/Newcastle)**  
7 Got himself booked just before the break and kept his head and his nerve from then on, ensuring the Galway full back line held firm. No fear or doubt and again for another 24 year-old the essence of the Galway spirit.
- Pádraic Mannion (Ahascragh-Fohenagh)**  
7 Brought his serious skill and physicality to the position, even in the face of the continuous onslaught from Pauric Mahony. Lasted the pace and distance, and the reason the Galway half back line won the day.
- Gearóid McInerney (Oranmore Maree)**  
9 Massive game, his switch to centre back this season another reason they are champions. His outrageously block on Austin Gleeson one of the standout moves, and why Gleeson was never in it.
- Aidan Harte (Gort)**  
7 Found out of position in the fifth minute when Kevin Moran broke at goal, and finished into the net. Made plenty of amends at other times, showing both his experience, leadership and versatility.
- Johnny Coen (Loughrea)**  
8 Set the tempo and the template with his brilliant point after two minutes, running into space and holding his nerve. His athleticism showed into the homestretch too, a central and serving midfielder in every sense.
- David Burke (St Thomas's, capt)**  
9 An ultra marathon of an effort, hitting four points in one of the great midfield final displays. A captain's role. Replaced in the 69th minute only because his performance was complete.
- Joseph Cooney (Sarsfields)**  
8 Sonow has that All-Ireland medal to show alongside his father's, with a performance to boot, physical and smart. His early point exemplified that by muscling his way into position and making sure it counted.
- Joe Canning (Portumna)**  
9 From the throw-in was centre stage, cool and composed thereafter, his point from a sideline settling Galway's nerves after Waterford's second goal, finishing with an immaculate 0-9. Take a bow.
- Jonathan Glynn (Ardrahan)**  
6 Found his match in Barry Coughlan who kept him under high security, and with high or low ball couldn't find a way into the game. Possible lost a little patience too, before being replaced on 42 minutes by Niall Burke.
- Conor Whelan (Kinvara)**  
7 Not easy for a 20-year-old to rise above Noel Connors, but he had his moments nonetheless, his point late in the first half a reward for his persistence. Brave and determined throughout.
- Conor Cooney (St Thomas's)**  
8 Wow, his three points were a joy, and even if at times he drifted a little out of the game, was there at the death too. His fitness and physicality combined with talent another reason Galway are champions.
- Cathal Mannion (Ahascragh-Fohenagh)**  
8 Broke into the game early on with a settling point and was in the thick of it from then on before being replaced by Jason Flynn on 55 minutes. A big game even for an experienced 22-year-old.

**Substitutes**

9 Niall Burke and Jason Flynn made quick and telling impacts, both hitting two points each, and Flynn would have had a third had he not realised he'd more time. Shane Moloney also came in for a fully extended David Burke.

**Manager – Micheál Donohue**

9 May feel the gamble of starting Jonathan Glynn didn't come off but everything else did, the way Galway started and finished – ample evidence of a team brought to their peak performance when it matters most.



## Reaction Waterford

### McGrath urges Waterford players to feel proud despite the anguish



**Eamon Donoghue**  
at Croke Park

Deise manager aware of how difficult it will be for his young team to go one better

Waterford manager Derek McGrath was unable to say for sure whether he would be back for another crack at winning Liam MacCarthy, or whether his team would bounce back and go one better as easily as many expect. Following Waterford's three point defeat to Galway in Sunday's All-Ireland hurling final, McGrath said he's struggling to convey his pride without seeming to be celebrating "a defeatist moral victory."

"We are hugely disappointed because it's just so hard to get

here, but I've never been as proud of the lads," McGrath explained after the 0-26 to 2-17 defeat. Eoin Murphy (selector) told the lads he wanted the floor to swallow him up after the 2008 All-Ireland final defeat, and he just told them there, that's not the case now. But you need to get the balance right between saying that and accepting defeat.

In Waterford's only other senior All-Ireland final appearance since 1963, Kilkenny beat them 3-30 to 1-13 in 2008.

"That's hard, telling a lad you're proud of him, when we wanted the win so much, when they put so much into it. We have a lot of guys in that dressing room who operate in a world where winning is everything, so getting the balance right. Avoiding that defeatist moral victory approach in Waterford that I've spoken about for years. There's the whole negative connotations that could come with that. The feeling in the dressing room is abject disappointment, but the speakers in there Dan (Shanahan), Eoin Murphy, myself, we've been talking about pride."

This was only Waterford's

seventh ever senior All-Ireland final, their 14th in all grades (minor, under-21 and senior). In all, 10 players featured for Waterford against Galway who were 25 years-old or younger. Six of them are 23 or younger. With talent flowing up through the ranks from All-Ireland winning minor (2013) and Under-21(2016) teams, this side is expected to only get better.

**Steel**

"I've heard the word potential and talent in Waterford since I was a minor in 1992," says McGrath, "potential and talent aren't even a distant relative of what's needed out there today. There's so much more. And the lads have proved they have that, and Galway have proven to be a little bit ahead of us in that regard, but I think the steel in the Galway team is very, very obvious this year.

"So it's an expectation, but it's just so hard. Automatically you'd be thinking that other teams would be coming to the table too. It's an expectation without it being a definite. An expectation is what it is."

"Brian Cody came into our dressing room two years ago af-



ter we were beaten in the 2015 semi-final, and he said in a completely non-patronising way, it's so hard to get back here. And I think that's why he's kept Kilkenny so sharp, every year. So the expectation is we would improve but you just don't know."

As for McGrath himself, who has another year left in his term as Waterford boss; he would not give any assurances over his future. Or the future of Dan Shanahan or other backroom staff. "I haven't really put a huge amount of thought into

that," explained the Deise boss, not appearing like a man who had clear intentions of moving on. "The nucleus is there for a good team going forward, but there are just no guarantees."

**Uncertain future**

Another man whose future is uncertain is Michael "Brick" Walsh. The 34 year-old scored a spectacular first-half point on the right sideline, and was his usual industrious-self, before departing to large ovation on 56 minutes. "He is the best team-player that's ever played for Waterford. There is no debate, that's just how it is. His humility, and his crankiness at times, he's just a different gravy. A different mentality. The chap has three kids under five and he's just a brilliant man.

"He doesn't get enough credit for his guile either, when he's getting hooked he's ducking in, he handpassed to Kevin for the first goal. He was outstanding for us today, and in retrospect maybe we shouldn't have taken him off as early as we did."

Another questionable substitution was the replacement of Jamie Barron on 65 minutes, he'd scored 0-2 and has been

Waterford's best player this summer. "Jamie had been sick all last week, he didn't train in nearly 10 days in the run up to the final. He missed out on the 15 aside match last Friday week. He was noticeably pale last week, so we did all we could to get as much out of him for as long as we could. Jamie has had a massive year and again followed it up with a good performance today."

As for the run of game itself, McGrath puts Waterford's sluggish first half down to Galway simply being better. "I don't think it was nerves, I don't think it was tension. Galway being better for the first 15 minutes, that's what I put it down to.

"I think we played into Galway's hands in the second half, because we went long and our perseverance with our short game sort of got lost. We were going so long and we were dragging our half forward up the field and the space started opening up for Galway in their forward line. But Galway were prime for it. They've won the Walsh cup, the league, they've won the Leinster championship, they're Kilkenny in waiting."