

DERRY GAA

Cluiche Ceannais
Sinsear Iomána Dhoire



Celtic Park
13 September, 2020
Throw-in: 2pm

SLAUGHTNEIL V KEVIN LYNCH'S

CLG Roibeard Eiméid, Sleacht Néill v
Cumann Iománaíochta Chaoimhín Uí Loinsigh



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Slaughterneil's Chrissy McKaigue holds the Fr. Collins Cup following a hard-fought victory over Kevin Lynch's in the 2019 decider at Owenbeg. In a game of twists and turns, Robert Emmett's eventually came out on top to secure their seventh successive Derry SHC crown.



A DECIDER LIKE NO OTHER

MICHAEL WILSON (DERRY JOURNAL) SPEAKS TO SLAUGHTNEIL'S BRENDAN ROGERS
After seven titles in a row, Slaughtneil must have thought they'd seen it all on county final day but thanks to COVID-19, this year will be a decider like no other.

Yes, the protagonists are entirely predictable, the county's undisputed dominant force in one corner, their arch nemesis and only viable challenger in the other, but everything else surrounding the 2020 final has an air of the unknown. Pre-match protocols and preparations, no changing rooms or marching band, face masks, water breaks and, most crucially of all, no bumper crowd roaring the players.

"Toward the end of the final last year, you could hear the roar of the crowd for every free or every tackle and maybe that will change things but I don't think it will change the quality of the hurling," smiles Slaughtneil's Brendan Rogers, "Celtic Park is usually in fantastic shape at this time of year so it should lend itself to good quality hurling.

"It will be a massive encounter and it's very fortunate for those lucky enough to be there but with the live stream people shouldn't miss out. That's very good from a hurling perspective because I'd say it's going to be very competitive game and I think everyone is looking forward to it, players and supporters. If it's a good game, it will show the quality of Derry hurling."

Going for a remarkable eighth title in a row, Slaughtneil could almost be forgiven for being somewhat blasé about another final but there is no danger of complacency among Michael McShane's

players, especially not where Kevin Lynch's are involved.

"Yeah, the old foes again," laughs Rogers, "Going into the Championship we both we're probably the bookies' favourites but it's very hard to tell, there have been upsets in Derry over the past few years and with COVID and the lockdown you don't know how teams have been able to prepare or what facilities they've had to work with.

"There is no point trying to pretend both teams haven't had very convincing wins in the semi-finals but I think both probably went out and performed like that in those games because they knew what would be lying ahead in the final. Both were trying to show how they had progressed while working on things they wanted to work on heading into the final.

"Look, Dungiven know what they are going to get from us at this stage and we know what we are going to get from Dungiven so we are looking forward to what should be a very good competition and a good game of hurling."

One bonus of the coronavirus hit season has been the players ability to solely concentrate on their club duties, something Rogers says he has enjoyed, even if his dual status means his fixture list remains somewhat hectic.

"It is very condensed, there's no doubt about that," he adds, "If anyone gets any

sort of injury it more or less rules them out for the foreseeable but it's enjoyable especially when you have no pulls from the county.

"Usually intercounty would have just ended and there are a couple of league games still to play so you are sort of rushing into the club championship. Now everyone has had a clear run at it and that makes it more enjoyable because you are getting to play as a club which is why lots of people are now calling for the split season.

"There is the enjoyment factor in it but you always want to play all the best stuff at the best time of year, that's where the decision lies."

So how has the COVID-hit county final week differed from past years?

"We need to rest up so it's been lying low at home, off to training, and things like that. Look, it's county final week and that's what you are looking forward to all year," adds Rogers.

"It's the one thing you aimed to get to get to after lockdown, it's why you wanted to get playing again, why we did all that training at home when you couldn't get to the pitch. It was always because of the belief that if things worked out we might get to a county final, that would be the big thing out of this year and we are in that position now so you cannot be any more grateful than that."



Kevin Lynch's full-forward Tiarnan McHugh celebrates a superb goal just 20 seconds into the second-half during the 2019 Derry SHC Final at Owenbeg. Slaughtneil responded however to run out 1-23 to 2-12 winners.



SLAUGHTNEIL ATTACKING POWER A NUT TOO DIFFICULT TO CRACK

MICHAEL MCMULLAN (COUNTY DERRY POST) PREVIEWS THE FINAL

It went on for an eternity. Following Conal McCloskey's leg break, the 2014 final seemed like it would never end. And in the absence of referee Garrett Duffy's stoppage time being communicated to the fourth official's board nobody in Owenbeg knew how long was left. Kevin Lynch's had time to save the game with points, but in the bedlam of injury time, goal was very much on their minds. Ball after ball rained on the Slaughtneil defence. Hand after hand, they fielded it and cleared their lines.

A year after smashing through the glass ceiling of beating the Lynch's, they were determined that it wasn't a once off. It was a changing of the guard. The following year, it took extra time for Slaughtneil to see off the Dungiven men's challenge and since then, Banagher and Slaughtneil have closed them out of the battle for the Fr Collins Cup, one they have not held aloft since 2011.

In 2018, at the end of an epic encounter in a Ballinascreen cauldron, Richie Mullan – who put on an exhibition of free-taking – missed a late free as Slaughtneil edged home by the narrowest of margins.

Last year, Slaughtneil looked deep inside themselves when Tiamán McHugh's powerful shot found its way to the net just seconds after half time. An upset was on the cards, but Michael McShane's men wrestled back the pendulum in their favour, before steering their way out of the storm.

Sunday marks the latest chapter.

"Our boys know what they have to do," said Lynch's manager Geoffrey McGonigle after their semi-final win over Ballinascreen.

"They have to try and beat the best team in Ulster, so if that's not motivation, what is?"

Goals from McHugh and Odhran McKeever put them in a commanding lead they let slip against Swatragh in the first game of the season. In their win over Banagher they needed a late burst to get over the line. In their semi-final win over Ballinascreen, they cut loose and made hay in the room afforded to them. McKeever went through two markers in a first half that saw McHugh bag a fifth goal in four games. Niall Ferris was the player who tied all the pieces together.

McGonigle has structured his side around the Kelly brothers in defence. Paddy was one of the best players in last year's final and he remains at full back, with his younger brother Conor now in the number six jersey. Behind them, Sean takes over from BJ Lagan in the goalkeeper jersey.

From last year's decider, Niall Smyth makes way for Ciaran Steele in defence and the only other likely change will see Darragh McGilligan get the nod in attack with the unavailability of Corey O'Reilly this season. Pdraig O'Kane has been used from the bench and has an uncanny knack of finding the net.

O'Kane, McGilligan and midfielder Eoghan Cassidy were all part of the Derry Celtic Challenge winning squads, coached by Ryan O'Neill, and are the latest of Kevin Lynch's recent production line.

Goalkeeper Seán Kelly and Richie Mullan have three minor championships and two Ulster titles, with another six of their semi-final winning team have at least one minor medal in the club's recent dominance under the eye of Kevin Hinphey.

They come up against Slaughtneil, who have all won minor championships in their rise to the top of the tree. Under Michael McShane, they developed as a team.



KEY BATTLES

Sean Cassidy v Tiarnán McHugh

In the last two games between the sides, Tiarnán McHugh has proved to be a handful for Slaughtneil's defence. He has five goals to his name and had a hand in two others during the season. This will be an area Michael McShane will be keen to come out on top of. He did move Shane McGuigan back during last year's final, but it would upset their defensive balance.

Chrissy McKaigue v Thomas Brady

This was a fierce battle in last year's final and Brady fits the bill to once again go man to man with McKaigue. In their games with Dunloy, his ability to impose his game on Paul Shiels put Slaughtneil in the box seat to victory. Both McKaigue and Brady are ultra competitive and will test each other to the full. The Lynch's will hope he recovers from his knock in Sunday's football clash with Loup.

Conor Kelly v Cormac O'Doherty

So much of Slaughtneil's play comes through Cormac O'Doherty. Last year Slaughtneil played with a sweeper and it would allow Liam Óg Hinphey to sit in the space, when O'Doherty floats. That doesn't appear to be the case and Conor Kelly will have to find the balance between protecting the middle and following O'Doherty. It will dictate how Slaughtneil play.

In the semi-final against Swatragh, it was their use of the ball that stood out. Their first three balls went via Gerald Bradley and with 1-2 on the board, they could've easily had another two goals. When the 'Swa tried to close off the middle, Slaughtneil went around the edges with a inch perfect short game and went over the top. Their third option was raw pace in the form of Brendan Rogers. Lurking on the wing, he took off and tore Swatragh asunder.

Sunday will be different. Kevin Lynch's won't afford them the same space and it will come down to how well Slaughtneil can adapt. Their sweeper system of last year, with three inside forwards and two link forwards, with Mark McGuigan and Brian Cassidy's workrate has been parked. It has been the traditional two lines of three, with Cormac O'Doherty foraging around midfield.

Against 'Screen, the half forward line were too close and choked their room for the McGuigans – Jerome, Sé and Mark – to operate in. When they opened it, they went to town. If Slaughtneil adopt the same formation, it will prevent Liam Óg Hinphey from plonking himself between Conor and Paddy Kelly to mop up ball.

Kevin Lynch's big advantage is now having Seán Kelly in goals and he can act like a sweeper/keeper, like Oisín O'Doherty does at the other end. If the Lynch's are forced to go man for man, Kelly's alertness off his line will come into play. The last two years were terrific encounters. A smaller crowd will take from the occasion, but this year's version will follow a similar trend. Little has changed. Slaughtneil's attacking unit, if anything has got more potent and it defines the way towards an eighth successive title.

VERDICT: Slaughtneil

COVERAGE, PHOTOS AND ANALYSIS OF
THE 2020 DERRY SHC FINAL
IN TUESDAY'S COUNTY DERRY POST

SENIOR HURLING FINAL 2020

SLAUGHTNEIL



FIR ÍONAID:

- 16 Francis McEldowney
- 17 Michael McEldowney
- 18 Peadar Kearney
- 19 James Mc Closkey
- 20 Conor Mc Kenna
- 21 Gareth O Kane
- 22 Pronsias Burke
- 23 Cathal Mullan
- 24 Liam Cassidy
- 25 Conan Hunter
- 26 Fergal Ó Caiside
- 27 John Mellon
- 28 Sean Mc Closkey
- 29 Paddy Convery

- 30 Shea Cassidy
- Morgan McEldowney
- Cormac McKenna
- Fintan McGrath
- Danial McCartney
- Padraig Quigg
- Sean T McErlean
- Karl McKaigue

BAINISTÓCHT:

Bainisteoir
Michael McShane

Alex Campbell
Karen Kielt
Dr Noel Brick
Bernard Cassidy
Patrick McEldowney

KEVIN LYNCH'S



FIR ÍONAID:

- | | |
|----------------------|----------------------|
| 16 Brian Lagan | 30 Thomas Doran |
| 17 Ciaran Mackle | 31 Martin Mc Erlain |
| 18 Donal Kelly | 32 Ryan McElhinney |
| 19 Jack Mullan | 33 Connor McElhinney |
| 20 Darragh Mullan | 34 Eugene Leonard |
| 21 Liam Millar | 35 Connor McKelvey |
| 22 Shea McKeever | 36 Ultan Ward |
| 23 Pádraig O Kane | |
| 24 Eoghan McGrellis | |
| 25 Ruairi Craig | |
| 26 Ronan Mullan | |
| 27 Ruairi Rafferty | |
| 28 Niall Mc Nicholl | |
| 29 Pauric Mc Nicholl | |

BAINISTÓCHT:

- Bainisteoir
Geoffrey McGonigle



COMING OF AGE

In a video interview with DerryGAA.ie, Kevin Lynch's Ryan O'Neill explains how a strange year has had a knock-on effect on the hurling squad, but is looking forward to another county final.

"Our boys started off in January with a preseason and the next thing the carpet was pulled from everybody's feet in March. We're just glad to be back out hurling again, because there's been a lot of people dealing with a lot of different things."

O'Neill also reserves praise for Sunday's opponents: "Slaughtneil have been great Derry champions and they've been great Ulster champions as well. They're a good side, with good young players and it's the final everybody wants to see."

He is also quick to point out the hard work that has gone into bringing through the current senior squad from underage: "Our senior team is a very young team. The boys have been winning Feile titles and are

coming of age now. This is where you want your underage to be. And we want our underage players now to see the young lads coming through the ranks of the club. We've been doing a lot of work the last few years at underage, with a lot of good coaches. Long may that continue."



[CLICK TO WATCH FULL VIDEO](#)



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to watch our video interview with Slaughtneil manager Michael McShane



A scramble for possession during Slaughterneil's victory over Kevin Lynch's in the 2019 Derry SHC Final. The two sides meet again in the 2020 decider.

Photography by Margaret McLaughlin

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