

CLÁR OIFIGIÚIL £2

# DERRY GAA SENIOR FOOTBALL CHAMPIONSHIP FINAL

Pairc Na gCeilteach, Doire, 7 Deireadh Fómhair, 2021 – 2.00 i.n.



**Glen**  
CLG WATTY GRAHAM, AN GLEANN

VS



**Slaughterneil**

CLG ROIBEARD EIMÉID, SLEACHT NÉILL

(REF: SEAN CURRAN)

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## FÁILTE ÓN CHATHAOIRLEACH



A Chairde Gael,  
Our county championships have taken on added significance this year, as so many of us were unable to enjoy the colour and excitement of attending our football and hurling games in 2020.

The Derry GAA championship has a unique tradition and atmosphere that reminds us why we love our sport and it has been a pleasure to see that build over the last number of weeks. I thank you for your continued assistance and cooperation in adhering to all health and safety regulations while attending our fixtures, as we have got together to share in the enjoyment of this wonderful competition.

Today, that competition reaches its conclusion for 2021 and I am delighted to welcome you to this showpiece game in the O'Neill's Senior Football Championship.

I would like to congratulate both Glen and Slaughtneil on reaching this year's Final. Robert Emmett's are no stranger to this occasion and will be looking to add another set of successive titles to their burgeoning honours list. Watty Graham's have made massive strides in recent seasons and will hope to go one step further today after their final appearance two years ago, for what would be a historic hoisting of the John McLaughlin Cup.

Both sets of players and management have performed to an excellent level on their championship journey this season and we look forward to a game that showcases not only some of the best footballing talent in our county, but some of the best in Ireland.

Whatever the outcome, our winners today will bring unbridled joy to their clubs, families and parish, after what has been a difficult 18 months.

I take this opportunity to commend the players, coaches, mentors and volunteers from all our Derry GAA clubs at all levels. It hasn't been easy in the past two seasons to keep things ticking over. We are indebted to their passion, talent and commitment, that provides the lifeblood of our local communities and maintains that sporting outlet so many of us rely upon.

We should remember the significant time our volunteers give selflessly, for the benefit of the association to which we all belong. The GAA relies heavily on the tireless work of our many volunteers; I want to acknowledge the dedicated team of stewards and officials, both here at Celtic Park, and at Owenbeg. Each year, our county ground plays host to the largest sporting events in the North-West, for that we continue to be indebted to our volunteers.

I would also like to thank our sponsors. In Derry we are very fortunate to have so many local businesses supporting our teams and competitions. We would like to send our special gratitude to H&A Mechanical Services who have been Derry GAA's primary sponsor for the last five years. We are indebted to their enormous generosity and support in that period.

A special thanks also to O'Neill's Sportswear who are the title sponsors of our Senior Football Championship and all those who continue to support us in any small

way.  
Club Derry continues to provide massive support to Derry GAA activities at all levels and we are now supplemented by the recent launch of the WeAreDerry Business Network. Without the valiant efforts of our much valued Club Derry and Business Network committees and members, quite simply, we are unable to function.

We should also remind ourselves that without our officials, we would not have our games and we wish Sean Curran and his team of officials all the best in officiating today's final.

At a personal level, I consider it an honour and privilege to hold the position of Cathaoirleach in our wonderful Oakleaf County. We have made excellent strides both on and off the field in the last number of years, as evidenced by our minor footballers claiming a fifth All-Ireland title this summer. That level of achievement does not happen by accident. It is the result of years of hard work and dedication and we continue to move forward to maximise the massive potential that exists throughout our Derry GAA community.

Finally, I wish all players and officials the very best of luck for today's game.

Enjoy the match, enjoy the atmosphere, enjoy being here.

Thank you for your continued support.  
Go raibh maith agat.  
**Stephen Barker**  
Cathaoirleach,  
Coiste Chontae Dhoire

## AMHRÁN NA BHFIANN

Sinne Fianna Fáil  
A tá fé gheall ag Éirinn,  
buíon dár slua  
Thar toinn do ráinig chugainn,  
Fé mhóid bheith saor.  
Sean tír ár sinsir feasta  
Ní fhagfar fé'n tiorán ná fé'n tráil  
Anocht a théam sa bhearna bhaoil,  
Le gean ar Ghaeil chun báis nó saoil  
Le guna screach fé lámhach na bpiléar  
Seo líbh canáidh Amhrán na bhFiann.



Amhrán na bhFiann will be performed today by **Kathryn Mullan** from Slaughtneil.

Kathryn won the Ulster Scór Sinsir title for solo singing at Silverbridge, Co Armagh at last weekend's Ulster finals. Comhghairdeas Kathryn!





by ODHRÁN CRUMLEY

## DERRY SENIOR FOOTBALL FINAL 2021 PREVIEW

# GLEN VS SLAUGHTNEIL

*"I saw the danger and I passed  
Along the enchanted way  
And I said, let grief be a falling leaf  
At the dawning of the day." – Raglan Road, Luke Kelly*

In Gaelic Games, 'The Parish' is everything. For everything that brings parishes together, the same chapel where children are christened, the same schools where the same children are educated, the same shops, hairdressers and barbers. The same street names, the same postal workers and ultimately the very same sod of land where we go to our eternal rest.

It's everything in between that is so interesting, the idea that familiarity breeds contempt, parish rivalries run much deeper than the usual jousts for the John McLaughlin Cup which is saying something when death would be considered or indeed preferred rather than tasting defeat on any given County Final Sunday.

Today is the showdown everyone wanted, the showdown everyone touted when Glen threatened to emerge from Slaughtneil's all-

conquering shadow. They've reared their head, they have threatened, they've got one over on their nearest and dearest only to falter at the final hurdle in 2019, chance missed, experience gained.

For too long they have watched on in berated breath, a begrudged respect and a deep understanding that the pain of watching 'themins up the road' have success only feeds their ambition to be better, not only to emulate but to go one better.

Robert Emmett's, the envy of any club in Ireland, the club that can do it all and do it at the one time, small ball, big ball and camogie, all the while doing so in a stretch of land sparsely inhabited never mind ventured into by the casual punter. This all adds to their mystique and aura.

The reigning county champions, they haven't been at their best in

this years championship is the belief with many, such is the high standard expected of them. But, here they are again, ready to be shot at, they'll have the bit between their teeth to silence the noisy neighbours.

The Watties have been the side that many have tipped to finally break the duct in only their second senior county final, a staggering statistic for a town with a population of in and around 4,200, the John McLaughlin Cup has never lived amongst that population.

Like Conor McKenna's arrival back from Down Under and the appointment of Fergal Logan and Brian Dooher to the hot seat, they have been halted as the messiahs after delivering the Sam Maguire once again for the people of Tyrone.

Similarities can be drawn to Malachy O'Rourke's arrival at Glen, his role almost messianic when you

speak to any of the green and gold faithful. He seems to have installed a belief that when they belly of beast arrived before for Glen, it had grim reaper like tendencies and the familiar taste of defeat bore true. O'Rourke has been here before and done it with the The Loup, he's claimed the Anglo-Celt for Monaghan amongst other titles.

His side look like a county team, they've been business like in their approach, feverish in their pursuit

and ruthless in their execution. The argument remains that they are yet to be tested but today is the acid test, where the sacrifices and everything comes with a big name appointment come to the fore.

Those ambitions and or expectations can only be matched if a county title is delivered. Come 4pm today we will have a better idea of where they are really at. Whether it'll be another winter on the maroon side or whether the famous John

McLaughlin Cup will be draped in the green and yellow of Glen for the first time in its history.

One wouldn't not be surprised if the ticker on the Celtic Park turnstiles hits a five figure sum for the first time in a very long time. How will it go you ask? That's not for me to say, one thing is for sure, there'll be no one leaving early...

Odhrán Crumley  
@OdhranC14





# FOOTBALL CHAMPIONSHIP ACTION 2021

Photos by: MARGARET McLAUGHLIN



SPORTS, NEWS & FEATURE PHOTOGRAPHY  
*Margaret McLaughlin Photography*  
W: [mclaughlinpress.com](http://mclaughlinpress.com) E: [mclaughlinpress@gmail.com](mailto:mclaughlinpress@gmail.com)





# DERRY GAA GIVE THEIR FANS THE FULL PICTURE

by DECLAN BOGUE

*Like almost every county they have a fully-operational streaming service for games and will be broadcasting the county final through their own channels on Sunday for the princely sum of £5.*

For such an enormous crowd, there were certain mitigating factors. It was the very first time Glen had even made it to a senior county final which is staggering for a town of around 4,200 population.

But this Sunday, there is a chance that the five-figure mark could be reached with a showdown of two teams that don't merely border each other, but more accurately co-exist in Slaughtneil and Glen.

One of the greatest accomplishments of recent times in a GAA sense though, is how nobody needs to miss out on anything. Like almost every county they have a fully-operational streaming service for

Given that it is £12 on the gate, there is a significant temptation for many to sit on the sofa and enjoy it with a kettle near to hand. Alan Gunn, a native of Monaghan who has lived for years in Maghera will be providing the commentary, with former Derry star Paul McFlynn on co-commentary.

*"There is no question about it. We only really considered it because of the crowd restrictions last year. The same would be true for a lot of counties. Those technological advances within the GAA landscape have been accelerated by Covid, there is no doubt about that," he states.*

In 2020, it was a case of exceptional need. Some games were played behind closed doors, and some

*"I am not saying there was a 'duty' on us necessarily, but it was worth doing because of that and I think the fact there were so few people at the games, contributed to the success," says McRory.*

*"We learned a heap of stuff last year around the optimum way to do this, the way to roll it out and what it would take to produce a production both in terms of on the day, but also the system behind the scenes of getting logged in, paying systems and all of that."*

"What we are doing is almost a product in itself where people can come in and subscribe, watch

As an entity, 'We Are Derry' is run by amateur volunteers. While they are entirely grateful to him, commentator Alan Gunn isn't paid, and neither are the analysts. The entire enterprise is conducted by a small group of volunteers who are expected to deliver a production worthy of television standards.

*"To me, that stuff is vital. You cannot examine it properly if you are not doing it."*

"I think there will be an effect on general attendances going forward. Not so much a county final, you could see a dip potentially in those other games." But as he points out, there are only so many hours in the day.

*"I don't think we want the case three or four years down the line where every game is broadcast live on social streaming platforms. I don't think there is a need for it."*

*"Even the Premier League are only mandated to show X number of games over a weekend. That's why five or six games start at 3pm on a Saturday, so that people would pay into games across England, in the biggest league in the world!"*

Glen and Slaughtneil will be an intensely local skirmish, but available worldwide.



Glenview P.S., Castle Cup winners 2004. Back L-R: Pearce McGrath, Brendan Rogers, Kevin McErlean, Ryan Dougan, Stevie O'Hara, Tommy McErlain. Front L-R: Brendan O'Kane, Ryan McDonnell, Ciaran McFaul, Padraig Cassidy, Conor Carville, Cathair McCabe, Diarmuid McMullan.



**■ CONGRATULATIONS**  
to Watty Graham's  
Ceili Dancers, Ulster  
Scór Champions 2021



# WHO WAS WATTY GRAHAM?

The Glen club appearing in their second ever final are named after a Presbyterian named Watty Graham. Some historians suggest that his proper name was Walter Grimes. However it is all about a brave man who gave his life for the freedom of his country.

He was associated with the town of Maghera which was to the fore in the 1798 Rebellion against a harsh and unjust regime. In the end it was a brave but futile exercise. A pitchfork or scythe was never going to beat cannonballs.

Watty Graham was hanged on 15th June 1798 reportedly on a beech tree in the town which was blown down in a storm in 1945. Like many defeated rebels he tried to escape. He is said to have been in a 'safe house' in Magilligan where he was

betrayed and brought back to Maghera. His body was exhumed and buried in the 'Old Churchyard' in the town. His grave is unmarked.

The rebellion for the most part, particularly in the North was led in the main by Presbyterian ministers and their congregation. They would have been largely descended from the Scottish lowland planters of a century previous. Rev John Glendy was the rebel leader in Maghera. The militia burned his house and Graham's among others.

The Glen club have kept the



memory of a 1798 hero very much alive.

# WHO WAS ROBERT EMMET?

Robert Emmet's short, dramatic life came to a tragic end on September 20, 1803. However, although his life was short and his struggle in vain, his efforts, vision and idealism left a mythic mark on Irish and on the world history.

When asked if he had any thing to say in response to this sentence, Emmet gave what is considered to be one of the most famous speeches of the period. Emmet's speech to the court [The Speech from the Dock] could be regarded as the last protest of the United Irishmen:

'I have but one request to ask at

my departure from this world – it is the charity of its silence. Let no man write my epitaph. No man can write my epitaph, for as no man who knows my motives and character dares now to vindicate them, let not prejudice or ignorance asperse them. Let them rest in obscurity and peace until other times and other men can do justice to them. When my country takes her place among the nations of the earth, then shall my character be vindicated, then may my epitaph be written'.



## FOGRA

### Acknowledgements

Editor:  
**Ciaran McRory**

Photography:  
**Margaret McLaughlin**

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**David Higgins (DJ Print)**

THANK YOU for taking the time to read our match programme today. We hope you enjoy its content.

One theme of today's issue is that of change, and over the past 18 months we have strived to bring you the best of what Derry GAA has to offer through the use of digital technology. Whilst this has been enormously beneficial to us in engaging with our supporters both near and far, there is still some room for traditional publications like this one and we hope you will find it a fitting accompaniment to today's occasion.

These programmes could not be completed without the many talented gael's we are blessed to

have in our county. They willingly volunteer their time and energy over and over again and we are indebted to their generosity.

The assistance of our participating clubs is also greatly appreciated, in what is already a hectic build up for them.

A final thanks to the ever professional team at DJ Print, for their patience and assistance.

What you are reading today is done completely voluntarily. We know no other way.

Thanks!  
**The Derry GAA Digital Team**  
**Doire C.L.G.**

# SENIOR CHAMPIONSHIP WINNERS

1	Bellaghy	21	1956 1958 1959 1960 1961 1963 1964 1965 1968 1969 1971 1972 1975 1979 1986 1994 1996 1998 1999 2000 2005
2	Ballinderry	13	1927 1974 1980 1981 1982 1995 2001 2002 2006 2008 2011 2012 2013
3	Newbridge	10	1937 1940 1945 1948 1950 1955 1966 1967 1970 1989
4	Lavey	8	1938 1943 1954 1977 1988 1990 1992 1993
5	Dungiven	7	1947 1951 1983 1984 1987 1991 1997
6	Magherafelt	7	1939 1942 1944 1946 1949 1978 2019
7	Slaughtneil	6	2004 2014 2015 2016 2017 2020
8	Ballinascreen	4	1934 1935 1941 1973
9	Glenullin	3	1928 1985 2007
	An Lúb	3	1936 2003 2009
11	Ballerin	2	1957 1976
	Éire Óg	2	1907 1952
	Eoghan Rua	2	2010 2018
15	Ballymaguigan	1	1962
	Clan Chonail	1	1914
	Sarsfield's*	1	1916
	St Patrick's	1	1917
	Emmett's	1	1918
	Derry Guilds	1	1921
	Buncrana	1	1930
	Burt	1	1931
	Desertmartin	1	1953



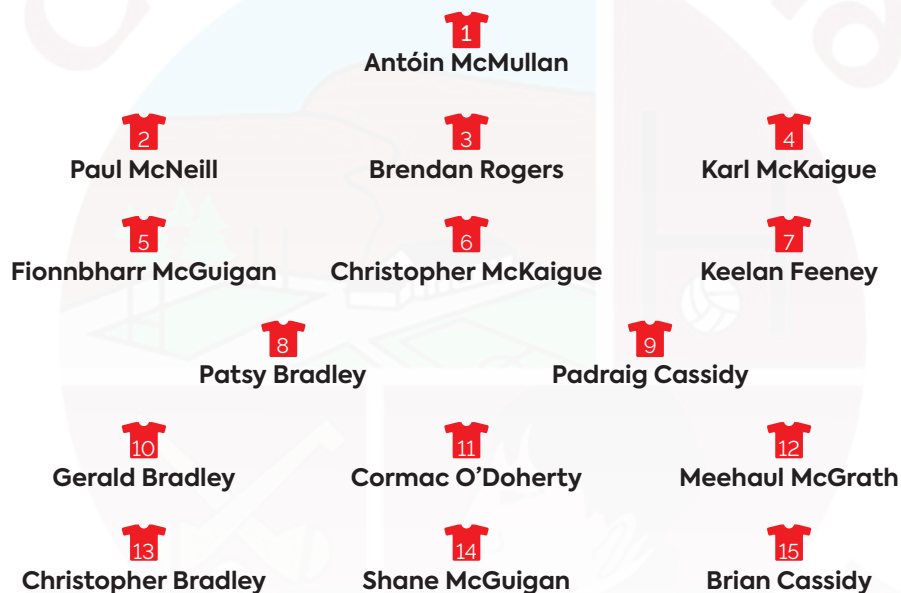
# INTERMEDIATE CHAMPIONSHIP WINNERS

2020	Greenlough	2003	Ballymaguigan	1986	Craigbane
2019	Foreglen	2002	Newbridge	1985	Foreglen
2018	Banagher	2001	Ballymaguigan	1984	Moneymore
2017	Newbridge	2000	Craigbane	1983	Glen
2016	Castledawson	1999	Faughanvale	1982	Slaughtneil
2015	Greenlough	1998	Faughanvale	1981	Faughanvale
2014	Castledawson	1997	Craigbane	1980	Glen
2013	Foreglen	1996	Faughanvale	1979	Swatragh
2012	Swatragh	1995	Craigbane	1978	Faughanvale
2011	Craigbane	1994	An Lúb	1977	Glenullin
2010	Castledawson	1993	Ballymaguigan	1976	Greenlough
2009	Ballymaguigan	1992	Craigbane	1975	Kilrea
2008	Greenlough	1991	Drumsum	1974	Glack
2007	Newbridge	1990	Bellaghy	1973	Ballinascreen III
2006	Eoghan Rua	1989	Limavady	1972	Swatragh
2005	Claudy	1988	Slaughtmanus	1971	Ballymaguigan
2004	Foreglen*	1987	Craigbane		



### SLAUGHTNEIL

CLG ROIBEARD EIMÉID, SLEACHT NÉIL



#### FIR ÍONAID:

16 Conaill Scullion  
17 Sé McGuigan  
18 Francis McEldowney  
19 Peadar Kearney  
20 Ronan Bradley  
21 Mark McGuigan  
22 Sean Cassidy  
23 Jack Cassidy  
24 Brendan McEldowney  
Peter McCullagh  
Bernard Mellon  
Michael McEldowney  
Conor McAllister

#### BAINISTÍOCHT:

Bainisteoir  
**Paul Bradley**  
Selectors:  
**Gavin Devlin**  
**Seamus Bradley**  
Physio  
**Karen Kielt**  
Medic 2  
**Padrig Kelly**



Referee:  
**Sean Curran**

Linesman:  
**Emmet McShane**

Stand-by referee:  
**Damien Harkin**

Fourth Official:  
**Gregory McWilliams**

Umpires:  
**Alan Nash,**  
**Eddie Nash,**  
**Anthony Campbell,**  
**Lawrence McCormack**

### WATTY GRAHAMS

CLG WATTY GRAHAM, AN GLEANN



#### FIR ÍONAID:

16 Andrew Warnock  
17 Stevie O'Hara  
18 Alex Doherty  
19 Caolan Bradley  
20 Cathal Mulholland  
21 Conall Darragh  
22 Conor McDevitt  
23 Marc Dixon  
24 Adam McGonigle

#### BAINISTÍOCHT:

Bainisteoir  
**Malachy O'Rourke**  
**Ryan Porter**  
**Johnny Bradley**  
**Michael McCullagh**



# HOW THE PANDEMIC HAS CHANGED THE GAA FOREVER

by CIARAN McRORY

With online broadcasts at local club games, digital ticketing systems and fixtures refactoring, Ciaran McRory takes a look at how the Covid-19 era has potentially altered the GAA landscape permanently...

From the apparently safer vantage point of November 2021 it's probably fair to say that sports feels normal again. With another SFC about to conclude and spectators back enjoying our games, it certainly feels normal. But the GAA is not the same today as it was in February 2020, with the coronavirus pandemic leading to permanent changes in how our games are managed and consumed:

## Live is life

Many of the new GAA trends driven during the Covid-19 pandemic have existed to some degree prior to 2020. Live, online-streaming of club games is one such phenomenon. Some counties experimented with TV platforms in the last decade, while the odd county final was given the broadcast treatment. But in 2020, with attendances heavily restricted and many local games across Ireland played behind closed doors, the streaming of club games was a huge success. Viewers paid a small fee to watch the games and bar the odd hiccup here and there it was win-win.

Most counties have engaged in providing their supporters with some level of live broadcasting and it's become a poster-child for pandemic-induced technological acceleration.

But one year on, the whole idea has reached near saturation levels and the sheer volume of games

broadcast live by some counties is a real head-scratcher, with some choosing to broadcast all their championship games live. Considering the return of spectators to fixtures in 2021, it would be interesting to hear what the objectives are with that particular approach, beyond flat-out altruism. There is certainly merit in providing access for bigger games, especially while some sections of the audience are unable to attend games, but the overheads and expensive use of resources involved behind the scenes – not to mention then levels of technical expertise required to actually provide a service worth paying for – might outweigh the actual need. It will take a year or two for a healthy balance to be struck.

## Just the ticket

A very welcome addition to the GAA's hitherto archaic logistical armoury is that of digital ticketing. You will have used an online ticketing app to purchase your ticket for today's final and used its QR code to enter the ground. Driven by Covid-19 regulations around handling paper documents and exchanging cash, we are now treated to a cashless, paperless ticket utopia. Just as nature intended. Gone are the days when you might have wandered round a far-flung village in search of an elusive ATM, or made your way to that crazy little van the GAA used to distribute tickets from, about a mile

away from Croke Park.

The new approach hasn't all been plain sailing however. The backend system administrators are forced to use to distribute intercounty tickets to clubs looks as though it was lumbered together when Mark Zuckerberg was still in diapers and belongs in a technology museum. While the Ticketmaster application for this year's championship games resulted in frustratingly long online queues for those trying to purchase tickets even for games with limited crowds. The good people of Ireland haven't been subjected to such ticketing ignominy since the Garth Brooks fiasco of 2014.

On a positive note, one can only imagine that the teething problems experienced this year will soon make way for a much more streamlined approach to GAA ticketing across the board. County treasurers and secretaries – and maybe even the odd chairperson – can breathe a sigh of relief, knowing that the technology that has existed for multiple decades is finally being used to take some weight off their shoulders.

## Split ends

One of the unintended consequences of the race to complete the 2020 fixture calendar at all levels, after months of lockdown, was the notion of the "split season" between club and county

competitions. Heralded across the land as the majestic solution to that age-old problem of how to satisfy the lowly club footballers appetite for games against a backdrop of intercounty greed, the "split season" was such a neat concept that the media jumped all over it without a second glance. A few positive soundbites followed and the GAA adopted it at Congress quicker than intercounty coaches started moonlighting in club roles.

This was a decision made during a pandemic, when for a few weeks the club scene burst onto the nation's TV screens. It was fresh and novel and caught the imagination.

But the so-called "split season" is not a neat concept. The GAA doesn't work like that. You only have to squint ever so slightly to realise it isn't a split-season at all. In reality it just means that club players on county squads get to play less with their clubs. There will still be protracted club seasons and provincial finals in late November and in many cases a meaningful club window of just one month.

Meanwhile, the Club Player's Association, who had been formed to "fix the fixtures for all players", appeared content with what was a hasty agreement. Made with little consultation due to the restricted nature of any debating mechanisms in 2020. The CPA actually disbanded soon after: "with our objective achieved, the time is right to step away."

## Playing for penalties

Soccer fans are well used to watching penalty shootouts decide the outcome of big games and championships. Often they're met with either horror or downright excitement, but few can deny the level of drama they bring. Other sports dally with tiebreaker situations also: namely tennis and the overtime structure in American Football, but the GAA has always been reticent. Perhaps because of the amateur nature of the sports involved it was felt a penalty shootout would hurt too many feelings. Or, more likely, it was an inert (non)reaction to what soccer does (remember that even the idea of yellow and red cards on the GAA field is a fairly recent development – down with that sort

of thing!).

So prior to 2020, the idea of a penalty shootout to decide a Gaelic football game was only slowly creeping in and confined to circumstances such as provincial club games or the FBD League – games played in the depths of winter, when it gets dark at approximately 2pm. Some of you may even recall UUJ ousting IT Sligo in a Sigerson Cup game as far back as 2006!

But since Covid-19 struck, replays have been restricted and GAA fixtures have required wrapping-up in double quick time, so penalty shootouts have become de rigueur. In 2020, Dungannon captured the Tyrone SFC title after penalty kicks, while Down defeated Offaly in hurling's Christy Ring tournament by means of a shootout. With fixture congestion set to continue long after we've got to grips with the pandemic, it feels like penalties could be here to stay. And it's only a matter of time before we see a major senior intercounty game decided by place kicks or a big Derry Championship game for that matter!



**The GAA binds our communities and our county together.  
Help us strengthen those bonds for the future generations.  
For Club & County - Join Club Derry. Thank You!**

derrygaa.ie



by DERMOT McPEAKE

# CHANGE COMES DROPPING SLOW

There's a passage in Ernest Hemingway's novel *The Sun Also Rises* in which a character named Mike is asked how he went bankrupt. "Two ways," he answers. "Gradually, then suddenly."

It's classic Hemingway. Three words and a comma with profound insight on the nature of change in our lives.

Watching children growing up, parents becoming older, economic changes, liberation movements, the global climate and even county finals, change comes in a thousand small gradual increments until one day it seems dramatic.

The day of the event arrives and all seems suddenly changed. A parent dies. A company goes global, or bankrupt. A football team wins a county championship.

If Glen can make history today and win their first John McLaughlin Cup it will have been a process of well over a decade of work. Tens of thousands of small actions by many people have brought them to this point where change would be seen as seismic.

On 13 October 2007 a group of men sat down to have a frank

conversation about change. People like Enda Gormley, Fergal McCusker, Stephen Murtagh and many others asked themselves hard questions. What change was required to secure the club's first ever senior title?

Common themes of communication, culture, motivation and a common vision were identified. But there was no dramatic change. In its stead was a process of years of incremental change bringing us to Celtic Park today. It's a cycle which will continue tomorrow regardless of the outcome today.

Slaughtneil have been through the same cycle. 14 September 1969 was the day the club first came within reaching distance of the title. Peter Doherty and Bellaghy ended that dream but only for 35 years. A group of men set about the slow change that resulted in the club attaining legendary status during the last decade. But the wheel keeps turning

and many other Derry clubs are now on the same path. As are the Derry senior football team.

Slow painstaking organic growth over the past decade has seen the county underage teams reach levels that are unsurpassed in our history. Between 2015 and 2020 Derry minors appeared in five out of six Ulster minor finals with two All-Ireland final appearances. You have to go back to the early eighties for any comparable period when the county reached five out of seven Ulster finals and three All-Ireland finals between 1980 and 1986. It's slow cyclical compounding change.

Yet the desire for instant gratification and the big shiny solution is all around us. The big win. The turning point. Today's media deals in suddenlies because they grab the attention. Take the recent GAA Congress as an example where the tragically titled 'Proposal B' was

on the table.

At its essence this proposal removes the relevance of the GAA's provincial football competitions, removes the national football league and replaces it with much the same thing, now called the championship.

It was billed as the bastions for change verses the forces of conservatism. It's a film played out many times before. This narrative driven approach to the understanding of highly complex issues presents perils to any organisation. Pro-change is always a tempting position to adopt as it's often trendy. It carries associations of progression and often political points for those seen to be driving that change. For example, following Congress, former GAA President Sean Kelly MEP presented his vision for the future of the GAA championship in the Irish Examiner. Realising that any successful plan

needs a better name than 'Proposal B' he modestly called it 'The Kelly Plan'. There must be a happy medium somewhere.

All of this political wrangling ignores the reality of change. At the heart of the thinking of the competition restructuring was a desire to see more competitive games. An end to hammerings. In reality no such thing would have occurred. A division three or four team that won through to the All-Ireland series would still have been hammered by a division one team. In reality the 'weaker counties' would have had less to play for under what was billed as their rescue package. The proposed competition change ignored the fundamental law of change that any real and meaningful change is as a series of tiny increments. It asked the wrong questions. Competitions do not make better teams. Teams do not become winners overnight. People,

culture and resources make better teams. Ask the Gaels of Glen and Slaughtneil. They know.

A win today for either side will again be a suddenlie and reported as such. A fork in road. A beginning or an end. However, the wiser heads will know different because those responsible for bringing today's teams to where they are know that it's the gradualies that count. Daily, weekly, yearly planning, development and growth are what make excellence a suddenlie.

The food and travel writer Anthony Bourdain once said: 'Everything changes, nothing changes at all'. In the end life happens and sometimes it's called change. People leave a mark and life leaves one back. It's never complete. There will always be something missing. Another goal to strive for. And that's where the joy lives.



Photo by Margaret McLaughlin



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A Bright Alternative



Photo: Margaret McLaughlin

by **BERNIE MULLAN**

## COUNTY FINALS FROM THE PAST

The last county final meeting between the district board champions took place at Dungiven on 13th October 1957. The participants were North Derry champions Sarsfield's Ballerin and South Derry champions St. Treas Ballymaguigan. Then, the district winners would meet alternately. Ballymaguigan had the semi final game with a victory over Sarsfield's the city champions. Ballerin went straight to the final.

There was a curious similarity between the birth of the two clubs. Ballymaguigan's was founded in a field on 23rd April 1944 by Michael J. O'Neill, John McCartney and Eddie Bateson. Ballerin was founded in the City Café Derry by Barney McNicholl, Harry Mullan and Paddy Deighan. The three had travelled by bus to watch Derry play Donegal at Celtic Park and over a meal on 29th October the club was 'launched'.

Prior to the foundation of the two clubs Ballymaguigan men would have turned out for Newbirdge and the Ballerin ones for Glenullin.

Back to the final and what a difference there is now in a county final 64 years later. Back then the bus or a car served as the changing room, there were no showers except the ones that fell from above, no PA system to announce teams and no match programme. The attendance at that final was a few hundred.

For Ballymaguigan to win South Derry when Bellaghy and Newbirdge were so strong was remarkable. Ballerin had lost in the North final the year before so their second district title was no great surprise.

For the record Ballerin won by 3-8 to 2-6 after leading by 2-4 to 1-2 at half time. The Ballerin scorers on the day were Patsy Mullan 3-0, Sean O'Connell 0-4, Seoirse McKinney 0-3

and Brian Mullan 0-1. Ballymaguigan scorers Gabriel Muldoon 1-1, Barney Rea 1-0, P. Lavery and Sean Young 0-2 each.

The Ballerin team was: Bobby Mullan, P McKinney, James Mullan, G Mullan, H O'Connell, W Harkin, J Mackey, S O'Connell, M Mullan, S McKinney, Brian Mullan, D. Mullan, Jim Mullan, P Mullan, J. McCorriston.

When the current final programmes are hardly big enough to hold the list of subs it was a lot different back then. Ballerin had two subs, they would have had three had the now father Seamus O'Connell been allowed out of Maynooth for the game. Father Michael Mullan did not stand in for the team photo. It was frowned upon for priests to play football at that time.

Remarkably there was a 'deputation' of people from Ballybofey at the game. Sean Young the Ballymaguigan midfielder worked in a Ballybofey bank and Fr. Michael Mullan was a curate in that parish. Both faced each other at midfield!

If that county final was prehistoric in comparison to today just go back to 1942 when Glenullin and Magherafelt met in a farmer's field at Gelvin between Drumsurn and Dungiven. The game ended in a draw. As it was North Derry's turn to host the final Glenullin insisted that the replay remain in the north. Magherafelt insisted otherwise so the title was awarded to the Rossas on a walkover!

In the early years of the GAA most of the action was in and around the city where players from Innishowen and east Donegal played in Derry for travel purposes. Among the Derry champions of that time we find Burt and Buncrana.

The first county final played

outside the city area was between Ballinderry and Glenullin at Bellevue Park Magherafelt on 2nd October 1927 with J. McKenna of Lissan the referee. The following report appeared in the Mid Ulster Mail on 8th October. "The play was too rough for comment. Led by a Magherafelt man, the spectators rushed the field and a Magherafelt spectator struck a player of the Shamrock's (Ballinderry) player. A 'free fight' ensued and the referee had to abandon all hope and left the field. Glenullin had been leading by 0-8 to 0-3 at the time of the free fight.

After a board enquiry Glenullin were disqualified and the final re-fixed with Drumsurn who had been runners up in North Derry taking the place of Glenullin. Although there are no reports or a result of that game we do know that Ballinderry would most likely have been declared champions. Indeed the final might never have been played as no record was ever put in place.

In 1917 with the country in a state of tension the county final took place at Celtic Park between St. Patrick's Waterside and Glenkeen (Ardmore). St. Patrick's won to become the first club to complete the county football and hurling double. That year a tournament titled the National Aid Tournament was played by clubs in Ulster. Sarsfield's from the city beat Cavan Rory O'More's in the semi final by 2-0 to 0-1. In the final played on 4th November Sarsfield's lost to Castleblaney Faughs by 2-5 to 2-1.

Today life is lot easier for GAA clubs. In days gone by there was very few phones, even less cars, communication was mainly by letter or word of mouth and it was a six day week for workers. The pitches were generally farmer's fields where often it was the case of dodging 'cow clap' as much as an opponent. It was even known for clubs to share a football. A pair of football boots would have made a hole in a week's wages. It is because of people in the tough times who planted the seed that has brought our association to the position it has reached today.



by CHRIS McCANN

# THERE'S NO PLACE LIKE HOME, WELL MAYBE DESERTMARTIN

Home is not where you live but where they understand you  
– Christian Morgenstern

We park up under the shadow of Slieve Gullion and walk towards the concrete seating at Desertmartin where a clump of my fellow parishioners have staked out a bridgehead. I've not spoken to any of the folks sitting on the terrace in a year, but as is the way with people who've know each other for what seems like forever there is as they say, 'no oul' shite.'

We sit down on the banking beside Kieran 'K' McLaughlin, a fellow member of the Termoncance class of 84 – his son Eunan is starting in the half-forward line. Club secretary James Roddy is in the vicinity and we are joined by our club youth officer Declan 'Bap' Toner.

There's an ease in being among your own, people who you've known for decades. It's like being in your ma's house, no matter how many years you've been out on your own,

you can walk-in stick the kettle on like it was still your kitchen, say 'who's for tea?' and no one bats an eyelid.

Covid meant there wasn't even the usual Christmas jaunt home in 2020 but any sense of my status as an exile is perfunctory. A quick: "Jesus! Would you look who it is?" covers it off.

That formality done with the exchanges among Na Cunna cognoscenti ease into familiar rhythms and tropes. 'Who's missing the day?' 'Are this lot up to much?' 'Which wan of these Desertmartin lads was it that started the All-Ireland minor final.' The themes of the conversation will be instantly recognisable to Gaels hanging over a wire in any club in any parish from Mizen to Malin.

Only the hardcore hounds have made the trip to Pairc an Cuas. The Covid-impacted nature of the club leagues means that there's little

jeopardy in this match. It won't affect our status next season. In addition, a few members of our usual starting 15 are on holiday and a few more are out due to Covid.

The absentees mean that the consensus among the Limavadyans is that we'll be lucky to get a result. The one accommodation made for my lack of attendance at matches is a brief run through of which players we are missing today, notably attacking linchpin Ricky King.

Eight years in England mean I now know many of our younger players only by clan name. Most of the lads I managed as minors or reserves in 2008 to 2012 have cycled through the senior set-up and out the other end. More of the starting line-up is familiar to my wife Bronagh who mentored many of them as Under 8s. I'm reduced to referring to them by affixing the prefix 'young' to their surnames, she is able to cheer for them as Harry, Jamie and Brandon.

Despite the downbeat pre-match assessment of our lads' chances, they start very sharply, with Harry McLaughlin taking some mighty fetches at midfield and Cormac Quigley leading the hosts full-back line a merry dance.

By half-time we are six-points up. I make my way to the clubhouse and talk to a few more hounds, a quick word with my cousin

Megan O'Kane, a hello with the club vice chair Niall MacFlynn. I stop briefly to chat with Brendan Gormley, a Wolfhounds stalwart but a Desertmartin native. I pull up a picture on my phone of the club's 2007 Under 12 side which he and I managed and he introduces me to his brother.

By the time I return to my seat, the tide of the game has started to turn, 'K's' young lad Eunan has seen a second yellow card and the St Martin's side has already kicked three points to halve their post interval deficit.

A man down and without many of their more experienced players the young lads struggle to get a foothold in the game, our focus drifts further from the on-field action. This has little impact on the craic among the old Hounds. We Statler and Waldorf our way through the second 30 minutes. By its end the match has receded to a backdrop and, in the August sun, Bap, K, James

and I recount well-treaded yarns that have been dusted down many times before and lost nothing in the retelling.

The long whistle goes and as we make our way back to our various cars, I get: 'Right sir, good to see yes. Maybe we'll catch each other again before ye head back'. But I spend the next two weeks in Donegal and Mayo, so it doesn't happen.

Limavady haven't scored in the second half and that six-point half-time lead has turned into a four-point defeat but the afternoon has been everything I wanted from it; familiar, relaxed, easy. Eighty minutes have been spent on autopilot, nothing forced, no edifice or trying required. Everything I've missed in a year of zoom and teams meetings, conducted from my North London base.

45 minutes later we park up in my parents' drive under the shadow of Binevenagh. I walk into the house, my Ma and Da are there with my sister Rosie. They have cleared up after having Sunday dinner and are sat finishing yesterday's Irish News crossword.

Rosie looks up: "Jesus! Would you look who it is?" I've been home for a week, so any sense of special treatment ended six days ago: "Make yourself useful and put the kettle on would ye."

No oul' shite. You're home.

Harry McLaughlin scrapes the skies in Desertmartin.



Today we remember all Derry Gaels who have  
gone to their eternal rest in the past year.  
*I ndilchuimhne ar Ghaeil Dhoire a chuaigh ar shli  
na fírinne i mbliana.*



■ Flags at half mast as Owenbeg and Derry GAA falls silent to remember the late Damian Brown of Wolfe Tones Bellaghy, 12 October, 2021. Photo by Margaret McLaughlin.



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