

Rugby News

Munster yet to decide on playing as funeral details confirmed

GERRY THORNLEY

The Munster squad and management will convene again in their High Performance Centre at UL today before confirming whether they intend to go ahead with Saturday's Champions Cup encounter with Glasgow Warriors at Thomond Park. This followed confirmation from Anthony Foley's family that the funeral of Munster's former player and coach will take place on Friday.

The Munster squad regrouped at their UL base yesterday for the first time since Foley's sudden passing in Paris on Sunday morning, and the ensuing postponement of their opening Champions Cup game against Racing 92.

According to a statement from Munster earlier yesterday, they will do so again today in continuing "a modified training schedule this week" in planning for Saturday's game, which has a 1pm kick-off.

Director of Rugby Rassie Erasmus and captain Peter O'Mahony will host a press conference at lunchtime which will now, most likely, confirm their intention to play Saturday's scheduled game.

Funeral arrangements

This follows confirmation yesterday evening of the funeral arrangements for Foley. His remains will be flown home today to Shannon Airport, from where they will be brought to

his family home in Killaloe, Co Clare.

They will lie in repose at St Flannan's Church, Killaloe from 1pm to 8.30pm sharp on Thursday evening.

Funeral Mass will take place at noon on Friday at St Flannan's Church, with Church reserved for family and friends only. Burial afterwards will be at Reilig Nua Cemetery, Killaloe.

Operating on a day-by-day basis, Munster's thoughts remain first and foremost with the fami-

lies of Foley and his wife Olive (nee Hogan).

Respects

Hence, not only will the squad wish to pay their respects at the funeral, only in light of yesterday's developments will they confirm their intention to play Glasgow.

The tournament organisers, EPCR, have been liaising with Munster pending developments while affording them time to clarify their intentions.

That the game is at home also increases the chances of it going ahead. Not only would a European Cup game at Thomond Park be the most fitting way to commemorate Foley's career, were it an away game, the attendant travelling would make fulfilling the fixture more problematic.

Indeed, the Munster A team's British & Irish Cup game away from Doncaster on Saturday has been postponed at Munster's request.

Rugby Concussion

IRFU confirms insurance premiums beginning to soar



Johnny Watterson Reports

Union declines to say whether concussion is reason for hike in costs

Rugby players and the IRFU are finding it more difficult to buy insurance as premium costs have begun to soar because of concussion.

As insurance companies argue that a career-ending concussion injury is repetitive rather than a one-off event, disagreement over payouts and increasing the cost of coverage is on the rise.

The fear all round is that more players like former Leinster, Connacht and Ulster scrumhalf Cillian Willis, who is suing his former club Sale Sharks for "clinical negligence", will emerge.

According to sources in the industry the issue of indemnifying the doctors who treat the players has also arisen as the issue becomes increasingly more litigious.

Tom Grace, the IRFU honorary treasurer said in his end-of-year 2015 report that insurance costs "increased significantly" over the year. The IRFU, yesterday, declined to comment on whether the concussion issue was responsible for a €500,000 hike in costs.

"The IRFU does not comment on rumour or speculation, but can confirm that as is the case with every business, home and indeed motor insurance policy in Ireland, the IRFU's various insurance premiums, across our entire insurance portfolio have increased, and that such increases are never due to any one factor," it said in a statement.

Irupa chief executive, Omar Hassanein, speaking at the launch Headway's nationwide concussion aware campaign in Dublin, believes the area of concussion and affordable player insurance has become an area of contention.

"It's an interesting point," he says "A lot of our policies are con-



Cillian Willis: the former Leinster scrumhalf is suing his former club Sale Sharks for "clinical negligence". PHOTOGRAPH: BILLY STICKLAND/INPHO

structured such that they cover one-off, non-degenerative injuries and I guess with the increased awareness around the area of head injuries, concussion, it is making it more and more difficult to insure in that area.

Grey area

"It's also quite a grey area in that you can argue that a person's chain of concussions is generally set off by a one-off incident but you could also argue to the contrary that a series of injuries have led to that person's retirement from the game.

"Concussion is a lot more difficult to measure than a broken leg or a broken arm so in the absence of having that solid information there is always going to be an opinion as far as whether that is insurable or not. Back to the original point, you're dead right it's a challenge."

As rugby knows head injuries are the most commonly recorded injury and concussion one of the most common reasons for player retirement with 72 per cent of concussions coming in the tackle area.

Data from Headway's campaign, conducted by Amara Research, comes up with some revealing figures with 70 per cent of parents believing that schools and clubs are not protecting children from dangers of concussion across all sports. Furthermore over half of the parents surveyed were unsure



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- Omar Hassanein

if their child would tell them if they received a concussion while playing a sport, with rug-

by the most mentioned sport associated with the injury.

The poll was conducted online from a sample of 1,000 across all ages and gender in September of this year.

"We probably will inevitably find it more difficult to secure the type of premiums we want for the type of coverage we want," said Hassanein of the elite professional end of rugby.

Negotiations

"It's hard for me to comment. I guess the IRFU are in negotiations on the contract policy, the one that exists within the standard contract and we would liaise on that.

But players can then take their own top-up insurance and each player's top-up is based on their own individual situation. We have put a set of standardised policies the players can

take up. There is always going to be tweaks and changes according to the players history of injury. Often concussion is one area where the tweaks and changes could happen."

Research published in the *British Journal of Sports Medicine* less than 12 months ago concluded players who returned to play in the same season after a diagnosed concussion had a 60 per cent greater risk of time-loss injury than players without concussion.

The research suggested their data paved the way for trials of more conservative and comprehensive graduated return to play protocols, with a greater focus on "active rehabilitation."

The current return-to-play-protocols are not evidence based or supported by peer reviewed scientific research.

Gaelic Games TV Rights

Package changes may impact on live league games

Virgin Media customers will be unable to access Saturday evening live matches

IAN O'RIORDAN

Changes to the availability of the Eir Sport TV package will impact on the potential live viewership of the 2017 Allianz Leagues, with further implications for the GAA's new media rights, agreement for which is now "imminent".

The GAA's current media rights deal across all platforms - TV, radio and online - expires at the end of the 2017 league, with the new agreement then running for three years, 2017-2019, starting from next summer's championship. Few major changes are expected and there is almost certain to be a continuation of the Sky Sports package despite increasing objection at county council level and also from the Keep Gaelic

Games Free to Air group. RTE, still the principal rights holder and who had the rights to 31 live championships matches under the current deal, is however facing stronger competition this time from the likes of Eir Sport and TV3.

In the meantime Eir Sport has taken over the remaining existing rights to the live Saturday evening games in the Allianz Leagues, which previously went out on Setanta Sports: Eir Sport acquired Setanta at the end of 2015 for a reported €20 million and rebranded the station earlier this year. The station is also now looking to expand its live GAA coverage into the championship.

However, a disagreement with the Virgin Media platform (formally UPC), who had pro-

vided Setanta and also initially Eir Sport, means those league games will no longer be available to a substantial audience. Virgin, who have just over 300,000 mostly urban subscribers, dropped the Eir Sport package, which includes BT Sport, at the end of July after it failed to agree commercial terms on a wholesale arrangement for the six channels.

Bundle deal

While Eir Sport is still available free through its own Eir broadband service or as part of their Eir Vision TV bundle deal, and also to order on other platforms such as Sky and Vodafone, this will impact on the potential viewership for the 2017 Saturday evening live league games. In the 2016 league, Setanta showed 17 live Saturday evening games, 11 in football and six in hurling, including most of Dublin's home games in Croke Park.

According to an Eir Sport spokesperson: "Each week, we

are continuously adding more and more subscribers to the Eir Sport pack through our Eir Vision TV and Eir broadband offers as a result of the content we offer.

"It is too soon to speculate on the potential viewing figures for next year's Allianz League.

31

The number of championship matches RTE have the right to under the current deal

Virgin Media customers cannot access the Eir Sport pack on the Virgin Media platform at this time."

This also has the potential to impact on the 2017-2019 GAA media rights deal, depending on what way that is split up: Eir will be kept to keep or expand their TV rights especially given they are also now one of the headline sponsors of the championship.

and also from the Keep Gaelic

Comment

Malachy Clerkin



Sport unites us in grief at loss of a good man

It was impossible not to think of Cormac McAnallen this week.

There are very few deaths in life where you can remember where you were and what you were doing when you heard about them.

But to flick over to the rugby on Sunday and find the screen filled with a picture of Anthony Foley and the brutal numbers 1973-2016 underneath was to know instantly that you'd never forget that moment.

It was the same with Cormac 12 years ago.

I was living in a flat down by Dublin's Christchurch Cathedral at the time and had long since been able to tune out the sound of the bells in the morning but this time I woke to the sound of my phone ringing and my mother's number flashing up on it. Ordinarily, a sports star dying would have gone in one ear and out the other with Ma Clerkin but this was different. She had actually met Cormac the previous September.

Shamefully, her eldest son, the reporter, was not yet a driver and needed to be brought to English to meet the Tyrone full back before the All-Ireland final. So to hear on the radio six months later that he was gone, just like that, shocked her like it had shocked everyone else. She still mentions him the odd time as a result.

The last few days have had a bit of that. People who wouldn't normally pass any remarks on sport in general and rugby in particular have nonetheless been stilled by the numb paralysis that has followed Anthony Foley's death.

Family man

Some see a family man who has left behind a young wife and two small boys, some just see a well-known person gone too young and struggle like everyone else to make sense of it.

There's none to be made of it, of course. Just like there was none 12 years ago. A sudden death like this is such a loutish intrusion on everyday life. It doesn't ask permission, it doesn't excuse itself. For those who were close to Foley, a solid, dependable building block of their existence has just disappeared. No warning, no time to tense or brace.

And because he was involved in sport at the highest level, that loss gets shared around. Over 10,000 people visited McAnallen's house after Cormac's death. Over 3,000 wrote letters to the family. Most of them never met him and either just admired who he was from afar or wanted to offer solidarity at the worst time because they were familiar with him at the best.

That's what sport does. It creates that connection, however tenuous, between people. It presents the best of you, the player, to the rest of us, the public. It creates a context for familiarity in a world that otherwise has a tendency to drift into anonymous, community-less solitude.

I didn't know Anthony Foley but I was in the room for one of the sweetest moments of his life. The press conference in Cardiff after Munster won the 2006 Heineken Cup hadn't started yet, for the simple reason Foley, Declan Kidney and Peter Stringer all looked completely spent once they took their seats at the top table. Foley was in his socks and just sat there looking at

us, as if to say, "What, you want me to come up with words now, on top of everything else?"

The silence was broken by a roar from the back of the room. "Hon Foley!" shouted Mick Galwey, there in jeans and a jacket and working as a co-commentator for Radio Kerry. Foley's face cracked. "Hon Gaillimh!" he roared back before beckoning his old friend forward. And the two of them shared a hug of such pure and genuine oblivious love that it rendered the press conference moot. If you can't make good copy out of that, a few post-match clichés aren't going to help your cause.

This is why that old, well-worn banality that says a death like this puts sport in perspective has just never rung true. For a start, it has always felt slightly weird that people only say it about sport. When Prince died earlier this year, nobody said it put music in perspective. Or that Caroline Aherne's death really put comedy into context. For some reason, only sport is ever blithely dismissed like this.

Identity

Yet to do so is to miss the point spectacularly. For Anthony Foley, sport didn't need to be put in perspective. It was itself the perspective through which he saw and approached life. Same with Cormac McAnallen. It was their very



For those who were close to Foley, a solid, dependable building block of their existence has just disappeared. No warning, no time to tense or brace

identity - or at least enough of it to hold a working majority over what was left.

And it is the reason that so many people feel touched by their deaths. They were good enough to share sport with people they would never meet or interact with. We saw them move heaven and earth to get better at it. We saw them at their most powerful and most vulnerable, often in the same afternoon. We saw them at their most human.

That's why sport is not diminished by the untimely death of one of its heroes. When the put-it-in-perspective people feel the need to remind us that these are silly little games at the back of it all, they presume we're too caught up in it to figure this out for ourselves. But of course we know that a result here and there isn't important in the general scheme of things. That's the very essence of being into sport. Who could handle it year after losing year otherwise?

But this week, just as in those frigid March days in 2004, sport is knitting thousands of disparate strands of humanity together in shock at the loss of a good man. Something that powerful is no triviality. Branding it as such does scant justice to the life that has just been so cruelly extinguished.

GAA Fixtures

TODAY
Dublin SFC quarter-finals: Castletown v Skerries Harps, Parnell Park, 6.45; Kilmacud Crokes v St. Jude's, Parnell Park, 8.15.
TOMORROW
Dublin SFC quarter-finals: Ballymun Kickhams v Raheny, Parnell Park, 6.45; Lucan Sarsfields v St Vincent's, Parnell Park, 8.15.
FRIDAY
Tyrone SFC final replay: Coalisland v Killybeggs, Healy Park, 7.30.
SATURDAY
Shinty International: Scotland v Ireland, Bught Park, Inverness, 2.0.
SUNDAY
Galway SFC final: Corofin v Salthill-Knocknacarra, Pearse Stadium, 3.30.
London SFC final: St Kiernans v Tir Chonnall Gaels, Greenford, 3.0.
Roscommon SFC final: Padraig Pearces v St Brigid's, Kiltloom, 3.30.

Limerick SHC final: Ballybrown v Patrickswell, Gaelic Grounds, 3.30.
Mayo SHC final: Ballyhaunis v Tooreen, Tooreen, 3.0.
Meath SHC final: Killybeggs v Kiltalee, Pairc Tailteann, 3.30.
Offaly SHC final: Birr v St Rynagh's, O'Connor Park, 3.0.
Waterford SHC final: Ballygunner v Passage, Walsh Park, 3.0.
Westmeath SHC final: Clonliff v Raharney, Cusack Park, 2.30.
Wicklow SHC final replay: Bray Emmetts v Carnew, Aughrim, 2.0.
Cavan SFC final replay: Castlerahan v Carrigrohane, Bredin Park, 3.0.
Clare SFC final replay: Craiove v Kilmurry-Ibrackin, Cusack Park, TBC.
Laois SHC final replay: Borris-Kilcotton v Rathdowney-Erroll, O'Moore Park, 4.0.
Ulster club SHC final: Louisaig (Antrim) v Slaughtneil (Derry), Athletic Grounds, 2.30.