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THE JOHN FOGARTY INTERVIEW

Twenty years ago, there were the three shadowy priests who, it was claimed, had knowledge of Colin Lynch's suspension before the Munster Council had even met to decide his faith. In Liam Doyle, Seánie McMahon, and Anthony Daly, meanwhile, Clare had the three wise kings, forming one of hurling's greatest half-back lines. Two decades on from the Banner's last Munster SHC success and the All-Ireland title that got away, the trio recall that tumultuous summer of '98, from Lynch's ban to Jimmy Cooney's bad time-keeping

The one that got away from Banner brothers

John Fogarty: Twenty years on, how does that season and Clare's last Munster SHC success sit with you?

Liam Doyle: The three-game saga with Offaly is what sticks out the most. My one disappointment is that we could have participated in another All-Ireland final.

Anthony Daly: We were in it, sure. For about four hours!

LD: And the pints were for four hours too!

AD: Your man (Ger Loughnane) saying, "Get up to bed, you're playing again next week"

JF: Long before all that, there was a league semi-final against Cork, where Clare were accused of taking a fall knowing you had to play them again in Munster.

Seánie McMahon: That was always the story when we lost a league game, that we trained savage that morning. We never, ever trained the morning of a game. We probably fed off a lot from Loughnane and it wasn't a case of 'lads, don't win today' but we didn't have that extra bit of drive. Around about that time, the league was gone nearly crazy. All the games were savage and we probably came to the realisation that the league wasn't the be-all and end-all. I always felt when you won an All-Ireland, winning the league after that didn't matter. The priority for us was always the first round in Munster against Cork. We were well beaten, we didn't go out to play badly but it wasn't a goal.

AD: The booze-up in Liscannor was good that Sunday.

JF: Was that the last of the drink before facing Cork again?

AD: That was it. We swore to a man that nobody would have another until then. When you think of it now, they're banning them (from alcohol) for eight months

AD: I remember coming back to Power's (in Clarecastle) but I don't remember much of the match, really. I do remember coming back and meeting an awful sound fella from Clarecastle, Peter Cosgrove. A dead-on GAA fan, a Clarecastle fan, a Clare fan. He said to me, "Dalo, will you ever stop wasting my money? Will ya let me know when you're not trying in these league matches? I'm after bringing the kids and the wife to Thurles and spent on petrol, grub, and a couple of pints — will ya ever just let us know so I could stay at home and wait for the Championship?"

I said, "Cossy, I didn't realise we were off either! I was trying anyways!" Nobody was going out to play bad, like. He (Loughnane) didn't ramp it up. He didn't do what he would do the week of a Championship match, into the goalmouth and savage us all. He set the tone.

JF: It was an incredible summer in many ways, getting as many games (six) as Clare would hope to get this Champion-

ship. Did you feel unstoppable after winning Munster?

LD: After the first day against Waterford, you could say we were lucky to get a second day. We knew in training the following week, it was fairly rammed into us, that the replay wasn't too far off being an All-Ireland final. We were told that we had to stand up and be counted.

JF: How much did Ger protect the players from the controversies, deflect like Jose Mourinho?

SM: The thing got so big it wasn't a case of protecting the players; it was all around us. You couldn't avoid it, really. I always remember the Friday night before the first game against Offaly, the night that (Colin) Lynch got the three-month suspension. I didn't sleep a wink that night, I was so mad. We were all of the view that we were being hard done by. You couldn't avoid that. I would feel that year we played our best hurling and had we got to the final there was no possibility that we wouldn't have won it; Kilkenny weren't that great

Clare captain Anthony Daly shields the ball from Offaly's John Ryan in the controversial 1998 All-Ireland SHC semi-final, a game that had to be replayed after a time-keeping error by referee Jimmy Cooney.

Picture: Ray McManus



anyway. We were a small bit hit and miss. I remember saying to you (nods to Daly) after the first Waterford game that I wasn't anyway nervous or anxious and that was maybe because we were a bit flat having been so up for the Cork game. That was the way we were, Jekyll and Hyde, but back up for the second Waterford game. We had injuries and suspensions for the Offaly games.

LD: I still regret to this day that I played but... I tore ligaments in my ankle in the replay. Brian Lohan was missing too (having been sent off in the replay against Waterford) but when Colin got suspended... I had a fitness test where we met up beforehand and I got the go-ahead. But I regret playing because I didn't give myself enough time to recover.

JF: Jamesie O'Connor spoke before about the off-field developments sapping energy — did they?

AD: Everybody is different. Personally, it didn't bother me. I never got off on that sort of stuff. I was fucking loving it when

everybody was yapping about us. But as a unit, there's no doubt it was a huge distraction. I also remember that Friday night of the meeting in Limerick. It came on the late news, I was sitting at home with the mother, and "There's Mike Palmer," I says. He was working with Lynch's crowd, Lynch's father doing the coal and the briquettes. A big Clare crowd had gone into the Limerick Inn. Then it was (erroneously) said Lynch's grandmother was dead to make it worse. I was a bit distracted going to bed that night. I felt more for Colin than anything else because we were all wired for that replay against Waterford. Okay, he let rip but the punishment was miles beyond the crime.

SM: It was when you consider (Michael) Duignan drew straight (across David Forde). It (Lynch's ban) was the greatest disappointment. Whatever happened happened but who was giving the evidence was fairly ridiculous.

AD: Sure, even Jimmy Cooney said it himself — and I've nothing against Jimmy Cooney for blowing the whistle, that was a mistake — but he said he would ruin the game if he sent off Michael Duignan we were so far ahead. Who gives you the right not to ruin the game?

SM: That was caught on the telly afterwards. Lynch's thing was totally post the match. We all have the best of time for Duignan but where was the parity?

AD: It was for Colin more than ourselves. We had a good panel and fellas were going well in training and the likes of Rusty (Christy Chaplin) could come in and do a job, no bother, but he was a huge loss. It was for him as a person that we felt for him; he had given up so much for hurling. You couldn't be at training before Lynch. If you were there at 5.50pm for 7pm training, he'd be there out on the field.

JF: When you hear Seán Kelly, then Munster Council chairman, expressing regret about Lynch's suspension on the RTE Scannal documentary about Clare's 1998, does it ring hollow?

LD: I only saw the documentary on YouTube three weeks ago. It probably does (ring hollow). Dalo said it affected players differently and he's right. Who decided to bring Lynch to court? You can say that because it was so much in the media. In that way, it would be disappointing because he was no doubt a loss to us with the amount of energy he gave us and the amount of ground he'd cover. I would have been covering the two boys anyway but he'd give me a hand-out at times. Colin took it to another level from his own personal preparations.

AD: Thank God, there wasn't social media back then. It would have been another day's work. Around the time of the documentary, Christy O'Connor and myself were going down to the Munster club final and Seán Kelly was going in the same gate as us. We got chatting but I said: "We won't mention '98. At least you came to (Munster) medals presentation afterwards".

He said: "We got that one a bit wrong alright."

JF: How did Colin take it at the time?
SM: Lynch would be a man's man, like. He wouldn't have let on. He was disappointed but he wasn't going around crying. He would still have been thinking of the team. He still trained. There was always the talk he might get back on an appeal and a deal being done for the third (Offaly) match.

JF: The group must have felt like they



broke a mirror with all the bad luck you had.

AD: As Seánie said, we were becoming Jekyll and Hyde in our performances. We were wired for Cork, jumping the wire out on the field. Jimmy Barry-Murphy and Dr Con (Murphy) and Jim Cashman were there in a huddle and I screamed: "Get out of my fucking way!". They moved and Dr Con told me years later that he said to Jimmy: "We're in trouble here, boy".

Then in the first Waterford game because we had the better of them most of the time and hadn't played them much in Championship there was a feeling we were hot favourites as All-Ireland champions. We were down for it, ramped it up for the replay then down again for the first day against Offaly.

It lingered into '99 as well when we were poked to get a draw against Tipp but like lunatics in the replay. It was the way Ger managed as well, it was all duck or no dinner. You were either psyched out of your head or flat and we were great at flat. At the same time, it seemed like they (officials) were going to stop us whatever way they can. We were using that in training. It was probably how we got such a good performance out of ourselves the second day against Offaly. Like Seánie said, I don't think there would have been any fear of us in a final.

LD: The second day against Offaly, we shouldn't have put ourselves in that position — we were 10 points up.

AD: But we still didn't lose it — we were three points up.

SM: We would never have lost that game. We had ridden the tide. There's no way I would have ever seen us losing the game at that stage and we would have seen it out until the end.

JF: Have any of you met Jimmy Cooney over the years?

AD: No, I did a thing on Newstalk with Duignan about it and he said he had met him at the Galway Races. Duignan had abused the shit out of him at the final whistle for blowing it up early but I said to him he should have been coming from the stand to do it! What can you do about it at this stage? I wouldn't say anything to him.

SM: He made a genuine mistake.

LD: The one thing about that time was

the stewards came in so quick. He didn't have time to make up his mind, like.

JF: You say you were wired but was it a case of going overboard with the siege mentality?

LD: Colin's suspension was on the news around the clock but we had to stay focused. We had to try and keep it out of our minds as much as possible.

AD: With hindsight, the first thing we should have done was get out of Dublin first thing Monday morning. I still think we should have replayed it but we should have gone home to Clare and bought ourselves a couple of days and not go into the bowels of Croke Park the following morning. While that was going on, we were being ran around Belfield. It was all wrong to me. We should have been out in the Forty Foot having a swim, recovering.

SM: I missed that anyway (training session).

AD: I didn't do it. "I'm not doing it, Mike (McNamara)," I said. (Imitating McNamara) "I'm surprised in you, you're the fucking captain." I told (Ollie) Baker not to do it as well — we were throwing a rugby ball to each other. Playing again the following week in Thurles, if you watch it again Stephen Byrne was man of the match in goal. (Brian) Quinno deserved a move off Joe Dooley; I'd have gladly gone back on Joe Dooley the third day at corner-back. I'd no fear of marking Joe Dooley; the fella I was afraid of were the ones faster than me and Joe wouldn't be faster than me. Quinno wasn't flying, he wasn't having a good game. He could have played at wing-back as handy or swapped with Frank (Lohan).

LD: He had sunstroke during the week.

AD: He was sick and said nothing. We didn't play bad the third day and I still think we would have won if we had got out of Dublin, put the mockers on Offaly a bit. They knew on the Monday that they had a replay; they shouldn't have known that until the Wednesday. This is all with the benefit of having 20 years to think about it.

LD: We probably could have even stuck it out an extra week.

AD: It seemed to me the rematch was arranged 12 hours afterwards. We could have gone to Lahinch for a swim, a meeting between ourselves. Loughane

FRIENDS REUNITED: Liam Doyle, Sean McMahon, and Anthony Daly reflect on Clare's golden days at Dromoland Castle.
Picture: Eamon Ward

wouldn't give us much say in what we were doing but it would have been better. We would have turned the tables on Offaly. Like, it wasn't our fault.

LD: Byrne made five saves.

AD: Danny Scanlan's chance? Jaysus.

SM: Alan (Markham) had a couple of shots.

AD: We done enough to win the third game and it would have been sweet to win it that way. Nobody would have gotten more pleasure out of it than us that way. The real hard road.

JF: Did the board have your backs throughout the season?

AD: There was no board — there was Loughane and that was it!

LD: We didn't really take any notice. We were only thinking about the games and Ger was calling the shots. He probably consulted with Dalo but that was it.

AD: I remember when he came into the bar to tell us to go to bed and I told him that we'd play them again and we'll beat them. Because I didn't want winning an All-Ireland and people saying, "Ah, you didn't really win that one". We had a general feeling that way but what I said then was a rush of blood to the head. We should have bought a bit of time.

JF: The legacy of '98 — when did you reconcile with it?

LD: I was at the All-Ireland final and I was saying to myself that we should be out there but we got back into the club championship. We were then back to the gym sessions with Clare where we might have been signing into the gym but going to the swimming pool instead. 1999 was a new beginning.

Obviously, you still think about it but at the time we had to move on.

SM: It finished very disappointingly but I wasn't harping on about it the following January and February. There are games you win you should really lose and there are games you lose you shouldn't lose and they balance out.

I would definitely put it down as an All-Ireland we should have won but then we would have lost in '95 and '97. We wouldn't have deserved to (lose) but could've. You just get on with it and that's not being ignorant about it.

AD: It was different for me because the

night before the match my brother dropped dead in London. To tell you the truth, I was reconciled to it fairly quick. I was up in Dublin for the final and the following morning my phone — I had a mobile, which wasn't common — kept ringing like a hand grenade beside the bed. My brother told me that Paschal was dead. That fairly put it to bed, to tell you the truth, because he probably would have been in my mother's house — he came home for all the big games. His time was up, he had a heart attack and it put in context for me.

If you told the three of us that we would have won three Munsters and two All-Irelands we would have taken the hand off you.

A Kilkenny fella would probably be more bitter about it, looking for his eighth medal. We still felt we had a great chance in '99 and I often feel we let that away more than '98 because if we got over Kilkenny into a final against Cork having lost to them in the Munster final... I remember (Brian) Lohan jumping up on your (mods to McMahon) back for that high ball and leaving DJ (Carey) behind him. We felt there was another one in us.

SM: You're not going to get it back.

AD: Your man (Loughane) was so good, he had you thinking about '99 already. That was his way. You park it but it's later in life it gets you more that you should have won three.

JF: We're 20 years on and talking about Clare's last Munster title. It's not a specific question but why hasn't it happened since?

LD: It's hard to put your finger on it but Munster has been competitive. When Clare won the U21 in 2009 and subsequent to that the three-in-a-row, in the last five or six years they should have won one or two with that group of players. I know they're still going and their time may come this year or next year but they probably should have won the Munster final last year.

JF: With the U21s' recent heavy defeat to Limerick, is there a genuine fear in you that this famine will be prolonged?

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SM: Munster is so competitive that you need a lot right to win it. It's not beyond this team to go and win it even though people are writing them off. Their performances will have to improve on what's been there the last three or four years.

AD: You would be worried watching the U21s. I'd know from being with Limerick that they've been in the gym since 15. They're following their programmes strictly and we're only catching up now. If somebody told us that when the ribbons went up over Drumcondra when Pat Donnellan lifted the cup in 2013 that we wouldn't be back there until 2018... I think any of us would have our mortgage on that we would back soon enough. We won the U21s the following year. Maybe they kind of got that All-Ireland too soon in their own development. We've won four of them so we're not going to give it back but it came quick even though the talent was coming. I was in charge and we didn't win a Munster but we were in Croke Park five times in the three years. Quarter-finals were in Croke, which was a help, but we were in two semis. We couldn't get any sense that now in 2018 we would still have no Munster and even no All-Ireland final appearance since. We would have all said last year that it was a learning curve for the boys (Donal Moloney and Gerry O'Connor) but there's a bit of pressure this year to come out of Munster.

JF: The two boys have been talking openingly about pressure.

AD: They've been straight up.

JF: Will the new Munster SHC format suit Clare?

LD: If you look at the league, I know Tipp were beaten in the final but they used 31 players and were looking at the bigger picture. We didn't use as many players, probably 10 or 12 of the championship team were out most days. You wouldn't want to be picking up too many injuries for a small squad whereas Tipp have built a



panel for the long haul. We didn't give as much game-time to some new players.

SM: Over the last few years, I would have always felt the longer the year went on the better Clare would get. I think the fact they've the four games... and an awful lot is going to depend on the Cork game and if they can come out of that with something it would be massive. The depth of the squad is possibly not there but if they could avoid the injuries I can see the likes of (Conor) McGrath and (Shane) O'Don-

LOOKING AHEAD: Liam Doyle has concerns about the depth of this year's Clare panel.

Picture: Eamon Ward

nell flourishing with the more games they get if we can keep getting the ball to them.

AD: It could come down to the last game against Limerick, 19,000 in the (Cusack) Park. It would be some hot day. Tipp and Cork might be okay and then it will be us or Limerick. As Doyle said, the boys said last year they were trying to get their best team out for the championship. This year, they came out with a more settled team and they didn't experiment with the goalie or the full-back line. If we could get a draw

or something positive, with Waterford coming to the Park in the first game we could turn over Waterford then and if you have three points after two games you're in a good place. Win the two home games and we've a great chance.

LD: There's a lot of pressure on Cork too.

SM: We're five years waiting for a performance in the Championship. Have we ever come close to the 2013 All-Ireland final replay?

Hatchet Man

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Player of dubious skills and proven menace.

 **Irish Examiner**

WE DEFINE THE GAMES THAT DEFINE YOUR SUMMER

8 THE BIG INTERVIEW



John Fogarty

Teacher. Husband. Father. Manager. Derek McGrath accepts he could be better in every role, but he tries. God, damn it, he tries. In typically candid fashion, he spoke exclusively to the *Irish Examiner* ahead of tomorrow's All-Ireland final about failing to strike a balance in his life and the contradictions that both define and fuel his life and management.



"So, rumble, young musicians, rumble. Open your ears and open your hearts. Don't take yourself too seriously, and take yourself as seriously as death itself. Don't worry. Worry your ass off. Have ironclad confidence, but doubt — it keeps you awake and alert. Believe you are the baddest ass in town, and, you suck! It keeps you honest. It keeps you honest. Be able to keep two completely contradictory ideas alive and well inside of your heart and head at all times. If it doesn't drive you crazy, it will make you strong. And stay hard, stay hungry, and stay alive. And when you walk onstage on tonight to bring the noise, treat it like it's all we have."

Bruce Springsteen, SXSW keynote address, 2012.

Sarah McGrath is unlikely to be in Croke Park tomorrow. Her husband Derek has pleaded with her to attend but she says she doesn't want to mess up a good thing. She was at the Munster semi-final but only lasted until half-time.

"Since then, she hasn't gone to any match," says the Waterford manager. "She's just stayed away and now she's just at the stage where she's kind of thinking there's some sort of superstition attached to the fact that she hasn't gone to games."

A ticket will have been put aside for her just in case she changes her mind. Given the sacrifices she has made and the demands placed on her, it would be only right that she be there. From a tumultuous first season in charge that could have finished him as Waterford manager to now, she has taken every step. Her employers AIB have been accommodating to her these last four years as De La Salle College have been to her husband.

"I'd have often said to her, 'Look, Sarah, it's going to get worse before it gets better'. That would have been the common theme. The aftermath of year one would have been the worst scenario we faced as a family. We'd be beaten by Wexford in the championship and been relegated and lost a couple of selectors. Then we were omitting 10 guys from the panel but it was never a loss of faith on her behalf. She was always 'if you think what you're doing is right, then do it'. She would have been so supportive but fearful of the consequences that would come with it. In trying to brace or warn her, we would talk about acceptance of people's opinions and saying nothing, which would be hard at times."

Being John Mullane's sister would have given her a taste of what was to come. Only a taste, mind. "The one good thing about John was that there was always a feeling he was one of the major players for Waterford so there was seldom a scenario where she had anyone giving out about his form. He was always to the forefront of what Waterford stood for. The only time she got uptight was when there was a danger of John being involved in anything and that was something he really got on top of as he went through his career. She would be

nervous for him and nervous about what people would say about him, so it's been simulated long before now. (But) nothing prepared her for the management element of it."

Together since 1994, McGrath knows he would be lost without her as much as he appreciates he could be there more for her and their sons, Fionn and Odhrán. Last month, she and the boys spent two weeks in Santa Ponsa. McGrath joined them for a couple of days between training sessions the week following the semi-final win over Cork. Nobody needs to tell him it wasn't ideal.

"I'd love to create the perfect scenario where we would go out for a meal and we're away from it but she just lets me do my own thing on it. This is what it is for me now. I'm obviously committed to my marriage but in time I will be more committed to domestic life. That's the sad thing but it's the truth. The reality is she's brilliant, she's great with the kids, and what I do

Waterford manager Derek McGrath gets emotional during the All-Ireland SHC semi-final against Cork at Croke Park. McGrath has become friendly with Mickey Harte and says: 'I'd love to have his composure, being on the line and just folding his arms.' Picture: Lorraine O'Sullivan



with the kids is almost always dramatic. I'm saying to them, 'Let's go to Tramore and to the amusements'. It's not out the back, tapping around or going to the local park. I won't say it's materialistic but there's a part of it that's not real. There's probably a sadness to that.

"We obviously got away for 36 hours after the (Cork semi-final) game but last year in the run-up to other games, we would have gone to Dublin. I actually did the tour of Croke Park before the semi-final last year and we stayed in Coppers on the Wednesday night. We just got away from it. There have been sporadic moments when we've got away from it but they have been few and far between, albeit the support and the love is constant." A man as self-aware as McGrath isn't ignorant of the irony of his "loco parentis" remarks regarding suspended Conor Gleeson and how he spoke to the player's mother about his disciplinary case. Former Kilkenny star Eoin Larkin seemed to take exception to McGrath's actions when he tweeted: "Why is derek McGrath meetin (sic) wit his players mothers, theyre (sic) senior players. Not u6s. 1st de burca and Conor Gleeson".

Not that he feels obliged to explain himself to Larkin but he stands by his actions: "Conor is 20 years of age. There was a huge emotional scenario whereby he was going to lose out on an All-Ireland final appearance and has lost out. What can be conveyed at times is this super-human approach as if I'm some sort of Mother Teresa character and to me, it's just the decent thing to do, to talk to his mother. Invariably, what can happen in the run-up to a final is the rumour mill goes full circle as regards what should be done about the case and the hearing. You were going to talk to them to set them straight and explain your thought processes on it. That nearly equated with her. Conor was immediately on board with the way we wanted to address it. That's the relationship we have tried to build with all the families.

"If it was Kevin (Moran), for instance, if it was Brick Walsh, I might have just called that Brick himself instead of talking to his parents. It's the nature of who you are dealing with. Both Tadhg (de Búrca) and Conor are relatively new to disciplinary procedures and the scrutiny and the amount of exposure they have been given over the last number of weeks. You can't really apologise for trying to do the right

thing."

Like Gleeson, Tom Devine will also be missing out today having left the panel following the league campaign to travel. After his two goals against Galway in Salthill and the trouble he gave Daithí Burke back in April, he wouldn't have been far from Waterford supporters' thoughts in the build-up to tomorrow. Nor McGrath's.

"He's won a championship in San Francisco. I saw a photo of him and he's in pristine condition as he always is. Particularly with the fact of how well he played against Galway a few months ago, he's in my mind. I said previously that Tom is so independently minded and spirited that there was never a moment when I contemplated saying I wonder whether we should give Tom a ring and invite him back into the panel even having progressed from quarter-final to semi-final. Tom is one of the guys that when he leaves the panel, there would be no sense of regret. There would be a sense of delight for the panel. He lives in that mind where we'd all like to live in — no bitterness or no badness in him. He just did what he wanted to do. The only thing you'd think of is including him in some capacity as regards the event himself because he has contributed a lot over the last three years, which shouldn't be forgotten."

From organising the meals for journalists at the press morning to suits to nailing down the game-plan earlier this week, there are few things that McGrath hasn't involved himself in for this final. He could say he's a control freak but then he gave Austin Gleeson permission to do a host of publicity interviews less than a fortnight before the game. It would set off alarm bells for most managers but not McGrath.

"It doesn't affect his training or how he plays and that's the most important thing. He's a fine young man. The irony is the leash that is sometimes associated with our style of play is not tightened on players when it comes to exposure in the run-up to games."

After beating Kilkenny for the first time in 58 years, he encouraged his players to appreciate that victory for what it will be in time — historic — rather than trying to belittle it ahead of their quarter-final. He doesn't want them to diminish anything



“I’m obviously committed to my marriage but in time I will be more committed to domestic life. That’s the sad thing but it’s the truth

tures were aligned to what they wanted. He’s just a great man. He once said the key to living, in general, is recognising the uniqueness of the individual. For us, that parallels “(To Kill A) Mockingbird”, which is what I’m always quoting from, seeing things from other people’s point of view.

“You have someone like Michael Walsh who has three kids and has to leave at a certain time to get them settled. Fiona is his wife and sometimes he’s not home until 10 o’clock. Then, you have a free spirit like Jamie Barron, doing a thesis in UCC. A lot of lads are like that, Darragh Lyons in Cork IT and living the dream, if you like, in college. Mickey has been brilliant at merging all those concepts.”

Before 2003, Harte had nothing but the 1986 and ’95 All-Ireland final appearances in terms of tradition. At least Waterford have the 1948 and ’59 successes but McGrath hasn’t been inclined to lean on them. “We haven’t referenced it at all and that is in no way belittling the achievements. We’re aware of our history, we’re aware of our last All-Ireland, we’re aware of the great men, the Martin Ógs (Morrissy), the Frankie Walshs, the Philly Grimes, the Austin Flynnns, the Tom Cheastys etc. We’re aware of their iconic status and are completely respectful of their achievements including John Barron, my own club-mate.

“We said in the run-up to the Kilkenny game we wouldn’t reference ’59 because it had been so long since we had beaten them. We might have mentioned it once but then decided it wasn’t the best course to follow. We’ve just gone down the route of preparing for the game as a single entity and that might seem very cold but that’s the way we’ve gone about it. Do things cross your mind like involving Martin Óg or Austin Flynnn for a talk to the lads? Of course, they do but when you park those thoughts it’s not because you’re being disrespectful of those men; it’s because you’re preparing in a different way.”

Anyway, if it comes to drawing from the past, McGrath knows Galway have a more potent motivation in honouring the spirit of the recently-departed Tony Keady, a man whose company he shared and enjoyed in the hours prior to last year’s final. Waterford’s motivation may not be quite at that emotional pitch, which mightn’t be such a bad thing when they were, to no avail, in 2008. This has been quite the journey for McGrath and his young group but he doesn’t allow himself to indulge in the romance of it.

“There’s no satisfaction looking back and thinking ‘it’s been great, no matter what’. I haven’t allowed myself that. We’re only focused on Galway and getting the best out of ourselves. Success is often judged on trophies. I could be very coldly judged on two league finals, two Munster finals and if we lose Sunday, we’ve only won one trophy out of five. I’d accept that is the job of people to do. Real success for us on Sunday is arriving at the pitch of the game, the actual beat of the game, with real intensity and knowing our team is the now and in the zone and we take whatever comes after that. That’s our aim.”

To treat it like it’s all they have.

they should enjoy. Like the build-up to the final. Only Moran and Walsh have previous experiences of finals but McGrath’s not going to walk his players through everything, such as the presidential greeting.

“You get a reputation for detail and yet sometimes it’s a lack of detail that works. While the detail may come in terms of how we go about our business on the field, that mightn’t need to be the case off it. I would recall, for instance, when we were in our first county final in ’05 against Ballygunner. Eddie O’Connor was training us and the Sunday before, we had gone around in a mock parade and shook hands. It was the simulation of what would be coming in our first final the following week. We played really well in that final but were beaten by a brilliant Paul Flynnn point at the end. People were saying we have every aspect covered and they were accurate but it’s not something you can follow on with just because another crowd have done it previously.

“We’ll mention it but I’d like to think the group are able to deal with it. There’s lots of stories like Michael D (Higgins) or Mary McAleese going back to their seat and saying ‘I knew by talking to them that they were nervous’. I’m not sure psychologi-

cally how meeting the president on the red carpet will impact on the boys. How they deal with it won’t have any influence on how we play or otherwise. I think the fellas will be okay.”

McGrath would be loathe to think that his players mightn’t cherish the opportunity in front of them.

“There’s pomp and ceremony with the final and it’s a different set of circumstances. Us against the world, that siege mentality, works to a certain degree in certain scenarios, but it’s a final and it has to be enjoyed. They’re rooted in ordinariness and I think they’ve taken the example from Kilkenny. The greatest thing I ever saw coming out from Kilkenny was their willingness to move onto the next challenge and be as ordinary as you can be but not a false humility, which is something that isn’t attractive to people. I think that comes from their parents and their teachers and themselves.

“The advice we have given them in the run-up is to be themselves. So if they’re in a photograph with somebody down the town they haven’t lost the run of themselves — the reality is they’re just having a photograph with somebody.

“They’ll prepare well for the game no matter what.”

Waterford hurling manager Derek McGrath with his wife Sarah and sons Finn and Odhran. Sarah is unlikely to be in Croke Park tomorrow. Derek has pleaded with her to attend, but she says she doesn’t want to mess up a good thing.

Picture: Patrick Browne

For those players who wish to attend, there’s Mass in Enfield tomorrow at 9 and 11. As a lapsed Catholic himself, McGrath wouldn’t dare impose it on them but the message is “it won’t do us any harm”. He has spoken before about how his faith becomes more emphasised before matches. He will have said a few prayers to the Sacred Heart “never asking to win but be the best we can be. Tell Him ‘I’ll go to Mass Sunday’, don’t go subsequently. There’s an element of hypocrisy but you’re trying to do your best by everyone.”

In recent times, he’s become friendly with Mickey Harte, a man who openly speaks about the power of prayer and how it can work for teams. McGrath read his two autobiographies and was astounded by Harte’s perseverance and calmness. “I’d love to have his composure, being on the line and just folding his arms. I see elements of that in Micheál Donoghue as well. Mickey would have remarked to me that Garvaghey was really in place before they won an All-Ireland but once they got over the line it acted almost as a catalyst for everything to take off and the struc-

THE JOHN FOGARTY INTERVIEW



In February, Tipperary selector Shane Stapleton was concussed following a seemingly innocuous collision with Clare's Jamie Malone at Cusack Park in Ennis. The incident triggered a frightening chain reaction with seizures, hospitalisation, and being unable to work for almost a month. Now fully recovered, he tells his story

'If this is what rugby players go through, I don't know how they go back into contact'

Shane Stapleton would take you back there if he could but he is unable to do so. He has no memory of the incident that left him in hospital for a couple of days and kept him out of work for four weeks.

All the Tipperary selector can tell you about is the fright, not how his concussion and seizures spooked him but scared his wife Claire, their two girls and his parents.

When radio and social media reported on February 11 that he had collapsed after the collision with Clare's Jamie Malone, it sent shockwaves through his nearest and dearest.

The video of the moment makes it look a lot less serious than it was. So does Stapleton's reaction. After being pushed by Malone in the second half of the February 11's Division 2 game in Ennis, he was straight back on his feet. However soon after he was down on the ground again and urgent medical attention was required.

If ever there was a scenario of just how deceptive concussion can be then Stapleton's case was a textbook example. His head struck the concrete surface at the Ennis venue. His brother Micheál and friends in the stand saw the danger signs before Stapleton.

"They knew after I got up off the ground that there was something wrong with me when they saw I was taking verbal abuse from the Clare maor foirne and another official because I would never accept it normally. They were really worried when I went down again the second time."

That worry was shared by his fellow Golden-Killfeacle clubmates Shane O'Connell and Josh Keane who were playing that afternoon. Keeping their concentration on matters in hand was difficult when they looked to the sideline and realised Stapleton was in bad shape. He was moved to a medical room beside the dressing rooms where he experienced another seizure as an ambulance was called for.

"I had no history of it so it must have been whatever way the brain reacted to the trauma. The doctors thought my memory would come back when my brain got back to normal and the swelling went down but I still can't remember

anything about the incident at all."

Stapleton was eventually brought to Limerick's Mid Regional Hospital's critical decisions unit, a place he likens to "a hotel" such was the attention and treatment he received. He would remain there until the following Tuesday morning. But the recovery had only just begun.

Rest and tests were to be his routine for the next five weeks. Driving was ruled out, as was returning to work as a teacher in Fermoy's Coláiste an Chraoibhin. Though CT, MRI scans, and x-rays came back clear, he was under strict instructions to do as little as possible.

The grogginess eventually subsided but he couldn't take any chances. "The overwhelming problem for me was that it was really uncomfortable. I was in a neck

brace for a couple of days and I just couldn't turn in the bed.

"It was difficult now looking back on it. It was tough being out of work and tough being home with the girls and not being able to do anything. You know yourself, when you're used to meeting people and going to matches and whatever and then you're sidelined at home it's a big change. People were getting so-called cabin fever after two enforced days indoors during Storm Emma but I had five weeks on lockdown."

He reckoned he might be allowed to attend Tipperary's subsequent game against Meath but that request was given short shrift. "I thought I would just arrive on. It didn't have to be a selector's capacity but just to be around the dressing room. There wasn't a hope. I was still sleeping 16 to 18 hours a day. If this is what rugby players go through, I don't know how they go back into contact. I can't imagine how they do that."

He returned to work just before the

Easter break having been given the all-clear by his neurologist Dr Paul Crowley. His GP Iver Hanrahan, a fellow Golden man, has been a godsend. He would have always have huge appreciation for Tipperary team doctor John Hynes and physio Ian Dowling but as his first responders that day in Ennis his respect for them has soared. The understanding provided by Coláiste an Chraoibhin principal Christy Healy was exceptional also.

"He and the staff have been very supportive since they had all heard it in the media. They knew about it before I had to get onto them. I'm never out of work so I'm looking forward to the final school term. It's a great school, I get on well with the staff and students alike and you'd nearly miss the banter with them. There would be a really good relationship with them, especially being involved in the football and hurling teams in there. You'd miss the craic around the place.

"I also missed the first round of the intermediate club championship. I've played the previous 22 or 23 years for the club so I can't wait to get back playing this month."

But if there's a lesson he will take with him it's the experience his family endured. "I now see impact this has had on my family and at the end of the day family has to come first."

Clare's Jamie Malone in action last month. 'I'm glad he has moved on and is back playing so well for Clare,' says Shane Stapleton.

Picture: Matt Browne/Sportsfile



Stapleton knows he and his family weren't the only victims either. His memory of the moment may not exist but he knows Malone never meant to hurt him. The pair have been in touch a lot since the game.

"Jamie Malone has been a gent. I'm glad he has moved on and is back playing so well for Clare. We've been texting forward and back since. At no stage did anybody think it was done on purpose. If he caught me and brought me to the ground after the push there wouldn't have been anything more about it but, no, Jamie has been onto me. Colm Collins phoned and one of the stewards from Cusack Park even came into the hospital. It's been tough for all involved."

As if the injury wasn't bad enough, insult was added to it when Stapleton was subjected to criticism in Clare, blamed for



Malone's two-match suspension.

"I know we got bad press in Clare but we had nothing to do with the sending off or the suspension. Looking back at the video, no Tipp player or backroom member brought any attention to it. The linesman was beside it and called it and it was done and dusted.

"I guess I was unlucky in terms of timing at the moment because maor fairnes seem to be more high-profile figures recently with Dan (Shanahan) and The Rock (Diarmuid O'Sullivan) the past couple of years and Jayo (Sherlock) and (Tony) McEntee.

"Third parties who weren't there felt I went looking for trouble, but if you look at the video I was just standing there. It's not like the Jason Forde and Davy Fitz thing from last year, that's for sure. I was standing three yards behind the line even behind Liam (Kearns) and I just wasn't ready for the impact. I just couldn't brace myself for it."

Stapleton has kept a quiet profile in Kearns' management team so to see his name in headlines was uneasy for him. "I'm a fairly private fella. I've been with Tipp for the last six or seven years in different capacities and I didn't go into Tipp football for publicity. I went into learn and give a tiny bit back but this was the first time my name was out there and it was a bit embarrassing.

"People were coming into the house showing paper clippings and showing me that this fella said this and that online.

"I used to train the Fermoy footballers and the Kildorrery hurlers and I know a few of the lads from Mary I and they'd be talking about nice a fella Jamie Malone is. I was hoping he knew nobody in Tipp was blaming him or it was a personal

thing. It was just a freak result of the push but before people comment about any incident they might realise that they don't know how it can affect those involved."

Stapleton eventually returned to the sideline for the Cavan game and the re-fixed match against Down in Newry on Saturday having had to make do with following the wins over Meath and Louth on the wireless. That victory over Meath prompted an unusual reaction in him. "Maybe a side-effect of the concussion was emotions. I felt a small bit emotional when the final whistle came against Meath. I remember hearing (fellow selector) Paul Fitzgerald on Tipp FM on the Monday night afterwards and he namechecked me and said the win would have been nice for me. Jesus, I started weling up. That was kind of difficult. I was more used to it by the Louth match and they had played so well in the first half. It was great to see them bounce back after a really poor performance in Clare."

That Tipperary narrowly missed out on promotion to Division 1 was obviously a disappointment but hardly a crushing one. "We never spoke about going up or aimed to go up. It makes no difference to our plans. We had intended to win all our home matches and that was the only goal we spoke about. We knew we had a good away record. Cavan had been only our second away defeat in three years so we knew we'd pick points up away from home but we didn't know where.

"The lads have trained well, we won Division 3 last year and that really only

Tipperary selector Shane Stapleton was back patrolling the sidelines against Cavan and Down after suffering a concussion in a sideline fall against Clare.

Picture: Oliver McVeigh/Sportsfile

saved our blushes for the year after a poor performance against Cork and then against Armagh. We could look back and say, 'Well, at least we got out of the league'. We're going to be judged on Championship and if we could beat Waterford and have another good battle with Cork maybe Tipp people would say that's a good year and we can forget about the league.

"But I don't think people realise just how difficult the league is. You're trying to train really hard on a Tuesday and Thursday, trying to do a bit on the opposition and you're travelling up to Down and Cavan and it almost takes over the week. We have up to 13 lads in Dublin and I know it's first-world problems but it's not easy for them."

Football's relationship with hurling in Tipperary is healthier than it was and Stapleton believes the county's investment in the bigger ball game is now showing returns. "Liam and Michael Ryan also have a very good relationship. There's no hurling-football divide in terms of the two senior set-ups. We both know that people can go from one panel to the other and it just makes sense when they've come up through a dual structure since they were 14/15.

"Steven (O'Brien) and John Meagher have been making the headlines after coming over to the football panel but you've Bill Maher, Liam McGrath, Emmet Moloney and Josh Keane were dual players up all along. Then it goes the other way. We'd love to have Paudie Feehan, Paul Shanahan, Willie Connors, Paul Maher etc but you can only play 15.

"We've had a good pre-season. We were reasonably happy at this stage last year and then April went totally backwards for us because we couldn't get lads fit and we

picked up a knock after knock. We're going into this club month hoping that they come back to us in the shape they're in now other than Shane O'Connell and Philip Austin. It's going to be a tough month.

"Tipp are going to be the most affected county in the land because a lot are going to be playing four or five matches. It'll be interesting to see what Liam Kearns and Michael Ryan are saying in a month's time because it's going to be tough on all parties involved, including the clubs themselves."

Of course, two of Tipperary football's favourite sons are abroad: Former captain and 2016 All-Star nominee Peter Acheson working in Dubai and 2014 All-Star nominee Colin O'Riordan plying his trade with the Sydney Swans. Oh, to have them back.

"Achey was our leader," Stapleton states. "He still has huge influence on the group and he knows the door is always open for his return. There were even comments that if we got to Division 1 Achey would have to come home. It's all tongue-in-cheek but maybe he might collect Colin O'Riordan on the way back and bring a couple of new hips for Ciaran McDonald and we are sorted!"

"Seriously though, the lads would miss him (Acheson) even socially because he is such a good character. But when himself and (his girlfriend) Roisin are happy over there, it's hard to wish he was back. I think at some stage they will be home but maybe Tipp football mightn't be at that stage able to take advantage of it because the timing mightn't be right. Once the pair of them are happy over there, the lads are content and we all wish them well in their adventure."

You might even say it's been that for Stapleton this past while but he's certainly glad that his is over.