

## **Crossmolina to smash traditional barrier in battle of giants**

A Mayo and Galway head-to-head shootout at the final fence of the 2000 AIB Connacht Club senior football championship had been well predicted from the very start of the campaign, and so it has transpired.

And next Sunday's showdown between the Mayo champions and defending Connacht champions, Crossmolina, and Galway kingpins, Corofin, will almost certainly attract a bumper attendance to St. Tiernan's Park, Crossmolina.

Special parking arrangements will be put into place and an early arrival at the venue is advised.

The bookies have installed Crossmolina slight favourites to keep the title in Mayo for a second successive year, basically because they have home advantage and are rarely beaten on home soil.

Corofin, the 1998 All-Ireland club champions, booked their place in Sunday's decider with an unimpressive two points' win over Leitrim champions, Aughavas, at Carrick-on-Shannon last Sunday.

The last few weeks for Corofin, located seven miles on the Galway side of Tuam, have been hectic, having played three championship games over the last three Sundays &ndash; the county semi-final, county final and last Sunday's Connacht semi-final. All games were played in atrocious conditions so physical fatigue must be creeping into the legs of the Corofin player at this stage.

Last Sunday's semi-final over no-hopers Aughavas also came at a cost, as full-back Jason Killeen is unlikely to start on Sunday due to a recurring hamstring injury. The County player failed to see out the opening twelve minutes before limping off.

Killeen is just one of five Corofin players in John O'Mahony's county senior panel, Martin McNamara (goalkeeper), Ray Silke (centre-back), Kieran Fitzgerald (midfield) and Kieran Comer are the other four panelists.

It's a huge advantage to the defending champions that they will be entering the game fairly fresh and without injury worries. Their last three championship outings were played over a period of seven weeks.

Indeed the seriousness in which the Deel Rovers are approaching the game is reflected in the fact that five members &ndash; Tom Nallen, James Nallen, Michael Moyles, Kieran McDonald and Enda Lavelle &ndash; in the county panel withdrew from the county team for the trip to New York two weeks ago, and were also absentees for the league game against Fermanagh last Sunday at Enniskillen.

However, tradition favours Corofin's return to the top of the pile, as a Mayo club has yet to put titles back-to-back.

Claremorris, Garrymore, Knockmore, Castlebar and Ballina all failed to retain the honours in the past.

But in my estimation, this is a better Crossmolina team than last year, more mature and is bound to have learned much from last year's &endash; their first dip in the waters at this level &endash; adventure to the All-Ireland semi-final.

The defence is more solid and composed, while midfielder Michael Moyles appears to be back at his best form.

Up front, all six forwards &endash; Lavelle, McDonald, Gardiner, Loftus. McGuinness, and Leonard &endash; have the potential to destroy defences on their day.

The Mayo champions have also a number of experienced campaigners to call up from the bench, particularly Noel Convey and Liam Moffatt for any of the forward positions, Gabriel Walsh for midfield and Stephen Rochford for a defensive role.

Indeed all four players would make any club senior team in the county and this clearly reflects of depth of playing talent available to the team mentors, Thomas Jordan, Mick Moore and Padraic Syron.

Corofin, although retaining a number of the '98 All-Ireland winning squad, did not impress me last Sunday.

Corofin looked vulnerable on several occasions and were mostly dependent on the two left-wing defenders, John and James Lardner to keep the Aughavas attack at bay.

John was the Man of the Match in the county final last Sunday week, and James was my selection for the accolade at Carrick-on-Shannon last Sunday.

The biggest threat to the Crossmolina defence will come from left corner-forward Alan O'Donovan, who accounted for 1-4 of the side's 1-9 to 1-7 win over Aughavas.

His free-taking is exceptional and the champions' defence would be well advised not to conceded too many frees within forty metres from their posts.

Centre-forward David Morris, Derek Reily and the powerfully strong Kieran Comer at full-forward will also pose serious threats to the home defence if given the necessary acreage.

Kieran Fitzgerald can pose a certain amount of problems for James Nallen and Michael Moyles at midfield.

Overall, Crossmolina are a better balanced side and have, as I say, a set of forwards who should have the homeside ahead at the final whistle