

Crossmolina Expects

By: Padraig Burns

"A year on and the questions are being asked again of Crossmolina. Last year in the same stage of the competition against Na Fianna they just didn't perform. There is a determination within the set up not to allow the same thing happen again this year.

As half-back Francis Costello says, 'fellows hurt a lot last year because we just didn't play. It would have been easier to accept had we played well and lost but we didn't.'

And so to next Sunday. Crossmolina decided a week or so after their defeat in Longford last year that they would give it another go. There were things to prove.

But it nearly all went wrong very quickly for the Deel Rovers side. Their first outing against West Mayo was going the way of a peculiarly shaped pear until very late on when they turned it around.

The scare seemed to work. After that they more or less strolled through the championship, though Burrishoole did a lot better in the final than many thought they would.

The provincial championship was also won in some style and the performance against Corofin in the final was as clinical as it gets.

However, Costello again warns of the danger of reading too much into it. "We played well alright, but they were a tired team at the time, after playing so much football in a short period. It won't be like that next Sunday, you can be assured of that."

In preparation the Mayo champions have played a number of challenge games. They have tested themselves against county Under-21 teams and inter-county senior teams. Just a few weeks ago they played Clare in a specially arranged challenge game.

They even travelled to Enniskillen to play Fermanagh but the game had to be postponed due to a frozen pitch. But at least it gave them an opportunity to familiarise themselves with the surroundings.

On the injury front Crossmolina are confident that they will have a full complement to pick from even though there are minor doubts over Tom Nallen (arm) and Kieran McDonald (ankle).

Nallen had his arm in a sling at the weekend but that was more precautionary than anything else while the gifted McDonald is expected to shrug off his injury.

Crossmolina are going to need all their big guns firing on Sunday if they are to make it through to the All-Ireland Final on St. Patrick's Day. Bellaghy came through a tough Ulster campaign and they are notoriously difficult to beat. Former Sligo manager and current Donegal manager, Mickey Moran, has been coaching them all season and he is sure to have them in fine shape.

Needless to say, with Moran as coach, they do tend to play the short ball and like to hold on to possession. The word from within the camp is that they are weary of the challenge that will be posed by Crossmolina. But they feel that if they play to their strengths then they can advance. Those strengths are embodied in players such as David O'Neill; Kieran McNally; Joe Cassidy; John Mulholland and Karl Diamond.

They're going to make it very tough for the Deel Rovers, that can be taken as read, but there's something about the Mayo men this year that suggests that they will be planning a trip to Dublin in the middle of March.

The game will be live on TG4. The programme will start at 2.20p.m.