

Mayo men take it home at long last

II Ireland Club Final victory over Nemo Rangers as referee John Bannon blows.

Mark Gallagher

SUDDENLY, Connacht rules all things GAA. The poor relation in Gaelic games has just enjoyed one of the most successful weekends they could have hoped for. The two club champions and four teams in the league semi finals. Maybe, it is a coincidence or it could be a more bizarre development. What will the league success and that of Crossmolina mean six months down the line? Will all four teams in the All Ireland semi final be from the province? Will Roscommon and Leitrim duke it out for Sam Maguire on the final Sunday in September?

Of course, the fact that there are four Connacht teams in the league play offs may simply be a reflection of how far that competition has fallen. And it is difficult to imagine most Galway supporters, and followers of Mayo after Monday, won't greet the semi finals with the typical shrug the rest of the country has for it. The league will mean diddley squat to both of these counties, if they aren't in contention come August.

Mayo, especially, will have their appetites stimulated after Easter Monday. It will be fifty years this September since Sean Flanagan raised Sam above his head and the county revelled in footballing success.

Now, these proud and passionate people, raised on a diet of expecting their county to fail, have something else to celebrate. One group of Mayo footballers becoming kings again ensured those well meaning, but hackneyed, phrases were prised from the cupboard on Monday.

"This is the shot in the arm Mayo football needs" and "this will do a lot for football not only in Mayo, but in the whole of Connacht."

The same tired, old chatter was released when Ray Silke hoisted the Andy Merrigan cup three years ago. Six months later, it was Sam Maguire he was lifting.

The significance of Crossmolina's victory wasn't lost on James Nallen, either. "It was a truly great day," the powerhouse midfielder James Nallen said. "What Mayo football has lacked since the fifties has been some success at senior level. So, we can build on what we have achieved."

But, how much can their supporters expect the county to construct on what Crossmolina have founded. In the past twelve years, only three counties have followed the feat of their county champions and captured the All Ireland. Cork repeated what Nemo did in 1989, Dublin traced the footsteps of Kilmacud Crokes in 1995 and then, Ray Silke's double three years ago.

"Looking back to the effect Corofin had on us," Galway manager John O'Mahony recalls, "the biggest effect had to be the psychological effect. A Galway team winning finals at Croke park again showed people that it can be done. It is one thing saying you are going to win, another thing completely actually going out there and winning."

Mayo seemed to be affected more than most by this superstition they have not been meant to win All Irelands in Croke park.

Trace your finger back from Ballina a couple of years ago to those two All Irelands in the mid nineties to the demolition of Garrymore in the early eighties, their scrapbooks comprised only bad experiences. If anything, Crossmolina has shown the county how to win.

"That is going to be a big thing, that the jinx is dead," O'Mahony says. "The victory is going to be a spring in the step of every footballer in Mayo. It is a confidence booster, as Corofin was for Galway a few years ago. People now see the reality that there is no such things as hoodoos and it is all about how you play under the pressure."

Playing under pressure. For years, Mayo teams have played like they don't expect to win, even when, in 1996 and 1997, all logic dictated they should. Maybe now, with Kieran McDonald's sterling display and the way James Nallen lorded it in midfield, they have been shown how to take that final step.

"It will have implications for Mayo football. How much it will help them is hard to say," ex Mayo manager John Maughan says. "Whatever way you look at it, Galway remain the team to beat in Connacht. They have shown in the league, running up big scores against teams much more impressive than those Mayo have faced."

As a Crossmolina man, Maughan sat in Croke Park on Monday, a very proud man, particularly as somebody who has had to face criticism of Mayo teams being afraid to win All Irelands. "We got that a

lot in 96, but the way Cross won that match, playing with a swagger, showed tremendous character.” Sensibly, Maughan is not reading anything into the fact there are four Connacht teams in the league semi finals, “Tyrone played some great football and would have pushed Galway very hard, only they couldn’t play.” But, he does see a bright future for Mayo football, if he isn’t quite reaching for the shades yet.

“Mayo under 21s are in the All Ireland semi final, we have had some good minor teams in the past and Pat Holmes has done very well with a team still at a transitory stage. He has brought some young players in and they have settled quickly. The future looks good, but it always looks good in Mayo.” Only now, the path has been cleared by the McDonalds and Nallens of this world. Mayo teams, afraid to win on the really big day. That’s becoming as much of a fallacy as the weak state of Connacht football.

II Ireland Club Final victory over Nemo Rangers as referee John Bannon blows.

Mark Gallagher

SUDDENLY, Connacht rules all things GAA. The poor relation in Gaelic games has just enjoyed one of the most successful weekends they could have hoped for. The two club champions and four teams in the league semi finals. Maybe, it is a coincidence or it could be a more bizarre development.

What will the league success and that of Crossmolina mean six months down the line? Will all four teams in the All Ireland semi final be from the province? Will Roscommon and Leitrim duke it out for Sam Maguire on the final Sunday in September?

Of course, the fact that there are four Connacht teams in the league play offs may simply be a reflection of how far that competition has fallen. And it is difficult to imagine most Galway supporters, and followers of Mayo after Monday, won’t greet the semi finals with the typical shrug the rest of the country has for it. The league will mean diddley squat to both of these counties, if they aren’t in contention come August.

Mayo, especially, will have their appetites stimulated after Easter Monday. It will be fifty years this September since Sean Flanagan raised Sam above his head and the county revelled in footballing success.

Now, these proud and passionate people, raised on a diet of expecting their county to fail, have something else to celebrate. One group of Mayo footballers becoming kings again ensured those well meaning, but hackneyed, phrases were prised from the cupboard on Monday.

“This is the shot in the arm Mayo football needs” and “this will do a lot for football not only in Mayo, but in the whole of Connacht.”

The same tired, old chatter was released when Ray Silke hoisted the Andy Merrigan cup three years ago. Six months later, it was Sam Maguire he was lifting.

The significance of Crossmolina’s victory wasn’t lost on James Nallen, either. “It was a truly great day,” the powerhouse midfielder James Nallen said. “What Mayo football has lacked since the fifties has been some success at senior level. So, we can build on what we have achieved.”

But, how much can their supporters expect the county to construct on what Crossmolina have founded. In the past twelve years, only three counties have followed the feat of their county champions and captured the All Ireland. Cork repeated what Nemo did in 1989, Dublin traced the footsteps of Kilmacud Crokes in 1995 and then, Ray Silke’s double three years ago.

“Looking back to the effect Corofin had on us,” Galway manager John O’Mahony recalls, “the biggest effect had to be the psychological effect. A Galway team winning finals at Croke park again showed people that it can be done. It is one thing saying you are going to win, another thing completely actually going out there and winning.”

Mayo seemed to be affected more than most by this superstition they have not been meant to win All Irelands in Croke park.

Trace your finger back from Ballina a couple of years ago to those two All Irelands in the mid nineties to the demolition of Garrymore in the early eighties, their scrapbooks comprised only bad experiences. If anything, Crossmolina has shown the county how to win.

“That is going to be a big thing, that the jinx is dead,” O’Mahony says. “The victory is going to be a spring in the step of every footballer in Mayo. It is a confidence booster, as Corofin was for Galway a few years ago. People now see the reality that there is no such things as hoodoos and it is all about how you play under the pressure.”

Playing under pressure. For years, Mayo teams have played like they don't expect to win, even when, in 1996 and 1997, all logic dictated they should. Maybe now, with Kieran McDonald's sterling display and the way James Nallen lorded it in midfield, they have been shown how to take that final step. "It will have implications for Mayo football. How much it will help them is hard to say," ex Mayo manager John Maughan says. "Whatever way you look at it, Galway remain the team to beat in Connacht. They have shown in the league, running up big scores against teams much more impressive than those Mayo have faced."

As a Crossmolina man, Maughan sat in Croke Park on Monday, a very proud man, particularly as somebody who has had to face criticism of Mayo teams being afraid to win All Irelands. "We got that a lot in 96, but the way Cross won that match, playing with a swagger, showed tremendous character." Sensibly, Maughan is not reading anything into the fact there are four Connacht teams in the league semi finals, "Tyrone played some great football and would have pushed Galway very hard, only they couldn't play." But, he does see a bright future for Mayo football, if he isn't quite reaching for the shades yet.

"Mayo under 21s are in the All Ireland semi final, we have had some good minor teams in the past and Pat Holmes has done very well with a team still at a transitory stage. He has brought some young players in and they have settled quickly. The future looks good, but it always looks good in Mayo." Only now, the path has been cleared by the McDonalds and Nallens of this world. Mayo teams, afraid to win on the really big day. That's becoming as much of a fallacy as the weak state of Connacht football.