

All-Ireland Senior Hurling 2019

Brian Flannery Reports

So there you go Tipperary is the 2019 All-Ireland senior hurling champions. It is worth remembering that twelve months ago Tipperary failed to win a single game from four championship outings. What a difference a year makes! The return of Liam Sheedy as manager appears to have been the catalyst for a coming together of these Tipperary players in a singular desire to return the Premier to the summit of hurling. Sheedy earned his coaching and managerial spurs the hard way. His managerial career is however littered with success. Having been involved with the Tipperary intermediate team he struck gold with the 2006 Tipperary minor team guiding them to that season's All-Ireland. Having lost the 2008 All-Ireland senior semi-final to Waterford, Sheedy returned the following year to go one better in qualifying for the 2009 All-Ireland against rivals Kilkenny. While Tipperary lost that classic final they delivered a display that posted their potential for everyone to see. When Tipperary returned to the 2010 decider there was few surprised with their triumph after a Lar Corbett inspired victory.



Surprisingly Sheedy stepped away from the managerial arena after their 2010 victory. When Liam Sheedy indicated that he was willing to return to the fold for 2019 there was little time taken in appointing Sheedy back at the helm. Liam Cahill who himself has franked his credentials with minor and U-21 success must wait for a future vacancy. When you review Tipperary's victory over Wexford you can see All-Ireland winning credentials all over this performance. The greatest test of a team or an individual is its' ability to overcome adversity. Reduced to fourteen men after the dismissal of John McGrath and already trailing by five points it looked like Tipperary were about to exit the championship. This Tipperary had all the excuses in the world to leave this one go. They were a man down, five points down, had three legitimate goals disallowed and their opponents awarded a goal from what looked suspiciously like a square ball. But the Tipperary players said 'No', not today, not on our watch. Tipperary simply refused to lose. All-Ireland final day is a little different. Everything is multiplied by a factor of ten. Supporters from the traditional or 'lucky' counties have a routine. They travel up at the same time, they have the same parking spot and they will go to the same pub for the pre-match build up.

Last Sunday Galway won the minor contest in a canter, their third minor title in a row. A young Kilkenny side had no answer to the Tribesmen. By the time the senior final approaches the stadium is full to the rafters. When you look around the stands you can feel the energy from a ground heaving with anticipation. Now perhaps when they were rebuilding the gaff they might have put a roof on it. A couple of massive downpours had some fans scurrying for shelter. Retreating behind the stand to avoid the rain seemed a poor option to me. If you have spent €90 on a ticket and another €7 on a match programme you may as well tough it out and at least watch the bloody game. You can only get wet once and sure you'll dry off eventually.

Of course who you may end up sitting beside is a complete lottery. The guy next to me gave a good running commentary to all within earshot. At first I thought he must be talking to the person at his other side but soon realised that he wished to engage me in his ongoing match analysis. Needless to say after a mere ten minutes my fellow traveller would have at least half the Tipperary team substituted. Here one minute villain the next, that is fickleness of most fans in-game match analysis. The game won't be remembered as a classic. A slow start to the game by the eventual champions was quickened by the Niall O'Meara goal. The sending off which most some to agree was merited left Kilkenny undermanned in a game they couldn't afford to be. Tipperary possesses too many clever and accurate hurlers not to take advantage. For the record I believed Barry Heffernan was Man of the Match with Seamus Kennedy and Ronan Maher in close contention. Once again the Tipp supporting cast of Jake Morris, Willie Connors, Mark Kehoe and Ger Browne looked to have more to offer than their Black n'Amber clad opponents.

There was no way back here for Kilkenny and when the stewards were ordered to their 'End of Match' positions the game was already done. God winning is great. The scenes of jubilation were that of a team that had never won a title rather than one in their twenty eight successes. Watching players go to the side of the pitch to embrace family members and loved ones reminds one of the real meaning of success i.e. being able to enjoy it with those who helped you achieve it. The agony for the defeated must surely only be increased by the convention and etiquette of having to stay on the field to witness the winners celebrate, A truly hash and cruel tradition. A curtains are drawn on another intercounty hurling season. Lessons learned? Perhaps. The race for 2020 has already begun and let's hope it's a more competitive one for our local Déise hurlers.

My Team of the Year

1. Eoin Murphy (Kilkenny)
2. Cathal Barrett (Tipperary)
3. Liam Ryan (Wexford)
4. Richie English (Limerick)
5. Brendan Maher (Tipperary)
6. Ronan Maher (Tipperary)
7. Padraic Maher (Tipperary)
8. Noel McGrath (Tipperary)
9. Diarmuid O'Keeffe (Wexford)
10. Lee Chin (Wexford)
11. T.J. Reid (Kilkenny)
12. Peter Duggan (Clare)
13. Graeme Mulcahy (Limerick)
14. Seamus Callanan (Tipperary)
15. Patrick Horgan (Cork)

Hurler of the Year - Seamus Callanan (Tipperary)

Young Hurler of the Year- Adrian Mullen (Kilkenny)