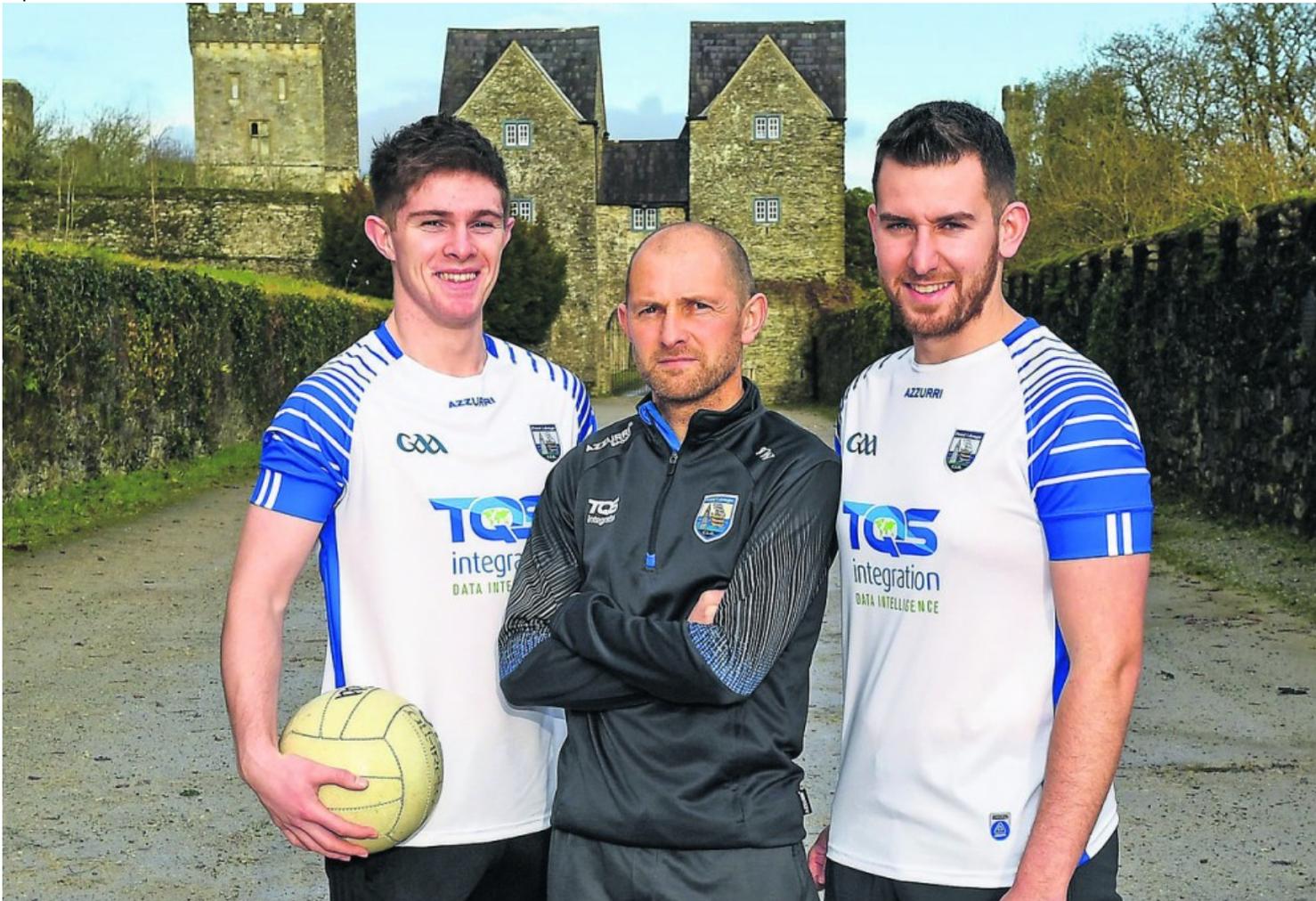


NATIONAL LEAGUES BEGIN

National Football League Waterford v Limerick

(Saturday, Fraher Field, 7pm)

We might be only three weeks into a new year, but the senior footballers of Waterford and Limerick clash for the second time in 2020 on Saturday evening next when they meet in the first round of games in the National Football League at Fraher Field. The sides clashed at the same venue in Waterford's first competitive outing of the year as they locked horns in the McGrath Cup.



Conor Murray, Benji Whelan and Paudie Hunt will be hoping to begin the National League campaign with a win. Photo: Matt Browne/Sportsfile

Limerick came to Dungarvan following their win over Clare and their 2-10 to 0-10 victory that night gave them a place in the final against Cork, a game which they won 0-20 to 0-16.

Just 187 patrons parted with their cash to see Limerick defeat Waterford although the hosts fought their way back into contention after Limerick raced into a 1-7 to 0-2 lead.

In the end it was the old adage that goals win games that proved correct once more.

Players like Danny Neville, Jamie Lee and Gerard Stack will be key to Limerick's scoring chances and if the Waterford backs can keep their chances down to a minimum as well as the chances that Lee will have from frees then you have to feel that

Waterford stand a very good chance of opening this year's league with a win.

Benji Whelan has a much different looking Waterford panel this year compared to what he used last year. Some experienced players have decided not to opt in this year, but they have been replaced by a number of very good up and coming players within the county.

While Waterford lost their two games against Limerick and Clare in the McGrath Cup, Benji Whelan got to see 23 of a panel of 31 in action for different lengths of time and there's no doubt that other players will have had a chance to impress the Kilmacthomas club man and his selection team.

When picking the team they are likely to go with a mix of the two sides which played in the McGrath Cup competition. Paudie Hunt, who made his debut as a late call up in last year's All-Ireland Qualifiers against Westmeath, is most likely to start between the posts, with the likes Stephen Curry, Darach Ó Cathasaigh, Dermot Ryan, Sean O'Donovan, Michael Kiely and Michael Curry set to feature in the back line. Brian Lynch and Jason Curry could well be in the middle of the field while in attack the likes of Jason Curry, Eoin O'Brien, Dylan Guiry, Donie Fitzgerald, Conor Murray, Darragh Corcoran and Fergal Ó Cuirrín could all be involved.

As was the case of last year, the league will be Waterford's priority in 2020 and if successful they will go into the new look second tier All-Ireland Championship in a very good position.

Waterford had a disastrous start to the league last year when they lost their first two games and while they recovered well after this, they had given themselves too much to do. If Waterford are to get out of this league this year a win on Saturday evening is a must as the side won't want to be playing catch up after the first round of games. Are Waterford good enough to win on Saturday evening? I would never bet against them to do so in the league when playing at Fraher Field.