

Eastern Intermediate Hurling Championship

Now that the hype and excitement associated with the All Ireland Hurling Final clash of last Sunday is over, it's straight away back to domestic endeavour this weekend, and what a mouth-watering double header is in store for hurling and football followers at Walsh Park on Friday evening (6.15).

This eagerly awaited affair was first scheduled for Saturday afternoon, but rescheduled at the request of one of the contestants. It's the plum pairing of the Intermediate championship match to date, with the winners becoming clear favourites not only to take Divisional honours but the county crown as well.

Ever since the beginning of the season most neutral opinion favoured both Portlaw and St Molleran's to be involved in the ultimate shake-up, and 44 matches later the situation hasn't changed one iota. Originally a total of fourteen teams set their sights of this most coveted title and an opportunity to be associated for the draw for the 2009 senior race.

The only team standing with an unblemished record, the Carrickbeg club have long been fancied to win this competition for the first time since 1970. While they've lived dangerously a few times during the course of the group stages their unbeaten record remained intact.

Their opening round match versus Ballygunner back in early May turned out to be a most bizarre affair, producing an abundance of score totalling totally thirty nine in all. Ballygunner conceded a staggering tally of six goals and twelve points, but registered a total of twenty one points by way of reply,

In round two St Molleran's came within a whisker of losing to Tramore in a Walsh Park thriller a month later, winning by the bare minimum. Subsequently Mollerans handed out a 4-20 to 0-6 trimming to Kill, before they'd a close shave in a marvellous match against St Saviours - a team they are likely to face in the Final should they beat Portlaw.

After a walkover from Ballydurn, their final group match versus De La Salle saw Mollerans win by six points. In the quarter finals in they found themselves pitted against a Dunhill outfit who had realistic hopes of going all the way. The game took place at McGinn Park, Ballygunner on one of the most atrocious evenings of a dismal summer with a late Alan Walsh goal proving decisive.

Progress

Operating in group B of the Intermediate championship, Portlaw, who relinquished their senior status three seasons ago, a year after they had decisively beaten Shamocks in the 2004 Intermediate Final, have been challenging strongly ever since.

This year, however, they haven't had matters all their own way and at one stage the fear was that they wouldn't make the knock-out phase. They lost their opening match to great rivals Clonea and later scraped a one-point win over a fancied Roanmore outfit. However, their round three defeat of Erins Own in mid June looked like being the straw to break the camel's back and with two crunch games to follow, Portlaw's prospects of reaching the quarter finals looked very glum. Yet they knuckled down admirably and while they had to pull out all the stops to account for both Dunhill and Mount Sion, it was an early August walkover from Ferrybank that eventually saw them through to the last eight.

There, Tramore took them to a replay, but Portlaw eventually got their act together, coming from behind to carve out a slender but deserved victory.

Quite a number of the Portlaw side have played senior for the club in the past, and as such will not be short the necessary experience to see them through, more especially if players of the calibre of Andrew Kirwan, Billy Laffan, Eoin and Frank Galvin, Freddie Kelly, Mark and Paul Power, Edmund Rockett, Darren Long and John Hartley play up to their full potential.