

Munster Championship's Allure Remains Firmly Intact



Waterford have nothing to fear when facing Cork again this Sunday at Semple Stadium.

Munster champions Limerick gave all and sundry a timely reminder as to why they carry such a prestigious mantle by beating Tipperary in Thurles for the first time since 1973.

Their manager TJ Ryan and now sole bainisteoir since Donal O'Grady's departure has consistently spoken all year about the fact that the reigning champions of any competition in any code should never be written off.

How true Mr Ryan, as the provincial title holders out hurled and out fought a disappointing Tipperary outfit.

Sunday's result in Semple Stadium was a victory for honesty and hard graft over prettiness and illusions, substance over appearance if you will. I really admire the commitment of the Limerick players who probably won't pick up All-Star awards but collectively the sum of the whole is much greater than the sum of the individuals.

Meanwhile, Tipperary are fast becoming the Arsenal of the hurling world, nice to look at but failing to get it done when it matters most.

Similar to the North London giants, Tipp manage to win a title once every decade but seem unable to build anything like a consistent era.

Players like Seamus Callanan, Noel McGrath and John 'Bubbles' O'Dwyer are all occasionally of All-Star quality but sure surely no team can accommodate all three at the same time – even Patrick 'Bonner' Maher can't carry that many 'fancy Dans' on his shoulders.

Bonnerm the Lorrha native and Army man is back to his marauding best but clearly needs help in order to resurrect Tipp's now diminishing All-Ireland challenge.

For those interested and for Eamon O'Shea (if you're listening Eamon!) may I suggest once young Colin O'Riordan from JK Brackens has finished his Leaving Cert that he's immediately parachuted into the Tipp panel to add at least a second ball winner to their forward line. O'Riordan was centre-forward on the Tipp minor hurling team last year, you may remember he caused our soon to be Celtic Cross winners a lot of problems in Waterford's opening round defeat to the Premier last April.

Surprisingly none of the Tipperary minor hurling All-Ireland winning team of 2012 has progressed to senior level to date.

There is a truism that it's only when you're gone that you're missed. How many love songs are devoted to the notion that it's only when you depart are you truly appreciated?

Too many perhaps as these types of odes invariably evoke as much pain as they though love but really in hindsight how good was Brendan Cummins for Tipperary? Tipp's current custodian Darren Gleeson has waited an eternity for Cummins to retire but now in his 30s himself, it seems his best days are behind him. Gleeson is a good club net minder and on occasions in the past there would have been murmurings that perhaps Cummins was slipping and it was time for change.

Yet with every passing game that Tipperary play Brendan Cummins lore grows just a little bit. As the song says you never know what you had til it's gone.

Anyway, away from Premier musings, it's back to Semple Stadium this Sunday for Waterford's replay with Cork and the usual narrative from the pundits is now firmly established.

Waterford, it is said, missed the boat last time out, Cork will never be as bad again, you only get one chance to beat a county like Cork, the extra game will do Cork good and various other claptrap from the great hurling sages that fill columns in the national papers.

Ok, so let's have a look at this in a bit more depth and avoid making any lazy or predictable assumptions that are so prevalent elsewhere. Firstly Cork can be as bad again. Again the assumption that Cork failed to win the last day because they played poorly is a veiled insult to the performance of Waterford and fails to acknowledge how well our guys played. Cork will have much the same individuals playing this Sunday as two weeks ago so of course they may be no better this time round.

The Cork backs are all good hurlers but they are not all good defenders and that is their biggest area of concern.

I would rate William Egan and Eoin Cadogan as better defenders and perhaps Jimmy Barry Murphy will make adjustments.



Colin Dunford has the pace to trouble Cork's defence again this Sunday.

With regard to the assumption that Waterford missed the boat and you only get one chance to beat Cork: have we forgotten so quickly that Waterford defeated Cork as recently as 2010 in the replayed Munster Final in Thurles?

Waterford have every reason to be confident about their chances of winning this Sunday. Derek McGrath should have a considerably stronger hand to play this Sunday with Shane O'Sullivan, Stephen Molumphy and Ryan Donnelly all likely to be available.

I expect Shane O'Sullivan will come straight in for the misfortunate and injured Eddie Barrett at centre field.

Shane Fives will be pushing hard for inclusion in the first XV and a reshuffle of the backline may see Tadhg Burke assigned to police the dangerous Alan Cadogan.

Expect few other changes in the line-up but Waterford will have more options from the bench this time round. The big gain for Waterford from the drawn game must surely be the confidence that such a performance provided.

I got the feeling that there was a slight deficit in belief last time out but each player will now know that they can win this game.

When on top, Waterford need to take their chances and make sure their dominance is adequately reflected on the scoreboard.

If they are on the back foot for a period they will need to find a way of getting a score or two to break Cork's momentum, they need a go to man to step forward during these periods.

We will need to run at what must be a nervous Cork defence, engage them and have them facing their own goals.

Players like Austin Gleeson, Colin Dunford, Brian O'Sullivan and Jake Dillon are ideally suited for this task and the likes of Ray Barry and Maurice Shanahan (if fit again) being good options to continue the task from the bench if the need arises.

There are no certainties in sport but this is likely to be the most open Championship for many years. Clare await the victors from next Sunday's trip to Tipp. Fortune favours the brave, there's nothing to fear for Waterford in Semple Stadium but we need to travel in numbers and become the 16th man for the white and blue.

It has been a difficult week for the Crystal city on the economic front but another honest performance from our hurlers will give us all a lift so let's help them a little and show our support by making the trip to Tipp if at possible.

So we're all geared up for another Munster Championship special and hopefully a step closer to a title win - one game at a time though. Best of luck, lads!