

Changing Manager is Not the Answer



“It’s horrible just thinking about the Carlow match,” admitted captain Shane Briggs.

Waterford senior football captain Shane Briggs has called on the County Board to re-appoint Niall Carew as manager for the 2015 League and Championship campaigns.

Speaking exclusively to The Munster Express on Wednesday last prior to his summer departure to the United States, Shane Briggs made his case for the Kildare man’s retention in the managerial hot seat.

“The days are gone now in Waterford, as it was when I started off, when guys could take training off every couple of weeks and not give the full commitment to the squad and in turn the manager, but still be in with a chance of making the team come the Championship,” said the Ballinacourty clubman.

Over a cup of tea in the relaxed surrounds of the Park Hotel, the Deise skipper continued: “As a squad, players aren’t willing to accept that kind of attitude anymore; you’d rather be in the trenches with players who perhaps aren’t as talented football wise but are a lot more committed to training and to their team mates.

“That’s a double-edged sword of course, because there are lads out there with talent who can’t make the commitment to the squad for a whole host of reasons, but Niall has looked for players to make a solid commitment, and we’re happy as players with his approach. And I think if you were to ask most players in the panel at the moment, that the vast majority of the lads I’ve spoken to since the Carlow match would like to see Niall given another term as manager.”

Reflecting on the qualifier defeat to Carlow, a team Waterford has enjoyed a decent record against in recent seasons, Shane admitted: “It’s horrible just thinking about it.”

He continued: "Last year's loss against Galway was terrible, but at least we'd played well against a relatively big enough name within football, but in Carlow the other day, we played so badly - it's galling because we know we're capable of so much more. But we know as players that we've no-one to blame but ourselves."

The captain agreed with Niall Carew's post-match sentiment that only six of the Deise's starting XV played up to scratch at Dr Cullen Park.

"Yeah, I'd have to go along with that." he said.

"Our fitness levels were fantastic; maybe we were lacking a bit of football nous. We've got a lot of young fellas in the panel now, players that haven't been exposed to inter-county football.

"From my own point of view, it must have taken me three to four years to get up to speed with the demands of the game at that level. A lot of the lads are students and I've no doubt they'll come back stronger, but they'll have to keep with it; if they don't it's going to be a waste of time for them...

"What really kills it is that we probably prepared better this year than we did last year and we got a good draw against Clare in the Munster Championship and, let's face it, a pretty good draw against Carlow in the qualifiers.

"Of course, you have to remember that last year we had Gary Hurney in the team, Andy Doyle from Stradbally was with us last season and he's been away this year too so that's a huge amount of experience and ability on the ball in Championship football we've lost in both Gary and Andy, and you can't buy experience like that, or instantly replace it for that matter.

"I think we've several players who are a year or two shy of that level of experience and that does count for something, particularly at intercounty level. Because Carlow were very physical the other day, they turned over an awful lot of ball and that was pretty much our downfall, when they turned over they broke quick, and got a good few points off us from those turnovers, and at our level of the game, that's criminal.



Niall Carew, whose term as Deise boss has officially concluded. It remains to be seen if the Kildare man shall be re-appointed to the post for 2015.

“We’d done an awful lot of gym work, but to really come up to speed from a physical perspective in Championship football, then you’re talking about building up strength and conditioning levels over six or seven years.”

Shane continued: “Take Donegal, for example. They must have been one of the most physically well-prepared sides when they won the All-Ireland a couple of years ago, but that team had been on the road for three to four years and then the following year, they were gone in terms of contending for the Sam Maguire. That shows how important is it for guys to stick with it.”

While Shane Briggs felt the panel prepared better for 2014 than the previous season, that unfortunately didn’t replicate itself in terms of both results and performances.

“Look, realistically, John Owens came in as manager and took on a team that was in its prime. Think about it: the team had Wayne Hennessy, Brian Wall, Gary Hurney, Mick Ahearne, Liam Ó Lonáin, lads in the prime of their careers, some of the best players to ever play football for Waterford. “But since Niall came in, there’s been a huge turnover of players, and a lot of younger players have been introduced into the group, and it takes time to integrate all those players when it comes to developing a bit of cohesion and consistency.

“And then you factor in the guys that couldn’t give the commitment that Niall was looking for, the commitment that’s required

nowadays at inter-county level. And that's been a bit of a problem too.

"Some of the younger players' endeavour has been fantastic, but some, and I say this with the greatest of respect to their clubs, are operating at junior or intermediate level, which makes the step-up to inter-county level an even greater challenge, and there's no doubting that.

"I mean, there's guys from my own club, playing Senior Football Championship level, that have taken a number of years to get up to the pace at inter-county level; as I said about myself it must have taken me three to four years to get to the point I needed to be.

"It takes time for players to bed in, and don't forget there's a massive step-up in turn from senior club football to inter-county football, which effectively means you're into heavy training from October each year to get where you feel you need to for the following summer."

Add in younger players yet to make the breakthrough from the extended panel, along with players who may fall out of consideration with the Deise senior hurling squad, and it's clear that Shane Briggs remains optimistic about Waterford's footballing future.

"The exposure to top class football probably isn't there for Waterford, but there are plenty of good footballers in Waterford. Plenty."

See the July 15 edition for the second part of our interview with Shane Briggs.