

Leading From The Front



Kevin Moran charges forward during the Waterford Crystal Cup meeting with Limerick IT.

| Photos: Noel Browne

Deise skipper Kevin Moran relishing his new challenge

The call to the captaincy wasn't one Kevin Moran was expecting. But when the question was put to him by Deise boss Derek McGrath to lead his county in League and Championship action this year, the De La Salle man didn't need to be asked twice.

"It hadn't been something I'd given all that much thought to, to be honest" he told The Munster Express ahead of Saturday's Division 1B opener, away to Limerick.

"I was only asked at the start of January; we'd been back together as a group for a decent stretch of time by then, and my mind was just on training, the same as all the other lads.

"But of course, to be asked to captain Waterford is a great honour for me. I was very happy to have been asked, I hope it's a role I can fill well, drawing on my past experiences and I'll be doing my best to set an example for the whole panel as captain while doing all I can to get my own game right as well. I'm really honoured to captain the team and I just hope it's going to be a good year for us. Someone has to be captain and it just happens to be me!"

The shadow boxing of recent months, much of it focused on the changes made to the senior hurling panel has subsided somewhat in recent weeks.

Of course, one suspects it may return to the discourse should a difficult looking trio of away League fixtures in Limerick, Wexford and Offaly not go Waterford's way, but right now, the focus is solely set on the Gaelic Grounds this Saturday night.

"It's hard to know right now how we're going to perform, but there's great confidence in the panel," said the new Deise skipper.

“Of course, replicating that hard work and the good work we’ve done on the field now has to translate into results is what it all comes down to, and we’re very aware of that.”

Moran added: “We’ve had two to three months of training to prepare for what, on paper, looks like being the toughest match in the League as far as we’re concerned.

“Limerick are one of the top two or three teams in the county right now; they won the Munster Championship two years ago, beat Tipp last year, narrowly lost the Munster Final and probably feel they left an All-Ireland semi-final behind them when they lost to Kilkenny. Kilmallock are into the All-Ireland Club Final (where they’ll face Andy Maloney’s Ballyhale) so it’s fair to say that hurling in Limerick is on a crest of a wave right now, and you can understand why. They’re up there right now, won the Waterford Crystal so they’re in good shape at the moment – they’re a serious team.”

Said Kevin: “We’ve been focused on February 14th in Limerick since the turn of the year. And you’ve got to look forward to games like Saturday night. It’s what all the hard nights over the winter are geared to; it’s what it’s all about.

“We’re under no illusions that it’s going to be a tough match, but there’s no form guide as such worth talking about when it comes to the two of us in a head to head situation over the last few years.

“We’re expecting a tough match; it’s rarely any other way any time you travel to Limerick, but we’re confident that we can go out and produce a good performance on Saturday, hopefully one that’ll be good enough to win the game for us and set a tone for the rest of the League campaign.”

Pre-season training, by Kevin Moran’s admission, went up a few notches this time around. “We’ve done huge amounts of training; more so than I’ve ever done. Now that’s not to say that we’ve done a massive amount of hurling.

“But we’ve worked very, very hard on our fitness since well before Christmas, and over the last few weeks, we’ve played a few more matches but you know, your hurling in winter is never as sharp as you’d like it to be, and that’s go for more than ourselves of course.

“Getting the bit of game time on top of all the conditioning work is important; it’s something Derek and the lads identified this as maybe not being as good as we’d have liked it to have been last year. But from that point of view, there’s a huge amount of confidence in the panel because we know we’ve put in a lot of hard work and psychologically that can only help.

“We played Clare on Saturday night, Tipp last week, Limerick IT and Limerick in the Waterford Crystal Cup and we’d the three matches before Christmas as well, and they’ve all been a big help in our preparations, no doubt about it. We’ve had the hurls back in the hand since January and we’ve been continuously improving since.”

The captain continued: “The year doesn’t be long going once the League is up and running. We’ve six or seven weeks on the trot ahead, hopefully. Then we’ve two or three weeks of a break where we’ll be back at the clubs, by which stage there’s a lot of work done, and I really think now, a week out from the start of the League, that we’re in a very healthy position.”

The infusion of youth into the squad is something Kevin Moran is enthused about, and he believes the young, potential match winners at Waterford’s disposal bode well for the challenges that lie ahead in 2015 – and beyond, for that matter.

“We may be a little less experienced than some other teams at this level right now, but we’ve been together as a group now

for a few months and I think we've gelled well as a panel," he said.

"Age is something you can get hung up on; it's only a number at the end of the day and while there's plenty of guys who are young in terms of age, they've a great deal of maturity and leadership which mightn't traditionally be associated with players that young, but we need that and it's great to have those type of characters and leaders in our panel."

Critically, many of those players are conditioned to winning, a facet which Kevin Moran conceded is "huge".

He added: "That can only help us; it's a big plus for the panel to have so many young players that have tasted All-Ireland success and beaten top teams; I mean that applies to Noel Connors, Philip Mahony and Padraic Mahony as well; we've got two generations of All-Ireland Colleges' winners in the panel now, and we have players who know what it's like to win an All-Ireland title in Croke Park, and hopefully that'll rub off on us all as a group.

"Because success for Waterford at senior level is something we all want. Success is badly needed in the county, it's badly wanted and it's something we all want."

A win in Limerick on Saturday night would be the ideal start for a new-look Deise side and its new skipper. We wish Kevin and his team mates well.