

## ALL-IRELAND CLUB INTERMEDIATE FOOTBALL FINAL

# Neighbouring rivalry is left aside ahead of final clash

Other clubs get behind Oughterard

DARA BRADLEY

OUGHTERARD GAA Club chairman, John Gillespie, attended a county football committee meeting last Thursday night, chaired by fellow clubmate, Kevin Clancy.

"There was as much talk about Oughterard as there was about Corofin - that'll give you a measure of where it's at," he said of the buzz surrounding Oughterard's biggest day.

"The amount of goodwill and good wishes, particularly Killannin and Moycullen people,

they've really rode in behind us. At times they'd be our deadliest enemy but they travelled to Kilmallock, and quite a few Corofin people travelled as well. The support from Moycullen and Killannin was unbelievable," said Gillespie.

The parish of Oughterard has obviously also backed this team, which is unbeaten in championship this season. And on the M18 motorway bus journey home from Limerick after defeating Templenoe in the semi-final, texts flooded-in from ex-pats living abroad planning trips home for the All-Ireland

final.

"We were getting messages of people booking flights home from America and London and everywhere - it's unreal stuff. Aunts and uncles, brothers and sisters, former players, guys that had to emigrate for economic reasons, or whatever. It's just brilliant stuff. It's just hard to believe," he said.

Gillespie is a club stalwart. A member of that strong Oughterard team of the 1980s, who lost a senior county semi-final replay against Mountbellew in '86 and again in '87, he and current manager Tommy Finnerty were



Dara Bradley of the Connacht Tribune interviewing Oughterard Club Chairman John Gillespie ahead of Saturday's All-Ireland club intermediate football final at Croke Park. PHOTO: SEAN LYDON.

selectors with Kevin Clancy in 2011.

Then he moved into administration - in its hour of need. "Five years ago, the club had financial difficulties, like every club. We put a team together that worked on the good work that had been done probably for the previous 20 years or more to try and bring the club up to date facilities wise, training wise, every sort of condition like that that you need to put in place to achieve this type of success," he said.

In 2019, his second year as chair, Oughterard minors won a

first ever county championship and the club's ladies team won a junior county title, with several players making the 'dream team' announced recently.

"The club is on a roll, it's on a bounce," said Gillespie, who added the club's vision for its Corrib Dale pitch, located on the right coming down Ardvarna Hill on the way into the village, includes floodlights and upgraded car park.

"And the achievements of the intermediates are inspiring a new generation, he said. "Our adult playing population is about 70. The intention is to put

in two junior adult teams this season. We would struggle at times to field teams at junior level but we have a very good juvenile system, and between the men and ladies, we fielded 17 teams last year.

"That takes a fair bit <None> of coaching, and organising. Intermediate being the flagship team, we put a lot of resources into it, but it's with a view to the juveniles looking up and seeing what they can aspire to in years to come and some of them are already really taken by these guys, they're heroes," added Gillespie.

## O'Sullivan took no persuading to become captain

DARA BRADLEY

OUGHTERARD intermediate footballers held more than 180 sessions together - training, matches, team meetings, recovery sessions and so on - over the past 12 months. Or as captain, Eddie O'Sullivan's better-half called it: "The amount of time you're away from your girlfriend in the year!"

He jests but there's truth in it; the commitment Oughterard players have made to reach an All-Ireland intermediate football final has been massive.

In early 2018, "it took no persuading" on the part of manager

Tommy Finnerty for O'Sullivan to take the captaincy. "I was more than happy to do it," said the 32-year-old full-back.

"I'd say Tommy might have been thinking (twice) about it again this year - whether I was up to it or not! At the start of 2019, we were doing ten 100-metre sprints, and I was doing well in the sprints, that might have got me over the line this year, because it was literally after the last sprint he came and asked me what my plan for the year was!

"In fairness to Tommy, he'd be cognisant that I'd be travelling a bit with work and he didn't want to put too much pressure on me



Oughterard captain Eddie O'Sullivan.

to make myself available. I suppose the captain has to be available to be at the majority if not all the training sessions," he

said.

Living in Claregalway, the business development manager in MCR Group, spends most working days in Dublin. And yet Finnerty will confirm O'Sullivan's attendance at the 180-plus sessions is second to none. Those sacrifices have reaped rewards. The semi-final victory in Kilmallock a fortnight ago, and the pitch invasion afterwards, is a highlight in a year full of highlights.

"It was brilliant. It's a cliché but that game took on a life of its own and the winning of it was an end in itself, and it was memories that you will keep forever. There're very few games you ex-

perience like that, where both teams go hard at it, no sweeper in sight, everyone going for the jugular, and it went to the end to win the game. For any club, the dream is to get to Croke Park. It's an old club, so for us to get there did result in emotion after, and it was a great experience to have forever," he said.

It'll be the man from Main Street's first Croke Park appearance, even though he twice captained Galway in an All-Ireland final including last year, during six seasons with the county's junior team.

"It was probably a blessing in disguise the last one wasn't in Croke Park because the cap-

taincy was put on me in the last minute, so I had enough nerves anyway without going to Croke Park. I wouldn't regularly have nerves, but the thought of doing a speech after. I'd no-one written down to even thank, which had me in a panic all day. I actually wouldn't normally have nerves because my job for Oughterard is to man-mark somebody.

"It's a fairly simple game when you man-mark someone, so you wouldn't get too nervous about it . . . you'd be well prepared to lead this team out, not that this team needs much leading. They're all well able to stand on their own two feet. Tommy has us well prepared," he added.

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best of luck in the All Ireland Final

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