

ALL-IRELAND CLUB INTERMEDIATE FOOTBALL FINAL

Young Monaghan boys vital to Oughterard's superb run

Brothers playing big part as Galway men go for glory

DARA BRADLEY

RYAN Monaghan, who turned 18 last November, might be the youngest player on the Oughterard team, but unusually, he's also the most experienced when it comes to playing at Croke Park.

A key member of the 2019 Galway minor football team, Monaghan starred twice at GAA HQ last summer; against Meath in the semi-final win and again in the agonising loss in the decider to Cork's late goal. "It's unbelievable up there, the dressing rooms are unreal, the whole atmosphere is class," he said of Croke.

Any tips for his teammates, who are Croke Park novices?

"Just think of it as another game. It's supposed to be enjoyed. The whole thing about football is it's supposed to be enjoyable, have fun and win. You don't want to think of it as a massive occasion. Just another game, go out and play your best and hopefully get the win," he said.

Sage advice. Hard to believe it's from a lad who will sit his Leaving Cert this June. But he's been showing leadership beyond his years all season.

Apart from one incident in the semi-final - "In the first minute I gave a shocking handpass. They almost got in (for a goal). I was crapping my pants!" he recalled - Ryan Monaghan looked like a seasoned campaigner, relishing the responsibility of marking one of Templeoe's quality forwards, captain Brian Crowley.

Some of that is attributable to the input of sports psychologist, Tony Óg Regan. "You have to be mentally prepared. You have to go in with the right mindset. We've been doing that all year. Even from the first champi-

onship game against Clifden we've been thinking about our preparation before the game. The week in advance, what are we going to do, what are we going to eat, how is our sleep, all these important things. We say that if we go out there with the right preparation, we'll do it," said Monaghan.

And it's worked. Whereas the likes of Ronan Molloy and PJ McGauley have had to wait 'til the latter stages of their playing careers to secure silverware, Monaghan didn't lose a club championship match in 2019. As well as a vital cog in the county and provincial intermediate triumphs, Monaghan also captained the club's history-making minor B team, which won a county title for the first time at that grade. "I guess I'm lucky! It's all on a plate for me, like. I'm so grateful. It's unreal," he said.



YOU'D SEE SOMEONE ON THE STREET, AND THEY'LL SAY 'GOOD LUCK THE NEXT DAY' AND YOU HAVEN'T A CLUE WHO THEY ARE

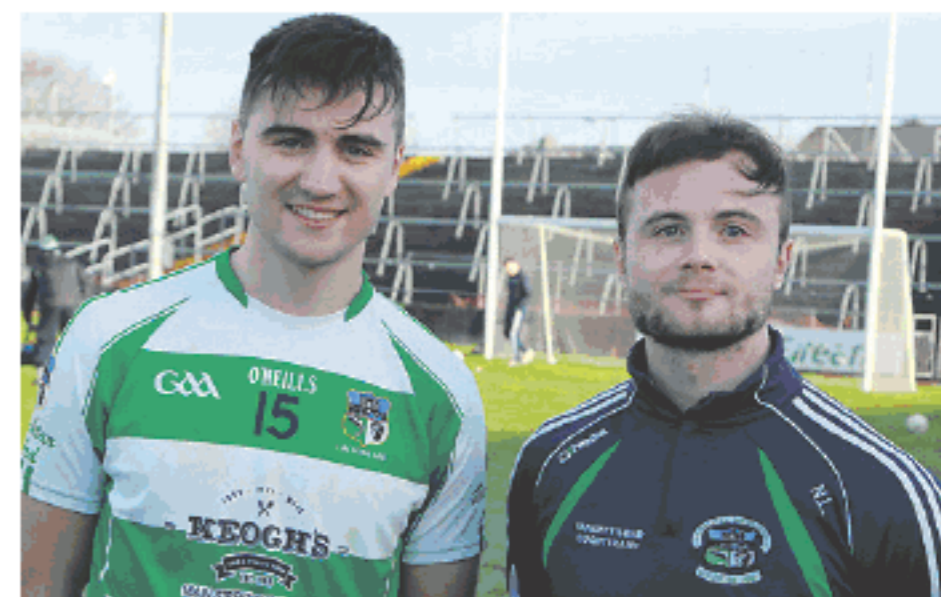
Not that that cuts the mustard with his mates in the local secondary school, St Paul's. "There's big hype in school. There'd be a good bit of slagging, 'you don't want to bottle it'. The lads are not afraid to give it to me! They're saying, 'you bottled the minor one, you don't want to bottle this one now like!' I guess there's a bit of pressure in that sense, but don't let that get to your head, and just go out there and perform.



Gearing up for Saturday's All-Ireland club intermediate football final at Croke Park are brothers Cian and Ryan Monaghan.



Brothers Patrick and Paul Walsh.



Brothers Eric and Niall Lee.

You have to just put it out of your head and hopefully win," added Ryan Monaghan.

Hype is something his older brother Cian (19), who he plays alongside in the half-back line, is having to adjust to as well. The senior of the Monaghan brothers from Cregg has enjoyed a fair bit of underage success through the years, including on teams coached by his father Terence, and Tommy Finnerty. But nothing compares to the excitement created in the aftermath of the semi-final in Kilmallock.

"It's brilliant. I don't even know at the moment, it's kind

of a dream. It's a joke. You're going through town and people are putting up flags and signs, and it's just unbelievable. Just after the final whistle, when the whole parish was on the pitch. Mad scenes. They invaded it. It was just unbelievable, people you would never see at a GAA game in their life and they were out saying 'congratulations'.

"You just got to take it in. Especially for a small country village like ours - we've got the backing of everyone. You'd see someone on the street, and they'll say 'good luck the next day' and you haven't a clue who they are! It's unbelievable," said

Cian Monaghan, a student of financial maths and economics at NUIG.

Like most of their Oughterard teammates, both Monaghans - in separate interviews - pinpoint a group game against Micheál Breathnach last August as the season's defining moment.

Trailing by nine points at one stage, and down by seven at half-time, Oughterard rallied in the second half to win by two. Forward Patrick Walsh's motivational half-time speech helped, said Cian Monaghan. "There was an inner belief in us. Paddy Walsh gave some inspi-

ration words. He just inspired a belief in us that day and we went out and turned that lead over. It was a massive win. We got an easier run to the final," he said.

Cian Monaghan was in Croke Park last Summer to witness his brother's contribution to the Tribesmen's effort. And this Saturday, he's relishing the prospect of lining-out with his brother on the GAA's hallowed turf. "It's a dream come true really, just to be going up to Croke Park and just to be walking out onto the pitch - I can't even put it into words, it's brilliant," he added.

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The very best of luck to all the Oughterard Team and Management in the All-Ireland Final.

Best of luck to all the players and management involved in the All-Ireland final on Saturday.

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