

ALL-IRELAND CLUB INTERMEDIATE FOOTBALL FINAL

Finnerty is aware that big hurdle has still to be jumped

Oughterard boss wary of Monaghan opponents

DARA BRADLEY

SEVENTEEN minutes into the second half of the All-Ireland intermediate club football semi-final, when Paul Walsh's goal put Oughterard 1-7 to 0-9 up against Templenoe, the message management on the sideline immediately filtered through to the players on the field, was very clear and concise. "Just two words - 'Croke Park'," recalled manager Tommy Finnerty.

"Croke Park is the theatre of dreams for every GAA player from once you put on your first pair of football boots playing under-6, 'til you hang them up. That's your dream to play there. Unfortunately, very few get that opportunity. That was the motivation that got us over the line for those last 10 or 15 minutes. We seemed to kick on once we

got the goal, it gave us huge confidence."

Finnerty knows what it's like to play at Croke Park - he won an All-Ireland minor medal for Galway there in 1986. The motivation for that came three years



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earlier, when he watched on television Matthew Tierney senior, father of current players Enda and Matthew, play in goals for the Galway minors.

"I remember seeing him on



The Oughterard intermediate football management team, from left: Dr. Peter Harte, Willie Moran, John Fleming, John Gillespie (Club Chairman), Tommy Finnerty (Manager), Liam Tierney, Aidan Fahy and Eugene Joyce. PHOTOS: SEAN LYDON.

the TV in 1983 and I said to myself 'God, wouldn't it be great to be on TV?' That was the dream when I was a 15-year-old. I think Matthew senior planted the seed for me personally," said Finnerty.

Since taking over the Oughterard intermediates two years ago, as manager he always believed they'd get to Croke Park. So much so that at the start of the 2019 campaign, Finnerty handed out the fixtures calendar for the year ahead, which had the All-Ireland pencilled in. Surely, for a team who were in a relegation play-off the previous season, such optimism was greeted with scepticism?

"There were one or two comments or jokes about it and I would just smile back. But in my mind, I felt it," he insisted.

"I suppose I was basing it on form and we were the only team that Spiddal failed to beat in last year's championship. And the fact that we were seven points up very late in the game (against An Spidéal) showed how good this team was potential-wise.

"So I was basing it on that and

I suppose above all I was basing it on the knowledge I have of the team because I had coached a lot of these players since they were under-8s and all the way up and I'd have coached every team in Oughterard from under-8s right through to now, a senior team. It's just the knowledge. After a while, you can weigh them up. You could nearly throw the whole 38 of them up in the air and you'd know what you had," said Finnerty.

Losing a big lead to An Spidéal that day in 2018, wasn't necessarily a bad thing in the long-run, he said.

"We were seven points up against Spiddal with seven minutes to go. Spiddal came back and drew the game and in hindsight maybe it was a good thing we didn't qualify out of our group last year because I think our guys had an extra year to prepare, they've got stronger and we've got one or two new additions into the panel as well. Certain things that you'd be working on, it gives you an extra 12 months to perfect them," he said.

Ask anyone in Oughterard



Brothers Neil and Donal Gibbons.

GAA and they'll tell you Finnerty is putting in 50, 60 and often 70 hours per week in preparing for the club's finest hour. He eats and sleeps Gaelic football; lives and breathes it, and will leave no stone unturned in his quest for All-Ireland glory. Finnerty is well aware, too, of the threat posed by their Ulster opponents.

"Under normal circumstances if you beat the raging hot favourites in a semi-final, you're installed as the favourites. But we're not and the reason we're not is because Magheraclone are a very good, seasoned senior team. In most

people's opinions, Magheraclone would in the top four to six senior clubs in Monaghan. I believe last year they just got caught out on a new points system that they just introduced in Monaghan whereby, as far as I know, the winning team gained five points for a league win if they played without their county players and they just got caught out on that.

"They were in the four previous county semi-finals and they were in county senior final in 2017. So, they're a very seasoned outfit, a very good team. We will have to be at our best to win," he said.

Best of Luck to Eddie and the Oughterard Team in the All Ireland Intermediate Club Final from all at MCR Group

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