

ALL-IRELAND CLUB INTERMEDIATE FOOTBALL FINAL

# Greatest ever day beckons for pioneering Oughterard

■ Finnerty's progressive squad on the brink of entering Gaelic football folklore

DARA BRADLEY

BY now, Patrick Walsh's dressing room 'if not now, when?' speech has secured its place in Oughterard GAA folklore. You may know the details but they're worth repeating.

On a wintery day last August, in the lashing rain at Moycullen, Micheál Breathnach were giving Oughterard a hiding. The difference at half-time was seven points but it could have been more.

Having drawn their first championship outing against Clifden, Oughterard needed a result to stay in contention in the 'group of death'. Up stepped attacker Walsh with a hair-raising rally the troops interval contribution. Others passionately had their say, too. And the rest is history - Oughterard outscored Breathnach's by 1-7 to 0-1 in the second half and won by two.

That comeback was the season's turning point; it instilled belief in the Connemara men who went on to claim county and provincial honours.

Now, they stand on the brink of history, one step away from the holy grail - an All-Ireland title. Oughterard, though, will need more than rousing speeches against the might of Monaghan's Magheraclone Mitchell's on Saturday at Croke Park (5.15pm).

The Galway and Connacht champions' 'never say die' attitude has helped them bounce back from seemingly insurmountable positions all year, and their superior fitness levels has earned the tag of a 'second half team' but give Magheraclone a seven-points head-start and, well, it's probably curtains.

Against Micheál Breathnach in the first drawn county final, Oughterard scored just three first-half points. They were ahead at half-time in the drawn replay, but only by a minimum having scored just 0-5.

It was midway through the second half before they got the upper-hand over Templenoe and they finished strongly in their two games in Connacht, too. Against Tulsk, in the semi-final, Oughterard enjoyed a final quarter burst that included 1-7 unanswered, and against The Neale of Mayo, they scored 1-8 in a devastating

22-minute period in the second half.

However, playing catch-up against what effectively is a senior club like Magheraclone, who have experienced heads all over the field, is a no-no. They'll be eager to hit the ground running; and they'll need to.

Against Templenoe in Kilmallock a fortnight ago, Oughterard's defence, especially half-backs, rightly received the plaudits for contributing to such a memorable victory.

Ronan Molloy was man-of-the-match but it could have just as easily gone to one of the Monaghan brothers, Cian and Ryan. Captain Eddie O'Sullivan made vital interventions in the full-back line, where Ciarán Hanley and Liam Moran also had big displays against a team that included four starters for Kerry in last year's All-Ireland final.



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Jordan Waller won the battle of the 'keepers with another clean sheet. Whereas his opposite number fluffed a pass that led to Paul Walsh's goal - a shot that Dan Cahalane should have kept out - Waller was solid like he has been all season. He has a calming influence, and the accuracy of Waller's restarts cannot be underestimated in the midfield battle for possession.

Enda Tierney put in a serious shift against Templenoe, and while his centrefield partner, PJ McGauley found the going heavy, his half-time replacement, Daniel Kenny was inspirational and is pushing for a starting place on Saturday. So too is versatile forward Cian Harte, who has been consistently reliable from the bench.

Ryan Monaghan (Galway minor), and Matthew Tierney, (Galway U20) are names recognisable to observers outside of



Oughterard defender Liam Moran, in action against Clan Hallissey of Templenoe, will be aiming to help shackle the Magheraclone attack in Saturday's All-Ireland club intermediate football final at Croke Park.

the county but the beauty of Oughterard is the collective - the team is greater than the sum of its parts.

The forwards need to improve, even though their endeavour in pressurising Templenoe's players trying to build attacks from deep set the tone for the overall defensive effort. Eric Lee worked hardest of all, and carried some amount of ball, but Patrick and Paul Walsh as well as Niall Lee and Brian Lambert brought energy too.

Matthew Tierney, their go-to

guy, had a relatively quiet day by his high standards but still emerged as top scorer, landing four points. His free-taking accuracy is priceless - twice he converted late frees to draw the county final and replay, before slotting home the penalty kick that eventually separated Oughterard and Micheál Breathnach.

O'Sullivan's man-marking job on Templenoe danger man, Stephen O'Sullivan, and the way he contained The Neale's Tommy Conroy, suggests he's

the obvious choice to marshal former inter-county star, Tommy Freeman but Magheraclone have several dangermen in need of close attention. Barry and Allan Kieran, and Ryan Farrelly all pose threats and midfielder Gavin Doogan knows where the posts are, too.

Magheraclone are best-known outside of Monaghan as the club with a pitch damaged by a sinkhole. Inside the county, they're known as serious contenders for senior honours. Though they were relegated to

intermediate in 2018, they won a senior county championship in 2004, and were senior runners-up in 2017. Neck-and-neck with Louth's Mattock Rangers, 0-7 apiece at half-time, they scored 17 second-half points to carry the day, 1-8 to 0-24. Both sides play conventional 15 on 15, without a sweeper, and a shoot-out could be on the cards.

■ Match odds: Magheraclone 10/11, draw 13/2, Oughterard 6/5  
Referee: Sean Laverty (Antrim)  
The game is live on TG4.

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