

GAA ALL-IRELAND INTERMEDIATE CLUB FOOTBALL CHAMPIONSHIP FINAL

O'Sullivan continues on a proud family tradition

By Billy Coss

TRACE back through the history of any Gaelic football or hurling club and the same surnames consistently reappear.

To say the O'Sullivans fit that bill in Oughterard would amount to quite the understatement. They've been enshrined in its fabric for generations and have also contributed handsomely to the county cause.

Brothers Dinny, Charlie, Tom and Eddie were all central to the club's first and last Galway Senior Football Championship title in 1938 when they defeated St Grellan's, Ballinasloe in the final.

Dinny was a pivotal player for Galway in their All-Ireland SFC victories in 1934 and '38, while Charlie was a sub in that latter success. Tom, meanwhile, would soldier in the maroon and white during leaner years in the 1940s.

Moving on into the 1970s



OUGHTERARD captain Eddie O'Sullivan, flanked by his father Kieran (right), accepts the Cotter Cup from fellow clubman and Football Committee chairman Kevin Clancy following their Galway Intermediate Championship win.

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and Kieran, Eddie's son, won an All-Ireland Minor Football Championship with Galway in 1976, shooting 1-3 in the

final against Cork. The lineage continues to this present day and Kieran's son, also named Eddie, is flying the family flag

and will lead Oughterard into battle at Croke Park.

Work entails extensive travelling and puts major demands on his time but, like his grandfather's generation and his own father, O'Sullivan is very fully committed to the county cause also. For six seasons divided into two stints, he was part of the Galway junior panel and last year was captain in their All-Ireland final defeat to Kerry.

For Oughterard, the 32-year-old has experienced the highs, lows and everything in between in the green and white for a decade and-a-half. In 2018 and '19, O'Sullivan was handed the captain's armband and has thrived on the responsibility as a tight, tenacious defender who is also no slouch in the attacking department when it comes to lifting the siege or taking the game to the opposition.

"You'd be well prepared to lead this team out, not that this team needs much

leading," explained Eddie. "They're all well able to stand on their own two feet. It's always a big honour to captain any team, let alone your club's first team. To be lucky enough to captain this team, it's just I'm extremely fortunate. Plenty of good captains, plenty of good players played over the past 16 seasons that didn't get anywhere or get any bit of luck, and we happened to get all the luck, especially against Templenoe."

It hasn't been without its bumps along the way but Oughterard have consistently shown that they're made of the right stuff. It was there for all to see in their clashes with Micheál Breathnach - both in their comeback in the group stage and in their penalty shootout victory after a replay in the Galway final - as well as against red-hot favourites Templenoe in their All-Ireland semi-final meeting.

"Micheál Breathnach have done more for us probably

that 50 or 60 training sessions. By putting us to the pin of our collar, in three different games - especially in that group game they had us beat out the gate - it had us very well prepared for what was coming down the line. If you can just stay in the game, and keep the numbers up front, don't fall too far behind the ball, you've always a great chance because you've a scoring threat.

"It's a cliché but that game with Templenoe took on a life of its own and the winning of it was an end in itself. It was memories that you will keep forever. There're very few games you experience like that, where both teams go hard at it, no sweeper in sight, and everyone is going for the jugular, and it went to the end to win the game. I suppose, for any club the dream is to get to Croke Park at some point. It's an old club, so for us to get there did result in the emotion after. It was a great experience to have forever."

Finnerty: 'That was my dream to manage this team'

By Billy Coss

HE won a Celtic Cross there as a Galway minor in 1986, and in more recent seasons travelled there as a member of Kevin Walsh's backroom. On Saturday evening, Tommy Finnerty will return to Croke Park as Oughterard manager for their All-Ireland Intermediate Club Football Championship final with Magheraclone Mitchells of Monaghan.

Herald Sport spoke with Finnerty about his side's campaign to date, their final opponents, his time with Galway and some special memories as an 18-year-old winning with his county.

ON REACHING CROKE PARK

Croke Park is the theatre of dreams for every GAA player from once you put on your first pair of football boots at under-6 till you hang them up. That's your dream to play there. Unfortunately, very few get that opportunity. Once we scored the goal to go 1-7 to 0-9 up on Templenoe in the semi-final, the message we got

onto the field to all our players was just two words: Croke Park.

That was the motivation that got us over the line for those last 10-15 minutes because we seemed to kick on once we got the goal, it gave us huge confidence.

ON DELIVERING ON THEIR POTENTIAL

Last year's form when you look at it, it was reasonably strong. We were the only team in Connacht that Spiddal did not beat. We were seven points up on Spiddal with seven minutes to go. Spiddal came back and drew the game that day 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.

ON THE NUMBER OF TRAINING SESSIONS

It was 174 at the AGM and

we're gone well over 180 now. Considering that we took a three-week break during the year and we had a couple of down weeks as well where we'd be taking it easy, so without doubt it's every second night. The players bought into it and they enjoy it. We try to vary it a bit.

ON SATURDAY'S OPPONENTS

They're a very good team. Under normal circumstances if you beat the raging hot favourites in a semi-final, you're installed as the favourites for the final. 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 be in the top 4-6 senior clubs in Monaghan.

ON HIS TIME WITH THE GALWAY BACKROOM

It was fantastic because I had five years with Kevin in Galway. I was driving the kit van for the first couple of years and then I was doing the free-taking coaching for 2-3 years. I would be collect-

ing Kevin, we live very near each other. I'd be collecting him first and I'd be dropping him off last. We had hours and hours and hours in the kit van and the topic was football. 90 per cent of the time the topic was football. Now, we had a lot of craic as well, but football was the main topic and it was a huge learning for me. To be honest, I was like a sponge for Oughterard because I knew that I was coming in managing the team. That was my dream to manage this team.

ON HIS MEMORIES OF 1986

Special time for any 18-year-old winning an All-Ireland minor title. I remember back in 1983 and Matthew Tierney senior, Matthew and Enda's dad, he was goalie for the Galway minors and I remember seeing him on the tv at that time and I said to myself 'God, wouldn't it be great to be on tv?' That was the dream at the time when I was a 15-year-old. I think Matthew senior planted the seed for me personally. I attended St Mary's College, Galway then and I was just very lucky in St Mary's when two of the Galway three

in-a-row team were there at the time in Bosco McDermott and Liam Sammon and we won a Colleges A against St Jarlath's which was a massive achievement. Those two men and Fr Barry Hogg put massive work into GAA in St Mary's. I was very lucky in my club I had so many great coaches like Pat Ferriter. Pat coached me all the way up from under-10s all the way up to senior in the club. Pat has

been ill recently and all in the club would like to wish him a speedy recovery.

OUGHTERARD manager Tommy Finnerty.

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