

SPORT

GAA ALL-IRELAND INTERMEDIATE CLUB FOOTBALL CHAMPIONSHIP FINAL

'The parish is the real winner'

• Finnerty praises Oughterard's band of brothers after victory

By Paul Keane

IN a game that ran beyond 66 minutes, it was clear from just before the hour mark that Oughterard weren't going to be caught at Croke Park. They finished strong, hitting the net, turning over kick-outs, sprinting past defenders and dominating possession during a 1-4 scoring burst between the 56th and 62nd minutes.

"You're always worried until the final whistle goes but we did have a bit to spare," said manager Tommy Finnerty. "Maybe with five minutes to go we knew we had it. For a manager, it's a dream when you have a bit to spare and you're practically pulling up with five minutes to go."

After all the training sessions, closing in on 200 at last count since the intermediate campaign began, it was a season's work paying out a rich dividend.

"We don't believe in taking a backwards step, we like going forward and we like playing football," said Finnerty, outlining the strategy that took them to glory.

When the Oughterard boss presented himself for interview afterwards, surrounded by local radio and print reporters, he looked entirely at home, like he was made for it. The good vibes were certainly strong.

"I'm so happy," he said. "I know Kevin O'Brien was happy winning the three in-a-row [with Corofin] but I cannot imagine he's as happy as I am."

It was satisfaction from a job well done and an elaborate plan that came together though in the hours before throw-in on Saturday, Finnerty did his best to distil his message right down to just one word.

"The big word we went with, just one word to simplify it for the team, was concentration," he said. "Because when you're in Croke Park, you've got to concentrate, the concentration levels have to be so high because as Kevin Walsh often said to the Galway lads, you run five to save 50. You can be running all day but if you're not concentrating, you lose the game."

"I was delighted with the performance. Coming up, the one thing I said to myself was,



JOY UNCONFINED: The victorious Oughterard players celebrate their All-Ireland Intermediate Club Football Championship final win over Magheraclone Mitchells of Monaghan at Croke Park on Saturday.

PHOTOS: RAMSEY CARDY | SPORTSFILE

'Once we put in a good performance, win or lose [I'll be happy]'. As a manager, there's a degree of satisfaction in that alone. But of course, the winner takes all and only one team can get their hands on the cup."

Some of Oughterard's players will undoubtedly be back to play again at Croke Park though they will never experience an occasion like this again.

"I'm just absolutely thrilled for Oughterard because the people really, really came out in force," said the manager. "For the last few weeks it was just unbelievable in the parish, everyone contributed. It was actually unbelievable. We had nine full busloads and a waiting list to come up. I'm just so proud of the parish, the parish is the real winner. We have the cup, but I think the parish is the real winner."

The open microphones presented Finnerty with a platform to stick it to the club's critics too, those in particular who had suggested Oughterard were highly unlikely to even win the semi-final against Templenoe, let alone the All-Ireland. The Kerry side had

county senior quartet Tadhg Morley, Gavin Crowley, Killian and Adrian Spillane in their ranks after all and, for many, they looked the best in the land at intermediate level.

"Well the best in the land is us," countered Finnerty. "I think it was lazy journalism by journalists to be honest with you, and by those that set the odds, because what I noticed was that all the talk was about the Spillanes and the Spillanes are only breaking into the Kerry team. They have a long way to go before they're like Pat, Tom or Mick."

Matthew Tierney Senior is another blast from the past, the former Oughterard and Galway underage player looking on proudly as his sons, Enda and Matthew, led the destruction of Magheraclone.

"I played an awful lot of football with Matthew Senior, he was a huge inspiration to me growing up, he was three or four years older than me and I used to look up to Matthew," said Finnerty.

"I still look up to Matthew because he's got a brilliant football brain. Often times I'd ring Matthew Senior, I'd bounce

things off him, I'd rate him that high, his opinion. Matthew is just a pure gentleman and I'm so thrilled for the Tierneys, for everyone on the team. We had seven sets of brothers out there, seven sets! And when brothers are fighting together it's hard to beat them."

A band of brothers indeed though there was more to it than just sheer character and bloody mindedness, as important as those attributes have been in a marathon campaign that ran throughout the worst months of the year. The stamp of class and quality was all over an Oughterard side that have no doubt inspired their local youth to aim high.

"We were up in the National School last

week, Micheál Ó Domhnaill, the principal, invited us up," said Finnerty, explaining how hands-on they've been in the locality.

"I don't think there'll be any homework for a while!"



CHAMPIONS: Oughterard manager Tommy Finnerty with Niall Lee.