

## GALWAY INTERMEDIATE FOOTBALL FINAL

# Despair of last year's Co final loss helping to drive Denvir on

■ Breathnach's star set for big day

STEPHEN GLENNON

MICHEAL Breathnach joint captain Sean Denvir is not likely to forget the pain of last year's county intermediate final replay defeat to An Spidéal. Every weekday morning, as he passes through An Spidéal on his way to work, it needles him.

In the immediate aftermath of his side's heart-breaking loss in the 2018 decider, the feeling of regret was worse; Denvir looking upon the flags and bunting flying proudly around An Spidéal as evidence of Micheal Breathnach's failure rather than as a monument to their neighbour's achievement.

"It was hard," admits former Galway senior forward, Denvir, who also lined out with Galway juniors in their run to the All-Ire-

land final earlier this summer. "Although I live in Galway, I teach in a local school (Náisiúnta Cholmcille), so I had to drive through An Spidéal all those mornings and see the flags out. That was difficult.



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"The first game, there was only the width of a post in it – so, we might have come through

– and then, the second game, we had an extra man for most of the game before it went to extra-time, and An Spidéal beat us.

"Looking back on that though, there are definitely things we can learn from it. We feel we are more experienced now, and hopefully we can take that experience into the Oughterard game, and hopefully we will have a positive result this year."

In other words, what doesn't kill, makes you stronger. "Yeah, it is one of those things," he says. "Hopefully we have learned for it and are better for it. Again, we came together in January looking for those little percentages that would take us that extra step. I feel we definitely have learned plenty from last year, and we are hoping to bring that into the final."



Micheal Breathnach's Sean Denvir who will be central to their hopes of going one step further than last year in Sunday's Intermediate football final.

Micheal Breathnach qualified for the knockout stages following victories over Kilkerrin/Clonberne and Clifden in the group stages. However, they did suffer defeat to Sunday's finalists in the second round, despite having led the tie by seven points at half-time.

"We just didn't perform in the second half. They came out (after the break) and in the first five minutes you could see that they were fighting for their season," says the 29-year-old, who is joint captain alongside Gearóid O Fátharta.

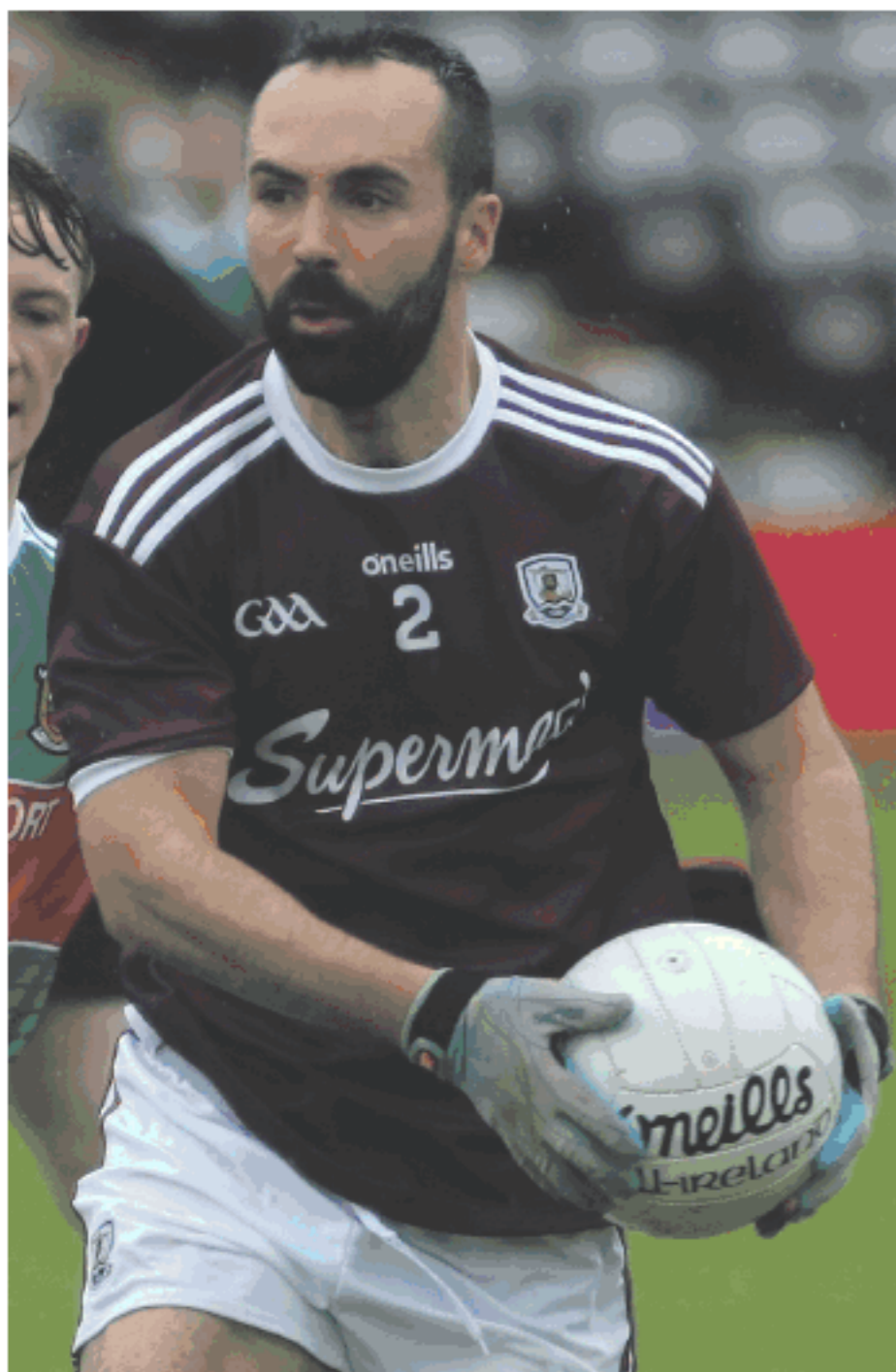
It was the second consecutive

year the two sides had met in the group stages – winning one and losing one – and Denvir highlights that in both years the two IFC finalists have come from their group, with An Spidéal qualifying for the decider last year and Oughterard this year. "So, it has probably stood to us having difficult groups."

With this being the third meeting between Micheal Breathnach and Oughterard, Denvir, who is also part of the club's junior hurling side pushing for honours at present, acknowledges they are no strangers to each other.

"They have super players. They also probably targeted this year, like ourselves, knowing there were two teams going up (to senior). They have super young lads coming through, the likes of Matthew Tierney, so we will have our hands full.

"That said, we are confident in ourselves, and our ability. Training went very well this week and we are hoping over the next few days we can brush up on a few more things and that we can be ready for the county final. Hopefully, we can have the cup coming home with us this time," he concludes.



Oughterard captain Eddie O'Sullivan in action for the Galway junior football team.

## Silverware would put the gloss on a great season – O'Sullivan

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ALTHOUGH Oughterard are delighted to have secured promotion to senior football for next season, captain Eddie O'Sullivan insists the primary goal – as with any team at the outset of the year – remains the same: to win the championship.

"It is great to get back up to senior, particularly after a 17-year absence, but this is still a huge game. Realistically, at the start of the year, you are setting out to win the intermediate county final. This is what we are gunning for, for want of a better word. So, we will try and see out the job now."

Given the manner of their knockout victories – they posted 3-15 and 3-18 against Caltra and Dunmore MacHales respectively – Oughterard are fully deserving of their place in the decider. They must be more than satisfied where their football is at.

"Yeah, we hit a rich vein of

form going forward into those two games," acknowledges O'Sullivan, "but I suppose, one thing we knew from the group games was that we were creating a lot of chances. Even against Clifden, we only managed nine points, but we had a lot of chances that day.

"Against Kilkerrin/Clonberne then, we scored 16 points, but we could have scored a bit more. When we came out of the group stages, we realised we weren't scoring goals and there was a bit more emphasis on trying to create goal chances instead of just scoring points. Thankfully, it worked out in those two games (quarter-final and semi-final)."

Qualifying for the final ahead of other leading contenders, including 2018 demoted senior sides Kilconly, Cortoon Shamrocks and Caltra, some may be surprised by Oughterard's progress. However, that should not be the case.

Last year, they drew with An Spidéal in the group stages –

they were the only team in Connacht not to lose to An Spidéal in championship action in 2018 – but exited the championship following a one-point defeat to Micheal Breathnach.

They made amends for that loss when reversing this result in the group stages this year, coming from seven points down at half-time to win by two. O'Sullivan admits it was a defining moment in their campaign. "In the first half, they literally had us beaten out the gate – they were waltzing home at half-time – but we said at half-time we just had to fight, minute by minute, and, luckily, it came right for us in the end, and we came out the winners by two points.

"There was a shift in focus that day, where we began to focus on the inputs rather than the outcome. Initially, in the group stages, you are thinking about winning the game. At half-time that day, the game seemed lost and we were going out of the championship. So, we

had nothing to lose.

"It was probably an easy moment to get everyone to switch their focus; instead of saying let's go out and win the game to a narrower focus of playing it minute by minute. I hate to say it, and use this phrase, but to focus on the process of what we were trying to do rather than focus on the scoreboard."

The shift in focus has certainly paid dividends and the 31-year-old defender, who is a contracts manager with the engineering division of the MCR Group, hopes it will now deliver their first piece of silverware at this level in almost two decades.

"The last time we won the intermediate championship was 2001, and we had a single year in senior in 2002," says the Galway junior footballer. "As I said, it is 17-years since we played at that level, whereas Breathnachs have a lot more recent experience. That might stand to them in the final, but hopefully our lads will continue to play the way they have been."