

# Breathnachs ready to atone for last year's final reversal

■ Gaeltacht outfit can expect a tough challenge from Oughterard

STEPHEN GLENNON

TWO of the big hitters of the 2019 county intermediate football championship – last year's finalists Micheal Breathnach and unbeaten Oughterard – will clash in what is sure to be a fascinating decider at Pearse Stadium on Sunday (3:45pm).

This will be the third meeting between the sides in the last two seasons, with Micheal Breathnach winning the 2018 group fixture by a point to put Oughterard out of the championship, before Oughterard defeated Micheal Breathnach by two points in this year's group encounter.

In truth, there seems little between the two and, while Oughterard will take huge confidence from their unbeaten run to date, Micheal Breathnach may just edge this one given their experience of last year's final – and replay – against winners An Spidéal.

Micheal Breathnach manager Frank Doherty admits that "to have come within a kick of the ball of winning the intermediate title last year" was difficult to take, but he praises the players for the manner in which they have responded to that setback in 2019.

"To be honest, it is a great testament to the players, I believe, that they have that character to come back and put two campaigns back-to-back. Last year, in the space of two weeks, we played in two county finals, with the second, the replay, going to extra-time.

"Now, here we are again this year, and it is really a great statement from the players – it shows their character – and that they are willing to work hard again this year, and keep pushing it all the time, and keep going. Obviously, we have got back to a final now and we are absolutely delighted."

Although Doherty's charges accounted for another championship contender, Kilkerrin/Clonberne, in the opening round, their subsequent defeat to Oughterard – on a 1-14 to 3-6 scoreline – left their title aspirations hanging in the balance. However, victory over Clifden in their final group tie secured them a place in the quarter-finals, where they faced Kilconly, a side Doherty had previously managed at senior level.

"I was involved two years ago with Kilconly when Kilconly

stayed up (in senior) by beating Micheal Breathnach in the relegation final. Then they meet again in the intermediate quarter-final! It was a funny, if not crazy scenario.

"I suppose, the other side of the coin was that I knew a fair bit about Kilconly going into that game, about the players they have, the dangermen they have, and how we had to react to that," states Doherty.

Although Micheal Breathnach trailed at half-time, 0-7 to 1-7, they kicked eight unanswered points after the break to take control of the contest before Dara MacGearailt rattled the net with three minutes to go to seal a 1-18 to 1-10 win. Kicking eight points from play, Rónán MacDonnacha was player of the match.

This set up a semi-final meeting against Cortoon Shamrocks, who, like Kilconly, had been relegated from senior in 2018. Again, it was another tough game, with 1-2 from Liam MacDonnacha the deciding factor in their 1-13 to 0-13 victory.

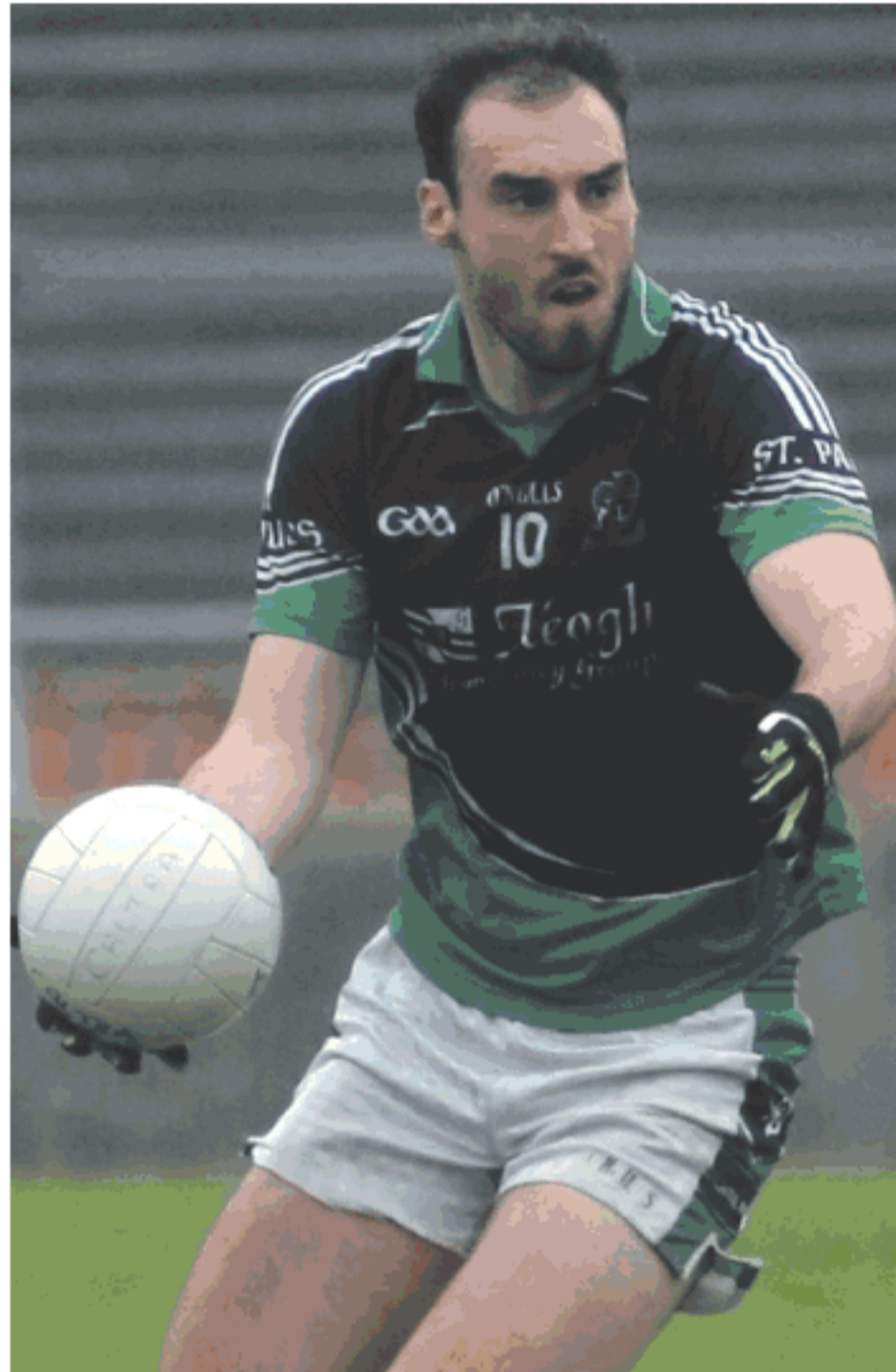
Doherty notes his side is now looking forward to the final against Oughterard, stressing that they will have it all to do to defeat a "serious" Oughterard outfit. "We beat them last year in the group by a point, knocking them out in the group stages, and then this year, they beat us. There is never much between us, to be honest.



**WE HAVE NO DOUBT THAT IT IS GOING TO BE A VERY CLOSE, HARD GAME, BUT WE WILL PREPARE AS BEST WE CAN**

"They have Enda Tierney, Matthew Tierney, and the two Lees (Eric and Niall); they have players that can hurt you. We saw what they did to Dunmore in their semi-final. They are a very, very good side. In my opinion, they have to be favourites now after the statement they put down against Dunmore."

However, Oughterard boss Tommy Finnerty scoffs the notion of his side being favourites. "In everyone's mind, those who know intermediate football, Breathnachs were the No.



Oughterard's Patrick Walsh who will be a key man in their attack in Sunday's Intermediate football final at Pearse Stadium.

1 team from the opening day of the championship, because of their track record and recent history. They went to a replay last year against An Spidéal in the final, having only come down from senior the year before."

That said, this did not phase Oughterard in their group meeting earlier this year. Having drawn with Clifden in their opening IFC game, Finnerty's men, who would also draw with Kilkerrin/Clonberne in their final group outing, defeated Micheal Breathnach, 1-14 to 3-6, in their second-round fixture. They did so by overturning a seven-point half-time deficit.

"That was really a game of two halves that day," recalls Finnerty. "Breathnach dominated the first half and we dominated the second half. There was nothing in it at the end – two points just – but it was great to get over the line. We really had to win that day, or else we were out.

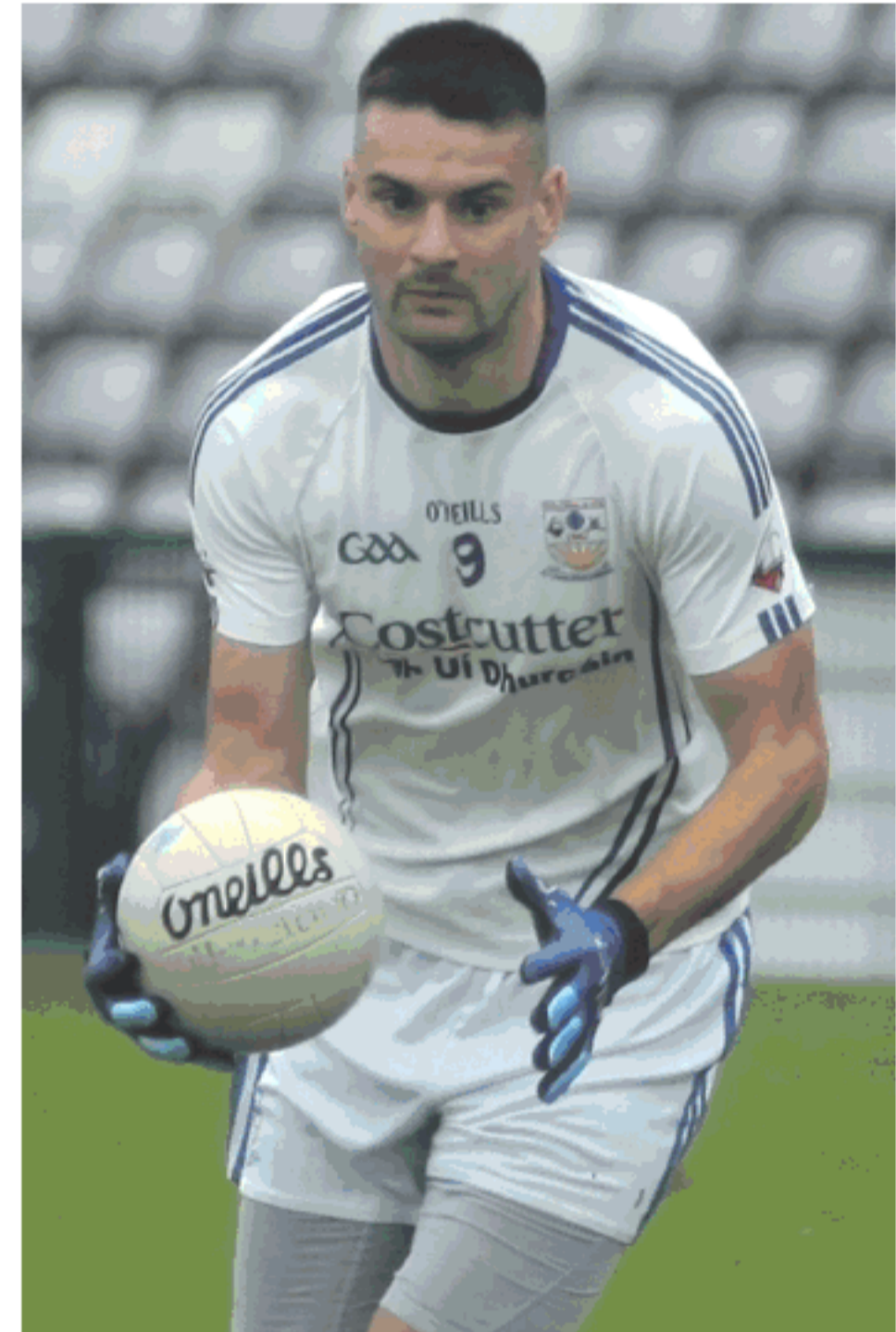
"We have such respect from Micheal Breathnach though. I don't think that win changed

the mindset, but it did make the lads believe that anything is possible. We were seven points down at half-time, 3-5 to 0-7 was the score, and in the second half we ended up winning by two points.

Although Oughterard's group games were tight, they have really opened up since they hit the knockouts. In the quarter-finals, they dismissed Caltra on a 3-15 to 3-6 scoreline – Cian Monaghan, Niall Lee and Patrick Walsh netting the goals – before they annihilated Dunmore MacHales, 3-18 to 0-6, in the semi-final.

The outstanding Matthew Tierney tallied 2-5 in that contest, 1-2 from dead balls, while Ryan Monaghan and Enda Tierney helped themselves to 1-1 and four points (two from play) respectively. Niall Lee (0-3) and Cian Monaghan (0-2) were also among Oughterard's eight scorers.

"We were expecting a very close game because Dunmore were the only intermediate side to have a 100% winning record, prior to that," says Finnerty. "There is no doubt we played



Micheal Breathnach's Tomas O Conghaille who will be hoping to give his team a midfield edge against Oughterard on Saturday.

well, but I suppose the win was a combination of us playing well and Dunmore having an off-day.

"We know it is a whole new ball game against Breathnachs. So, if you are able to compete with them, as we did in the group game, you are there or thereabouts. We have no doubt that it is going to be a very close, hard game, but we will prepare as best we can. Please God, on the day, we will get the bounce of the ball."

In truth, this game is a difficult one to call, as underlined by the two teams scoring averages. Oughterard, on average,

tally 1-16 and concede 1-9, while Micheal Breathnach average out with plus 2-12 and minus 1-11.

That would suggest Oughterard have an edge, but another stat not to be overlooked is that Micheal Breathnach have scored more goals (nine to Oughterard's seven) and conceded less (three to their opponent's six). As big as a goal is a championship game, it is bigger in a county final.

Ultimately, it may be the hurt of last year's disappointments that propel Michael Breathnach to victory. **Verdict:** Micheal Breathnach.

## PATHS TO THE FINAL

### OUGHTERARD

Group Rd. 1:	Oughterard 0-9,	Clifden 0-9
Group Rd. 2:	Oughterard 1-14,	Micheal Breathnach 3-6
Group Rd. 3:	Oughterard 0-16,	Kilkerrin/Clonberne 0-16
Quarter-Final:	Oughterard 3-15,	Caltra 3-6
Semi-Final:	Oughterard 3-18,	Dunmore MacHales 0-6

### MICHEAL BREATHNACH

Group Rd. 1:	Micheal Breathnach 2-11,	Kilkerrin/Clonberne 0-10
Group Rd. 2:	Micheal Breathnach 3-6,	Oughterard 1-14,
Group Rd. 3:	Micheal Breathnach 2-17,	Clifden 1-14
Quarter-Final:	Micheal Breathnach 1-18,	Kilconly 1-10
Semi-Final:	Micheal Breathnach 1-13,	Cortoon Shamrocks 0-13