

COMPETITION FOR PLACES DELIGHTS JOYCE AFTER GALWAY'S PROVINCIAL FINAL ROUT

PÁDRAIC Ó CIARDHA

WHILE Pádraic Joyce admitted he was probably "clutching at straws" as he pointed out some of the flaws in his team's performance in the 14 point win over Sligo in Sunday's Connacht final, the Galway manager wasn't short in his praise either.

Joyce suggested his side were "on a hiding to nothing" heading into the game as heavy favourites but was clearly pleased with his side's effort and application throughout, even when the game was long over as a contest. Joyce spoke in particular of his delight at seeing players throughout his squad looking to make an impression even when Galway were well ahead.

That competition to places extends to the goal-keeping position with Connor Gleeson preferred



Galway team manager Pádraic Joyce.

to Bernard Power for Sunday's final. The pair have

been switching in and out of the line up since the

final round of the league against Kerry and though Gleeson gave another assured performance, albeit under very little pressure, Joyce gave no impression that the competition for the No1 spot was settled heading into the All-Ireland series.

"We're not making our mind up [on Gleeson v Power]. We have two real top class keepers. I know it's a huge debate in Galway for some people but not for us. We had Connor in goal all year last year and, believe it or not, Connor twigged his back in the warm-up before the [All-Ireland] final last year so we're not going to leave ourselves short this year where, God forbid, Connor couldn't play the final last year and we'd have had to put in James Keane who hadn't kicked a ball all year," said Joyce.

"We're trying to get as

much game into guys as we can. There's no guarantee Connor will be in goal the next day. It's up to the way he trains the next two weeks. Both of them are good keepers. I don't mind who is in goal. We're in a situation where we have two really good keepers who we can trust and it's the same with other players."

One man who should be guaranteed a start against Tyrone is Matthew Tierney, who put in a Man of the Match performance in the half-forward line and put on a scoring clinic that even his manager would have been proud of.

"I constantly tell him he should be kicking 1-3 or 1-4, but 2-7 was phenomenal scoring. He could have had a third goal when he punched the ball over the bar. He's been one of our standout players so far... but I always tell these fellows that get these individ-

ual accolades that they should get it again in two weeks."

As dominant as the Galway performance against Sligo was on Sunday, Joyce is well aware that Galway will face an altogether different challenge when Tyrone come to Pearse Stadium on May 20th. "We know it's going to be a huge battle with them. It's going to be a different type of game than this," said the manager.

"We have a tough month ahead of us again, with Tyrone at home, Westmeath away and the losers of the Ulster final. They will be great games as well for us as management. I love these games where they are all different tactically. You learn a lot from them and realise where your squad is at and who's up for the challenge. I think we're in a good place, where we're at."

solid in defence as well.

As mentioned, Galway didn't get off to the best of starts on Sunday though you'd have to imagine they weren't helped by what must have been the slowest pre-match parade in the 135 year history of the Connacht championship. Any suggestion that the Castlebar Concert Band's snail-like pace around the pitch was an attempt to prolong local involvement in the final would only be mean-spirited, however.

Sligo, for their part, powered out of the blocks. Pat Spillane had them off the mark after just 20 seconds and Seán Carrabine doubled the lead with a free a



TIERNEY SHOWED HIS CONFIDENCE TO KNOCK OVER A TERRIFIC 35M SCORE WITHIN TEN SECONDS OF THE RESTART

minute later, the manner in which three Sligo players swarmed around Jack Glynn to force the free suggesting Galway wouldn't have it all their own way.

Dylan McHugh settled Galway with their first point after being set up by Rob Finnerty, who started in place of the injured Paul Conroy and though Darragh Cummins, who ended up with three points for Sligo, briefly reinstated their two point lead, Ian Burke grabbed one back for Galway before the Tribesmen hit the front.

John Daly and Damien Comer have so-often combined to create opportunities for Galway and that was the case again with the opening goal. Daly's ball over the top was judged to perfection as Comer got in behind Eddie McGuinness near the endline. Comer squared the ball to Tierney, who had three Sligo defenders converging on him but still managed to find a gap in the top corner to put Galway 1-2 to 0-3 ahead.

Three points in a row from Cillian McDaid, Shane Walsh and Tierney reinforced Galway's lead before Galway pounced on a Sligo mistake to put them all but out of reach after 23 minutes, Comer stealing possession from Finnan Cawley's poor crossfield kick before racing towards goal and picking out Tierney, who had charged up to the back post unmarked. Tierney rounded Daniel Lyons in goal before slotting home.

Further points from Shane Walsh and Ian Burke had Galway 2-7 to 0-5 ahead at half-time and though they lost Burke to a black card just before the break, it didn't seem to matter much.

Tierney showed his confidence to knock over a terrific 35m score within ten seconds of the restart and though Sligo replied with points from Niall Murphy and Seán Carrabine, Galway got the next four through Johnny Heaney, Cathal Sweeney, Tierney again, and the pick of the bunch from Peter Cooke, swinging one over with the outside of his boot from the right wing.

With a 2-12 to 0-6 lead at this stage, Galway slacked off in the



Galway's John Daly launching an attack against Sligo's Mikey Gordon in Sunday's Connacht Final.

ten minutes before the hour mark, allowing Sligo to kick four of the next five points, but the Tribesmen cruised home in style with Tierney (3), Seán Kelly, Johnny Heaney, Cathal Sweeney and Tomo Culhane all adding points in the final ten

minutes to ensure that the Nestor Cup was coming with them on the bus back to Galway.

Galway: C. Gleeson; J. McGrath, S. Kelly (0-1), J. Glynn; D. McHugh (0-1), J. Daly, C. McDaid (0-1); P. Cooke (0-1), J. Maher; M. Tierney 2-7 (0-1f, 0-145), S.

Walsh (0-2, both frees), J. Heaney (0-2); I. Burke (0-2), D. Comer, R. Finnerty. Subs: C. Sweeney (0-2) for Walsh (40 mins), D. Conneely for Finnerty (45 mins), C. Hennon for McDaid (48 mins), T. Culhane (0-1) for Comer (59 mins), P. Kelly for Maher (61 mins)
Sligo: D. Lyons; E. McGuinness, N. Mullen, E. Lyons; L. Towey, B. Cox, D.

Cummins (0-3); C. Lally, P. Kilcoyne (0-1); F. Cawley, P. McNamara, P. Spillane (0-1); K. Cawley, S. Carrabine (0-4, 2fs), N. Murphy (0-3, 1f, 145). Subs: M. Gordon for K. Cawley (41 mins), G. O'Kelly-Lynch for Lally (49 mins), P. O'Connor for Spillane (49 mins), M. Walsh for Cummins (53 mins), A. Reilly for F. Cawley (65 mins)
Referee: Brendan Cawley (Kildare).