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This Sporting Life

Galway vs Cork – quality football and great games down through the years

THE TRIBESMEN vs the Rebels! It sounds like the Tuatha de Danaan vs the Fir Bolg or the Ferocious O'Flaherties of Galway vs the Eoghanacht Kings of All Munster.

Galway-Cork rivalry in Gaelic football does not go back that far. Since 17-a-side was cut to 15-a-side from 1913, they've clashed 28 times in the National League and played ten Championship games, including two All-Ireland finals: 1956, won by Galway, and 1973, won by Cork.

The NFL score between these two counties is: Cork 16 Galway 8; draws 4.

It's 21 years since Galway and Cork were out of Division 1 of the League at the same time – or 1A as the premier division was called from 1998 to 2007. In the 1995-96 Division 2 campaign, Cork were promoted to the top division while Galway were stuck in Division 3, mid-table. They didn't get out of it until a new League format was introduced for the 1997-98 season, with Galway and Mayo placed in Group A along with Laois, Leitrim, Louth, Fermanagh, Carlow and, amazingly, Kilkenny. For the record, the Cats finished bottom of the table: played 7, lost 7. In Championship football Cork lead Galway 6-3, with one draw (1987).

They had played one League game (1941 Galway 1-12 Cork 2-2) before they met in the All-Ireland semi-final at Croke Park on August 12th 1945. It was widely felt, plausibly, that there was more at stake for the two teams than entry to the All-Ireland final. For Galway, after two brilliant victories in finals in the 1930s, against Dublin in 1934 and Kerry in '38, their ageing team lost three All-Ireland finals in a row (1940, '41, '42) and it would've massively boosted morale in the county if they could stop losing at Croke Park and, at the same time, match the high standards set by Roscommon in winning the Sam Maguire Cup in 1943 and retaining it in '44. A year later, Mayo scored a shock win over Roscommon in the Connacht Championship and then Galway knocked out Mayo in the Connacht final.

Cork had suffered in silence as their great Munster rivals Kerry celebrated the All-Ireland three-in-a-row of 1939 to '41. By 1945 the Rebels had gone 34 years without an All-Ireland victory. On top of that, dual star Jack Lynch, a future Taoiseach, had won All-Ireland senior hurling medals in the Cork four-in-a-row of 1941 to '44 and all Cork people were hoping and praying that he would make GAA history – the first player to win five All-Ireland senior medals in successive years. He went one better! After the defeat of Galway in the 1945 football semi-final (2-12 to 2-8) and victory over Cavan in the final, Jack was back at Croke Park in 1946 to win another All-Ireland hurling medal.

In early August 1945, the daily newspapers gave plenty of coverage to the big football game coming up on the second Sunday of the month, Galway vs Cork, but the front pages were all about the horror story in



JACK LYNCH, Cork hero in All-Ireland football and hurling finals in the 1940s.

Japan where, on August 6th, an American B-29 bomber dropped the world's first deployed atomic bomb over the city of Hiroshima, wiping out 90 per cent of the city and immediately killing 80,000 people. Three days later, a second B-29 dropped an atomic bomb on Nagasaki, killing an estimated 40,000 people. On August 15th, Emperor Hirohito of Japan announced his country's unconditional surrender: World War II was over; the Allies had accepted Germany's surrender on May 8th. The two bombings in Japan remain the only use of nuclear weapons for warfare in history.

Galway footballers next met Cork in the Championship in 1956, in the All-Ireland final, a mighty clash. The Sam Maguire Cup was taken to the West after Frank Stockwell scored two goals and five points, with his great friend Seán Purcell the chief playmaker and a third Tuam man, Jack Mangan, an inspirational captain. It appeared that Galway were well set to stay at the top for several years but in '57, playing Cork again, they suffered a shock one-point All-Ireland semi-final defeat.

At the same stage of the Championship in 1966, goalkeeper Johnny Geraghty from Kilkerrin heroically denied Cork's veteran full-forward Niall Fitzgerald two seemingly certain goals inside five minutes midway through the second half. Cyril Dunne got the Galway goal in a 1-11 to 1-9 win that set up the magical Three-in-a-Row.

Back came Cork seven years later; they had lost the 1956 final to Galway, the '57 final to Louth and the '67 final to Meath but in '73 they had a glory day when Billy Morgan received the Sam Maguire Cup after a 3-17 to 2-13 win over a gallant Galway team



TWO Galway stars of the present time who know how to beat Cork, Fiontán Ó Curraoin and Thomas Flynn, pictured on the day they won their second All-Ireland U-21 Championship medals, in 2013 at the Gaelic Grounds, Limerick. They were also the U-21 team's midfield pairing when Galway defeated Cork in the 2011 All-Ireland semi-final at Cusack Park, Ennis.

PHOTO: RAY RYAN



JOHNNY GERAGHTY came to Galway's rescue in the 1966 All-Ireland semi-final against Cork.

who had no complaints on the day. Four weeks after his 19th birthday, Jimmy Barry Murphy scored two goals for the winners.

Galway and Cork played highly entertaining football in '56 (final), '66 (semi-final) and '73 (final) and they turned it on again in the 1987 All-Ireland semi-final drawn game but Cork were well on top in the replay. It was Galway's turn in 2001, a Round 4 'back door' victory, 1-14 to 1-10, on the road to the second of the two 'Sams' won under the guidance of John O'Mahony, Steven Joyce and Peter Warren.

In the 2005 quarter-finals Cork defeated Galway by 2-14 to 2-11 despite brilliant displays by Pádraic Joyce (0-7) and Michael Meehan (2-2); and in the 2013 Round 4 qualifier it was Cork 1-17 Galway 1-16 ... and the memory of Michael Meehan's spectacular last-gasp goal from a 20-metre free, driven through a packed Cork goal-line.



CORK'S scoring ace in the 1973 All-Ireland SFC final: Jimmy Barry Murphy.