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Athletics

# Marathon man Pat Hooper will be missed but not forgotten

For the first time in 20 years the Dublin Marathon will take place without Pat as official race referee

Expand



Pat Hooper representing Ireland in the 1978 European Championship marathon in Prague. Photograph: Sportsfile/Connolly Collection

Gordon Manning

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It was just another of those humdrum lockdown days, grey and endless, all life suspended within a five-kilometre radius. Mick Clohisey was out for a stroll with his young son, Paul, when a notion grabbed him. He dug out his phone, scrolled through his contacts until it came to Jugger, and hit call.

“Howya, Mick,” answered Pat Hooper.

It was the spring of 2020 and the world was shut. Mick reckoned the isolation might be hitting Pat hard for he had always been stuck in the middle of some scheme or other, organising a race here, sorting out training there, whatever.

“I just got this urge to ring him,” recalls Mick. “We chatted away, he was happy I’d called. ‘Thanks for thinking of me,’ that kind of thing. I was delighted I did, because I don’t think I got to see him much in the months after.”

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That October, Pat Hooper, Irish Olympian, passed away. He was 68. On Sunday, for the first time in 20 years, the Dublin Marathon will take place without Pat as official race referee. It is the first in-person Dublin Marathon since 2019.

“He never tried to get out of doing it,” smiles his brother Dick, when asked if Pat enjoyed going out in the lead car. “I think he liked the whole presidential bit of it, waving to everybody!”

Dick won the first ever Dublin Marathon in 1980. For that maiden race there were just over 2,000 runners. There are 25,000 participants registered for Sunday's event.

Forever brothers, Pat and Dick were once also keen rivals. Dick won the national title in 1978, Pat won it in '79 – running his marathon personal best of 2:17:46. In 1980 the Hoopers made history, becoming the first brothers to run in the same Olympic Marathon. Dick finished 38th in Moscow, Pat 42nd.

Years later a video of the Moscow Games appeared in which the story of the trailblazing Hooper brothers featured. A camera crew had been deployed from Tokyo to cover the story of Japanese twin brothers running in the same marathon. But Japan boycotted the Olympics, and the filmmakers were already in situ. So, the history-making Hoopers went global and the wonderful grainy footage can still be viewed online. Only the narration is not Dick's voice, as it is portrayed, and he didn't pencil the prose either.

"Oh, that video," sighs Dick shaking his head. "And the real corny Mickaleen Irish accent."

Still, it is a valuable time capsule capturing a special moment of Irish sporting history.

Dick would go on to represent Ireland at two further Olympic Games, Los Angeles in 1984 and Seoul in 1988. He would also win the Dublin Marathon on two subsequent occasions, 1985 and 1986. For Pat, by the late 1980s a knee injury suffered during a road race in Czechoslovakia was starting to take its toll and eventually he needed to get a replacement.

So, with his running days over, Pat threw himself into Raheny Shamrock AC, and committed the rest of his life to the club absolutely, and athletics generally. He was an omnipresent figure on the Irish athletics circuit. And he ensured Raheny would be a club for everybody – it didn't matter whether you were a shooting star or a shuffling sloth, if you were out and moving that was good enough.

"That was his speciality, welcoming everybody. Running clubs might seem intimidating to people who have not always run, but that was one of his real qualities, his inclusiveness, he was so generous with his time," says Mick.

When Pat and Dick started running in the late 1960s, early 1970s, Raheny Shamrock's membership hovered precariously somewhere between 30-50. It is currently around 900.

"We'd wait until it was dark before we'd go out," recalls Dick. "We didn't want to be seen – you were thought to be crazy if you were out running on the roads."

There certainly was no tradition and culture of marathon running in the club before the Hoopers came along. But in 2016 Clohisey became Raheny's third Olympic Marathon runner. Dick was his coach.

Because of his knee problems Pat's preferred mode of transport became a bicycle and he was a quotidian sight cycling around St Anne's Park or along the coast road in Clontarf, always bedecked in a hi-vis vest. "Not that he cycled too fast," says Dick. "He was always kind of sauntering around."

Then, one unremarkable Thursday afternoon in October 2020, Dick himself was sauntering around when he stopped for a gander at the for-sale signs in the window of a local auctioneers.

'Are you thinking of moving house?' boomed a voice from over his shoulder. Dick spun around just as Pat was hopping down from his bike. They decided to walk and talk. So off they went, Pat and Dick Hooper, runners, Olympians, brothers.

"We had the most beautiful conversation, we touched on everything, family, running, Covid, everything, it was a lovely conversation," recalls Dick. "And I hadn't had a decent conversation with him in a long time."

"You know the way with brothers, somebody else is always around when you see each other and it just passes by, but it was just the two of us that day and we had that really lovely conversation."

After a little while Pat took leave to pick up a couple of things in a shop and they bid farewell the way brothers often do, "good luck, see you soon." The following afternoon Dick received a phone call – Pat had

passed away following a suspected heart attack.

“That walk with him did an awful lot for me, it sustained me, to be honest. And it’s funny, a lot of people have told me since that in those last couple of weeks before he died how they had met him and had great conversations with him. It was like he was doing a round of goodbyes.”

Mick still has the last text messages he exchanged with Pat, and Jugger remains in his list of contacts – it being the nickname Pat got from his distinctive running style and hulking frame that combined to see him move like a juggernaut.

“I got quite emotional when I heard the news,” says Mick. “It was hard to comprehend and it’s still hard to express how to feel, you still sense his presence around the place, you still expect to see him rolling in on his bike. I can hear his voice, that really deep distinctive, ‘howya, Mick.’”

Pat is buried in St Fintan’s cemetery, near the base of Carrickbrack Road in Sutton, a sweeping ascent that winds all the way up to Howth Head. It is a tortuous running route that was much-loved by Pat for his own training. Up and down the summit he would go, like a relentless bearded yo-yo pounding off the tarmac. Fittingly, he now gets to watch over the hill forever more.

“If I’m ever doing training runs up Howth I’d give a nod over towards Pat in St Fintan’s,” says Mick. “You couldn’t put a figure on the number of times he would have run up that hill – it was his staple, the Hill of Howth.

“I think he said to me once about something he had inscribed on his bedpost, ‘Get up out of bed, you lazy sod.’ It was to remind him to get out and do the miles, and he would have done so many of those grinding up that hill.”

Dick continues to run daily, usually clocking in around 10km “just to keep ticking over”. And he’s out five days a week coaching the next generation too. “It’s no hardship,” he smiles. “I love it. We both always loved the club – we’ve spent our lives in it.”

Raheny Shamrock AC recently ordered new singlets and many of the club’s athletes will be wearing them in Sunday’s marathon. But many will also be running in their old ones, because Pat had handed them over, often rustling them out from the boot of his car after a training session while using the amber beam of a street light to differentiate sizes. And to get your singlet from Pat meant something. It meant everything.

Today the organisers of the Dublin Marathon will make a special presentation to the Hooper family in recognition of Pat’s contribution over the years.

Dick Hooper, the man who won the first Dublin Marathon, will be back on the course on Sunday, the three-time winner has been organising stewards at the event for as long as his brother was race referee.

And Mick Clohisey, who was the first Irish runner home in the Dublin Marathon of 2018, will be on the start line once again for his hometown marathon. “It will be strange with Pat not being there,” says Mick. “He has been missed around the place over the last few years and he’ll be missed on the day of the marathon.”

But not forgotten. Never forgotten. And in his own way Pat Hooper will be present too.



[Gordon Manning](#)

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## Allianz Football League Division Two – Cork v Dublin

## ‘I think about him every day, he’ll be on the front of my mind on Sunday’



Gordon Manning

Cork and Dublin met in the All-Ireland semi-final replay at Páirc Uí Chaoimh 40 years ago, the day Tom Creedon passed away

Colman Corrigan frequently heads out the Killarney Road to the cemetery in Macroom. One of the gravesides he visits is up in the corner, top of the left. That’s where Tom Creedon rests.

Forty years gone. But never forgotten. Tomorrow, Corrigan will meet up with several of his former Cork comrades – Dinny Allen, Jimmy Kerrigan, Barry Coffey, et al. Occasionally they’ll grab a pint beforehand. Either way, they’ll be sure to have one after, a chance to give their tuppence worth on Cork football, but mostly because of the unspoken fulfilment it brings to simply be in each other’s company. Not old, just older. A critics collective.

But when Dublin come to the Páirc, well it cuts differently. Because of 1983, and all that. Corrigan was midfield in that iconic All-Ireland semi-final replay at Páirc Uí Chaoimh 40 years ago.

Dublin ran out 4-15 to 2-10 winners, but Cork lost more than a football game that day. Just hours after the final whistle, news filtered through that their team-mate, Tom Creedon, had died. He was just 28.

“We were well beaten by Dublin, everybody was disappointed, then later that night we heard about Tom,” recalls Corrigan.

Tom won an All-Ireland minor title with Cork in 1972 and made his senior debut in 1975. He was ever present from then until his passing, playing in nine senior Munster finals (including two replays) but coming up short against the great Kerry team of that era. He won a National League in 1980.

Tom featured in the league during the spring of 1983 and would have played in the championship that summer too, but on May 14th he was left in a coma following injuries suffered in an accident during which he saved his young son’s life.

## Young family

Tom Creedon junior was just 19 months old when his Dad took him out for the day to give Marion a break for a few hours. The young family lived in Ennis at the time, Tom was working at Moneypoint.

So, father and son headed to Tom junior’s grandmother’s house in Cork City to deliver furniture. With the baby in the cab of the van, Tom senior started lugging the furniture out when the handbrake went and the vehicle started rolling down the hill. Tom jumped behind the van, but in his attempt to stop it he got dragged under, though his intervention altered the course of the van and rather than rushing down the hill it instead hit a nearby wall.

“He died saving my life,” says Tom junior.

At the foot of the tump that day was a boy kicking a ball around. That kid would later win 27 caps playing rugby for Ireland.

“David Corkery was at the bottom of the hill,” says Tom. “I spoke with David about this recently. If the van had got to the bottom of the hill, there was a significant drop to a garden below. The direction of the wheels changed by Dad trying to stop the van.”

Tom senior spent the next 15 weeks in a coma at Cork University Hospital.

“It became apparent very early on that he was in serious trouble,” recalls Corrigan.

Those who played with Tom reckon his best position was centre back, but he also played corner back. In the 1980 league final he operated at midfield – scoring a point.

Séamus O’Sullivan first met Tom at Coláiste Iosáigáin. They both went on to study civil engineering and for many years they toggled out together for Cork, including the 1972 minor final and 1980 league decider.

“I would have classified him as one of my best friends,” says O’Sullivan.

“He was a real leader and well able to mo-



ivate people. He was ahead of his time, going to the gym when he was 18, 19. He was very dedicated, very committed. Outside of football, he was such a genuine person, a family man who was well respected by everybody.”

Creedon captained Macroom to the Cork intermediate title in 1982. Corrigan, who went on to win two All-Irelands with Cork, was part of that great Macroom side. But Creedon was the glue.

“People might have different interpretations of Tom’s skill level, but everybody agreed on his leadership qualities,” says Corrigan. “For that team in 1982, he was the leader of the pack.”

Whatever void Tom’s passing created in the Cork dressingroom, it was nothing compared to the hole it left in the lives of his wife and son.

“No good came out of my Dad dying,” says Tom junior. “I often think, from some of the worst things imaginable, some engineering advances or something might come about. But my Dad dying, no, there was nothing good from it, literally no good.”

Tom, Marion and the Macroom GAA club have ensured he is remembered.

In 2020, Tom established Masseytown Rotisserie Deli on Paul Street in Cork City. The name is a nod to his Dad, Masseytown was the area of Macroom where he was reared.

“Calling it Masseytown was a personal thing, it wasn’t so much for anybody else, it was for myself,” Tom adds.

He sources many of his ingredients from the Macroom region, trying to use suppliers from the community if possible. His Dad’s name is brought up regularly by customers.

“All the time,” he says. “It’s nice to hear the stories, but I suppose as I’ve got older I’ve started to appreciate more that he was my Dad, he wasn’t just this guy everybody knew because he was a footballer, he was my pops.”

## Surrounded by love

The years after the accident were difficult for the family but Tom mostly recalls being surrounded by love and how his grandad stepped up as a father figure. Nine years after the accident Marion found love again and married Cormac Hegarty.

“He’s a really great guy, he adores her and they are still madly in love,” says Tom. “After the accident she was a young single mom who had lost her husband and had a baby to look after, that was tough, but she was brilliant through everything, so it was great she met Cormac.”

Marion Creedon Hegarty is now a suc-

cessful entrepreneur in the image consultancy business, excelling in the arena of cosmetics, fashion and accessories.

In February 1983, Cork played Dublin in a league match at Croke Park, during which Tom featured off the bench. In between the league and championship, the accident occurred.

On August 28th, the morning of the All-Ireland SFC replay against Dublin, O’Sullivan – who by then was no longer on the Cork panel – travelled from Limerick to take in the encounter as a spectator. But he left home early to first stop off at CUH.

“I went in on the morning of that match to see him. Because I was living in Limerick at the time, whenever I was back in Cork I’d make sure to go visit. So I went in that morning before going to the game.”

O’Sullivan was one of the last people to see Tom. He passed away hours later.

While O’Sullivan was in the hospital with Tom, over on the banks of the Lee, a dressingroom they had inhabited for many years was grasped rigid with nervous tension.

“It is one of the most recognised games of the last 50 years,” says Corrigan. “Unfortunately, Dublin basically blew us away.”

“Brian Mullins gave a masterful display in both football and physicality, shall we say? We got done over.”

Afterwards, the Cork players showered and changed, some meandered down to The Leaping Salmon in Blackrock. But it wasn’t an evening for hanging around, and Corrigan was soon on his way to Macroom.

“I had only landed home, it was around 7.30, 8pm when I heard Tom had died. It was as if he had held on, waited to see if Cork



■ Tom Creedon son of the late Cork Gaelic footballer Tom Creedon, at his premises Masseytown Rotisserie Deli in Cork city.

PHOTOGRAPH: DARAGH MCSWEENEY/PROVISION

“It’s nice to hear the stories, but I suppose as I’ve got older I’ve started to appreciate more that he was my Dad, he wasn’t just this guy everybody knew because he was a footballer, he was my pops

could beat Dublin and get to the final. But when it was over, he just let go. “He had held on from May right through the summer months up until the 28th of August, for as long as Cork were in the championship. It seemed that way.”

O’Sullivan arrived back to Limerick only to hear the friend he visited earlier that day had passed.

Since 1985 the Macroom GAA club has run the Tom Creedon Cup, with the likes of Pat O’Connell and Martin Fitzgerald keeping it vibrant. Marion and Tom are invited to the launch annually and one or both are usually on hand to present the cup after the final.

“The club make a real effort with it, there’s a real heart and soul community feel around it. We as a family really appreciate that,” says Tom.

Then, in March 2004, the club officially opened Tom Creedon Park.

“I love going down there, that’s where I go to remember him,” adds Tom.

As if any further symmetry was needed for Dublin’s arrival to Páirc Uí Chaoimh on Sunday, the current Cork manager, John Cleary, was corner forward in 1983.

**Absentees**  
When Corrigan scans through the names from Cork teams of that era, with every passing year the list of absentees grows.

Tom Creedon from Macroom, Christy Ryan and John Kerins of the Barr’s, Diarmuid McCarthy from Ballyvourney, Michael Burns from Castlehaven. All gone.

“I go up to visit Tom once a month. Some of us may not go to church or whatever but we still find comfort and solace in going to see loved ones. Just to say a prayer or have a talk. There’s a fairly handy team of them about in heaven now.”

Tom junior will be in the Páirc tomorrow too. There is extra resonance with Dublin coming to Leeside in the 40th anniversary year of his Dad’s passing.

“I think about him every day,” he says. “He’ll be on the front of my mind on Sunday.”

“It’s nice when people want to chat about him. I always think when people stop mentioning your name, that’s when you are truly gone. Keeping his name alive, it’s important.”

Over the coming days, Colman Corrigan will make his way out beyond Tom Creedon Park to the cemetery in Macroom. He’ll amble up to the corner, top of the left, where he’ll pause for a while and let his friend know how it all played out against the Dubs this time.

## Kevin McStay interview

## ‘The only criticism that ever hurts me is the criticism I know I deserve’

Continued from page 1

## Gaps in the defence and resulting opportunities

There has been an even-handed reaction to the pre-season loss of 33 per cent of the championship backs.

Lee Keegan’s retirement brought down the curtain on a career that is seen symbolic of the unyielding Mayo crusade of the past decade. Sadness, though, goes beyond the purely elegiac.

Keegan was an All Star 15 months ago and again nominated last year.

Oisín Mullin, another All Star but at the other end of his career, was juggling the idea of returning to the AFL, where he had previously signed with Geelong before having second thoughts.

Like Keegan, he was spoken to at length about staying on but as the prospects in either case waxed and waned, McStay and his management kept the players updated before the finality of both departures settled.

“I didn’t set out to be zero and two!” he says “and in both cases I’m absolutely satisfied that I can say to Mayo supporters and Mayo people everywhere that we handled it as well as it could be handled. We left no stone unturned. Right until we didn’t have them, we thought they’d be back.”

“We did a lot of preparation by ensuring the players were kept informed as to how things were going. They were satisfied.”

“The manner in which we said our goodbyes was great. We tried everything but one young man wanted to live his life and explore opportunities and another had reached the end of his sporting life, and we totally respected that.”

There’s an awareness that the management conducted its optimistic business in public and that the withdrawal of both is perceived as a blow to the team but as neither was involved in the group this season, the disruption has been minimal.

“The minute they move on, we move on. Everyone in Mayo adores Lee Keegan and Oisín Mullin, and is so proud of them but they’re no longer in our group and players can see two gaps in the defence and the opportunities that come with that.”

“Oisín was back on a break around Christmas when we had the charity match against Sligo and he came and had something to eat with us afterwards. I had to remind him to take himself off the WhatsApp group now that he’s gone!”

## The beginning

This year’s league is unique. Never before has the spring competition been so closely aligned with a team’s championship prospects. The best route remains provincial success but thereafter every league point can potentially make a difference.

This evening, All-Ireland champions Kerry will be in town and another bumper attendance is expected. Regardless of brave new worlds, Mayo-Kerry sells itself but management will also be glad to measure where they are against the champions – regardless of how strong they travel.

McStay believes that it’s too

early to draw hard and fast conclusions but so far there have been no shattering reverses.

“The next challenge is Kerry and after that Tyrone and the only flag in the middle distance is that first round against Roscommon. There’s no life for us after that. Everything else is dictated by that. We want to get into the round robin from a position of strength but that depends on how Mayo-Roscommon goes.”

He knows from the experience with Roscommon that management is a high-pressure environment, which can sometimes get to people – even him, as he found himself in frustration chucking a ball at match officials and hitting linesman Niall Cullen, followed by a 12-week suspension.



“Where do we want to be? A team that can beat anyone on our day and a team that anyone else is delighted to beat

Crestfallen, he apologised for the lapse and a few weeks later departed the intercounty scene.

Five years later, he feels less pressure and pugnacity.

“I have a sense of what I can and can’t do. The things I’m not good at, I know and appreciate. The only criticism that ever hurts me is the criticism I know I deserve. There was a time when I’d read some horrible piece and I’d be jumping up and down, looking for an email address but the older I get, the mellow I become.”

He sets great store by the collegiality of the playing group.

“Something I really value from my military training. How are we getting on? Do we like each other’s company? We stayed in Monaghan before the last game, had a really nice weekend, did a good bit of work and got our point.”

“Could it have been two? It could but had the match lasted another minute it might have been nothing.”

“Where do we want to be? A team that can beat anyone on our day and a team that anyone else is delighted to beat. With two games played, everything’s still up for grabs so we’ll review it after four matches when we have the data and then we can make proper decisions on what’s next.”

“What’s next” – the great unknown that keeps Mayo going.

## Weekend previews and team news

By Seán Moran and Gordon Manning

## SATURDAY

## Division One

**Mayo v Kerry**, Hastings MacHale Park, 7.30 (Live on TG4) – A lively contest for both teams can be expected before another big crowd in Castlebar. Kerry got back on track the last day, chastising Monaghan and the word is that there may well be heavy weight supplements to the All-Ireland champions with Seán O’Shea and David Clifford nearing returns. That would subject Mayo’s developing rearguard to some testing, as they figure out what happened to their lead in Armagh. Aidan O’Shea was impressive at full forward until he began to wander and he is listed on the inside line again but the home side can impact on centrefield where Kerry are looking to reconstruct the sector post-David Moran.

Verdict: Kerry

## Division Two

## Derry v Meath

Owenbeg, 5.0 (Live on RTÉ2) – Colm O’Rourke has got his Meath tenure off to a positive start with two wins in their opening league matches. But the reality is Derry are a couple of notches above Cork and Clare. Rory Gallagher’s men have maintained their 2022 form, winning the McKenna Cup this year already and also chalking off opening league wins over Limerick and Louth. The Glen players have had a couple of extra weeks back training with the squad now as well. Meath scored seven goals in their two games so far, but don’t expect the Derry defence to be as accommodating.

Verdict: Derry

## Division Three

## Tipperary v Antrim

Semple Stadium, 6.0 – It has been a difficult start for Tipperary, with opening round defeats to Down and Cavan, and more significantly a season-ending cruciate injury to Conor Sweeney. His loss is huge, especially as Michael Quinlivan is not currently involved either. But Antrim lost both of their games as well, to Offaly and Down respectively. Both teams will see this as an opportunity to light the flame on what has been a slow-burning season. But the fear of losing again could lead to stalemate.

Verdict: Draw

## Division Four

## Wicklow v London

Aughrim, 1.0 – Both lost home matches in round two and although London pushed Leitrim up until the end, Wicklow should be able to register a first win but need to pick up performance levels or a shock could be on the cards against a much improved visitors.

Verdict: Wicklow

## SUNDAY

## Division One

(all throw-ins 1.45)  
**Galway v Tyrone**, Tuam Stadium (Deferred, TG4, live on TG4 app) – Meeting of the two sides, surprised by Roscommon. Tyrone responded well by securing a double-scores win against Donegal. The clicking of their attack spells danger for Galway, who have had terrible ill-fortune with injuries in their forwards, losing all of last year’s impressive full-forward line to injury and travel. At least Damien Comer’s knock against Roscommon was not season ending.

Verdict: Tyrone

## Monaghan v Donegal

Clones – Monaghan will need to get something here, as they have lost the two opening matches and the visitors are likely to be involved in the discussion at that end of the table despite an opening-day win over Kerry. The potential long-term loss of Patrick McBrearty is a hammer blow for Paddy Carr and weakens them here, probably fatally. A line drawn through Kerry might suggest otherwise but Donegal struggled to

create chances against Tyrone.

Verdict: Monaghan

## Roscommon v Armagh

Dr Hyde Park – The story of the league to date, Roscommon’s two wins from two is unprecedented in Division One since the hierarchical structures were re-introduced 15 years ago. It’s actually two years since they last lost a league encounter. Trying to build on last year’s encouraging performances, Kieran McGeeney’s team have amassed three points so far despite playing only at restricted intervals. Still, they looked impressive when reeling in Mayo a fortnight ago.

Verdict: Armagh

## Division Two

## Clare v Kildare

Cusack Park, Ennis, 2.0 – Glenn Ryan will have been thankful for the mid-league break, because Kildare had a difficult start. They were competitive against Dublin but their showing against Cork last time out was simply not good enough. Clare are Division Two’s great survivors but if there is not a response from Kildare in this game then it would be concerning for all involved.

Verdict: Kildare

## Louth v Limerick

Ardee, 2.0 – These are the teams tipped for the drop from Division Two and certainly for the loser here it is difficult to see a way of avoiding the trapdoor. Louth will be without

Ciarán Byrne for the rest of the season with a cruciate injury, but Mickey Harte’s men were hugely competitive so far while Limerick failed to keep in touch with either Derry or Dublin.

Verdict: Louth

## Cork v Dublin

Páirc Uí Chaoimh, 3.45 (Live on TG4) – Cork bounced back from their opening round loss to Meath with an impressive win over Kildare last time out. Dublin come to town on the back of victories over Kildare and Limerick. This would represent a significant scalp for Cork, but Dublin have the ability to control the middle third sector and dictate the pattern of the game.

Verdict: Dublin

## Division Three

## Fermanagh v Down

Ederney, 1.0 (BBC iPlayer & GAAGO) – Conor Lavery has got a bounce out of these Down players since taking charge. It is starting to shape up as a promotion battle between Down, Cavan, Westmeath and Offaly. Fermanagh had a good win over Longford last time out but Down are the top scorers in the division.

Verdict: Down

## Cavan v Longford

Breffni Park, 2.0 – Mickey Graham’s Cavan fell from Division One to Four in just three seasons, but they are now aiming to make it consecutive promotions. Longford won the O’Byrne Cup but have yet to pick up a point in

the league.

Verdict: Cavan

## Westmeath v Offaly

Cusack Park, Mullingar, 2pm – The midlands derby – and possibly a pivotal game in the race for promotion. Westmeath lost their opening match to Cavan before a high-scoring victory over Longford. However, Dessie Dolan’s side could ill afford two defeats in their first three games given the competitive nature of the division.

Verdict: Westmeath

## Division Four

## Sligo v Waterford

Markievicz Park, 1.0 – Sligo overcame their poor start to get on the board and try to substantiate their promotion favourites’ status. They should win here.

Verdict: Sligo

## Carlow v Laois

Netwatch Cullen Park, 2.0 – A midlands derby but there looks to be too much between them for that to impact after Laois’s strong opening against Sligo and Wexford.

Verdict: Laois

## Wexford v Leitrim

Chadwicks Wexford Park, 2.0 – Wexford need to start picking up some more points and the visitors don’t look like a soft touch, topping the table after two matches.

Verdict: Leitrim



Allianz Football League Meath v Dublin

# After the brawl is over...



**Gordon Manning**

Thirty five years after they were sent off together, the friendship of Meath's Bernard Flynn and Dublin's Eamonn Heery has outlived a fractious rivalry

**B**ernard Flynn spots Eamonn Heery immediately. "There's the man now," smiles Flynn, lifting himself up from the chair. They have history. But over the next few hours, it turns out not exactly to be the history you were expecting.

In December 1988, Meath hosted Dublin in a National Football League game at Páirc Tailteann. It remains the last time Dublin played a league or championship game against Meath in Navan. That 35-year anomaly will finally be rectified today.

Dublin won the 1988 encounter, 1-12 to 0-4. In The Irish Times match report of that game, Paddy Downey wrote: "Fears that the almost hostile rivalry between these teams might lead to brawling were well founded. In a first half of heavy tackling, there were three ugly skirmishes and two players, Eamonn Heery of Dublin and Bernard Flynn of Meath, were sent to the line by referee Tommy Howard."

Flynn says it was the only time he got sent off in his Meath career. Heery recalls it as his sole red card for Dublin. It also cost Flynn an All Star. At the time, a sending off automatically made players ineligible for selection. As they trudged off the pitch, Heery made sure to let Flynn know he could wave goodbye to his All Star.

Given the incendiary friction between the counties, it might have been a flashpoint that ensured the two would share nothing else for the rest of their lives apart from a dollop of spite. But a trope of that Meath-Dublin rivalry was a grudging respect. In the years that followed, the pair became friends. They roomed together during an International Rules tour in Australia, Flynn was in Heery's wedding, and in a time of crisis Heery was at Flynn's side.

On a drizzly Saturday afternoon, we met in a Dublin city centre watering hole to chat football, rivalry, red cards, broken bodies and friendship.

**Gordon Manning:** What do you remember of the 1988 game?

**Bernard Flynn:** I remember Dublin beat the bollocks out of us.

**Eamonn Heery:** You'd hammered us in the championship in 1987 and 1988, the league final too. That win in Navan was kind of a moment for us. The folklore goes that when we beat Meath that day, it was a marker.

**GM:** What about the sending off?

**EH:** This f\*\*\*er tripped me up from behind, that's how it started.

**BF:** Is it?

**EH:** You tripped me.

**BF:** The row that day was one of the worst I've ever seen. I'd forgotten about that trip.

**EH:** Course you did, sure tripping lads wouldn't have been in your nature!

**BF:** Talk about tripping, Eamonn was always great at leaving a trailing leg or a little flick. [Liam]Harnan was decked that

day, the Dublin lads got really stuck in. Tommy Carr started it, he was so annoyed after losing to us a couple of times that year, he started flaking. It was all-in then.

**EH:** There was murder at the other end of the field, so I was going down and the next thing he takes the legs from under me and suddenly we're rolling around on the ground. I don't think either of us got a box in, but we both got sent off.

**BF:** The RTE nine o'clock news that night started with "Mass brawl in Navan" and there are us two eejits on the ground.

**EH:** I hadn't been involved with Dublin in the league until that point. St Vincent's had won the Dublin senior hurling championship and so we went on to play in Leinster. But I was back for the Meath game. On the way to Navan, Gerry McCaul came down the bus. Gerry was old style, he says to me, "you are going in corner back today and you're marking Flynn". Then he walks away, turns and adds, "he scored 2-8 in an intermediate championship match last week". I was only playing two years for Dublin at that stage, so the likes of Bernard could end your career. At the time you were in the running for another All Star.

**BF:** Yeah, I was going well, but you couldn't get nominated once you were sent off.

**EH:** I think I mentioned that to you going off the pitch.

**BF:** Yeah, you f\*\*\*ing did.

**EH:** Afterwards we were back in the Coolquoy Lodge but I was despondent. We were after beating Meath but I'm thinking, "I'm gone, I won't get back in the team". Suddenly, people were coming up to me going, "well done, good boy Heery". So I start thinking, "I'll turn this around, I'll act like I'd done it on purpose to take Flynn out of the game".

**GM:** How did you become friendly after that?

**BF:** I worked with Davy Synnott and used to meet Eamonn at functions. Most of the Dublin lads were good lads, and on the field they were usually fair.

**EH:** Ah, Dublin were gullible.

**BF:** Not that gullible, did you ever see what himself and Keith Barr did to Colm O'Rourke in Croke Park in 1991?

(In the last of the four-game saga, O'Rourke was the meat in a Dublin sandwich between Heery and Barr. O'Rourke was carried off the field but did later return. Over the years, Eamonn has heard his former team-mate take the, erm, credit.)

**EH:** We need to clear this up, Barr didn't touch him. Barr has claimed this so many times, "O'Rourke got the ball and then I buried him". He has been on TV programmes and everything talking about it. He never touched him, look at the replay, it's not true.

**BF:** It was you. And if it was the other way around, one of our lads would have done the same.

**EH:** That's what O'Rourke said afterwards, "If I'd got the chance I would have done it, only three times harder".

In 1990, Flynn and Heery were both selected on the Ireland International Rules tour and were put in the same room together.

**GM:** Given what happened in 1988, was it awkward sharing a room?

**BF:** No, by that stage we had got to know each other fairly well. What happened in '88 wasn't an issue. Rooming with Eamonn was fantastic, that was a great trip.

**EH:** We had been training together for the International Rules and we had also been in each other's company a few times, socially.

**BF:** Then there was Eamonn's wedding. At the time the Meath-Dublin rivalry was still hot and heavy. I was in the toilet at one stage when one of Eamonn's close mates, who didn't know I'd be there, comes over. I'm standing outside the cubicle, he grabs me, we both go straight through the cubi-

cle door and I'm pinned up against the wall. Then he slides me down on top of the toilet. "What are you doing at this wedding?" He was only having the craic, but he put the fear of God in me. I thought I was going to be killed."

In 2009, Bernard had a hip replacement. The other operations he has undergone over the years include one for a cruciate tear and the need for full knee reconstruction. He still cannot fully straighten one of his legs. For much of his career he took cortisone injections just to play matches. He continues to regularly get epidurals to ease daily pain. At various stages over the course of the afternoon, the conversation returns to how broken up so many players of their generation now are.

At one point, Eamonn takes out his phone to show X-rays related to the back surgery he required last year. A few days after we met up, Bernard's pain intensified and he had to undergo back surgery in the Mater Hospital.

**GM:** Are many of your former team-mates in a similar way?

**BF:** Yeah, a lot of ours have had hip operations. I remember Gerry McEntee saying to me years ago, "Bernard, make sure you keep your health insurance up, no matter what happens".

**EH:** I thought I was doing great because I had heard about all of these boys needing to get stuff done. Then last February, I had a decompression done and I roared coming out of the hospital. They took me back the following week and done the full job. I had two operations on the back.

**BF:** I met Eamonn at Pat Gilroy's mother's funeral and I was genuinely shocked by how he looked that day. He was clearly in so much pain, it was written all over his face. I asked him if he was okay, and he told me about the operation. But you could see the pain in his face that day. Every four to six weeks I get epidurals. If I don't get them I can't walk, but the body doesn't really take them now either.

**EH:** You can't put that down to anything only football. We're lucky that we can get the jobs done but there are an awful lot of fellas who have damn all money, maybe no

spended with goals in the 49th, 52nd and 64th minutes, Shea O'Neill getting their first before Flynn weighed in with his two.

McElholm capped a superb Omagh display with back-to-back goals for his team, in the 56th and 58th minutes.



Dublin's Eamonn Heery and Meath's Bernard Flynn got together at Briody's on Marlborough Street, Dublin, where they chatted about their infamous scrap, the health and mindset of Gaelic footballers, unexpected support in a time of crisis, and today's Meath-Dublin showdown in Navan. Photograph: Dara Mac Donnail

health insurance, and are left waiting in pain for years to get something done through the public system. That's wrong, they should be looked after. Any fella who played should be able to say to their county board, I need a hip operation, can I get some help please.

**BF:** Eamonn is right. Nobody cares about you when you're finished playing.

**EH:** Think of the money you would have had to spend on yourself for the last ten



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The RTE nine o'clock news that night started with 'Mass brawl in Navan' and there are us two eejits on the ground

Meath have not beaten Dublin in league or championship since 2010. Last summer Dublin beat the Royals by 13 points. In recent years, there have also been drubbings of 16 and 21 points.

**GM:** What do you make of the rivalry now?

**EH:** Seán Boylan was a genius, he's one of the greatest human beings. I watched the programme they made about him and I was crying. We measured ourselves against his Meath teams.

Don't take this wrong, but the thickness is gone from Meath. No matter how much better than them you were, they fought all the way. But now, after 10 minutes Meath have been giving up in games.

**BF:** It's disappointing how poor we have been at competing with Dublin. I've spoken with some of the Dublin players recently and they have been shocked at Meath's inability to compete.

**EH:** In general, I think football now is shocking, I can't watch it. Hand-passing over and back, I can't stand it. As for Meath, I know Bernard was in the mix to become manag-



All-Ireland Colleges SFC Hogan Cup

## Omagh CBS hit Summerhill for six

**Omagh CBS 6-16**  
**Summerhill College 3-8**

PAUL KEANE  
at Croke Park

They scored six goals but, in truth, it could have been 10 and all but a point of their tally came from open play – a truly special Croke Park performance which captured the Hogan Cup title for Omagh CBS.

Fresh off their four-goal semi-final defeat of holders Naas CBS, the Ulster champions sniped half a dozen this time, with captain Eoin McElholm and Ruairi McCullagh contributing a brace each.

Conor Owens had a terrific game too, hitting 0-5, while

there were goals from Liam Óg Mossey and Tomás Haigney also as Omagh CBS matched their 2007 triumph.

Summerhill College, seeking to claim a first title at this level for a Sligo team, pulled back three goals in the closing quarter, with two of them coming from substitute Connor Flynn.

As early as half-time it was hard to see a way back for Summerhill who trailed by 0-4 to 3-8 following an exhibition of scoring from Omagh who posted notice of their intention to go for the jugular again with a point after just 19 seconds.

McElholm struck that score and the Loughmacrory talent's dovetailing with Owens was a feature of the opening half.

McCullagh, a goalscorer against Naas, took just five minutes to hit the net this time, per-

forming a clever handpass dummy before blasting to the net. Six minutes later, McElholm showed quick hands to offload to his left and find the onrushing Haigney, who fired to the net.

Ronan Niland, who pinched a crucial goal in Summerhill's semi-final defeat of St Brendan's, pulled back a point and team-mate Eli Rooney added another.

But it was a false dawn for Summerhill as Omagh finished the half with a series of scores to stretch their lead to 13.

Charlie Donnelly struck his second point before then turning provider with a sumptuous left-footed kick-pass in the 25th minute that picked out Mossey for his goal.

McCullagh's second goal in the 47th minute extended the lead to 20pts but Summerhill re-

formed with goals in the 49th, 52nd and 64th minutes, Shea O'Neill getting their first before Flynn weighed in with his two.

McElholm capped a superb Omagh display with back-to-back goals for his team, in the 56th and 58th minutes.

**OMAGH CBS:** C McAnaney, NFarry, B McMenamin, SKerr, Caolan Donnelly, CDaly, THaigney (1-0), E Donaghy, C Watson, Charlie Donnelly (0-2), R McCullagh (2-2), L McCullagh, COwens (0-5, 1), E McElholm (2-5), L Óg Mossey (1-1), Subs: N McCorney (0-1) for Watson (47 mins), D McCullagh for L McCullagh (48), B Gallagher for Farry, C O'Hagan for Donaghy, C McConnell for Kerr (all 50).

**SUMMERHILL COLLEGE, SLIGO:** D O'Brien, E Keane, R O'Kelly, Lynch, R O'Callaghan, J Campbell, R O'Sheir, J Donlon (0-1, 45), D Walsh, P O'Brien, M McDaniell (0-1), RNiland (0-2, one free), M Carroll, S O'Neill (1-1), E Rooney (0-2), G Lynch, Subs: J Walsh (0-1) for Carroll (38 mins), CFlynn (2-0) for Lynch (41), PKerins for Campbell (50), CO'Dowd for O'Neill (59).

Referee: B Cawley (Kildare).

All-Ireland Colleges SHC Croke Cup

## St Kieran's make no mistake

**St Kieran's 3-13**  
**Pres Athery 0-12**

PAUL KEANE  
at Croke Park

They don't take kindly to defeat in Kilkenny, that's for sure. Between last year's Croke Cup final loss to Ardscoil Ris, and last month's Leinster final reversal against a combined Offaly schools team, St Kieran's were loaded up with chips on their shoulders and highly motivated to bounce back.

They duly made their point with a powerful display, blitzing Presentation College, Athery for the third time in four campaigns to capture a 24th All-Ireland title.

Anthony Ireland Wall's 24th-minute goal tipped the balance of a tightly contested first half in St Kieran's direction, though the second half was played largely on their terms, yielding further goals from Donagh Murphy and Ted Dunne.

"We learned a huge amount from it," said manager Brian Dowling of that early February provincial defeat. "We said in the dressing room that day that we're not going to have this pain again and it drove us on for the rest of the campaign."

St Kieran's didn't have joint captain Harry Shine last month and Rory Glynn, man-of-the-match at Croke Park, only came on for the final quarter of that game, while Ben Whitty, a starter in last year's All-Ireland decider, didn't feature against the Offaly combina-

tion either. Athery set up with Cian Donoghue as their sweeper but after a tidy first half from the number 15, the tactic had to be abandoned as the westerners chased goals that never came.

"For long stages of the match we put it up to Kieran's but we just weren't strong enough and just fell away at the very end," said Athery manager Cathal Moore.

Athery captain Tiarnan Leen struck two early points which helped open up a 0-4 to 0-2 lead but once Glynn put St Kieran's ahead with a 19th-minute point, they didn't look back.

Glynn's sniped four first-half points from various angles and distances and, allied to Ireland Wall's screamer of a solo goal, they led 1-7 to 0-8 at half-time.

Free-taker Aaron Niland struck half of Athery's first-half tally but they only managed four points in the entire second half, two from play.

The second St Kieran's goal, from Murphy in the 38th minute, left five between them and Dunne added a third late on.

**ST KIERAN'S COLLEGE, KILKENNY:** S Manogue, B Hughes, K Corcoran, J Neary, T Kelly, T McPhillips, P Naddy (0-1), A McEvoy, D Murphy (1-0), B Whitty (0-1, 65), T Dunne (1-1), K Doyle (0-1), R Glynn (0-4), A Ireland Wall (1-2), H Shine (0-2, one free), Subs: N Shortall for McEvoy and B Murphy (0-1) for Kelly (39 mins), S Hunt for Wall (58), S Keenan for Whitty (63).

**PRESENTATION COLLEGE, ATHERY:** D Walsh, S Murphy, C Lawless, A Shearmon, C Donoghue, M Tarpey (0-1), M Fallon, A McDonoghue, D Courthran, T Leen (0-2), G Fahy (0-1), D McCartin, D Burke, A Niland (0-6, five frees, one 65), E Byrne, Subs: C Courthran for D Courthran (half-time), S Monaghan (0-1) for Byrne (39 mins), J Rabhite (0-1) for McCartin (49), N Kelly for Burke (57), O Quinlan for Fahy (58).

Referee: J Murphy (Limerick).