

PROVINCIAL FOCUS

LEINSTER SFC

FIRST ROUND			QUARTER-FINALS		
APRIL 5, 6PM Wexford			APRIL 13 Offaly		TBC
APRIL 6, 3PM Meath			APRIL 13 Dublin		TBC
APRIL 6, 3.30PM Longford			APRIL 12, 7PM Kildare		TBC
			APRIL 13 Louth		TBC
SEMI-FINALS			FINAL		
APRIL 26/27 Off/Car/Meath			MAY 11, 4.15PM		
APRIL 26/27 Kildare/W'meath					

Holders: Dublin
2024 runners-up: Louth
2025 Leinster title odds: Dublin 1/10, Louth 14/1, Meath 14/1, Westmeath 22/1, Kildare 25/1, Offaly 40/1, Laois 200/1, Wexford 500/1, Carlow 500/1, Longford 500/1, Wicklow 500/1.

LEINSTER ROLL OF HONOUR

Dublin 63 - Last in 2024.
Meath 21 - Last in 2010.
Kildare 13 - Last in 2000
Wexford 10 - Last in 1945.
Offaly 10 - Last in 1997.
Louth 8 - Last in 1957.
Laois 6 - Last in 2003.
Kilkenny 3 - Last in 1911.
Carlow 1 - 1944.
Longford 1 - 1968
Westmeath 1 - 2004

TOP STAT

■ THERE isn't much left to pick over in the Leinster SFC given Dublin's dominance over the past couple of decades now, but Louth have emerged as their main challengers in recent years and will reach their third successive final for the first time in their history if they come through on the other side of the draw to the holders.

EMERGING STAR

THEO CLANCY (Dublin) The bigger tests will come outside of Leinster for Clancy but it looks like he'll finally get a run of games in the Championship having featured in the last two Leagues, though more prominently this year. Has impressed for Kilmacud at full-back and is set to take the No 3 jersey for Dublin now.

OUR VERDICT

DUBLIN. Thankfully, at long, long last, the Leinster Council has decided to move the provincial semi-finals out of Croke Park for the first time in 30 years, though the need to do this was apparent at least 15 years ago. By now, the rest of the province is in too much of a psychological stranglehold to present a plausible set of circumstances for Dublin being ambushed outside of Croke Park for the first time since 1981, but here's hoping that there will be more competitive games at least. Either way, they'll win it for the 15th year on the bounce.

NEW Order, Happy Mondays, United and City, Strangeways and ship canals, the worker bee and ... Oisins GFC.

Manchester, so much to answer for.

Not least the world's most famous ex-GAA player, Noel Gallagher, who was at Croke Park and marched out to the sound of Amhrán na bhFiann as an U16 corner-forward with Manchester's Oisins GFC in 1983.

This summer Gallagher will be back in Croker with his brother Liam as part of the Oasis reunion tour.

The occasion of his first visit was a hastily arranged match, done on sort of a nod and a wink basis it seems, between Kilmacud Crokes and Oisins and — who regularly featured both Noel and Liam Gallagher.

"Both of my parents are Irish so we basically grew up here (in Ireland) in the 60s and 70s," Noel told Ryan Tubridy on the Late Late show in 2012, name checking dad Tom from Duleek and mom Peggy (Sweeney) from Swinford/Charlestown.

"I had an Irish upbringing and I used to play Gaelic football, not professionally of course, with a team from Manchester. We were U14, 16 and 18 champions consecutively.

"We came to Dublin to play exhibition games against some Dublin teams in Dublin (one was in) in Croke Park. We were hammered though but there is a photograph. I scored a point."

But then 1983 was a noticeably different time as far as this tale unfurled.

Noel wouldn't get his first guitar, as a present, until the following May; indeed, he showed little interest in being in a band until joining Liam's band, Oasis, eight years later.

On the other side of the ball, Kilmacud Crokes were nothing like the dual-code powerhouse they would become in the 90s — although the connection that day to the later breakthrough was strong.

1995 will forever be the year of Blur v Oasis. It was also the year the Dubs won the All-Ireland, and so did Kilmacud Crokes.

"The club won their first All-Ireland club title, against Bellaghy at Croke Park, in 1995 and from that day against Oisins (in 1983) there was myself, Mick Pender was in goal, Peter Ward would have toggled out too," says Paddy O'Donoghue, who would go on to be a selector with Pat Gilroy's 2011 All-Ireland winning Dubs.

"There is still a lot around the club who played in that All Ireland final, Sean O'Shea coaches the minor girls, Pat McCormack is here, Brian Walsh is in America.

"Another fella, Brian Buffini, became a huge property magnate in America and a New York Times best-selling author. RTE made a documentary about him."

Still, it was Noel Gallaher who was leading the race to make headlines when, after touring as far and wide as Japan, USA and Argentina 1990-92 with Madchester band Inspiral Carpets, he turned his attention to Oasis.

Noel was a very skilful corner forward, everyone was in a band except them!

BACK IN THE PARK
Noel Gallagher will be returning to Croke Park for the first time since his GAA days

The band signed a record deal in 1993, releasing the albums Definitely Maybe in 1994 and (What's the Story) Morning Glory? in late 1995.

Oisins GFC's Kevin McNeill, whose parents were from Louisburg in Mayo, is very much Manchester Irish in the same vein as the Gallaghers.

"I played a lot with Noel and Liam and their elder brother Paul.

"My brother Sean played in that game at Croke Park," says McNeill.

"Noel was a very skilful, tricky footballer, he was a corner-forward and, as I know he wasn't a free-kick taker, his score in that game in Croke Park must have been from open play.

"Paul was a defender but Liam, who would have played in the half-

back line, played less than Paul and Noel.

"We were from north Manchester and they were from south Manchester, in Burnage, and they stuck together themselves, but they were good lads.

"One thing though, I'd often read about them playing their GAA in Didsbury but Noel and Liam wouldn't likely have played there.

"Back then, Oisins were based in Hough End, on the main road as you come out from the airport, about 10 minutes away from Burnage where they lived."

Kilmacud's O'Donoghue remembers that game in Croker in 1983: "One of our mentors had family in

the Irish community in Manchester and their team were coming over to Dublin.

"They knew somebody in Croke Park and somebody got the great idea: let's ring Kilmacud Crokes, they'll have a team that can play.

"I was under-15 or under-16 at the time so, like any young fellow of that age, I was delighted to be asked to play at Croke Park.

"They were fairly useful as players, I don't remember anything like the referee allowing them to lift the ball off the ground or anything like that, but we were playing at a very high standard at U15/16.

"We made the U15 county final but lost to St Annes who had Ciarán

Walsh."

It was an encounter destined for little post-match attention and, while the world's news agenda would pivot towards the Gallaghers a decade later, McNeill was as surprised as anyone that the Noel he played against was interested in rock and roll.

"I never even knew they were musical at the time," says McNeill.

"I was a Smiths fan and if I was to say anything about that 1981, 1982, 1983, 1984 period when we were in our teens it was that everybody seemed to me to be in a band — that was the way it was in those times — except them!

"I've been to the Hacienda, maybe sort of after the Hacienda was famous for bands such as The Smiths and The Fall, most likely even post-Happy Mondays/Stone Roses when they would have more DJ-as-the-star turns.

"I have seen Oasis five or six times when they were together and my favourite song is Don't Look Back in Anger.

"That's because at the time of the Manchester bombings you had the fundraising night at Old Trafford Cricket Ground.

"There was talk on the night the two of them would be there but, as it happened, Coldplay were the main act and Liam played after them and, singing Don't Look Back

in Anger, was sensational."

Kilmacud would travel to Oisins for a 'return' fixture the following year with the added bonus of catching a Manchester United game at Old Trafford.

This, when United were good enough to beat Diego Maradona's Barcelona in the European Cup Winners Cup quarter-final before losing narrowly to Juventus in the semi-final.

Paul McGrath, Kevin Moran and Frank Stapleton were key members of the first team during that period. "We were playing games in all parts of Dublin against tough guys, teams such as O'Tooles, Craobh Chiaráin, St Finbarrs in Cabra ... and

let's be fair, I don't think any of them felt too threatened by Kilmacud Crokes," says O'Donoghue, laughing.

"So we weren't afraid or in awe of Oisins because we had plenty of working class areas in and around Stillorgan/Kilmacud.

"Actually they just seemed like decent working class kids.

"But we certainly got an education when we went over.

"Sure, we still hammered them in the game but we found out that the Irish bars didn't seem to have any rules about under-age drinking and we hung around!"

Cigarettes and alcohol? Definitely, maybe. Welcome back Noel.



THE BAND: Oasis, (l to r), Alan White, Paul "Bonehead" Arthurs, Liam Gallagher, Paul "Guigsy" McGuigan and Noel Gallagher



MEMORIES: Paddy O'Donoghue celebrates Kilmacud winning the Dublin Ladies SFC title last year and (left) with Gilroy in 2011



LOOK BACK IN CROKER

Noel Gallagher (circled) with his Oisins team-mates at Croke Park in 1983

PROVINCIAL FOCUS

MUNSTER SFC

QUARTER-FINALS			SEMI-FINALS		
APRIL 5, 6PM Tipperary			APRIL 19, 2pm Clare		ENNIS Tipp/W'ford
APRIL 5, 6pm Cork			APRIL 19, 7pm Kerry		TBC Cork/Limerick
FINAL					
MAY 4, 1.45PM					TBC

Holders: Kerry
2024 runners-up: Clare
2025 Munster title odds: Kerry 1/10, Cork 6/1, Clare 18/1, Tipperary 80/1, Limerick 250/1, Waterford 500/1.



MUNSTER ROLL OF HONOUR

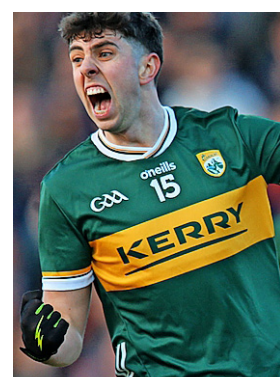
Kerry 85 - Last in 2024.
Cork 37 - Last in 2012.
Tipperary 10 - Last in 2020.
Clare 2 - Last in 1992.
Limerick 1 - 1896.
Waterford 1 - Last in 1898.

TOP STAT

■ CORK haven't won Munster since 2012, with Kerry claiming 11 titles and Tipp winning one in 2020, defeating a Cork side which had shocked Kerry with a last gasp extra-time goal. Kerry are dishing out hammerings in finals. Clare in 2024 (7), Clare in 2023 (15), Limerick in 2022 (23) and Cork in 2021 (22).

EMERGING STAR

DYLAN GEANEY (Kerry) IT'S unlikely any of the others will progress too far so it's probably going to be a Kerry player and so far the man who has stood out most is Dylan Geaney. He hit 1-2 from play against Galway in the final round of the League to cap a fine campaign. His vision and ability to finish goals and points mark him out.



OUR VERDICT

HOW much longer can the GAA go on wasting invaluable weeks in a packed calendar with a farcical competition like the Munster Football Championship? It suits Kerry as it virtually guarantees them a first seeding every year and an easier All-Ireland group, but it should have been axed

decades ago. Unless Cork come with something we haven't seen, they won't even put it up to Kerry. Clare are in Division 3. Limerick got promoted from Division 4 this year, while Waterford finished bottom of Division 4. If Kerry don't win it, it will be a massive shock.