

So this remarkable group just keep on making history. They have now got three of their great men to nine All Irelands. Incredibly, they have never lost a final. After their second half performance against Mayo in the All Ireland quarter final I remarked that they played like they had no medals. Yesterday on the full time whistle they celebrated like it was their first one. That first Celtic Cross is always special but I would wager that this one means more than most of the rest to them. James McCarthy mentioned the soul searching of the last two seasons in his acceptance speech as they sought to get back to their previous levels. In an emotional interview with Damian Lawlor after the match he mentioned how disappointed the players were with the way they performed in those semi-final defeats. They certainly banished those ghosts yesterday. It is difficult to know if this is the end of an era or if they now set their sights on Henry Shefflin with his ten and try and haul him in. They don't have to finish as there is clearly still more in them but very few sportspeople get to ride off into the sunset on their terms and they may be tempted.

Before delving into the action and the ecstasy and heartbreak let's take a beat to appreciate how hard both teams went at each other yesterday to win. It was breathtaking. While the final wasn't a shootout and littered with mistakes the intensity, frequency and ferocity of the hits was incredible. In the past a callow Kerry team struggled with the physicality of Dublin but they were able to match them toe to toe here. Even the Dublin warmup was ferocious. At one stage Mick Fitzsimmons and Cormac Costello were taking lumps out of each other, which was a sign of things to come. McCarthy interestingly also said afterwards how they went for, attacked every game this year and that it suited them better. The cautious, passive approach was ditched. Kerry also went for it. Albeit with slower attacks which didn't help in the overall scheme of things. A backward step wasn't taken. Players threw themselves at breaking ball, collided with each other repeatedly - on and off the ball - and cramped up such was the effort. There was no theatrics. There could have been more cards but it was a manly contest. It reminded me of some of our no holds barred A v B games where I threw up the ball and swallowed the whistle. You learn a lot about people in those particular conditions and both sides can look at themselves in the mirror in that regard. Because of the extreme effort of both sides it could almost be called 'The Turnover Final'. Dublin forced 23 turnovers scoring 1-07 from them and Kerry forced 18 turnovers scoring seven points from this method. 1-14 from a total score of 1-28 tells a tale, if not the tale.

When you win an All Ireland so much has to be got right. To lose you don't have to get much wrong. Dublin got most things right yesterday. The returnees certainly

helped the cause. Stephen Cluxton kicked two 45s - scoring for the first time this year - and was a staggering 100% on his own kickout, with Dublin scoring 8 points from their own restart. Brian Howard was a huge factor in this. After his early season sabbatical in South East Asia the Raheny man returned refreshed and rejuvenated. He was Cluxton's target, long and short as he repeatedly lifted the siege for the champions. When he went off injured his clubmate Seán McMahon presented himself for a kickout and Cian Murphy also won another crucial one in front of the Cusack Stand, similar to Brian Ó Beaglaoich last year. Paul Mannion another of the returnees once again kicked four points from play in an All Ireland final and Jack McCaffrey punched holes and got Dublin going forward when they were under the cosh. Colm Basquel may have been in danger of being replaced before he thundered into the game, forcing the turnover for Paddy Small's goal and kicking two great points. Brian Fenton got two points and Mick Fitzsimmons rolled back the years again.

But above all else as this great team have done again and again when the gun was put to their head they found a way. When Paudie Clifford punched an excellent point from an awkward angle in the 51st minute to put Kerry three ahead the signs were good for the Kingdom. No one involved on the field or on the sideline would have been thinking this is job done but they would have realised that they were in a strong position. In a low scoring game where every contest was a war and the result of said contests appeared significant three points was a huge lead. They had navigated through Dublin's third quarter push that so often got the job done for them over the years. However this year, and in particular in the semi-final it was the fourth quarter that they went into overdrive to finish the game. During the championship prior to yesterday they had scored 1-27 in the final quarter while conceding a mere 12 points. That pattern continued, as from Paudie's point until the finish, as Darragh Maloney pointed out to me in commentary, Dublin outscored Kerry by seven points to two. This culture of reproducing high performance consistently in adversity, under the highest pressure, in the closing stages is remarkable and so hard to achieve for any team. Alex Ferguson developed it with his Manchester United teams. The All Blacks had it. Michael Jordan and LeBron drove those standards for their teams. Limerick have it and Kilkenny had it. The various Dublin management teams led by Pat Gilroy, Jim Gavin and now Dessie Farrell deserve massive credit for achieving this enviable trait, and trademarking it. As of course do the players. Different players have done it on different days but critically someone always does it.

When the final whistle sounded and while accepting the Dublin win and appreciating their greatness my initial feelings were naturally disappointment for all

of the Kerry crew but mostly heartbreak for Paudie and David. They are superb footballers but more importantly they are fantastic people. They have endured a difficult summer but have continued to shine in the green and gold throughout a traumatic period. Those of us who have grieved in the past can relate to what they were going through off the field while they continued to perform on it. They come from a great family and they will handle this disappointment with dignity. Sometimes you hope that the stars will align to ease a challenge in life. Too often that is not the way it works unfortunately. Mostly it is the opposite in fact. It is too early to start looking towards 2024 for Kerry. I don't have the heart for it. Yet. However they will be back. It is a young team and as Dublin have done they will use the hurt to drive them forward. That is the only option.

For now, as Garry McMahon advised in one of the verses in his song The Kingdom's Green and Gold

“We savour Kerry victories, we salute a gallant foe
And when we lose, there's no excuse, we pick up our bags and go.”

Credit to Johnny Bradley and RTÉ for the statistics

“Tá an Ardrí imithe”.

Micheál Ó Sé when he rang Micheál Ó Muirheartaigh in December 2012

December 15th is an important date in my calendar. It is my Mom's birthday, coincidentally it is the day I proposed to Tina and it is also the day that Páidí Ó Sé passed away in 2012. It is hard to believe that it is ten years, as his presence and aura is still missed by everyone in West Kerry, and by the close knit Ó Sé family in particular, I'm sure. Something changed in Chorca Dhuibhne that day and it hasn't been the same since. Something unique, magical and spiritual left and is gone forever.

When Páidí Ó Sé's name is mentioned it means different things to different people. To Generation Z it is probably the famous sound bites borrowed from the Marooned documentary, “the grain of rice” and Alan Mangan being “f***ed over the line like a loaf of bread”. It is the Denny Allen punch which has 250,000 views on YouTube. To most it is the incredible career he had on and off the pitch with Kerry. From the attacking half back scoring points off the laces, to the sticky corner back shutting down forwards in All Ireland finals, to the Bainisteoir with a tight buzz cut in his canary yellow t-shirt. His larger than life public image is well known, his shy caring side probably not so much. His ability to hold court as easily with his regulars in Ard a' Bhóthair, a Taoiseach or a Hollywood actor was all part of his unique persona. As a colourful raconteur he regularly brought the house down. Those interactions are documented brilliantly in his pub gallery with the incredible collection of photographs that hang from every available space.

Páidí's life is one of legend now. Like many legends the stories that make that fable real can sometimes be exaggerated. Anyone that met him has a story. I could write a book. Easily. There would be at least one chapter, if not two entitled simply 'South Africa'. When our group reconvenes, which is not as often as we should, and talk turns to Páidí the hours melt away. The stories are the same but we still laugh at them as if it is our first time recounting them. Usually legends need embellishment. In many of the stories associated with Páidí there is no need. You have probably heard some and many couldn't be printed. Martin Sheen called to the pub at one stage. Far and Away had been filmed back west a few years previously. As Sheen was leaving Páidí shouted after him “Martin, Martin will you tell that Tom Cruise fella I was asking for him?” There is so much in that one on its own.

I grew up, like everyone else of my generation in Kerry watching and rewatching the Golden Years video and marvelling at these incredible footballers. They were like deity to us. I first shared a dressing room with Páidí in 1996. I was just out of minor and was on the under 21 team. Páidí was the senior manager, but also a selector with the under 21s. I couldn't take my eyes off him when he was in with us. He always had adidas gear. When he togged off his socks and shoes were the last things off. They were first on afterwards also which I always found unusual and funny. The traditional tog off he told me one time when I asked him about it. On the

pitch I noticed he had a big scar on his calf, which I presumed was hacked out by a stray stud at some stage. I later learned it was an angry goose that did the job when Páidí was a child. We beat Cavan in the under 21 final that year in a great game in Thurles. We travelled by cars in those days. I got a lift up with one of the county board lads but I wanted in on the fun afterwards. Darragh, Dara Ó Cinnéide and Jack Ferriter were with Páidí. I asked him after the match if I could jump in with them for the return trip and he agreed. A great night of stories and craic ensued. It was a real pinch myself moment for me. But he was always testing you also. Trying to figure you out. I imagine wondering if he could depend on you in the future in a big game in Croke Park. As we were coming down the road he would suddenly turn the radio up to the last if a song came on that he liked. The three boys wouldn't blink and I could see him staring at me in the mirror to see my reaction. I was laughing like a hyena as I thought it was hilarious, but also what else could you do? Evidently he viewed this as test passed.

As senior manager the selection meetings would often go late on the Tuesday night before a championship game. On his way home Páidí would ring every player that was starting. In the meantime I would have come home and gone to bed. When he rang and my mother told him I was in bed he always thought it was a great sign. "There's a man that's tuned in" he would say to the lads travelling with him in a half accusatory way, even if they had no other way of getting home until he finished his meeting and he was the cause of them being up late.

When I established myself on the senior team I would have done anything for him. He had a special ability to foster that loyalty from his players. If he considered you to be one of his men he couldn't do enough for you, and this worked both ways. I always found him incredibly generous, both with his time and his help. When we lost big matches on his watch most of my disappointment centred around the fact that I felt we had left him down. Prior to winning the All Ireland in 2000 we went to the Canaries on a team bonding trip the previous January. This was the opposite of a training camp and would also warrant an individual chapter in any anthology of Páidí stories. With each passing night and incident the hotel we were staying in, The Stil Marieta (it wasn't as classy as it sounds) was getting more and more sick of us. Finally it came to a head after the third night and we were warned that if we stepped out of line again we were out. Páidí gathered us in one of the small hotel rooms and gave us a right going over to make sure we understood clearly that we were in the last chance saloon. He wasn't too bothered about what went on elsewhere but he warned us not the crap on our own doorstep, using far more colourful language than that. When he was in serious mode and he spoke we listened. No more nonsense after that. At the end of the meeting he said "right lads we will finish the meeting in Patrick's Bar". We all headed down the strip to the bar and there was no sign of Páidí for a while so we thought he had ditched us. Shortly after he landed on with an old fashioned patterned suitcase. We were all looking at him and at each other wondering what the hell was going on. He walked into a corner of the bar and opened the suitcase. It was full of pesetas. He had fundraised himself and had exchanged the currency before we travelled so we would have a few bob on the trip. He held it back for a few days as he knew we would be short as the week went on. He then instructed the bankers as he called them, Pa Laide and Barry O'Shea, to divvy out the money.

Another time I was staying in a house with Dara Ó Cinnéide and Tomás Ó Se in Limerick when I spent a year in UL. We were back in early January getting ready for our exams when Páidí unexpectedly called to the door and said he wanted to take us for a few drinks and some food before he met up with Máire later. Off we went, the three happiest men in Limerick. He took us to PA Martins bar where we had a few pints and a laugh and then a taxi out to the Peony Court for a Chinese. Páidí loved a Chinese. When we sat down he realised it was time for him to head off to meet Máire so he threw £200 up on the table and said “enjoy the night lads” and vanished. £200 was a lot of money at the time and a small fortune to three students. Myself, Tomás and Cinnéide looked at each other, ordered the cheapest starter on the menu and headed for a night on the town on Páidí. All of the players that played for him loved him and those little anecdotes illustrate why. He had the medals but he was generous and most of all he was fun.

As much as he loved the craic I think he was happiest in Fitzgerald Stadium at the height of the summer preparing for a big championship match. He lived for that time of the year. He would speak of upping the ante once the cuckoo came. He was never overly bothered about the league but he was a different animal when it came to championship. He would have the shorts and his World Cup boots on. He didn't like the Copa Mondials, or slippers as he called them. He would be out on the pitch beforehand testing fellas. Taking shots on the goalies, looking for ball off players to see if they could hit him with forty yard kick passes. He used to get a great kick out of Mike Hassett. “Mike, Mike” he would shout as he called for the ball. Mike was one of our best kickers and would answer “Which finger Páidí?” and then proceed to nail the pass wherever Páidí wanted it. Páidí would roar with laughter. If he called you for a pass and the kick was messed up he had this way of throwing his eyes to the heavens that was like a knife to the gut. We all just wanted to please him. When he refereed the football he loved being stuck in the middle of it. He almost had to hold himself back from going for the breaking ball. Sometimes he would hop off you in the middle of the football. His enthusiasm was infectious. He liked to let the football flow. In 1997 when current boss Jack O'Connor was a selector he would often fill in during the football if there was an odd number. Jack was tasty and liked to get on ball and pull the strings. On this night Eamon Breen my club-mate and as about as aggressive and strong a footballer as you could come across was marking Jack. Every time Jack got the ball Eamon was pounding him and tearing him asunder. No free from Páidí. Not one. Out of complete mischief and roguery. He was delighted and laughing away to himself. Eventually Jack, no shrinking violet himself, got sick of it and roared at Páidí “For f*** sake Páidí” and kicked the ball up into the stand with temper. It wasn't half bad enough for Páidí who kept roaring “play on, play on” while laughing away. That one kept him going for weeks afterwards.

As a manager he was ahead of his time in many ways and was underestimated. His passion and love for Kerry was clear to everyone but there was way more to him than that. He was constantly thinking about the game and how to improve us. Even though we came up short in the final in 2002 Páidí was absolutely incredible that summer. While he didn't label it he was big into visualisation. He would tell us as we were preparing for a big match to imagine ourselves in difficult situations out

on the pitch and to picture how we would deal with them. He felt that a player would react quicker in the moment if they had thought about it beforehand. In 2000 when he was trying to encourage the forwards to share the ball more or “throw it around” as he would say himself he brought in a video of the great rugby center Mike Gibson. He had sourced all this black and white footage of Gibson constantly making the right decisions in possession and moving the ball on. As a manager he was demanding and honest but was brilliant at getting the best out of players. He was a master of the arm around the shoulder when it was needed but if he felt you needed a kick up the backside he could be brutal.

When we trained like dogs in the winter time he had sympathy for the heavy gang, as he had been there himself under Micko. While John O’Keeffe was working with the gazelles he would take us off for different work, still tough but crucially it was doable. He didn’t want us too disheartened. I remember one night we were training in the back pitch in Killarney and there was a huge amount of surface water on it. Johnno was out with his cones to mark out a track for the athletes that ensured they avoided the pooled water. Páidí came out for training with hurdles and put them in the middle of the floods. The heavy crew ploughed through the water and over the hurdles. When we finished a run Páidí would tell us to watch the lads tiptoeing through the muck, while we were willing go through anything to win. He was master of the mind games. Even though we were clearly not as fit as Johnno’s crew he made us feel as if we could take on the world. And he trusted us to get there fitness wise for championship, which we always did.

I was so privileged to follow in his footsteps later as Kerry manager, and I often thought of him. Shortly after my appointment a handwritten letter arrived from Páidí in September 2012, wishing me luck but also advising me of the importance and responsibility of the role. It was an honour to get that letter from him, and while in general I don’t do nostalgia I framed it. I have no regrets from my time in charge but I regret not getting back to see him that Autumn of 2012, as I intended, to thank him in person for the letter and the gesture. Never meet your heroes they say. I met mine and I still miss him.

A is for Amhrán na bhFiann and the Artane Boys Band. When our national anthem is being belted out in a packed Croke Park tomorrow take a second, wherever you are. Those of us lucky enough to be there in person and the fortuitous few inside the ropes will have the hair standing on the back of our necks. As a nation we are great to beat ourselves up but our All Ireland final days are fantastically unique, to be treasured and enjoyed. Before the madness begins embrace the pride.

B is for Black Magic. When we travelled to Croke Park for the big championship games by train it was a sign that the serious stuff had arrived. Páidí Ó Sé loved the giddy energy on the train as we laughed our way to Dublin. From old stories being retold to cheating at cards we always had tremendous fun. There was always some poor unsuspecting soul cleaned out at the cards. The Sé's and Seamus Moynihan were never too far away from the action. We were more like a bunch of kids on a school tour than a team facing into a season defining battle. Black magic was how Páidí described the jovial atmosphere and he always felt it was a good sign for what lay ahead.

C is for Comer and Clifford. Damien Comer and David Clifford are front runners in the Player of the Year race and will have a huge say in where Sam Maguire heads on Monday. Comer has scored 2-09 so far this championship, all from play while David has amassed 1-13, in a game less. Whichever one of these key men catches fire can decide the final. Both will have designated man markers, Jason Foley and Seán Kelly in my opinion, and both will have sweepers sitting in front of them. Both are aerial options as evidenced against Dublin and Armagh. Galway put a few in high early in that Armagh match to Comer, one which resulted in a goal chance that he narrowly fisted wide. Kerry had success with a few high balls as well with Sean O Shea's goal and Clifford's mark and point coming from direct deliveries. Bearing in mind the struggles that Galway had with the high ball at the back against Armagh and at the end of the Connacht final against Roscommon I expect Kerry to test their pulse here, which leads us to 'D'.

D is for decision making. This will be critical tomorrow both with and without the ball. While the teams have the capacity to kick inside and counter attack at pace they will face packed defences at various stages during the match. Early on I am expecting the game to be cagey and nervy. Galway will have plenty of bodies back to keep it tight in the initial stages. They started slowly against both Armagh and Derry and will know that a similarly slow start against Kerry could be fatal. On the Kerry side this is where decision making will be key. They will want to kick inside as much as possible but the man in possession needs to assess when this is on and when it's not. Early against Mayo they were guilty of forcing kicks

unsuccessfully and in the replayed All Ireland of 2019 there was an aerial bombardment early that didn't work. When it's on put it in, when it's not don't force it.

E is for evergreen. Should it materialise a huge battle could be between David Moran and Paul Conroy. They are of a similar vintage and are similar type players. Both are leaders for their teams, kick pass through the middle third and are very strong in the air. That aerial battle could be pivotal. Galway in particular favour going long with their kickouts. Conor Gleeson will go short if it's obviously on but other than that he takes no risks. He has a big boot and Galway like to get plenty of bodies around Conroy to pick up breaks if he doesn't catch it clean. They try to box out the area around the fielder to increase their chances on the breaks. Gleeson also uses Damien Comer as a kickout option at times, particularly long down the middle. Because of this I think Kerry will be careful with their press. They will go man to man to prevent the short one but will realise they need bodies under long kickouts, which is where Gleeson wants to go anyway. If they push too many players forward in their efforts to force Gleeson long they could be caught short at the back. In the four big championship games this year Galway have score 3-26 from their own kickout, short and long. Moran and Conroy's battle for control of the skies will be captivating and crucial.

F is for free taking. Along with Dean Rock, Kerry and Galway possess the best free takers in the country. Sean O'Shea and Shane Walsh are masters of their craft. Throw in David Clifford for good measure and it is a costly exercise giving away cheap frees. Usually it is harder to win frees in All Ireland finals and both teams are quite disciplined in the scoring range. Kerry have conceded an average of three scoreable frees per match in the championship while Galway are almost at four. Both teams will be über conscious of this the next day and they will try to tackle with aggression but with extreme discipline in their defensive areas as they know giving up a free there is tantamount to giving up a point. Where a free taker can come into their own on the biggest days is kicking a crucial kick at the end of the game, a la Sean O Shea last day out, Rian O Neill against Galway or Rock's All Ireland winning kick in 2017.

G is for goals. A goal in any game is significant but even more so in an All Ireland final, particularly an early one. It can really set the tone for the day. When it comes to goals the finalists have very different stories to tell. Kerry are conceding very few, only one so far but they are also short of goals upfront scoring a mere three so far in the championship. Conversely Galway are scoring plenty, eleven, with at least one a game but they are also conceding them having left in six goals so far. If

they get the chance to go a bit more direct at times goal chances may result for Kerry.

H is for history. There is a great history and connection between two counties on the western sea board, counties with a rich tradition and a record of trying to play football. In the last 20 years going back to the 2000 final Kerry have had the upper hand winning most of the big games. When Galway did the three in a row in the sixties they held the whip hand beating Kerry three years in a row. Mick O'Dwyer despite all his success always had a respect and dread of Galway. The last big championship game featuring the counties in 2018 was won by Galway and a large cohort of players from both sides featured in the 2017 All Ireland under 21 semi final that Galway also won. Galway teams when they get to Croke Park and get a head of steam up can be hard to stop. History tells us that there will be nothing in it.

I is for ikigai. This Japanese expression means that which gives your life worth, meaning, or purpose. It is about finding joy in what you do. When I think of Jack O Connor involved in football I think ikigai. He is obsessed, but in a good way. He is consumed by it but he loves it. That love for football is infectious. He has been involved in Kerry teams of one shape or another for over thirty years going back to his time with the Kerry Vocational Schools. He will know tomorrow is all about winning though. This will be the eight All Ireland final he will be involved in as a selector or manager. So far he has won five and lost two. Rest assured he will be looking to add to that record.

J is for Joyce. It doesn't surprise me in the least what Pdraig Joyce is achieving with Galway. We are the same age and played a lot of football against each other all the way up through minor, under 21 and senior. He was a brilliant and driven player. He is a successful business man and he made his private ambitions as a manager public from the off. He has adapted this year in particular and is now tactically flexible. He has learned the hard way that gung-ho won't win the All Ireland. He is happy to be defensive when necessary and attack when possible. He is a formidable opponent and regardless of what happens tomorrow Galway have made massive strides this year. He will know too that it is hard to get to All Irelands and it is about cashing in when you get there.

K is for knowledge. Galway have been on an adventure through the championship and from winning in McHale Park to the penalty shoot out against Armagh it is clear that they have been surfing a wave. Any team in any sport is dangerous in that space but Galway's history magnifies that threat. However, they haven't been

there on the big day before. Nearly all of the Kerry team have, most unsuccessfully and some with success. That knowledge and know how counts. While cliched to say that you have to lose one to win one it can often be the case.

L is for luck. Both managements and sets of players will try to control as much as possible but on the day a couple of breaks can be crucial. It is an uncontrollable so there is no point in focusing on it. After a loss in particular it can be a head scratcher. In the 2016 final Mayo scored two own goals in the drawn All Ireland. How can you explain that? Right at the end of the 2014 final we had played most of the football, got a lot right but Donegal mounted a last ditch attack and Colm McFadden palmed the ball against the outside of the post. We got the rub of the green that day. Napoleon famously preferred lucky generals and tomorrow that rub can be decisive.

M is for moment of maximum potential. We would refer to this in the lead in to a big match. When a team lose a big match, any match, the thought is often I would love to be back in the dressing room before the match and start over. As we know there is no going back though. The moment of maximum potential is just before a team takes to the pitch. The match is a blank canvas and everything is there to be contested. It is about having no regrets.

N is for Ninety-Seven. The Kerry All Ireland winning team from 1997 is being honoured before the match tomorrow. It will be a poignant day for the Ó Sé family as Páidí was central to that success as he led and empowered that team. They showed the way for the group that followed through the noughties. It was the first All Ireland that Kerry had won in 11 years ending an unwanted and unenjoyable famine. The group contained grizzled veterans who had seen it all and had been at the wrong side of some results including losing to Clare in 1992 and an emerging force of All Ireland under 21 winners. Many of this group didn't know how to take a backward step and that attitude will be needed tomorrow. It would be apt, if on the day that they are honoured it coincides with the end of the latest famine.

O is for O'Neill as in Cian. It is clear to me that Cian has had a big impact on Galway. From their defensive shape, to set plays, to their approach to kickouts and everything else in between I can see the evidence of his work. I am sure the other coaches, including Joyce himself and John Divilly in particular have a big input as well but having worked with Cian I recognise his coaching. Crucially he also has relatively recent All Ireland final experience which will be of help to the westerners. While he was in our camp in 2014 he would love the thought of putting one over a

traditional powerhouse. While I always wish him the best I hope he comes up short this time.

P is Press. Both sides are comfortable putting an aggressive press in place against the opposition kickout. The conundrum facing Kerry is already covered in E. Against Derry, Galway adjusted their press at half time and pushed five bodies into their full forward line in the second half. Odhran Lynch had got a couple of chip outs away in the first half and Galway reacted. They forced him long and did very well in the resulting contests. I have my doubts if they will be as brave on Sunday as such a strategy leaves them wide open at the back if they don't win the long restart. They will also realise that Kerry are good at the bunch and break. The Kerry backs are blessed with explosive pace and are good at getting separation and presenting themselves as an option. Shane Ryan has also been excellent both in terms of decision making and execution. Galway may elect to place a narrow zone around them to make it harder and they may even give up the kickout for stages. To win they will have to mix their approach and the bias of that mix could be telling.

Q is for quiet. Once a team hits Croke Park on All Ireland final day there are two moments of quietness that are features of the day, one welcome, the other the opposite. When the bus enters the stadium under the Cusack Stand and slowly crawls around under the Canal End the focus starts to really narrow. The previous few minutes has been an adrenaline filled journey as the Garda escorted team bus flies through the crowds on the way to the match. The thrill of this is hard to imagine and never gets old. The cheering, flag waving, colour, sirens and blue lights envelope the bus close to the stadium. Then, silence. Most of the players will be tuned into their music but for those of us without earphones in the only sound now is the whirring of the air conditioning. Around the corner up under the Hogan Stand and the bus stops outside our designated dressing room. As we alight the time to perform is here and the normal dressing room and match day sounds take over. The other time that quietness can be visited upon a team is when a vanquished side returns to the losing dressing room. Bryan Sheehan captured that very well on Paul Rouse's Irish Examiner Podcast this week and trust me that melancholy is to be avoided.

R is for Rambazamba. In the 1974 World Cup the home country and eventual champions West Germany played a brand of soccer that became known as Rambazamba. It was a term used to describe their fluidity and player interchange and was personified by Franz Beckenbauer. Modern football has become a form of this with Tom O Sullivan as likely to kick a point as dispossess a man in his full

back line. On the flip side Damien Comer has forced huge turnovers in his own last line of defence while also doing his thing at the other end of the pitch. The fitness levels of the players to continually repeat this is remarkable. Of course R is also for replay!

S is for substitutes. As we saw in the All Ireland hurling final last weekend a strong bench is critical when chasing an All Ireland. It was Dublin's not so secret weapon for years. Kerry on paper appear to have the upper hand here and Padraic Joyce tends to use his subs sparingly. I don't think Jack and the management will have been totally happy with the contribution of the bench against Dublin. They will expect more tomorrow. Against Cork first day out David Moran, Paul Geaney and Paul Murphy came off the bench and finished the Rebel challenge. There is a school of thought that suggests it is better to finish with your strongest team rather than starting with it. I wonder will Jack be tempted to hold one of his experienced lieutenants in the hope that he can steer the ship home in the last quarter when experience counts double.

T is for Tadhg and Tally. Tadhg Morley's significant role has been discussed plenty by myself and others already this year. As previously mentioned he will be helping out Jason Foley tomorrow in Kerry's efforts to contain Damien Comer. While I am not privy to the work that Paddy Tally is doing with the players I am sure he has had plenty of involvement in improving the structure at the back. For tomorrow though his experience of breaking down a massed defence may be of more significance. Kerry have struggled with this in the recent past and as a discipline of mass defence no better man to know the way around it. I expect Kerry to play with patience, but also with pace. Pace on the ball and pace in the movement of the ball. When I was involved we often used the mantra of "patience at pace", which applies again tomorrow.

U is for unlikely hero. Oftentimes one of the expected stars catches fire and has one of those special days on the biggest day, Maurice Fitz in 1997, Seamo in 2000, Padraic Joyce in 2001, Gooch in 2004 and a host of Dubs during their run. Sometimes a final can throw up an unlikely hero, at least unlikely to everyone outside the squad. There is so much analysis done on the key players that someone else can step up. Tomorrow is an opportunity for one of the lesser lights to be the name on everyone's lips Monday morning.

V is for Voltaire. The French Enlightenment writer maintained that perfect is the enemy of good. In an All Ireland final players and management will be striving for perfection but often good will be enough. From a players perspective the dream is

to play well on the big day but it only works out like that for a select few, or else you are Gearóid Hegarty. Often it is about being patient, backing yourself and concentrating on your job particularly if you are not involved in the game early. Wear yourself into it and don't panic. Don't worry about perfection, do what needs to be done on that day, for that match. Good will suffice and if perfect happens, fantastic. As Confucius put it "better a diamond with a flaw, than a pebble without."

W is for win. This is all that counts tomorrow. For everyone looking on from around the world there is an appetite for a lovely open game of football. A classic. Problem is there is always a loser in a classic. For those on the inside the manner of victory doesn't matter. Yes it is superb to win with style but it is a bonus. Despite all the systems and tactics ultimately it still comes down to mano a mano. There is an All Ireland medal to be won and it is between me and you. One of us is going home with that treasured possession and the other is going home with his tail between his legs and a lot of what ifs.

X is for X Factor. Shane Walsh and David Clifford undoubtedly have the X Factor. One of them could make tomorrow's final, his final. Sit back and enjoy watching a pair of geniuses at work.

Y is for years. It is a long time since Sam Maguire has visited either county. That appetite for success brings with it expectation. Both teams will appreciate that it is so hard to get to the final in the first place and that it is vital to seize the day. The beauty about it is that whichever county prevails, will have some homecoming and celebrations will last long into the winter. It will lift an entire county and their vast overseas diasporas. When we won in 2014 it was so unexpected within the county it was as if we hadn't won Sam in twenty years. It added to the post All Ireland glow.

Z is zone. I saw my compadre Paul Galvin complimenting the Limerick hurlers this week on their consistent ability to operate in a flow state, in the zone. Both teams tomorrow are still developing in general, and growing that aspect in particular. Winning big, tight matches repeatedly over time builds that ability to operate in the zone. Both teams have performance coaches of renown in Bernard Dunne and Tony Griffin and the pair were complimented by their respective managers this week. Battles everywhere, not least amongst the performance coaches.