

FEATURE MAYO GAA CLUBS RATED

What do you think? email sport@mayonews.ieColour by
NUMBERS

- ① ~~BALLINA~~ CROSS'
- ② CROSS BALLINA
- ③ BALLAGH'
- ④ ???

LEAGUE + CHAMPIONSHIP
RETIREMENTS??
NEW PLAYERS??
NEW MANAGER??



Pic: Keith Hanagan/Probus

With the Mayo GAA Leagues getting underway in four weeks, we rank the Top 40 teams

MAYO'S TOP 40

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FOOTBALL is a game of opinions. With that in mind we at *The Mayo News* have decided to offer our opinion on the top forty football teams in the county ahead of the start of a new season.

In compiling these rankings we had to be mindful of a number of different factors. The most obvious one is current and recent form. Crossmolina are the Mayo senior champions so they will naturally be near the top.

League and championship form was taken into consideration but they were not the absolute criterion. For instance, we have rated Castlebar Mitchels one place ahead of Knockmore even though the North Mayo side got to the County senior semi-final and Mitchels only reached the quarter-final.

However, we were mindful of the fact that Castlebar drew Crossmolina in the quarter-final and Knockmore through Kiltane; no easy task, but not at the same level as the well-oiled Deel Rovers machine.

Other factors came into play as well.

SQUAD

THE strength of a club's squad, be it from 1-15 or beyond, isn't necessarily the same as a club's form. Few could argue that Ballina have the strongest squad overall in the county but they had a poor league campaign this year and a semi-final championship exit. That can change.

POTENTIAL

THIS was another important, vital factor. Castlebar fall into this category as do Ballaghaderreen; many of their players have still to reach their peak and as a result the propensity to improve is great.

Potential also takes the form of new players coming on stream. Breaffy, Knockmore and Ballinrobe all enjoyed underage success this year and will be hoping that many players from those teams can make the step-up, if they haven't already.

OPINION

WE compiled our rankings as scientifically as possible. We looked in detail at the teams under observation, recalled our own experiences of seeing them, sought the opinion of other observers. We don't expect them to be 100% accurate, indeed we would be very surprised if that is the case as so many little factors can change from now to championship.

Naturally there are some intermediate clubs ranked above senior clubs. Only one of them can be Senior in '08 but we compiled the rankings based on if one team was to meet another in the morning: how would they do? We feel there are a handful of Intermediate clubs who would be more than a match for some Senior clubs.

CONTENDERS

WHICH clubs to include was always going to be difficult as well. We considered limiting it to senior and then realised that, in our opinion, some intermediate clubs were stronger than some senior. In the end we are ranking the 40 teams in the newly formed Divisions 1 and 2 of the County League. All Senior and Intermediate clubs fall into these and most of the serious Junior championship contenders.

We felt going any further would complicate things as we would be discussing a lot of 'B' teams who, as most observers will know, can be wildly different from one week to the next. There are exclusive Junior clubs omitted by this criteria but there had to be a cut-off point; ranking every one of the 59 teams currently entered (and there will be more B teams before the league starts) just would not be feasible.

We hope it provides some food for thought...

1 CROSSMOLINA

THE Deel Rovers are aiming for three-in-a-row and while the age profile of their squad is relatively old, there are few club teams who can boast talent like Ciaran McDonald, James and Tom Nallen, Joe Keane, Peadar Gardiner et al.

Tom Jordan also has a group of good, young players at his disposal from the county title winning Junior team who offer very good cover in the periphery positions. Still, it's hard to see where the replacements for the spine of the team will come. That may be a problem two or three years down the line but not yet.

2 BALLINA

STILL within touching distance of a county title and retain much of the core of the All-Ireland team. At underage they have not been strong in recent years (see heavy defeat in County U21 final) and while they have good options off the bench from younger members, Ger Cafferkey is the only young player who will certainly become a central player.

However, with guys like Pat Harte, Eanna Casey, Ronan McGarrity, Ger and Liam Brady and David Clarke still in their mid twenties, the Stephenites still have plenty of capacity to improve if the new management works. Remain the greatest threat to Crossmolina.

3 BALLAGH'

THE question is was 2006 a once off? We don't think so. John O'Mahony may have departed but his influence won't be far away. The average age of their six key men (Stephen Drake, James and David Kilcullen, Barry Kelly, Barry Regan and Andy Moran) is similar to their squad's, just over 22.

We can expect to see more of Pierce Hanley too. This year may not be the year they bounce back to take the County title but it will happen and Ballagh' have the potential to be the best team in the county in two or three years time.

4 SHRUTE/ GLENCORIB

THIS year is likely to be the last in charge for Declan Ronaldson and there is likely to be one mighty heave to go one step further than the County final of two years ago. Shrute showed some of their better form last year in the league, being narrowly pipped by Crossmolina late on.

As always they are strong in the full-forward and full-back lines but in between lies the problem. Trevor Mortimer may be deployed to help and many of the club's U21 team can make a difference but not enough to be in real contention for the Moclair Cup.

5 CASTLEBAR MITCHELS

THE drubbing suffered at the hands of Crossmolina in the quarter-final is still being felt in Castlebar but new manager Kevin O'Connor will be hoping to reverse that.

Possessing a squad full of talented players still to reach their peak, Mitchels have the capacity to make an impact but will need a lot of men like Barry Moran, Shane Fitzmaurice, Sean Ryder, Alan Joyce, Richie Feeney and Niall Lydon to step up to the plate when the need is greatest.

If the draw is conducive to building some momentum, they could be the dark horses this year but need to become more consistent.

6 CHARLESTOWN

STILL on the look-out for a permanent manager and that will dictate a lot. Ginger Tiernan has announced his retirement but don't be surprised to see a return. Tom Parsons has what it takes at midfield and with players like Dermot and Aidan Higgins, Anthony Mulligan, Kevin Deignan and Enda Casey doing the business, Charlestown have speed and talent.

While Mickey Divilly and Paul Mulligan are lively up front, Charlestown lack real scoring power. They will be a match for many teams on a given day but as long as they are missing marksmen, a repeat of 2001 is some way off.

7 CLAREMORRIS

THE Division 2 champions in 2005, Claremorris only lost four of their eleven Division 1 league games in '06 and were it not for a cruel one point defeat to Kiltane in the championship would have qualified from their group.

They are back in training but are still awaiting a replacement for Kevin Beirne who has stepped down as manager. Were one of the best teams in the early part of last season and, on their day, can be a match for anyone. Will need to provide greater consistency if they are to be a serious threat though.

8 KNOCKMORE

WHILE they were fair to average in Division 2 this year, Aidan McHale's men performed well in the championship, reaching the semi-final, although some may point to a favourable draw.

Still the talent is coming on stream, as evidenced by both Under 21 and Minor success and if players like Kevin McLoughlin, Brian Gibbons, Darren Reape and Ger Gaughan can make the step up to join U-21 team-mates, Aidan Kilcoyne and Trevor Howley as first team regulars, then McHale will have options aplenty with his nephew Patrick having transferred from Ballina.

9 KILTANE

LAST year was a good one for the Bangor men after reaching the championship quarter-final and coming third in the league. Their home pitch is arguably the hardest place to go in the county but they must improve on the road. They are a very solid senior club and won't be threatened by relegation but the question they will be asking is can they make the step-up to championship contenders?

We think not. They have some excellent club players like John Scanlon, Shane Lindsay and Edmond Barrett, but not just not enough talent to compete at the very top level.

10 MOY DAVITTS

THE Foxford based side have been a middle of the road senior club, rarely troubled by relegation since they were promoted over a decade ago, but rarely looking like serious challengers either.

Can this change? Probably not. Moy Davitts are as strong and able from 1-9 as most senior clubs but scoring power can be a problem. Fintan Molloy is a perennial threat but more will be needed around him. Conor Jordans should make an impact fresh from the Mayo minor panel but they still look like a mid-table team. Are also awaiting to appoint a manager.

11 WESTPORT

LAST year Westport came far too close to relegation in both league and championship for their liking. Which Westport do you judge? That of last year or the team that took Crossmolina to a replay in

the 2005 county semi-final?

Somewhere in between probably. Their problems lie in attack. Outside of Stephen Broderick and James Gill, only Ryan Cafferkey looks capable of helping out here and we don't expect a repeat of two seasons ago.

12 BREAFFY

HAVE been saved by the league restructuring after finishing second bottom of Division 1 but impressive championship displays against Garrymore and Ballinrobe point to a team who are capable at this level.

Able to mix the superb with the average from one day to the next but a strong Minor team should augment their side while other young players like Finin Canavan, Seamus O'Shea and Eoin Carney are all getting better. They are still on the lookout for a manager however.

13 BURRISHOOLE

THEIR good championship form over-rides indifferent Division 2 displays and they have the look of a good, solid Senior club.

Have a good handful of decent minors coming on stream and won't suffer badly with retirements either. The Morans, Liam O'Malley, Adrian and Enda McManamon and Ronan Loftus offer real class too. Martin Connolly has returned as manager and don't be too surprised if they make it to the last eight of the senior championship.

14 BALLINROBE

FINISHED bottom of Division 1 and will be hoping to get back on track this year. New manager Alan Flynn and selector Liam Horan will see that Championship form was better, with Ballinrobe pushing both Crossmolina and Ballaghaderreen close. Need scoring options in a big way although young Sean Burke may help in this regard. They will also be helped by options from the Minor B winning team in other positions. Another team strong from 1-9.

15 BELMULLET

WOULD list higher up the grade had they went on and won the Intermediate championship but quarter-final defeat to Tourmakeady leaves questions. They will point, with some justification, to the long break before that game but it was the same for the team that beat them.

Still an impressive year in Division 1 with five wins shows what they are capable of. However, only one came away from Drum fortress and that will have to improve. A young team who should get better and Intermediate championship favourites.

16 TOURMAKEADY

TOURMAK' are a tricky proposition. Their current form is exceptional but will the lack of rest come back to haunt them? Their players are flying but they're a small squad. We've decided to be conservative with our ranking on the basis of a long

season with a small panel seeing them struggle at senior. But don't be too surprised if we're wrong with guys the Prendergasts, Dolans, Naughtons, Ciaran Walsh and MJ Meenaghan around.

17 BALLINTUBBER

WERE many people's favourites to win the Intermediate championship but came unstuck in that infamous away semi-final to Tourmakeady.

League form was good earlier on with four of their five defeats coming after they were out of championship. The addition of James Horan to management is a coup as is the return of Paul Earley. A talented, young team with potential but that has been the case for a while now. It is time they started making it happen.

18 DAVITTS

ONE of the most deceiving teams in the county. Capable of mixing it with the best of them but the last two years under. Expect big things from Simon Cloherty, Declan Neary and Sean McHale (if available).

Impressive league form, being the only Division 2 team to beat Ballaghaderreen, and will benefit from league promotion. Guys like Michael Conroy, Colm Boyle, Ronan McNamara and Alan Roche are top level club footballers and Davitts will be planning on nothing less than an Intermediate championship win.

19 LOUISBURGH

JUST about kept their senior status with a win over Kiltimagh in the pits of December and had an indifferent Division 2 campaign too. Mixed some very good results (beating Ballintubber and drawing with Tourmakeady) with receiving a 24 point hammering from Ballaghaderreen. They should benefit from being in the new Division 1 but they need more match

A CASE OF NATURAL SELECTION

WITH every chart, poll or selection there will be fairly obvious choices and then there will be some that will provoke debate writes *Edwin McGreal*.

Of course clubs that are ranked below others are still very capable of turning them over. Nobody would be entirely surprised if Westport (ranked 11th) beat any of the three clubs ranked

immediately above them (Moy Davitts, Kiltane or Knockmore) on a given day but our rankings were based on how consistent we feel teams will be for the season. What became apparent in compiling

the rankings was that, at senior level, once you take Crossmolina, Ballina and possibly Ballaghaderreen out of the equation, the majority of other teams are capable of winning or losing to each other any given Sunday. Put simply, it is apparent that Mayo senior club football is one of the most competitive and even in the country. If

each team is fit, organised and motivated then it will be one fierce scrap for places. But Tom Jordan's Crossmolina are still the team to catch.

They could well struggle again to stay senior this year if their group is anyway tough.

20 GARRYMORE

THE old power-brokers look very much to be on the wane. Garry' lost seven of their Division 2 league games this year and lost all their senior championship group games. They possess a group of Minors who could make a difference but it's a big ask.

Are the favourites to lose their senior status and won't be helped by being placed in the new Division 2 (the only Senior club there) after finishing third last in Division 2 in 2006.

21 PARKE

CAN they repeat or better last season? We wouldn't rule it out. They may suffer from a couple of retirements and manager Tommy O'Boyle has stepped aside but over half their team are 25 and under. Expect big things from Simon Cloherty, Declan Neary and Sean McHale (if available).

22 KILTIMAGH

IN their first year back to Intermediate, Kiltimagh will be hoping to bounce straight back up. They will be boosted with the input that minor forwards Liam Lydon and Ronan Malee will offer as they are in dire need of scoring power. Contenders at Intermediate level but we don't see them winning it.

23 KILMEENA

IN the new look Division 1, Kilmeena have been handed the toughest group in 1B and that will either make or break them. Another side with a young, talented team although they don't have many options if injury becomes a problem. Will ask questions of plenty of Intermediate teams.

24 SWINFORD

BACK in the new look Division 2 and will finally be hoping to make an impression on the Intermediate championship after failing to emerge from the group for two years running. Young players like Aidan Campbell and Minor duo Rory Kelly and Shane Philbin can make an impression alongside the established names.

Another side who may suffer from Division 2 status this season, they are a quarter-final team at best.

25 AGHAMORE

ANOTHER team with a young age profile and over the next three years they will continually be provided with strong Minor players. Have plenty of talented players in their early 20's and Aghamore will be challenging for Intermediate honours inside five years but maybe not just this year.

26 BALLYHAUNIS

WERE showing very well in 2006 up until a collapse in the county semi-final against Parke. Were indifferent in Division 3 but they can point to a hectic schedule for their dual players.

Another side who may suffer from Division 2 status this season, they are a quarter-final team at best.

27 KILLALA

COULD be questions over whether they will be Junior in '07 if they win the All-Ireland title but, bar their county final defeat to Crossmolina B, Declan O'Dea's team are good enough for another level.

Impressively topped Division 3 ahead of eight Intermediate teams. If they are not promoted this year, they will be in 2008.

28 CILL CHOMAIN

THE 2005 Junior champions had a good Intermediate campaign last year, bringing Ballintubber to a replay in the quarter-final but they finished second bottom of Division 2.

Their reliance on dual players who also line out with Inver United often presents problems but they are a young team who can make an impression.

29 HOLLYMOUNT

ANOTHER team on the slide. Holly' finished bottom of Division 2 and struggled in championship too. While young players like John Healy, Darragh Hughes and Oisín Gill will get better, the age profile of Holly' isn't conducive to making a burst back to where they came from.

30 BONNICONLON

HAD a decent league campaign even if they never threatened in championship. Have able players like Damien Dempsey, Alan Egan and Des McCann but strength in depth is a problem. Won't struggle to keep their status but unlikely to trouble the knockout stages either.

31 MAYO GAELS

GAELS have little coming through to change from being an average Intermediate team. Struggled in Division

3 and their championship form was similar, beating Kilmalee but losing to Tourmakeady and Ballyhaunis. Have work to do and may struggle.

KILMAINE

WHEN they came out of Junior in 2003, many thought it wouldn't be long before they were Senior. Lost an Intermediate semi-final in a year later and have struggled since. Another with work to do to reverse the tide.

CROSSMOLINA B

SUCCESS is meant to make you stronger but in Crossmolina B's case, the opposite is likely to be true. Will lose some of their best players to the first team and their year could be tough.

THE NEALE

WILL be one of the favourites for the Intermediate despite a shock defeat to Moygownagh in last year's quarter-final. Won every game en route to topping Division 4 and should improve further.

35 BALLA

CAME badly unstuck in the Junior semi-final against Crossmolina B in 2005. James Armstrong will be determined to have his charges back in better shape this year and with key man Alan Costello back to his best, they have a chance.

36 CARRAMORE

WERE competitive in Division 3 of the league but slipped badly in the group stages of the Junior championship, being pipped at the post by Ballintubber B. Remain perennial championship contenders.

37 ISLANDEADY

WERE promoted from Division 4 and capable of making the Junior breakthrough someday; hard to know if this will be it though. Under the new management of club legend Tony 'Ticker' Collins.

38 BALLINA B

RELEGATED from Intermediate this year it's hard to see Ballina B coming straight back up. Should qualify from the group stages but they could, like their neighbours in Crossmolina, be weakened by losing players to the first team.

39 MOYGOWNAGH

FINISHED bottom of Division 3 with eleven straight defeats but were more at home in the Junior championship, making it to the semi-finals. Unlikely though to be one of the teams who will push for Junior honours.

40 EASTERN GAELS

THEIR championship form hints at a team who will struggle in the new Division 2. In the Junior Section D, Eastern Gaels finished sixth out of eight teams, below three second or B teams. An uphill struggle.

