

SUNSPORT INVESTIGATION

HQ WORRY

OVER RISING NUMBER OF CASES

GAA'S HIP OP STARS



MULLIGAN... deadly

John the lookout for May

FBD LEAGUE

LEITRIM V

ROSCOMMON

By GORDON MANNING

ROSCOMMON boss John Evans feels both teams in tomorrow's FBD League final will have one eye on the Championship.

The Rossies, who beat Mayo last weekend, face Leitrim in the decider in Carrick-on-Shannon.

But the sides are also due to meet in the Connaught Championship on May 18 and Evans says that adds extra interest to proceedings.

He added: "Leitrim have certainly been showing form - they won the FBD last year, so it's another challenge and good preparation for us."

History

For the Ridge County there is the added incentive of making history by becoming the first team from the county to successfully defend a title.

And both finalists also have important league campaigns coming up.

Roscommon will be hoping to gain promotion from Division 3.

While Leitrim must emerge from Division 4 if they are to make any significant progress over the coming years.

They host Antrim in their league opener on Sunday February 2 and boss Seán Hagan said: "The whole thing is geared towards the National League, to get our best team starting against Antrim."

Leitrim will look to Emlin Mulligan to lead their attack tomorrow against a side high on confidence after beating Mayo.

PADDY POWER ODDS: Leitrim 9-4, Roscommon 4-9, Draw 15-2.

VERDICT: Roscommon.

No place for biting

By JACKIE CAHILL

PAT QUILL has warned biting will not be tolerated in Ladies Football.

The Ladies Gaelic Football Association President insisted a case of biting has not yet been reported in Ladies football.

But he said: "Sometimes your next incident is only just around the corner so you never know."

"But it's something that team managers and players know will not be tolerated in Ladies football."

"Biting or spitting or any of those things - there is simply no place for it in a sports field."



JOHN HARRINGTON

PATRICK CARTON is the surgeon who deserves a share of credit for Clare's All-Ireland glory.

The Waterford-based doc performed operations on Banner pair Conor McGrath and Darach Honan in the last year.

And his careful cuts proved crucial as the pair knocked in late goals to clinch victory over a resurgent Cork in September's replayed final.

Chronic hip injuries had threatened to ground both inter-county careers before they had fully taken flight.

But Carton's pioneering form of keyhole hip surgery sent them soaring.

McGrath and Honan are not the only two members of the Clare team Carton has operated on.

But he will not reveal the names of the others who have not gone public themselves about the surgery.

Davy Fitzgerald's champions are not the only team who have benefited from his services either.

The number of hurlers and footballers he has operated on in Whitfield Clinic gets longer by the week.

Carton told SunSport: "The vast majority of inter-county hurlers and footballers who have had hip problems would come through our unit."

"We had good success with Clare last year because we operated on a number of their team and they ended up winning the All-Ireland."

Seal

"It was the same with Kilkenny the year before, so our track record is good at the moment."

The surgery we've developed is unique and I've presented it to various international conferences over the last few years.

"It's called a labral cuff repair. Basically the structure that gets damaged in the hips of most of these guys is the seal around the hip - the labrum - which is a vital structure in the hip."

"We've developed a unique way of protecting that during the surgery by removing a lot of bone from the hip and then restoring and repairing the labrum at the end of the procedure."

"By doing it this way we've had a great level of success."

"We've got guys back on the field who a few years ago would have been forced to give up."

But why has there been such an explosion in the number of players who have required hip surgery?

The horror of the hip has overtaken the curse of the cruciate. Kilkenny duo Richie Power and Cillian Buckley and Déise pair Richie Foley and Maurice Shanahan are just four more of the many top hurlers who have had the procedure.

Gaelic football stars are also going under the knife in growing numbers. Cork's Damien Cahalane, Paddy Kelly and Jamie O'Sullivan are currently rehabilitating.

"There are a lot of people who have been active in sport all their lives who require surgeries in their 40s and 50s."

"This surgery will hopefully allow the hip to be shaped more normally, let the athletes back to their sport and put off that eventual hip replacement."

Carton (below) believes GAA hip injuries have been misdiagnosed and mistreated for years.

He says one of the reasons there are now more hip surgeries is because the correct cause of groin problems like Gilmore's and Osteitis Pubis is being identified.



PROBE... Keyhole operation pic shows a labral tear, like one of many suffered by top GAA stars of today



A WARM SURGERY FEELING... X-ray shows hip abnormality

Young players more likely to need ball joint surgery

ing from hip surgery, as are Kildare trio Eamonn Callaghan, Eoin Doyle and Niall Kelly.

And the average age of inter-county GAA players requiring hip surgery is getting LOWER.

Last year Waterford's Stephen Bennett - thought to be the best minor hurler in the country - underwent double hip surgery.

He is just one of many in his age group and Carton says that is because some young sportsmen are more prone to it than others.

He explained: "The vast majority of the younger patients would have a certain shape of hip that causes conflict in the ball and the socket during sports."

"The more sports they play and the more intensive it is, the higher chance they have of developing problems in their hips at a young age."

"In the past these symptoms would have been managed with physio and young players would have been forced to ease off on their training and stick to one code."

"You could manage for a couple of years - but, generally, the symptoms would get the better of you and they'd have to give up their sport."

"And once they do that, the symptoms would slowly disappear again."

"Those in their late 20s and early 30s who get the symptoms would be those who would need hip replacements at an earlier age."

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"So there's no doubt the GAA are making efforts to look at this and address it, which is very important."

"I expect that over the next few years there'll be changes in the timing and intensity of training as well as when they introduce competitions."

"I'm more than happy to get involved with the GAA and other sporting bodies to look at ways of trying to educate people, and work on ways of minimising the risk to the young guys coming through."

Carton has already begun to notice a growing awareness of hip injuries and how they should be treated in the GAA community.

He added: "We've spent the last six years teaching physios and doctors how to diagnose the condition."

"A lot of the physios are getting good at it now. So we're picking up on it early, we're treating it early and the results are so much better then if you can actually stop the process early in its tracks."

"I've noticed that a lot of county managers who have noticed groin or hip problems with their players are trying to get it sorted out as early as possible rather than try to nurse a player through a season."

"That's a change and it's encouraging because the earlier we can operate on these sorts of injuries the better results we'll get."

"They're taking it seriously and I know from talking to doctors and physiotherapists that they are very concerned."

"One of the ways we're going to look at tackling this is by bringing in hip screening."

"We've just had a research programme approved by the UCD ethics committee to look at 100 athletes who don't have symptoms to see if there's any underlying problems with hips that could

develop. The Kildare panel are going to get involved in it and that should happen in the next few weeks."

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SURGERY... Waterford's Stephen Bennett (right) had a hip op

LIAM HAS CONCERNS

LIAM O'NEILL admits the rise in hip surgeries among elite young hurlers and footballers is a major worry.

Waterford's All-Ireland-winning minor hurler Stephen Bennett is one of a number of underage players who had double-hip ops in the last year.

And O'Neill insists that is "one too many".

The GAA president told SunSport: "You have to worry what are they going to be walking like when they're older."

Duty

"I've said it to clubs and county boards wherever I've gone, it's our duty to put the player first."

"I've said to any person in charge of young teams that they're working in child-care whether they like that description or not."

At this time of year many of the top young players can be over-loaded as they are training and playing with BOTH their county's Under-21 and senior panels, as well as representing uni-

versities in the Sigerson and Fitzgibbon Cups. O'Neill is worried that a dangerous workload is being put on players at certain times of the calendar.

He said: "It's still a concern and I'm trying to conduct an exercise with counties where we want them to tell us their full list of games for last year."

"Then we'll be able to see at what points of the year we're loading too many games on players."

"I think we'll find huge gaps in the calendar and also periods of huge loading. It will have to be graphically illustrated though, because most people can't see it unless it is put in front of them."

"That's why we're in the mess we're in - because we haven't looked at it. People are very slow to give us information but the more they resist me the more I want to get it."

"If last year's didn't work and we stick with the same schedule this year, then what message does that send out about how we're looking at games?"

"Change is a process, I know that. But at some stage if there's a good idea then change will come eventually - even if it is resisted."

O'Neill believes technology could be used to track how much elite players train and prevent managers from taking advantage of them.

He added: "I like the idea of a chip that records all the training a player does over the course of a year. A player would log his training sessions and matches every week and there would be a limit on what he's allowed to do."

By JOHN HARRINGTON

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He added: "I like the idea of a chip that records all the training a player does over the course of a year. A player would log his training sessions and matches every week and there would be a limit on what he's allowed to do."

"So if you're on the UCD Sigerson team, the Laois Under-21 team and the Laois senior team, you can go to all of your managers and show them exactly what you're doing and explain why you can't take part in every training session with every team."

"I think that sort of technology would be fantastic."

BEEN THERE... Cork footballer Damien Cahalane and Kilkenny hurling ace Richie Power have gone under the knife

THE NUMBERS DO NOT LIE...

THE NUMBER of GAA players undergoing these procedures is steadily rising every year.

In 2012 there were 132 claims for hip surgery made under the GAA's player insurance scheme - compared to 105 in 2011.

The player insurance scheme covers up to €4,500 for surgery with a double hip operation coming in at around €10,300.



WORRIED... GAA chief Liam O'Neill believes young players are being worked to the bone



CUNNINGHAM... trip

Old rivals will be up to Ant-ics

WALSH CUP SEMIS TOMORROW (All 2pm) KILKENNY V GALWAY Freshford

GALWAY boss Anthony Cunningham believes there could be a bit of shadow boxing in Freshford tomorrow.

Kilkenny and Galway will probably be seeing each other a couple of more times this year.

The sides will cross swords in Division 1A of the league on March 9. If they both win their Leinster quarter-finals they will meet in a provincial semi-final in June.

The Cats were untested by DIT last week, running out 5-23 to 1-9 winners. Galway had to battle to beat Offaly, 1-14 to 1-13.

Both managers are looking at players but Galway remain without their Portumna contingent - including Joe Canning and Damien Hayes.

PADDY POWER ODDS: Kilkenny 4-9 Galway 15-8 Draw 10-1

VERDICT: Kilkenny WEXFORD V DUBLIN

ANTHONY DALY has made wholesale changes to his Dublin team from the side which beat UCD during the week.

Simon Timlin, Matthew McCaffrey, Shane Durkin, Matthew Quilty, Robbie McMahon, Eamon Dillon and Mark Schutte come in to face Wexford.

Liam Dunne's Wexford hammered NUI Galway 4-22 to 0-7 last week and will hope to build on that momentum.

But Daly's charges should be fighting for their places and that might be the difference.

PADDY POWER ODDS: Wexford 11-8 Dublin 8-13 Draw 10-1

VERDICT: Dublin WATERFORD CRYSTAL SEMIS CLARE V UCC SIXMILEBIDGE

DAVY FITZGERALD'S Clare showed some decent early season form to beat Limerick 1-14 to 0-11 last weekend.

Fitzgerald's men are not long back from their team holiday and he was casting his eyes over the periphery last year.

UCC, who beat Mary Immaculate 3-28 to 2-14 last time out, have never won the Waterford Crystal Cup.

The Banner should be strong enough to ensure this is not their year.

PADDY POWER ODDS: Clare 1-5 UCC 7-2 Draw 12-1

VERDICT: Clare TIPPERARY V UL Nenagh

TIPPERARY have yet to be tested this season. They hammered LIT 3-20 to 0-5 and then last weekend chucked up a 2-16 to 0-8 win over Kerry. University of Limerick surprised Waterford with a 1-11 to 0-8 win. They also beat WIT 2-30 to 1-20. They are unlikely to amass such a big score against Tipp.

PADDY POWER ODDS: Tipperary 1-5 UL 7-2 Draw 11-1

VERDICT: Tipperary

TOMORROW: WATERFORD STAR RICHIE FOLEY'S TRIPLE HIP OP HELL