

SFC – A Brief History:

By: Longford Gaelic Stats

In the years that followed the foundation of the GAA in Thurles in 1884, the movement quickly began to permeate throughout the country with the establishment of clubs and county structures. While it had been long assumed that 1887 was the first year of official activity in Longford, it was in fact the foundation of the Granard Healy's club that should record 1888 as the year of initiation of the GAA in the county. Thereafter, the words of Michael Cusack seemed prophetic as the Association 'spread like a prairie fire' and by the time of the draw for a first Longford Senior Football Championship in 1890, twenty one clubs had been established and were ready for competitive action.

As those clubs sprung up across Longford, the first County Committee (County Board) was elected at a meeting at the Market Square in Longford town on Sunday, 13th October 1889. When one considers how fractured the local GAA and their competitions became over the coming decades, it does seem remarkable that the 1890 Senior Football Championship involved so many teams and was played out to a conclusion. The final was played between Columbkille St Columbkille's and Rathcline John Martins in Abbeycartron on 8th June 1890, with the North Longford side winning by 1-0 to 0-4. Lest anyone be confused by that score-line, it should be noted that a goal at that time could not be beaten by any number of points.

After such encouraging beginnings, the 1891 Senior Football Championships would involve even more teams (26 in total), but was beset by problems from the start, with confusion over notice for games, withdrawals and objections. The GAA was faced with its first crisis in the aftermath of the Parnell affair, and activities and structures in Longford and other counties effectively ceased. The 1891 Senior Football Championship remained unfinished, and more than a decade would pass before competitive games resumed.

With the resumption of GAA affairs in Longford in 1904, the Senior Football Championship now involved a far smaller group of clubs. The 1904 competition included nine teams, and Longford Leo Caseys defeated Killoe Young Emmets in the final by 2-7 to 0-1. Championships were often few and far between in the years that followed. In fact, only eight competitions were successfully completed in the 37 years after the first competition of 1890. The fact that they were sporadic can be attributed to a number of different, and significant, factors, including the political crisis of 1891 and the conflicts and turmoil that became common features of Irish life in the first two decades of the 20th century culminating in the Easter Rising and Irish Independence.

Killoe Young Emmets became the first club to enjoy a dominant period of success, as they claimed four Senior Football Championships over a nine-year period between 1907 & 1915. However, having previously been credited with the 1912 Championship, we have now established that this final was in fact the conclusion of the 1911 competition; the decider was played on 3rd March 1912, with Killoe defeating Edgeworthstown by 0-2 to 0-1. There was no competition in 1916, 1917 & 1918, with the Spanish Flu pandemic and War of Independence impacting activity at the time.

The 1919 Senior Football Championship previously credited to Clonguish was in fact the Senior League title (called League-Championship at the time). The Senior Football Championship of 1919 actually concluded with victory for Clonbroney (now Seán Connolly's) over Killoe Young Emmets in a replay by 1-3 to 0-3 on 3rd August 1919. In 1920 Ballinamuck 98's won the club's first and only Senior Football Championship title with victory over Longford Wanderers on a scoreline of 1-4 to 0-0. Due to a combination of factors, including the Civil War, Longford's prolonged involvement in the 1924 Junior championship (reaching the All-Ireland final which was played in

July 1925), and the controversy over Longford's suspension by the Leinster Council (1926-27), there were no club Senior Championships played in any of the years between 1921 and 1927.

The Championship titles of 1922 and 1923 had previously been credited to Longford Wanderers, but records confirm those as League titles with no Championships played in either of those years. The 1926 final between Granard and Mullinalaghta, which was abandoned due to violent scenes, was in fact the League (League-Championship) final. Senior Football Championship eventually resumed in 1927 with Drumlish winning the clubs first title with victory over their neighbours and fellow parishioners Ballinamuck 98's in the County Final – the only time two clubs from the same parish faced off in the SFC decider. Drumlish retained the title in 1928 having been awarded the match (county final was scheduled for 27th May 1928, but Longford Wanderers failed to field).

Efforts to establish the scoreline from the SFC final of 1932 have proven fruitless – it is the only county final on record which does not have a score-line in our records. In reporting the game between Drumlish and Granard for the Longford Leader, Jim Mannix apologised to readers for doing so a week later than expected as he had been ill. However, the brief report did not include the final score. It should be noted however that Jim provided the GAA reports for the Longford Leader for many years and without his commitment and service, we may have struggled to confirm many score-lines for the 1930's and 1940's.

St. Marys Granard had become the principal force in the early 1930's, reaching seven finals in a row. In the post-war years, North Longford clubs including Mullinalaghta, Colmcille & Drumlish Young Irelands (later Eire Óg) were more dominant than those in the southern half of the county, though eventually Longford Slashers emerged as a new club in 1954 and today leads the Roll of Honour with 16 Senior Championship titles to date.

The golden years of Longford football in the 1960s were dominated at club level by Clonguish and St. Marys Granard. The two sides back-boned the county team with the likes of the Bardens, Flynns, Burns', Mick Hopkins and Terry McGovern, and shared out nine Senior Championship titles between them from 1962 to 1970. Clonguish won four consecutive titles between 1962 and 1965, the first and only club to achieve this.

From the 1970's to the 1990's, Longford Slashers, Cashel and Fr. Manning Gaels stand out as the most dominant clubs at different times (Cashel in the early 1980's, Slashers in the early 1990's and Fr. Manning Gaels in the late 1990's), while new challengers emerged towards the end of the 20th century and into the beginning of the 21st century including Dromard, Abbeylara, Ballymahon and Clonguish. The 2010's were dominated by Killoe Young Emmets and Mullinalaghta St. Columbas with the two clubs shared out 10 championship titles between them from 2012 to 2023. The breakthrough success of Mullinalaghta in capturing Longford's first ever Leinster Club SFC title in 2018 is testament to the competitive nature of club football in this era.

Fourteen of today's clubs in Longford can lay claim to one or more SFC titles and only seven clubs have never appeared in a SFC final. It has often been said that there was little more than a 'kick of a ball' between many teams in the Longford championship. This was literally true in 48 finals where the winning margin was one score (a goal or a point).

There have also been finals and performances of significant note over the years. Ardagh St. Patricks overcame a fancied Longford Slashers side by 3-15 to 0-10 with a near perfect performance in 1978; Mostrim and Ardagh St. Patricks required two replays and 210 minutes of football to decide the title in 1985; Abbeylara won their maiden title with a surprisingly comfortable victory over Fr Manning Gaels in the rain back in 2000. The pick of the county finals over the past 30 years might well include the 1994 final between Longford Slashers and Colmcille, Ballymahon's breakthrough win over Clonguish in 2002, and the two-game duel between Killoe Young Emmets and Longford Slashers in 2012.