



CONNACHT FINAL 2010

• Roscommon v Sligo • McHale Park, Castlebar • Throw-in: 4pm



Crucial midfield battle

Connacht SFC championship final

Roscommon v Sligo
McHale Park Castlebar, Sunday at 4 pm

■ Seamus Duke

The last time that Roscommon and Sligo played in a Connacht senior football final (1947), the vast majority of the attendance at this Sunday's match at McHale Park would not have been born. So Sunday's Connacht decider is a unique pairing between two teams who dearly want to win the Nestor Cup.

Sligo are the hot favourites and deservedly so. Not alone did they sweep through the league this year in Division three but they actually won the divisional final in Croke Park playing some very attractive football. Then they set about the Connacht championship in very determined fashion.

On the face of it they had what looked like a very tough draw. But as we now know they disposed of Mayo in Sligo and then went to Galway and should have beaten the Tribesmen in Pearse Stadium in the first game. Then they battled back like a really seasoned championship outfit in the final ten minutes to overcome Galway in the replay.

Any team who beat Galway and Mayo in the Connacht championship deserve to be favourites to win the final, but I think that the bookies odds of five to one on is poor value for Sligo.

By contrast it has been a poor year overall for Roscommon. Relegation to division four was followed by a less than convincing win against London. Granted, Roscommon played much better against Leitrim than they have in recent times but Leitrim are a division four side whereas Galway and Mayo, whom Sligo have beaten, are division one teams.

But when you look at the form lines a little closer there are very good signs for Roscommon. Firstly, Roscommon's only

win in the league was against Louth who should be Leinster SF champions today. Roscommon were very unlucky against Wexford in the league and we know that Wexford went to Galway and beat The Tribesmen last weekend.

Then there is Limerick who should have beaten Kerry in this year's Munster final. In last year's league Roscommon should have beaten Limerick down in Kilmallock, so maybe the form book has been thrown out the window this year.

Sligo are a very impressive team and they have developed a panel of 22 or 23 players who have all performed well when called upon. Philip Greene is a very accomplished goalkeeper and will man the goal line for the Yeats county on Sunday.

Captain of the Sligo team, Charlie Harrison leads by example and the Naomh Eoin man has been having a fantastic year at corner back. Noel McGuire captained Sligo when they won the Connacht title in 2007 and is a vastly experienced and inspirational full back and beside him Ross Donovan has a reputation for being one of the top defenders in the game now.

In the half back line U-21 captain Keelan Cawley has been very impressive while Mark Quinn and the lively Johnny Davey have been impressive all year. It will be interesting to see who Sligo play at midfield. Tony Taylor is returning from injury while Stephen Gilmartin has been in and out of the team.

Up front Sligo have loads of options. Mayo man Alan Costello has been having a great year for the side while Mark Breheny will lead the attack at centre half forward. Breheny is a super player and was the man of the match in the replay against Galway. It is likely that Eamonn O'Hara will also start in the half forward line but where he will end up playing is anyone's guess. Kenneth Sweeney, Stephen Coen, Colm

McGee, Gary Gaughan and Sean Davey are all in with a chance of a place on Sunday. But the star of the Sligo attack for the past two years has been the brilliant David Kelly who in the humble opinion of this writer is the best corner forward in the game alongside Colm Cooper.

Then there is the talisman of Sligo football Eamon O'Hara. He may start as a wing forward but he could be played in front of the full back line, at midfield or in attack. He seems to be the "go to" man wherever he is needed and he has been most effective this year.

Roscommon will be along familiar lines on Sunday. Geoffrey Claffey is now one of the best net minders in the game and he will have a huge influence on proceedings on Sunday.

In the full back line there will be a huge onus on Seanie McDermott, team captain Peter Domican, and Stephen Ormsby because Sligo dangerman David Kelly is a huge threat and is the most likely Sligo attacker to get the match-winning scores.

David Casey was the 'man of the match' against Leitrim and he will be a vital player again in McHale Park on Sunday. Cathal Dineen and Seanie Purcell are the men in possession of the other half back line spots, but Enda Kenny is back fully fit and may be introduced in that sector.

At midfield Michael Finneran and Karol Mannion will have a vital job of getting enough ball for the attack and David O'Gara is also a player who is back fit and who may well be an option in this area.

In attack, Roscommon will have to ensure that the scoring onus does not rest with Donie Shine. In the half forward line David Keenan, Paul Garvey and Cathal Cregg started against Leitrim but all three will have to up the ante for Sunday's game.

Ger Heneghan did well against Leitrim, and Donie Shine remains our biggest

scoring threat and John Rogers will also have to chip in if Roscommon are to have a chance of winning the game.

Finals are all about will to win and Roscommon will know that this is a marvellous chance for them to totally resurrect their season and win an unlikely Connacht title. However the facts are that this young Roscommon team have not been impressive over the past two years and the form in the games against London and Leitrim would not inspire confidence ahead of Sunday's game. However, the second half display against Leitrim was a big improvement and the team are progressing.

By any yardstick Sligo have to be the favourites to win. They have a clever manager who has got the best out of his players and their wins against Galway and Mayo have been well merited. However, it is also a fact that Roscommon would never have been afraid of playing Sligo in the championship and that will be no different on Sunday.

Sligo have played in three very bruising games in the championship so far and that will stand to them. They have match winners in their attack in Mark Breheny, Eamon O'Hara and David Kelly and the Roscommon defence will have to play as well as they have done for many years if they want to restrict Sligo.

However the real battle will take place at midfield where Michael Finneran and Karol Mannion will have to get at least 50 percent possession in that area. Cathal Cregg and the other half forwards will also have to work harder than they have ever done before to secure possession for the attack if Roscommon are to win this game.

I am expecting that there will be no more than four or five points in the game in any event. According to the bookmakers Sligo will win easily but I don't think that even the most committed Sligo supporter