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Just a thought ...

CONNACHT'S inter-pro victory, their first in 45 years, is a significant development. Captained by Mayo man Aidan O'Shea, it will lift morale in the province and make for a more competitive championship.

Flying the GAA flag in Cardiff

THE evenings are lengthening, the sap is rising and GAA clubs the world over are bursting into life. In Cardiff, deep in the heart of Welsh rugby land, St Colmcilles is greeting the new season with untrammelled optimism.

Located at the western edge of Gloucestershire County Board, the Cardiff club is the only non-university GAA club in Wales. It's a thriving facility for young Gaels and four Mayo men are at the heart of it ... all of them motivated by their Irish heritage and a passionate love of our games.

College lecturer Barry McDonnell, a native of Castlebar, lines out in defence. Financial planner and company director Shane Hyland from Ballinrobe is their full-forward and the club's treasurer.

Fergus O'Neill from Partry, a member of the staff of Cardiff Council, mans the posts. And their corner back, a financial controller who came to Cardiff 14 months ago to be with his girlfriend, is Patrick McHale from Cooneal, Ballina.

St Colmcilles has a chequered history according to Barry McDonnell, who is son of popular Castlebar fisherman Hughie McDonnell and his wife Theresa. It was formed in 1956 succeeding the Emmetts, which had folded in 1915 because of the Great War.

It grew steadily and robustly, winning the league in 1961 and their first county championship in 1967. Six years later they were top of the pile with the championship of Great Britain captured.

An inverse proportion to that significant achievement, however, was the astonishing collapse of the club the following year when, simply, it ceased to operate.

Resuscitated in 1983 for underage football, St Colmcilles, bedecked in new colours, established



HAVE BOOTS, WILL TRAVEL The St Colmcille's GAA club, Cardiff squad are pictured at the Paidí Ó Sé Tournament in Ventry, Co Kerry last year.

firmer roots. A senior football side was later fielded, and then a ladies' camogie team.

The club has since won county league and championship in all grades, culminating in the under-14s winning the All-Britain title in 1988.

"A lot of hard work by a few dedicated people has resulted in the youth of the Cardiff area being able to play our national games today," said Barry.

"The GAA pay for a youth development/promotional officer for schools around the county. The system is beginning to pay off as we now have a minor team that is feeding the senior team over the past couple of years.

"When you consider that a trip to play South-

ampton's Southern Gaels involves a round trip of 300 miles, it shows true belief that the GAA will flourish in a time of reverse emigration."

He said Gaels arriving in Cardiff were mainly students and white collar workers, "as opposed to the manual workers of yesteryear, who are still coming in, but not in great numbers. One thing is certain though, the love of Ireland, our heritage and our games will impossibly never diminish."

Cardiff Metropolitan University, where Barry is a lecturer in Physiology and Head of the Vascular Physiology Research Group, has merged with two other colleges for participation in the British University Games.

"The university team provides Colmcilles with a pool of players who stay in Cardiff for work, which acts as a sustainable way of recruiting new players. So both teams work together to keep the GAA alive here.

"The university and club also field a ladies' team, which works on the same basis as the men's in terms of overlap between university and club," said Barry, who keeps up with local events through *The Mayo News*.

The club has had a major sponsor for many years now in CM Utilities who are based in Cardiff. Fundraising events are held during the season, ten per cent of which this year is being donated to a local cancer charity.

Criticism of Cooper tackle is 'claptrap'

KERRY come to MacHale Park on Sunday without Colm Cooper. He has been one of the great exponents of Gaelic football over the past decade and Kerry will miss the sparkle of his creativity.

But to suggest, as one analyst has already done, that the tackle that contributed to Cooper's cruciate injury was dangerous and reckless is a typically illogical piece of claptrap that is aired now and again in a bid to emasculate the physical aspect of the game.

The attempt to prevent Cooper from scoring was indisputably courageous and legitimate.

Unfortunately one player received a serious injury. No foul was called. Nor should there have been. Blocking is a basic tenet of Gaelic football. It happens frequently, but only when an iconic figure is injured does it make headlines.

It takes courage to execute it successfully, and while on this occasion Cooper had scored before the impact, neither player, intensely committed as each was, could have checked his momentum in time to avoid the collision.

No Kerry person complained. They voiced sorrow at the loss of a player whose leadership

will be missed over the summer. But being Kerry, they carry no grudge about a vigorous tackle properly executed. It's not in Kerry's make-up to moan.

If, however, they take advantage of the volumes of advice proffered to them on how to succeed without their celebrated leader Kerry will come to Castlebar on Sunday with buoyed up confidence.

Andy Moran may not be blessed with the elegance of Cooper on the football field, but he was to Mayo two seasons ago what Cooper is to Kerry. He was Mayo's lynchpin and at

the peak of his powers when forced to retire with a cruciate injury in their match against Down in 2012. I think Mayo needed him more than Kerry need Cooper now.

True, they are in transition, but their pride and tradition are nourishment on which few other counties can call and from which generally comes the spark to reignite their fires.

We'll get an idea of their progress on Sunday when they come to MacHale Park sharing with Mayo a desperate need to win their first league points.

It's not often you hear of a Kerry side being out-muscled

by the opposition, but according to reports, Derry were physically stronger in their most recent league defeat.

The Kingdom will benefit on Sunday, however, from the return of Marc Ó Sé to the defence, and they have in James O'Donoghue, Barry John Keane and Conor Cox three talented forwards offering a stern test to a Mayo defence that has been found wanting in recent games.

Eamonn Fitzmaurice is also able to call on the likes of Johnny Buckley and Kieran O'Leary now that Dr Crokes are out of the championship, and together

with Anthony Maher and Donnchadh Walsh, they still represent formidable opposition.

The Mitchells' success denies James Horan the use of some regulars and the chance to blood a few new young hopes. If none of the long-term injured is ready to return and Ger Cafferkey, Colm Boyle and Lee Keegan are still nursing injuries from Omagh, the manager will be hard pressed to field anything but a skeletal side unlikely to succeed.

But the opportunity is ripe for the fringe players to prove worthy of the manager's faith in them. This is their chance.