

## **Proposals for reforms of the GAA Hurling Championships 2018-20**

Following the debate at Congress 2017 on the reform of the All-Ireland senior football championship, the Uachtarán and Ard Stiúrthóir asked the Central Competitions Control Committee (CCCC) to examine the current structures for the senior, U-21 and minor hurling championships. In doing so, they identified three questions that needed to be addressed:

- might the eight additional matches provided for in the new football championship structure (namely, the round-robin group stage that replaces the existing quarter-final format) draw attention away from and diminish the All-Ireland senior hurling championship?
- do the arrangements for Galway's participation in the Leinster senior, All-Ireland minor and U-21 hurling championships best serve the needs of that county, and of hurling in general?
- do the existing structures best serve the needs of Antrim (or any other Ulster county that might qualify for the All-Ireland series) in the minor and U-21 hurling championships?

The Uachtarán and Ard Stiúrthóir held informal discussions with various individuals and units of the Association and reflected on various proposals submitted from committees and individuals over the years. This information was collated and passed to the CCCC to provide a basis for discussion on revised structures for the hurling championships.

The views of the National Hurling Development Committee and An Coiste Bainistíochta were also sought before completion of the proposals that are outlined below.

Based on the feedback received, the CCCC established three obligations that must be met in formulating its proposals:

- (i) the retention of the provincial senior championships;
- (ii) the provision of additional quality games for players and spectators;
- (iii) any proposal adopted must not have a negative impact on the time available to play club games.

This latter constraint precluded the adoption of various suggested structures that worked well in principle but that did not take cognisance of the length of time required to run off such new competition structures. The proposals, therefore, were formulated – for all levels of senior hurling – to ensure:

- that significant club-only periods would be maintained between the end of the Allianz hurling leagues and the beginning of the senior championships;
- that August (except for the All-Ireland semi-finals and final) and subsequent months would be left free for club competitions.

The recommendations that follows regarding the Liam MacCarthy Cup have their roots in a proposal first mooted by the HDC in 2012.

This document proposes that the rules governing the All-Ireland senior, U-21 and minor championships be temporarily set aside in 2018, 2019 and 2020 to allow the following formats to be the subject of experimentation in the championships of 2018, 2019 and 2020.

### **Senior Hurling Championship Proposals**

#### **I. Liam MacCarthy Cup**

To consist of two provincial championships and a provincial qualifier group (linked to the Leinster and Munster championships).

#### **A. Leinster and Munster Championships Round-Robin Groups**

<u>Leinster</u>	<u>Munster</u>
Dublin	Clare
Galway	Cork
Kilkenny	Limerick
Offaly	Tipperary
Wexford	Waterford

1. Both provincial championships will be played on a round-robin basis; therefore, there will be five rounds of four matches each.
2. Each team will have two home and two away matches.
3. The two teams finishing in the top two places in each group will qualify for their respective provincial final.
4. The winners of the provincial finals will qualify for the All-Ireland semi-finals.
5. The defeated provincial finalists will qualify for the All-Ireland quarter-finals.
6. The third-placed teams in both championship groups will remain in the championship (see 'All-Ireland Quarter-Finals', below).
7. The bottom-placed team in the Leinster championship round-robin group will play in the provincial qualifier group in the following year, and will be replaced in the Leinster championship by the winner of the provincial qualifier in the previous year. Where Kerry (or another Munster team) wins the provincial qualifier, they will play off against the bottom team in the Munster championship round robin. The winner of that play-off game will play in the Munster championship round robin in the following year and the loser will play in the provincial qualifier.

**Note:** The teams identified, above, as participating in the Leinster and Munster championship round-robin groups are based on current (i.e. 2017) qualified teams.

#### **B. Provincial Qualifier Group**

1. In 2018 this group will consist of five teams:

Laois  
Westmeath  
Kerry  
Antrim  
Carlow

The eligible teams have been determined by their final positions in the 2017 championships. Laois, Westmeath and Kerry, having finished, respectively, in first, second and third places in the 2017 qualifier, will take three of the provincial qualifier group places in 2018. Meath, having finished bottom of the 2017 qualifier, will be relegated to the 2018 Christy Ring Cup and will be replaced in the 2018 provincial qualifier group by the 2017 Christy Ring Cup winners and runners-up (Antrim and Carlow).

2. The winning team of the provincial qualifier group will qualify for a play-off match, on an alternate-year basis, against the third-placed team in the Munster or Leinster championship round-robin group. The play-off winner will progress to the All-Ireland quarter-finals (see table below).
3. The winning team of the provincial qualifier group will also be promoted to the Leinster championship round-robin group for the following year and will be replaced in the provincial qualifier group by the bottom-placed team in the Leinster championship round-robin group. However, where Kerry (or another Munster team) wins the provincial qualifier, they will play off against the bottom team in the Munster championship round robin. The winner of that play-off game will play in the Munster championship round robin in the following year and the loser will play in the provincial qualifier.
4. The bottom-placed team in the provincial qualifier group will be relegated to the Christy Ring Cup and replaced by the winners of that competition.
5. The provincial qualifier group will be played on a round-robin basis, and matches will be played during the same period as those of the Munster and Leinster championship round-robin groups.

**C. All-Ireland Quarter-Finals**

1. As noted above, the defeated provincial championship finalists will qualify for the All-Ireland quarter-finals.
2. As noted above also, the third-placed teams in both the Leinster and Munster championship groups will remain in the championship, with a pathway open to them to qualify for the All-Ireland quarter-finals. The quarter-final pairings will be determined on a rolling two-year-cycle basis, as follows:

YEAR 1	YEAR 2
<p><b><u>Play-off match</u></b>            3<sup>RD</sup>-placed team in Munster championship group            v            Winner of provincial qualifier group (home-venue advantage)</p> <p style="text-align: center;"><b><u>Quarter-final 1</u></b>            Winner of above play-off match            v            Defeated Leinster provincial finalist</p> <p style="text-align: center;"><b><u>Quarter-final 2</u></b>            3<sup>rd</sup>-placed team in Leinster championship group            v            Defeated Munster provincial finalist*</p>	<p><b><u>Play-off match</u></b>            3<sup>rd</sup>-placed team in Leinster championship group            v            Winner of provincial qualifier group (home-venue advantage)</p> <p style="text-align: center;"><b><u>Quarter-final 1</u></b>            Winner of above play-off match            v            Defeated Munster provincial finalist</p> <p style="text-align: center;"><b><u>Quarter-final 2</u></b>            3<sup>rd</sup>-placed team in Munster championship group            v            Defeated Leinster provincial finalist*</p>

\*To preserve and enhance the importance of the provincial championships, home-venue advantage in the quarter-finals should be granted to the beaten provincial finalists.

#### **D. All-Ireland Semi-Finals and Final**

1. The Munster and Leinster champions will be kept apart in the semi-finals.
2. Provincial champions cannot meet the team they defeated in their provincial final in the All-Ireland semi-final.
3. Subject to the provisions of point 1 above, repeat pairings will be avoided in the All-Ireland semi-finals. A draw will take place, if necessary, to avoid repeat pairings.
4. The All-Ireland semi-final winners will meet in the All-Ireland final.

#### **Note: Provincial Championships and Provincial Qualifier Group**

While, in some respects, it was considered preferable that the provincial qualifier group-winner be allowed to enter the Leinster or Munster championship group in the same year, the CCCC considered that the scheduling impact of such a provision on the playing of club games would be contrary to the core principles of recent Congress Rule and Central Council scheduling changes (i.e. to create significant time periods for club-only activity) and would all but eliminate the possibility of having a club interlude period for the counties in the provincial qualifier group at the end of the Allianz leagues.

For this reason, the winner of the provincial qualifier group enters a play-off against either the third-placed team in the Munster or Leinster championship round robin group, which provides the right to play in the All Ireland quarter-finals. Also, the winner of the provincial qualifier group earns the opportunity to participate in the Munster or Leinster championship in the following year.

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#### **II. Christy Ring and Nicky Rackard Cups (based on 2017 finishing positions)**

**Christy Ring Cup** (eight teams):

Armagh, Derry, Down, Kildare, London, Mayo, Meath, Wicklow.

**Nicky Rackard Cup** (eight teams):

Donegal, Leitrim or Warwickshire, Longford, Louth, Monaghan, Roscommon, Sligo, Tyrone.

**Christy Ring and Nicky Rackard Cups** to be played as follows:

1. There will be two round-robin groups of four teams each.
2. The round-robin phase will be completed over no more than four weekends (i.e. three rounds plus one gap weekend).
3. Group sections to be played on a two-year cycle; each county will have at least one home game per year; where feasible, the home/away arrangements will be reversed in the second year.
4. The top-placed teams in each group will play each other in their respective final.
5. The winner of the Christy Ring Cup will be promoted to the provincial qualifier group for the following season.
6. The winner of the Nicky Rackard Cup will be promoted to the Christy Ring Cup for the following season.
7. The bottom-placed team in each group will meet in a relegation play-off; the loser will be relegated to the next-lowest grade for the following year.

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### **III. Lory Meagher Cup**

Four teams participate: Cavan, Fermanagh, Lancashire and either Leitrim or Warwickshire.

1. There will be a single round-robin group of all four teams.
2. Each team will play at least one home match.
3. The two top-placed teams will play in the final.
4. The winner will be promoted to the Nicky Rackard Cup for the following year.

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### **IV. All-Ireland U-21 Hurling Championship**

The idea of an open draw for the competition was discussed. However, it was considered that an open-draw format would undermine many of the benefits of the existing U-21 championship. It was also noted that the possibility of scheduling Wednesday-evening games would likely be lost in an open-draw format (due to potential travel distances), which could have a significant knock-on effect on counties' ability to plan club fixtures.

It was considered, too, that an open-draw format would probably require a seeding system if the competition were to remain competitive; it was also pointed out that none of the other main championships are organised on an open-draw basis.

Notwithstanding the above, the current structure – whereby Galway enters the All-Ireland semi-final without having played a game, and in which the Ulster champions have participated in only one All-Ireland final since the competition was inaugurated in 1964, despite having a guaranteed semi-final spot for much of its history – is not sustainable.

#### **Proposal**

The proposal is for Galway and any Ulster teams of sufficient strength to be accommodated in the Leinster championship. In such a scenario, the Leinster and Munster champions would qualify directly for the All-Ireland final; there would, therefore, be no All-Ireland semi-finals at this level. This format would be a significant help in creating additional time in the calendar to achieve proper scheduling of the U-21 hurling championship in the summer months (running alongside the senior provincial championships). It would also have minimum impact on club activity.

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### **V. Minor Hurling Championship**

It is recommended that changes be made to the existing structure of the All-Ireland minor hurling championships to better serve the needs of Galway, Antrim and Ulster.

#### **Proposal**

1. The provincial championships to be played as at present; the Leinster and Munster champions to qualify for the All-Ireland semi-finals.
2. A round-robin All-Ireland series to be organised to produce two more All-Ireland semi-finalists. The three participating teams will be Galway and the defeated Leinster and Munster finalists. In the event of teams finishing on equal points at the end of this round-robin series, their placings

will be determined by the following tie-break devices, in following order of application: (i) score difference, i.e. subtracting the total scores-against from the scores-for; (ii) highest total scores achieved; (iii) highest total goals scored.

**Note:** Where all three teams finish level on points and cannot be separated by the tie-break devices outlined in (i), (ii) and (iii) above, one team will go forward through the drawing of lots, and a play-off will be held between the two remaining teams.

Consideration should also be given to the participation of Antrim, and possibly of one other Ulster county, in the Leinster minor championship. If the proposals outlined in this document are accepted in principle, further discussion should take place with the HDC and the Leinster and Ulster Councils on how best to accommodate this.

This discussion should also encompass a review of the Celtic Challenge in the context of the above proposals to ensure that it continues to provide an appropriate pathway for developing counties. The discussion with the HDC should specifically consider the issue of whether counties that participate in the restructured minor hurling championship outlined above should also participate in the Celtic Challenge, and, if so, for which counties it would be most appropriate to do so.

## Master Fixtures Plan 2018

### Current Hurling Structure – Draft Outline Dates 2018 (BASED ON 2017 CALENDAR)

wk	AIBREÁN	wk	BEALTAINE	wk	MEITHEAMH
13	1 AFL FINALS	18	6 LSHC Round Robin3 RING RACKARD MEAGHER ROUND 2	22	3 LSHC Semi Finals
14	8	19	13 RING RACKARD Q-Fs; MEAGHER R3	23	10 MSHC – SF2 RING RACKARD MEAGHER FINALS
15	15 AHL Final	20	20 MSHC1 LSHC Quarter Finals MEAGHER R4	24	17
16	22 LSHC Round Robin1	21	27 MSHC – SF1 MEAGHER R5 RING RACKARD SF 1	25	23 (Sat) Hurling Qualifiers Rd 1 24 Leinster Hurling Final
17	29 LSHC Round Robin2 RING RACKARD, MEAGHER R1			26	30 (Sat) Hurling Qualifiers Rd 2

wk	IUIL	wk	LÚNASA	wk	MEÁN FÓMHAIR
26	1 Munster Hurling Final	31	5 (Sun) AIHC SF2	35	2 (Sun)
27		32	12 (Sun)	36	9
28	15 (Sun) AIHC QP's x 2	33	19 All Ireland Hurling Final	37	16
29	22	34	26 All Ireland Football Final	38	23
30	29 (Sun) AIHC SF1			39	30

### Proposed Hurling Structure – Draft Outline Dates 2018 (i.e. how it might work)

wk	AIBREÁN	wk	BEALTAINE	wk	MEITHEAMH
13	1 AFL FINALS	18	6	22	3 LSHC and MSHC & Prov Qual RR Rd 4
14	8	19	13 RING RACKARD, MEAGHER R1 LSHC & MSHC & Prov Qual RR Rd 1	23	10 LSHC and MSHC & Prov Qual RR Rd 5 RING RACKARD MEAGHER FINALS
15	15 AHL Final	20	20 RING, RACKARD, MEAGHER R2 LSHC & MSHC & Prov Qual RR Rd 2	24	17
16	22	21	27 RING, RACKARD, MEAGHER R3 LSHC & MSHC & Prov Qual RR Rd 3	25	23 (Sat) Hurling Playoff – Ring v 3 <sup>rd</sup> place Leinster/Munster 24 Leinster Hurling Final
17	29				

wk	IUIL	wk	LÚNASA	wk	MEÁN FÓMHAIR
26	1 Munster Hurling Final	31	5 (Sun)	35	2 (Sun)
27		32	12 (Sun)	36	9
28	15 (Sun) AIHC QP's x 2	33	19 All Ireland Hurling Final	37	16
29	22	34	26 All Ireland Football Final	38	23
30	28 (Sat) AIHC SF 1 29 (Sun) AIHC SF2			39	30