

Written by Padraig Burns
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It's been a strange couple of weeks for the sport of hurling. The sports superpower, Kilkenny, are defeated by a resurgent Dublin team in the final of the national league but just a week or so before that event, Cavan announced they will not be fielding a team in the championship this summer.

That decision attracted lots of comment, most of it genuinely heartfelt by people with a love of hurling, but in reality it had all been heard before.

Everyone knows it's a constant battle for hurling people to keep the sport alive in the counties where it is not the primary Gaelic games sport in as much as it must be practically impossible to keep Gaelic football going in Kilkenny.

Strangely enough, that particular debate about the weakness of football in Kilkenny is seldom aired. It gets a bit of media attention at times when the county team can only muster a point in a league game but that's about it.

That could be because of the relevant strength of the football game throughout the country and there's no need to worry about the poor standard of the game in Kilkenny, or maybe it's just an acceptance that matters will never change in Kilkenny and there's little appetite for challenging the status quo there.

What's happened in Cavan could, I'm sure, be replicated elsewhere around the country. Hurling just doesn't have the numbers to draw its players from like football has and matters must be even more difficult now with so many potential hurlers and footballers emigrating in search of employment. There is no straightforward solution to the problems facing the sport.

What has happened in Dublin could most likely not be repeated elsewhere as that's down to population. In essence, once Dublin got their structures right, it was only a matter of time before they were genuine challengers to the established power bases in places like Kilkenny, Tipperary and Cork.

There is some superb work being carried in promoting hurling in the counties where it is not the main sport.

Here in Mayo, hurling has a solid base from which it works from diligently, but there's no point in anyone pretending that in any time soon it will challenge football in terms of popularity.

But, I guess, that's not the point and it's not the reason why people give of their time to the sport. It's because that they have a love of it and they want to see other people sharing in the enjoyment. When you think about it, isn't that a good enough of a reason on its own.

The importance of sport

EVER wonder how significantly less off we'd all be if as a society we didn't have sport to enjoy. Imagine the awfulness of that.

Connaught Telegraph - Strange few weeks for hurling

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I couldn't help but think about that on Sunday morning as I drove to Castlebar to help out with the preparation of the admin work that needed to be completed ahead of the arrival of the 250 women (and one or two men!) who had opted to run in the mini marathon for the Cystic Fibrosis Association in Mayo.

It was a wonderful occasion. Everyone was in great spirits and looking forward with relish to completing the 10k.

Some were running, most were planning to walk the route, and some were doing a combination. But none of that mattered. It was about the occasion and the taking part.

Fair play to everyone who organised it. It must have been a mammoth undertaking and I can only imagine the amount of hours of work that went into it.

The entire event demonstrated just how important a role sport plays in all of our lives. Here we are, at a time when everything is going pear shaped all around us in terms of our economy but sport allows us all to forget it all for a while at least.

That was why what happened in Castlebar last Sunday was so important. For a few hours at least, entire families could forget about their woes and enjoy the simple things in life like fresh air, sunshine and exercise.

Life doesn't get much better than that. Well done to everyone and here's to next year.

Targeting Mourinho

THERE was a fair old race last week to see who could occupy the highest spot on the hill of moral ground in the aftermath of the Real Madrid/Barcelona Champions League semi-final. Jose Mourinho was their target. He was 'bad for football', according to Liam Brady, though just how, he didn't properly explain. He just kept repeating himself.

OK, I know what he meant.. He has never really liked Mourinho since he described Wenger as a 'voyeur' (hard to blame him there, I suppose) and he pinned a lot of the blame for what happened at the Bernabeu on Mourinho and his tendency to antagonise people.

Somehow, in the midst of all this campaign to demonise Mourinho, Barcelona has managed, in the main, to escape censure. Of course the genius of Messi helps in that the Barcelona players did regard but most of the diving, the simulation and the intimidation of the match officials.

Don't get me wrong, Mouinho can overstep the line at times, but he made some valid points about the decisions that nearly always go the way of Barcelona.

Remember the key one in the Arsenal game this year when van Persie was sent off or the time at Stamford Bridge when somehow the referee failed to give any one of four clear-cut penalty decisions to Chelsea.

What happened in the aftermath of the Chelsea game was that Drogba did his famous rant and that conveniently took the heat of the referee and Barcelona.

Something similar happened last week when Mourinho said what he said and instead of analysing what happened in the game, the media attention turned to what was said afterwards. The Portugese serial winner might be better advised saying nothing after the game tonight. Hard to see that happening though.