

FOOTBALL ALLIANZ NATIONAL LEAGUE

# Mayo refuse to go quietly

## Another one point win books league final date with Donegal

SEMI-FINAL



**Mayo** 2-10  
**Galway** 1-12

MIKE FINNERTY  
CROKE PARK

THE longer Mayo's current winning streak continues the more they leave us wondering just how they do it.

They meander through large passages of games without showing any great interest, they ride their luck spectacularly, and eventually they seal the deal. It is a pattern that has become as predictable as it has successful. And it shows no sign of abating any time soon.

Two goals at critical moments turned out to be the scores that ultimately turned this match in their favour and set them up for a league final date with Donegal next Sunday.

Unfortunately nothing became this tepid semi-final last Sunday like the ending of it. With Croke Park only filled to one-third of its capacity the match was played for the most part against a wall of deafening silence.

The football was also mediocre and apart from a handful of outstanding individual displays and the end result there was very little for John O'Mahony to get carried away with.

The record books will show that Mayo have now won their last six matches. What they won't document is how patchy the displays have been and how the results continue to mask shortcomings at midfield and in attack.

But obviously there are positives too and Mayo's fitness levels, work ethic, team spirit and refusal to panic remain their greatest attributes.

Liam O'Malley and Keith Higgins gave polished displays in the two corner-back spots with the latter holding Michael Meehan scoreless.

Enda Devenney and Peadar Gardiner (when they escaped the attentions of their tight-marking opponents) remain dynamic runners from the half-

back line while David Heaney, Andy Moran and Ger Brady all toiled honestly.

Conor Mortimer never stopped trying either but he failed to score from play. It is now obvious that his marker, Damien Burke, is no way in awe of Mayo's top scorer in the competition.

The match itself never reached any great heights and Galway and Peter Ford will feel that in many ways it was one that got away.

They led by 1-2 to 0-1 after 14 minutes and by 1-8 to 1-5 ten minutes into the second half. On both occasions they were in complete control only for Mayo to plunder goals that turned the match on its head.

Cormac Bane was a constant threat in the first half and his goal on seven minutes (after Padraic Joyce picked him out) propelled Galway into the lead.

Derek Savage then tacked on a point as Galway forced the pace and threw the ball around confidently.

As is their wont Mayo came roaring back in sensational fashion; two Galway defenders contesting the one ball which broke fortuitously into the path of Ger Brady.

To his credit the big forward

showed nimble footwork to step past the goalkeeper and lash the ball to the net. The game was back on.

Alan Dillon then sauntered in to chip the equaliser a minute later and Mayo seemed to have settled.

Galway's response was equally impressive as Joe Bergin drove them on from midfield and Nicky Joyce (free) and the lively Bane drilled points to restore a two point cushion (1-4 to 1-2) by the 21st minute.

The ebb and flow nature of the game continued unabated as Aidan Kilcoyne and Conor Mortimer (free) landed points to haul Mayo to parity before Bane and Mortimer traded scores before the break.

It was 1-5 apiece at the short whistle but Galway started the second half with much of their customary old swagger.

Three points were reeled off in the opening five minutes from Padraic Joyce and his cousin Nicky (two frees) as Damien Burke, Michael Comer, Joe Bergin and Ja Fallon pulled the strings.

Galway also created further chances that came and went and were to prove costly in the end. Had they converted their dominance into scores at that stage



**CAUGHT ON THE REBOUND**  
Mayo's Alan Dillon (right) watches his shot fly past Galway goalkeeper Paul Doherty in the 48th minute of last Sunday's NFL semi-final at Croke Park. It drew Mayo level and changed the course of the game. Pic: Sportstie

Mayo may have been beyond redemption.

As it was a foul on Conor Mortimer inside the square resulted in a penalty that doubled as a life-line for his team. Paul Doherty produced a smart save to stop

the spot-kick but Alan Dillon reacted quickest to the rebound and stabbed it to the net.

There were 48 minutes gone and Mayo were back on terms. The sides were level on three further occasions during the ten

minutes that followed and were locked together at 1-11 to 2-8 on 58 minutes.

At this stage Mayo upped the ante and Ger Brady fisted the lead score before Conor Mortimer clipped a free to open up a two point cushion.

Mayo were doing just enough to keep Galway at bay and all they could muster in the final fifteen minutes was a pointed free from Padraic Joyce.

The final whistle brought a disappointing contest to a close and nobody showed too much emotion. This may have been a league semi-final but it was still merely the prelude to the main event. Five weeks and counting now...

**MAYO**  
D Clarke; L O'Malley, J Kilcullen, K Higgins; E Devenney (0-1), B Padden, P Gardiner; P Harte (0-1), D Heaney; G Brady (1-1), K O'Neill, A Kilcoyne (0-1); C Mortimer (0-3, 3fs), A Dillon (1-2, 1f), A Moran (0-1).  
**Subs used:** A Campbell for Kilcoyne; M Conroy for O'Neill.

**GALWAY**  
P Doherty; K Fitzgerald, F Hanley, D Burke; D Meehan, N Coyne, M Comer; J Bergin, D Blake; D Savage (0-1), J Fallon, N Joyce (0-4, 3fs); M Meehan, P Joyce (0-5, 3fs), C Bane (1-2).  
**Subs used:** N Coleman for N Joyce; B Cullinane for M Meehan.  
Referee: D Coldrick (Meath)

### TALKING POINTS

**MAYO'S LUCKY STARS**  
YOU may well make your own luck but Mayo have enjoyed more than their fair share in recent weeks.

There was Dublin's missed penalty, Tyrone hitting the crossbar twice and last Sunday another bizarre example. Remember when two Galway defenders ran into each other and Ger Brady pounced to goal? Not to mention that penalty rebound. Not that we're complaining ...

**CROKER'S WALL OF SILENCE**  
BRINGING the Donegal, Mayo and Galway teams and supporters to Croke Park last Sunday was the only topic of conversation beforehand. The ground was practically empty, there was no atmosphere worth talking about, and

most people wanted to be somewhere else. Castlebar, Galway or Cavan to name three places ...



**MAYO'S TRAIN OF THOUGHT**  
THOSE passengers on the early morning train from Clarenorris to Dublin last Sunday morning had the Mayo squad and management for company. John O'Mahony and co decided to take the train and so there was no overnight stay in the capital. The low-key approach obviously worked well and saved a few euros into the bargain.

# A lot done but more to do

## John O'Mahony says victory changes very little for May 20

**REACTION**  
**EDWIN MCGREAL**  
CROKE PARK

JUST after emerging from the Galway dressing-room to offer his condolences, John O'Mahony leans back against the wall and faces the media. A combination of fifteen dictaphones and mics are planted under his nose almost immediately. He was cornered but didn't appear to mind.

He was in high spirits. There was no fear of any shocking proclamations about Mayo being the team to beat but the manager looked content with what had just passed. Mayo had returned to Croke Park and came away with a victory to set up a shot at a league title.

"As we all know nowadays league is a good preparation for championship, to get a competitive game. The choice for us next Sunday was to be down in

Belleek wood (Ballina) running around the place or up here in a league final. I'd prefer and I think the lads would prefer to be here," O'Mahony chuckled.

But Mayo's performance wasn't getting the platitudes from their manager. It rarely will, one could counter, but there's no doubting there is room for improvement. It's hard to imagine O'Mahony preferring it any other way.

"It was good to win in Croke Park but Mayo didn't play as well as they did in last year's All-Ireland semi-final. That's the relevance. We gave away an awful lot of ball in the first half and if we examine our performance we'd be quite disappointed with it in many respects so it's great to get through to the final from that point of view.

"The game came up for both teams so fast that we didn't really have time to think about it. We'd hope to have a few lads back.

You could see that the intensity of championship (was lacking), maybe it was the hot day, maybe it was the fact that we are meeting in five weeks time."

Not surprisingly there was one team who now had an edge coming into championship, according to O'Mahony.

"It probably gives Galway an edge because I know if I had lost that game today I wouldn't have worried about the consequences on May 20 and in many respects it will mean a quieter build-up for them (Galway) so they are already in advantage mode."

Sunday was also the first time O'Mahony attempted to plot the downfall of the county he led to two Senior All-Irelands. He played down its significance.

"Peter Ford was quoted during the week saying that this is about the two teams. I have life long friends in that Galway dressing room and whatever happens we will do everything to try to get Mayo successful and across the line. The project right now is to advance Mayo football. As you can see they have worked hard and that's why we're in a league

### NUMBERS GAME

**46**

The number of thousands of empty seats that were left in Croke Park last Sunday.



**21**

The number of league semi-finals that Mayo have beaten Galway in since 1927.

**5**

The number of wides Mayo kicked last Sunday.



**FEELING THE STRAIN**  
Mayo manager John O'Mahony can't bear to watch last Sunday. Pic: Sportstie



**WITHIN TOUCHING DISTANCE**  
Mayo's David Heaney jumps with Galway's Niall Coleman during last Sunday's Allianz NFL semi-final at Croke Park. Pic: Sportstie