

= 2003 All @-@ Ireland Senior Football Championship Final =

The 2003 All @-@ Ireland Senior Football Championship Final was the 116th final of the All @-@ Ireland Senior Football Championship , a Gaelic football tournament . It was held on 28 September 2003 at Croke Park , Dublin and featured defending champions Armagh against Tyrone . The counties are both in the province of Ulster and share a boundary ? this was the first All @-@ Ireland Football Final between sides from the same province . Tyrone won their first title after the match finished 0 ? 12 ? 0 ? 09 in their favour . Many commentators were critical of the game 's entertainment value .

= = Competition structure = =

Each of the 32 traditional counties of Ireland is represented by a county side . Apart from Kilkenny , they all participated in the 2003 All @-@ Ireland Senior Football Championship . The " overseas counties " of London and New York also participated . Every county in Ireland is located in a province ; London and New York were in Connacht for the purpose of the championship . It began with four provincial championships ? knock @-@ out competitions between sides in the same province . The four winners progressed to the All @-@ Ireland quarter @-@ finals . The remaining sides , apart from New York , entered the All @-@ Ireland qualifiers to determine the other four teams to contest the quarter @-@ finals . These were followed by the semi @-@ finals and the All @-@ Ireland final .

= = Background = =

This was the first final between two counties from the same province ; in this case , Ulster . This was only possible because of the qualifying system introduced in the 2001 championship . Previously , the All @-@ Ireland Championship was only contested by the four winners of the provincial championships , so a final between two counties from the same province was impossible .

Tyrone had contested the final in 1986 and 1995 but lost on both occasions , against Kerry and Dublin respectively . Armagh were the defending champions , having won their first title the year previously . They had lost the final in 1953 and 1977 . No side had won consecutive titles since Cork in 1989 and 1990 , while no side from Ulster had done so since Down , who won in 1960 and 1961 .

Tyrone had already won the 2003 National Football League and the year 's Ulster Championship , in what was manager Mickey Harte 's first year in charge .

= = Routes to the final = =

Tyrone progressed directly to the All @-@ Ireland quarter finals as they won the 2003 Ulster Senior Football Championship , through victories against Derry , Antrim and Down . Armagh lost to Monaghan in the preliminary round of the Ulster Championship and therefore entered the All @-@ Ireland qualifiers at the first round . They defeated Waterford , Antrim , Dublin and Limerick to join Tyrone at the quarter @-@ final stage ; the ties were played whilst Tyrone were competing in the latter stages of the Ulster Championship .

Sides that had played each other in the provincial championships could not be drawn together in the quarter @-@ finals but none of these restrictions affected Armagh or Tyrone . Tyrone were drawn against Fermanagh , who had unexpectedly defeated Meath and Mayo in the qualifiers , while Armagh were drawn against Leinster championship winners Laois . Tyrone won their game by 1 ? 21 (24 points) to 0 ? 05 . Armagh defeated Laois by 0 ? 15 to 0 ? 13 , although the sides were level on points on nine occasions . Even before Donegal 's win over Galway , which meant three of the four semi @-@ finalists were from Ulster , there was intense media speculation about the possibility of an all @-@ Ulster final .

Tyrone 's semi @-@ final was against Kerry . Despite their captain Peter Canavan suffering an

injury early on , Tyrone won by 0 ? 13 to 0 ? 06 . Much of the match analysis focused on the manner in which it was played . It was characterised by persistent fouling (73 frees were awarded in total) and Tyrone 's defensive tactics . While many commentators expressed frustration about the quality of the game , some appreciated the skill with which Tyrone employed their tactics . Mickey Harte countered the criticism by saying : " There 's no use in us playing flamboyantly and losing . "

Donegal were Armagh 's opposition in an all @-@ Ulster semi @-@ final . Armagh were behind at half time but took advantage of Raymond Sweeney 's dismissal just after the interval to finish with a 2 ? 10 (16 points) ? 1 ? 09 (12 points) victory . Armagh may have had a larger winning margin had they not amassed 21 wides . A death threat was allegedly made against referee Michael Monahan in the closing minutes .

= = Pre @-@ match = =

Brian White , who had previously refereed two All @-@ Ireland finals , was announced as the match referee in early September . He had once previously refereed a game between Armagh and Tyrone ? an Ulster Championship quarter @-@ final replay in 2002 .

The final was highly anticipated , particularly as Armagh and Tyrone are neighbouring counties . Police Service of Northern Ireland Deputy Chief Constable Paul Leighton estimated that 40 @,@ 000 fans would travel from Northern Ireland to Dublin , despite each competing county only being allocated approximately 10 @,@ 000 match tickets . Declan Martin , policy director for Dublin Chamber of Commerce , expected the revenue generated in the city as a result of the final to double because two sides from Ulster were involved .

Road signs in the Pomeroy area were painted in Tyrone colours leading up to the match . This was condemned by the Roads Service , who said the signs would cost thousands of pounds to replace . In Strabane , a sculpture was covered in Tyrone kit . Ulster Unionist Party councillor for the town , Derek Hussey , responded by saying : " I know it is a unique sporting occasion , an all @-@ British All @-@ Ireland final , but the hysteria that has developed around the whole event is intimidatory to some people . "

John Boyle , a native of Armagh and owner of Boylesports , expressed an interest in placing a £ 250 @,@ 000 bet with nine other businessmen , each of whom would contribute £ 25 @,@ 000 , on Armagh winning the championship . The winnings and the stake would have been given to the Armagh squad . GAA president Seán Kelly denounced the idea : " Playing is a voluntary activity and should have nothing to do with gambling . Such bets put too much pressure on the players and are somewhat obscene . " The GAA was also critical of tickets for the final being sold in newspaper columns and on online auction sites .

= = Match = =

Martin McGuinness of Sinn Féin and Ian Pearson of the Northern Ireland Office were at the match , as were eight family members of victims of the Omagh bombing , who sat in the Hogan Stand as guests of the GAA . Donegal singer Mickey Joe Harte sang Ireland 's national anthem , Amhrán na bhFiann , before the match . In the All @-@ Ireland Minor Football Championship Final , held just before the senior game , Laois and Dublin drew , each side scoring 1 ? 11 (14 points) .

The starting line @-@ ups for the senior game were released several days before the match ; both sides chose to start with the same fifteen players that had started their respective semi @-@ final wins . Peter Canavan had recovered sufficiently from the ankle injury he sustained during Tyrone 's semi @-@ final to captain them . He was the only player in their starting line @-@ up who had played in the county 's last All @-@ Ireland final . Ciaran Gourley , who was also an injury concern for Tyrone , was deemed fit enough to play . Brian McGuigan was suffering from the flu but started . Armagh had no injury concerns and twelve of their starting fifteen had played in the final the previous year ? only Paul Hearty , Andy Mallon and Phillip Loughran were debutants ,

= = = Match report = = =

Both sides played defensively which led many commentators to bemoan the poor quality of the match . There were frequent pauses for injuries and accusations of diving . However , some analysts commented on the genuine desire to win both teams displayed . Numerous goal opportunities were missed , most notably by Tyrone , although only a block from Conor Gormley prevented Steven McDonnell from equalising for Armagh in the 68th minute . Tyrone led 0 - 08 - 04 at half @-@ time ; five of their points were scored by Peter Canavan from frees . He was replaced during the interval due to a relapse of his ankle injury during training , although he did return to the pitch for the final few minutes . Diarmuid Marsden was controversially sent off in the second half following an off @-@ the @-@ ball incident , leaving Armagh with only fourteen players . Marsden had been arguing with Conor Gormley when he was approached by Philip Jordan . Marsden raised his arm and made contact with Jordan , who fell to the ground . Some commentators claimed Jordan was feigning injury to get his opponent sent off . Armagh managed to stay within two points of Tyrone at times but were ultimately unable to catch Tyrone . At the final whistle , Tyrone fans invaded the pitch and remained there for an hour . In his speech after lifting the trophy , Peter Canavan dedicated the victory to every Tyrone team he had played on , the 1986 team (beaten in the final by Kerry) and every player who had played on teams without success . He also spoke of his father , who had died over the summer , and of Paul McGirr , who had played alongside many of the Tyrone team before he died in a freak accident aged 18 .

= = = Match details = = =

References :

= = Post @-@ match = =

Northern Ireland Secretary of State Paul Murphy congratulated Tyrone on their victory . The Ulster Council of the GAA congratulated both sets of fans , in particular the Tyrone fans who formed a guard of honour for the Armagh players as they returned to their team bus . Joe Kernan , manager of Armagh , also praised the opposition fans : " ... when the final whistle went and all the Tyrone supporters came running past me there wasn 't one bad word said . To me that was great . "

Crowds gathered across Tyrone the following day to celebrate the arrival of the Sam Maguire Cup . The players ' homecoming began at Aughnacloy before moving on to Ballygawley and Omagh , where upwards of 40 @,@ 000 fans gathered . Despite their defeat , Armagh were greeted by hundreds of fans on the Louth ? Armagh border on their return .

Armagh manager Joe Kernan claimed he would have resigned had his side won but defeat encouraged him to continue . He lauded his players for their effort nonetheless , saying : " .. we 've won an All @-@ Ireland , and got back to the final . I think that 's a phenomenal achievement . " He added that he was confident Armagh would win another title in the future . Of the match itself , Kernan said : " I think if Steven McDonnell had got that goal towards the end , even with the man down I think we would have won the game . Big matches hinge on certain things and that was one of them . " McDonnell applauded Conor Gormley 's tackle which prevented him from scoring : " ... I 'd say it was one of the best tackles ever . "

The match received extensive media coverage in Northern Ireland , especially from the predominantly nationalist Irish News . The Belfast Telegraph dedicated several pages to the match the following day , including the front and back covers , whereas The News Letter , a largely unionist publication , had sparse coverage , highlighting traditional attitudes to Gaelic games in Northern Ireland .

About a week after the final , a family in Coleraine were targeted in an allegedly sectarian attack , thought to be because they were flying a Tyrone GAA flag from their home .

Two years later , Peter Canavan 's return from injury as a substitute in the final ten minutes finished 14th in RTÉ 's 2005 series Top 20 GAA Moments .

= = = Match controversies = = =

Joe Kernan was adamant that Diarmuid Marsden did not deserve to be sent off and criticised players for pretending to be injured during the game . The player himself also disagreed with the decision : " The umpire said I struck him but I just saw the man coming towards me and it was more a case of getting myself out of the way or protecting myself . " He added : " I 'd never been sent off for Armagh before and to be sent off in an All @-@ Ireland final is hard to take . Hopefully I won 't be remembered for that . And I wouldn 't like to end the career on that note . " Kernan and Marsden contested the decision and subsequent ban , but the GAA 's Games Administration Committee upheld the penalty . However , after taking their case to the Central Council , the ban was overturned .