

Eddie Sullivan  
Chairman  
Fixtures Calendar Review Committee  
Croke Park  
23<sup>rd</sup> September 2019

Cc: Fergal McGill, Michael Martin, Kevin O'Donovan, Stephen Barker, John Costello, John Prenty, Ronan Sheehan, Michael Hyland, Seamus Woods, Conor O'Donoghue, John Horan & Tom Ryan

Dear Eddie

The Fixtures Calendar Review Committee has been in place now for four months and as we approach the time when the Group need to present options to the clubs, The Club Players' Association need to put on record the following points regarding the operations of the Committee:

1. Given the complex magnitude of the important task at hand and the strategic significance of the outputs of the Committee to the future of the GAA, it is extremely disappointing that there has not been more meetings to get the work done more urgently. The infrequency of the meetings does not match the implied desire of all stakeholders to work in good faith to get a resolution that was set out in the beginning.
2. We feel it's still disappointing that the committee is not formally guided by key principles, against which we can measure the validity of each proposal. While you indicated that Conor O'Donoghue's principles are understood by the committee, each member can interpret their importance as they see fit. This was obvious when some members failed to rank the principles, as requested in early August. Can I suggest that we prioritise the Top 3 principles that are obvious from those who did offer their opinion? i.e. i) Certainty ii) Competitiveness iii) Unambiguous priority.
3. The Committee has had no scope to discuss and propose imaginative and realistic proposals. At the first few meetings, time was allocated to presentations from various stakeholders. When we were then asked to review submissions from the general public, we were simultaneously advised of three broad frameworks for discussion. Rather than being a catalyst for debate, these frameworks have become the de facto recommendations of the committee, effectively discarding ideas from the submissions. While we believe this is very disappointing and a huge missed opportunity, we still hope discussions from October 2<sup>nd</sup> will allow us to amend and enhance these proposals.
4. The assumptions which accompanied the current proposals are too significant not to debate in detail. We believe there is a lot of scope to enhance the proposals if those assumptions are put on the table for deliberation. We would specifically note the following:
  - a. In all plans, there is a 3-week window for the pre-season provincial tournaments. That is giving those competitions automatic inclusion when every other competition has to fight for space.
  - b. The All Ireland club championship semi-finals and finals are fixed in December and January respectively in every plan. There is ample opportunity to fit them into the calendar year.
  - c. There needs to be a closed season for all games and training in the month of December as put forward by the GPA, CPA and Talent Academy in their submissions. None of the 5 plans specifically include this.
  - d. Retention of the existing U20/21 competitions without any proper review and consideration of The Talent Academy's report doesn't address the player welfare issues which are central to the problem.
  - e. All club and county matches should go to extra time, including Provincial & All Ireland finals.

5. We cannot assume implied consensus within the committee regarding any of the final options. We think it's only fair and transparent that each member confirms which option(s) they would like to recommend to Congress.
6. The National Club Committee submitted an excellent report to the Task Force, informed by direct engagement with clubs. In terms of the status quo (or any revised version of it), the Committee was unequivocal in its frustration, stating "*Irrespective of what theoretical weekends can be shown on a fixtures calendar, it is apparent that that greater demands on inter-county players will result in less, not more availability of these players to clubs*". We believe their three requests should be to the forefront of the Committee's thinking at all times:
  - a. Increasing the space for club championship over the summer months
  - b. Curtailing the amount of intercounty activity
  - c. Strengthening and enforcing the regulations with regards to the availability of county players to their clubs

We are now at a critical phase of the Task Force where we need to agree a route to Congress 2020 and at the same time ensure that all clubs in Ireland are presented with the options of the Task Force in time to study, debate and vote on them at General Meetings, so that they can mandate their counties at Congress. It is imperative that all counties should be formally instructed by Croke Park to have a meeting to poll the votes of the clubs on which option they vote for. This is the only way the GAA can truly demonstrate that the club is the single most important unit of the Association.

The Club Players Association will continue to engage in the process so long as fairness, honesty and transparency is applied by all members of the Task Force to delivering viable options to the clubs and other stakeholders. Ultimately, our work will impact on the lives and careers of players and they are entitled to fairness, clarity and transparency. With this in mind, our Executive and our fixtures committee have reviewed the 5 options presented to date and the appendix to this letter shows the positives, negatives and suggested changes to each plan.

Given our impending deadline, we respectfully request that the issues raised in this letter be considered by all members of the committee prior to October 2<sup>nd</sup> and that sufficient time be allocated to each topic for thoughtful deliberation.

Yours sincerely

---

Michael Higgins  
National Secretary, Club Players Association

## **APPENDIX: REVIEW OF 5 PLANS PRESENTED AT 4<sup>TH</sup> SEPTEMBER MEETING**

### **Option 1: 4 x 8 Option**

#### Positives

- There are 7 weeks in theory available to clubs from week 14 to week 20
- All counties start their championships on week 21 so there is fairness to all in this
- Certainty of 9 weeks from week 36 to 44 for clubs

#### Negatives

- Week 19 & 20 will be not truly available to clubs as intercounty players will be needed for round 1 of championship in week 21
- No championship football for clubs from week 21 to week 36 which is all of June, July & August
- Idea of having different counties in different provinces year on year is confusing to all
- Split championships in club means two pre seasons and a very long year
- December has not been allocated as a rest month for all
- All Ireland club championship will not be finished in calendar year and it is very tight to do it in the plan as presented

#### Recommendations to changes

- Select counties that permanently play in different provinces based on geographical location to that province
- All Ireland club semi finals and finals to be played in November
- December to be a closed/ free month for Inter county and club

### **Option 2: Flip Model**

#### Positives

- There are 12 consecutive weeks available to clubs from week 33 to week 44
- All counties start their championships on week 21 so there is fairness to all in this

#### Negatives

- There are only 3 weeks available to clubs in April
- Week 16 will be not truly available to clubs as intercounty players will be needed for round 1 of championship in week 21
- No championship football for clubs from week 17 to week 32 which is all of May, June, July & some of August
- Split championships in club means two pre seasons and a very long year
- December has not been allocated as a rest month for all
- All Ireland club championship will not be finished in calendar year and it is very tight to do it in the plan as presented
- All Irelands are too early in week 31 & 32

#### Recommendations to changes

- Scrap the pre-season tournaments
- In the Provincial Competition move one Leinster county into Ulster on a long term basis although it would remain in Leinster for administrative purposes
- Extend the club season in April to 6 weeks where intercounty players must be available to play a minimum of 4 club games (league or championship)
- Move the All Irelands later by a week or two
- All Ireland club semi finals and finals to be played in November
- December to be a closed/ free month for Inter county and club

### **Option 3: Split Season**

#### Positives

- There are 14 consecutive weeks for clubs from week 31 to week 44
- Excellent certainty for club players

#### Negatives

- Intercounty players will be unavailable to clubs from Jan to July for league games
- December has not been allocated as a rest month for all
- All Ireland club championship are not finished in calendar year and there is ample space to accommodate it

#### Recommendations to changes

- All Ireland club semi finals and finals to be played in November
- December to be a closed/ free month for Inter county and club

### **Option 4: Alternative Windows**

#### Positives

- There is summer club championship in every month of the summer
- Excellent certainty for club players

#### Negatives

- Will the intercounty player 10 day or 6 day rule be enforced and what sanctions will be put in place?
- December has not been allocated as a rest month for all
- All Ireland club championship are not finished in a calendar year and there is ample space to accommodate it

#### Recommendations to changes

- All Ireland club semi-finals and finals to be played in November
- December to be a closed/ free month for Inter county and club
- Would need guarantees, through as yet undetermined enforcement mechanisms, that counties would adhere to this calendar

### **Option 5: Improved Status Quo**

#### Positives

- There are 6 weeks in theory available to clubs from week 14 to week 19
- Certainty of 9 weeks from week 36 to 44 for clubs

#### Negatives

- All counties start their championships on different dates so this makes the April club period only usable by some counties.
- Week 18 & 19 will be not truly available to clubs as intercounty players will be needed for round 1 of championship in week 20
- No championship football for clubs from week 20 to week 35 which is half of May, all of June, July & August
- The football championship retains the Super 8's which has not worked and is a group stage at the wrong end of the championship making it strong teams stronger and the weaker teams weaker
- Split championships in club means two pre seasons and a very long year
- December has not been allocated as a rest month for all
- All Ireland club championship will not be finished in calendar year and it is very tight to do it in the plan as presented

#### Recommendations to changes

- Introduce a football championship that allows all counties start on same weekend to provide fairness