

Eddie Sullivan & Fergal McGill  
Fixtures Calendar Review Committee  
Croke Park

7<sup>th</sup> October 2019

Cc: 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/Fergal

Further to recent discussions, please find enclosed an updated version of the Flip Model. We'd be grateful if all members of the Taskforce could review and that time be allocated to discuss it at this Wednesday's meeting.

We believe this option has a lot of benefits, which align with the objectives of the Taskforce. Further to a decision at a previous meeting, it is designed to address the Football Championship only. Details of the Master Calendar and a Sample Club season are outlined in Appendix 1 & 2 respectively.

We welcome Tom Ryan's assertion that the financial return from existing structures should not play a factor in how best to move forward. While contingencies may be required, we believe this model offers huge promotional opportunities, which should increase the GAA's commercial and marketing prospects.

This updated option is informed in principle and practice by Fairness, Equality, Consistency and Certainty. It also includes several 'Rest' weekends, as we are very mindful of player welfare. With the increased number of games we are proposing, it should limit the need for excessive amounts of training and allow all GAA players to enjoy meaningful, competitive and regular games.

I look forward to a good discussion on Wednesday.

Yours sincerely

Michael Higgins  
National Secretary, Club Players Association

## Provincial Championship Groups

### Format

- The Provincial Championship Groups are an amalgamation of the existing competitions, the pre-season tournaments and the National League.
- The Provincial structures are adjusted so that each Province has 8 teams. Please see Box 1.
- The Provincial Championships would run in February and March on a round robin basis, each team playing each other once.
- The Top 4 teams in each Group would progress to Tier 1 of the All-Ireland Series, to be played in June and July. The bottom 4 teams in each Group would progress to Tier 2 of the All-Ireland series, to be played in tandem with the Tier 1. Please see Box 2.
- The top 2 teams in each Group would play in a Provincial Final towards the end of March. No replays, extra time to be used & if required, some form of shootout would decide the winner

### Benefits

- It maintains the Provincial structure, while also enhancing their importance by linking them to the All-Ireland series.
- It maintains local rivalries, offering a chance to play your neighbours at least once a year.
- It's provides simplicity & certainty for the scheduling of games; everyone knows when they start and finish and all teams start at the same time.
- All counties are guaranteed a minimum of 7 games and a maximum of 8.
- Most of the games would be competitive as there is an incentive to finish in the Top two and an incentive to avoid the bottom four.
- All teams at the start of the season have a chance to compete for Sam Maguire.
- For "weaker counties", they can develop within the provincial structures, to enable them to progress to Tier 1.
- All gate receipts to be ring-fenced for the Provincial Council.

### Challenges

- Convincing four teams to move from their current Provincial competition
- The groups could be re-named 'Districts' or 'Conferences' to distinguish their identity
- New York would no longer play in the Provincial championship or the subsequent All-Ireland series. The GAA should devise other mechanisms to showcase our sport & culture abroad e.g. an annual international tournament, involving the UK, Europe, Asia, Australia and US.

### Box 1 – Sample of new Provincial Groups

| Connacht Group | Ulster Group | Leinster Group | Munster Group |
|----------------|--------------|----------------|---------------|
| Galway         | Donegal      | Carlow         | Clare         |
| Leitrim        | Derry        | Wexford        | Limerick      |
| Roscommon      | Antrim       | Wicklow        | Kerry         |
| Sligo          | Armagh       | Dublin         | Laois         |
| Mayo           | Down         | Meath          | Offaly        |
| Cavan          | Tyrone       | Westmeath      | Cork          |
| London         | Monaghan     | Louth          | Waterford     |
| Longford       | Fermanagh    | Kildare        | Tipperary     |

## Box 2 - Sample of final League standings

|        | Seeds | Connacht group | Ulster group | Leinster group | Munster group |
|--------|-------|----------------|--------------|----------------|---------------|
| Tier 1 | 1     | Galway         | Donegal      | Dublin         | Kerry         |
|        | 2     | Mayo           | Tyrone       | Kildare        | Cork          |
|        | 3     | Roscommon      | Monaghan     | Meath          | Laois         |
|        | 4     | Cavan          | Armagh       | Wexford        | Clare         |
| Tier 2 | 1     | Leitrim        | Down         | Wicklow        | Offaly        |
|        | 2     | Sligo          | Derry        | Westmeath      | Limerick      |
|        | 3     | London         | Antrim       | Louth          | Waterford     |
|        | 4     | Longford       | Fermanagh    | Carlow         | Tipperary     |

## All-Ireland Series

### Format

- The top 4 teams from each Provincial Group compete in the Tier 1 championship (Sam Maguire). The bottom 4 teams from each Provincial Group compete in the Tier 2 championship (name TBC). They both operate to the same format.
- There are 4 Groups of 4, each team playing each other once. The groups will be decided based on how teams finish in the Provincial Groups i.e. The Provincial champions will be No.1 seeds, the runners up No. 2, 3<sup>rd</sup> place No. 3 and 4<sup>th</sup> place No. 4. They would be put in separate pots and drawn accordingly. Teams who played each other in their provincial final would not be allowed to be drawn against each other in the All-Ireland series.
- Examples using the above draft include: Galway could be drawn to play Tyrone, Meath and Clare. Leitrim could be drawn to play Derry, Louth and Tipperary.

### Benefits

- It would be consistent with the Uachtarán's vision to pursue a Two-Tier option next year, paving the way for a revised version in 2021.
- There's no ambiguity about when county teams will play. It removes the uncertainty, which currently exist with the Qualifiers.
- Every county team is guaranteed 3 games in the All-Ireland Series
- "Weaker" counties would have the opportunity to play against "stronger" counties.
- Seeding is dependent on performance in the Provincial Groups, offering fair and transparent competition.
- It provides opportunities to play counties that might not normally meet, throwing up interesting matches across the country.
- Tier 1 and Tier 2 matches could be played together at the same venue, offering a bonanza of games to promote.
- Supporters could buy season tickets for the Provincial Groups and/or the All-Ireland series, providing the GAA with a stable and lucrative income stream.

## All-Ireland Play Offs

### Format

- For both Tier 1 & Tier 2, there are four groups of two. The winners of the All-Ireland series groups are put in one pot, the runners up in another pot and then drawn accordingly.
- Teams from the same All-Ireland series group cannot be drawn to meet each other in the Quarter finals.
- Teams play each other in knock-out Quarter Finals of the All-Ireland Championship Play Offs, continuing with a straight knock-out to the Semi-finals and Final.
- No replays would be allowed and after extra time, some form of shootout would decide the winner.

### Benefits

- Re-introduces the drama of knock-out competition to the Quarter Final stage.
- The August Bank Holiday weekend could become an anchor date in the GAA calendar for the All-Ireland Football finals, again offering significant promotional opportunities.
- The maximum amount of county games the All-Ireland finalists would have to play is 13
- From mid-May to early August, considerable space is allocated to promote elite football.

## U20 competition

### Format

- To be played at the same time as the Provincial Group competitions, offering several weeks to complete the tournament
- No U20 player would be eligible to play for their senior county team in the Provincial Championship Groups.

### Benefits

- It re-asserts the Developmental nature of the U20 competition, offering elite young players the opportunity to showcase their talents, without the risk of burnout
- U20 matches could be played as curtain raisers to the Provincial Group games, allowing young players the chance to play in front of large crowds, giving the GAA further marketing opportunities
- Those in their final year of U20 could be eligible to play for their senior county team in the All-Ireland series later in the year.

## Club Season

### Format

- There are two significant windows for ALL club players in the country, regardless of success, to play with their county players. i.e. April & May and August & September.
- Games from October onwards depend on how successful a club team is.
- The Provincial Group structure would also be used for clubs, offering certainty and fairness. All County champions will have to play 3 knock-out matches to win their Provincial title.
- No replays would be allowed for any club games, including County, Provincial and All-Ireland finals. Extra time would be used and if necessary, some form of shootout would decide the winner.
- A pre-season tournament between local neighbours in other counties would provide an interesting way to prepare for the competitive county competitions.

### Benefits

- ALL club players, regardless of success, will have a defined season from February to September which provides certainty, meaning and regularity.
- With certainty of fixtures, County Boards can actively and effectively promote their county competitions, generating more interest and income e.g. selling club season tickets, offering stronger engagement with local sponsors, etc.
- With a guaranteed schedule, clubs will be better able to develop their talent over a number of seasons, which will ultimately benefit the county team as new talent emerges.
- Regardless of success, ALL clubs in the country would be guaranteed to have 12 weekends with their county players.
- For counties who don't progress to the All-Ireland Playoff's, county players will be available for 3 out of the 4 League games in June & July. Therefore, for some counties, it will be possible to play 94% of guaranteed club games with county players.
- With meaningful games played on a regular basis across the summer, it will decrease the incentive for players to travel abroad for the summer.
- All club and county competitions would be completed within the calendar year. Teams involved in the final stages of the Club All-Ireland will be able to enjoy their Christmas.

### Challenges

- County Boards must ensure they use the 12 guaranteed weekends with county players for meaningful matches i.e. League or Championship.
- County boards must be mandated to play at least 4 club league games in June and July, so that non-County club players are not idle during these months.
- The sample season outlined below is for one code. Dual counties would have to reconfigure their schedule but there are enough weekends to offer sufficient games for both codes.
- The Governance Taskforce currently being discussed should have the capacity to effectively sanction counties who do not use the schedule properly.

### Appendix 1 – Flip 2.0 – Master Football Calendar

|             | Jan                  | Feb          | Mar                | Apr    | May       | June                       | July                 | Aug           | Sept    | Oct                        | Nov               | Dec                      |
|-------------|----------------------|--------------|--------------------|--------|-----------|----------------------------|----------------------|---------------|---------|----------------------------|-------------------|--------------------------|
| <b>Wk 1</b> | <b>Close Season</b>  | Prov 2 + U20 | Prov 6 + U20 Semis | CLUB 1 | CLUB 5    | All Ire 2                  | All Ire Quarters X 2 | All Ire Final | CLUB 10 | County Quarter Finals X 32 | REST              | REST                     |
| <b>Wk 2</b> |                      | Prov 3 + U20 | Prov 7 + U20 Final | CLUB 2 | CLUB 6    | All Ire 3                  | REST                 | REST          | CLUB 11 | County Semi Finals X 16    | Prov Quarters X 4 | All-Ire Club Semi Finals |
| <b>Wk 3</b> |                      | Prov 4 + U20 | Prov Finals X 4    | CLUB 3 | REST      | REST                       | All Ire Semi's X 2   | CLUB 7        | CLUB 12 | County Semi Finals X 16    | Prov Semi's X 4   | All-Ire Club Final       |
| <b>Wk 4</b> | Sigerson /Fitzgibbon | Prov 5 + U20 | REST               | CLUB 4 | REST      | All Ire Quarter Finals X 2 | REST                 | CLUB 8        | REST    | County Finals X 16         | Prov Finals X 4   |                          |
| <b>Wk 5</b> | Prov 1 + U20         |              |                    |        | All Ire 1 |                            |                      | CLUB 9        |         | County Finals X 16         |                   |                          |

## Appendix 2 – Flip 2.0 – Sample Club Football season

|      | Jan                 | Feb                     | Mar                           | Apr    | May            | June     | July     | Aug    | Sept    | Oct                        | Nov               | Dec                      |
|------|---------------------|-------------------------|-------------------------------|--------|----------------|----------|----------|--------|---------|----------------------------|-------------------|--------------------------|
| Wk 1 | <b>CLOSE SEASON</b> | Pre-season              | Cross County League Cup       | CLUB 1 | CLUB 5         |          |          |        | CLUB 10 | County Quarter Finals X 32 | REST              | REST                     |
| Wk 2 |                     | Pre-season              | REST                          | CLUB 2 | CLUB 6         | Club (a) | Club (c) |        | CLUB 11 | County Semi Finals X 16    | Prov Quarters X 4 | All-Ire Club Semi Finals |
| Wk 3 |                     | Cross County League Cup | Cross County League Cup Final | CLUB 3 | REST/ Exams    |          |          | CLUB 7 | CLUB 12 | County Semi Finals X 16    | Prov Semi's X 4   | All-Ire Club Final       |
| Wk 4 |                     | Cross County League Cup | REST                          | CLUB 4 | REST/ Exams    | Club (b) | Club (d) | CLUB 8 | REST    | County Finals X 16         | Prov Finals X 4   |                          |
| Wk 5 |                     |                         |                               |        | FREE /Holidays |          |          | CLUB 9 |         | County Finals X 16         |                   |                          |

**Cross County League:** Minimum **3** games, maximum of four games; all without county players

**Club (a) – (d):** **4** League games without county players

**Club 1 – 12:** Guaranteed **12** games (League & Championship) **with** county players

Without progressing to knock-out stages of County Championship, ALL club players in the country are guaranteed to play 19 games; 12 with county players. For some counties, it will be possible to play 94% of guaranteed club games with county players.