

**HURLING > UNDER 21 CHAMPIONSHIP GUIDE 2018**

simulation in warming to their new task.

After all, Inagh-Kilnamona are not only gunning for their third successive Under 21A final appearance, having spread the honours evenly with Feakle/Killanena these past two years. They also are the current Minor A champions, spined by the largest contingent on the county minor panel (Aidan McCarthy, Keith White, Eamonn Foudy, Eoin Fitzgerald and captain Cian McInerney) that reached a first Munster Final since 2012.

Throw in the fact that at minor level three years ago, Inagh-Kilnamona finished at the semi-final stage of the A division while the Parish concluded in the last eight of the B rather justifies Inagh-Kilnamona's strong favouritism for this opening tie.

That said, having been disappointed not to have advanced to the 2016 Minor A Final, there's plenty of potential in the Parish side who will be led by the Hannan twins, Tom and Jack, Conor Tierney, Conor Kearns, Keelan Butler and Dara O'Shea although Cathal Ruane is still out injured.

Keith White is also a major doubt for Inagh-Kilnamona but they do have the remainder of last year's aforementioned Clare minor quintet while county senior Jason McCarthy is undoubtedly the talisman in a side that should have built up plenty of experience over the past two runs to the final.

*Verdict: Inagh-Kilnamona*

**Newmarket-on-Fergus v Sixmilebridge @ Clonlara, Saturday, 1pm**

**Newmarket-on-Fergus Management** Tom McNamara (Manager), Alan Barrett, Pat Freeman, Seamus Lynch, Shane O'Brien Jr, Martin O'Hanlon

**Sixmilebridge Management** Tommy Liddy (Manager), Stiofán Fitzpatrick, Christy Griffin, Brian O'Connell

AN already juicy derby that was revamped further in 2017 by the re-emergence of Newmarket as an adult force once more. First, there was that Under 21A Quarter-Final meeting that saw the Blues demonstrate real character to prevail. Then there was the epic senior championship semi-final that saw Newmarket set the pace but fail to capitalise on their goal opportunities that opened the door for Sixmilebridge regroup and eventually edge the day on their way to a third Canon Hamilton in five years.

However, a chance at redemption in the Clare Cup Final in December was one that Newmarket weren't about to pass up as they denied the 'Bridge a perfect season and more importantly reclaimed senior silverware for the first time since 2013.

So what will 2018 bring to the derby table?

Well, despite last year's Blue flu that Newmarket inflicted on their neighbours, the 'Bridge will hold the favourite's tag for Saturday's latest clash, backed by the county experience of Jason Loughnane, Colm Fitzgerald, Cathaoir Agnew, Pa Mulready, Tiernan Agnew and Paul Corry.

Colin Guilfoyle, who was Man-of-the-Match in that Clare Cup Final, will be Newmarket's main threat while Liam and Jack O'Connor, Cathal Hayes and James McMahon will all be expected to influence heavily if Newmarket are to maintain their current indian sign.

However, with no motivation required after last year's opening Under 21 defeat, Sixmilebridge should have the greater balance to weather the storm this time around.

*Verdict: Sixmilebridge*

**Under 21B Championship Round 1 Ballyea v Clonlara @ Sixmilebridge, Saturday, 3.30pm**

**Ballyea Management** Fergie O'Loughlin (Manager), Francie Browne, Kevin Sheehan



**Clonlara Management** Darach Honan (Manager), Fra Moloney, Barry O'Connell, Pat O'Hare

A REPEAT of the 2016 senior county final, Ballyea and Clonlara renew rivalries this weekend in this Under 21B opener. Kieran Galvin was out injured for Clonlara in 2016 but David Fitzgerald and Paraic O'Loughlin are survivors from that decider and along with the Moriarty's Cian and Aidan, Conor Bourke and Jathan McMahon. Clonlara have plenty of recent big game experience.

With Clare set to host Roscommon this Sunday in the National Football League, making allowances for Ballyea's key players Pearse Lillis and Cillian Brennan should see this fixture altered.

However, that is still to be decided and therefore with Clonlara faring better than their opponents in the minor grade over the past three seasons, the South East Clare side might just shade a tight contest.

*Verdict: Clonlara*

**Corofin/Ruan v Tulla @ Newmarket, Saturday, 3.30pm**

**Corofin/Ruan Management** Alan Bell, Ambrose Heagney, Alfie Jones, Luke O'Loughlin, John Punch

**Tulla Management** Michael Murphy (Manager), Kieran Brennan, Cian McInerney, Kevin O'Grady, Alphonie Rodgers

TWO sides that have been boosted by success in 2017 that they will hope to further capitalise on for the coming year.

Corofin won a first ever Under 21C crown, Ruan won the Under 15C while as an amalgamation, Corofin/Ruan secured the Minor B Shield after an epic final with Scariff/Ogonnelloe. Tulla meanwhile completed an unprecedented underage season with Minor B, Under 16C and Under 15B titles.

It might be a year or two too soon for Tulla to blossom at this level though as a more experienced North Clare combo backed by Damien O'Loughlin, Gearoid Cahill and Colin Haugh might have too much firepower.

*Verdict: Corofin/Ruan*

**Crusheen/Tubber v Éire Óg @ Corofin, Saturday, 1pm**

**Crusheen/Tubber Management** Pat Taaffe (Manager), Fergus Kennedy, Pascal Lee, James McNamara, John McNamara, Alan Tuohy, Helen McMahon (Medical/Physio)

**Éire Óg Management** Niall O'Connor (Manager), Brian Cooney, Tadgh MacNamara

THIS could well be the tie of the round in the B grade if both sides play up to form. Crusheen/Tubber can look to Ronan Monahan, Cillein Mullins, Ross Hayes, Breffni Horner, John Fawle and Eanna McMahon while Éire Óg are anchored by Conor O'Halloran, Tadgh Donnel-

lan and county senior football panelists Gavin Cooney and Einne O'Connor.

Éire Óg do possess the greater experience having played in the A grade over the past few campaigns but Crusheen/Tubber have plenty of scoring potential that might get them over the line down the final straight.

*Verdict: Crusheen/Tubber*

**Broadford v Clooney-Quin @ Whitegate, Sunday, 12pm**

**Broadford Management** John O'Brien (Manager), Cathal Chaplin, John Corcoran, Niall Moloney

**Clooney-Quin Management** Pat O'Brien (Manager), Pa Reynolds (Coach), Aidan Daffy

CONTRASTING 2017 adult campaigns have to be considered when assessing this rare meeting. Clooney-Quin defied the odds to reach a first county senior final in 73 years last October, with Michael Corry, Tadgh Shanahan, Conor Grogan, Jack O'Grady and Michael and Alan Culligan part of that historic drive that brought them to the brink of a Canon Hamilton crown.

Broadford on the other hand, having contested the previous two intermediate finals, failed to make it a hat-trick when bowing out at the quarter-final stage to eventual finalists Tubber.

However, while they also exited the Under 21B Championship at the first hurdle last year, Broadford have the greater pedigree heading into this weekend's opener as in tandem with Smith O'Brien's, they won a first ever Minor A title in 2015.

Darren Chaplin, Sean Phelan, Diarmuid O'Brien, Diarmuid Whelan and JC McMahon providing the county experience that should commence the new season with a win.

*Verdict: Broadford*

**Whitegate v O'Callaghan's Mills @ Ogonnelloe, Sunday, 12pm**

**Whitegate Management** Ger Muggivan (Manager), Raymond Cahill, Enda Durack, Kieran Kelly

**O'Callaghan's Mills Management** Conor Cooney, Michael Jones, Martin McKeogh, Brendan Noonan

WHILE it's a busy weekend for O'Callaghan's Mills who also represent the club in the A grade with Bodyke on Saturday, the defending B champions will be determined to reach their third consecutive decider, led by county senior panelist Gary Cooney and County Under 21 goalkeeper Killian Nugent.

Whitegate won't be any pushovers though as they have collected Minor silverware for the past three seasons, winning a Minor B Shield in 2015 before garnering back-to-back Minor C titles aided by the scoring power of Paul Burke, Michael Hynes and Ciaran Keenan.

*Verdict: O'Callaghan's Mills*

**Under 21B Championship Quarter-Final Cratloe v Smith O'Brien's @ Feakle, Sunday, 12pm**

**Cratloe Management** Mike Deegan (Manager), Michael Hawes, Brian O'Connell, Gearoid Ryan

**Smith O'Brien's Management** Arthur Stritch (Manager), Conor Hayes, Clive McLeish

A PLACE in the last four is the carrot for these B rivals who have contrasting records when it comes to this grade. Cratloe having contested two of the last three finals while also reaching last year's semi-final are backed by an exciting crop of players such as Billy Connors, Diarmuid Ryan, Michael Danaher and Rian Considine who have all represented the county.

Smith O'Brien's meanwhile, should have a strong side themselves having won the Minor A three years ago along with partners Broadford, with Mikey O'Shea and Declan Power central to that historic triumph.

However, they have tended to be slow starters in this grade, a trend that will need to be bucked if they are to stand any chance of progressing.

*Verdict: Cratloe*

**Under 21C Championship Round 1 Parteen/Meelick v Ennistymon @ Shannon, Saturday, 3.30pm**

**Parteen/Meelick Management** Seamus Bridgeman, Brendan Fitzgerald, PJ Flanagan, Colman Fox

TWO sides that are in the midst of a revival at the moment but Parteen/Meelick may just be a little further down the road in terms of development.

*Verdict: Parteen/Meelick*

**Banner v Inagh-Kilnamona (2) @ Kilmaley, Saturday, 4pm**

**Banner Management** Niall Romer (Manager), Noel Kenny, Derek Williams

**Inagh-Kilnamona Management** Micheál Barry, Brian Foudy, Kevin Hehir, Sean Mahony

A FIRST versus a second string but a lot will depend on who Inagh-Kilnamona lose to their first team. The Banner are improving with every season but are still inexperienced at this level.

*Verdict: Inagh-Kilnamona*

**Bodyke v Kilmaley (2) @ TBC, Sunday, 4pm**

**Bodyke Management** Liam Doyle, Syl Dolan

**Kilmaley Management** Kevin McNamara (Manager), Conor Sexton (Coach), Sean Hogan, Raymond Kennedy, Alan Markham, Bryan O'Loughlin, Shane Slattery

HOW Bodyke recover from their A exploits with the Mills and who Kilmaley use in their A tie against Clarecastle will hold the key to this result. As a first team, Bodyke will enter as favourites though. *Verdict: Bodyke*

**Opposite page: Under 21A representatives:** Paul Corry (Sixmilebridge), Sean O'Loughlin (Kilmaley), Cathal Lynch (Sixmilebridge), Colin Guilfoyle (Newmarket-on-Fergus), Cathal Noonan (Killanena/Feakle), Aidan McCarthy (Inagh/Kilnamona), and Cillian Nugent (O'Callaghans Mills/Bodyke);

**This page: Under 21 B/C representatives:** Cillein Mullins (Crusheen/Tubber), Ross Hayes (Crusheen/Tubber), Michael O'Shea (Smith O'Briens), Shane Hunt (Tulla), Ronan Molloly (Tulla), and Daniel Tracey (Scariff/Ogonnelloe). Natasha Barton