

John Horgan looks at north Cork side Shanballymore, as they make their tilt at claiming a Junior B county hurling title in Páirc Uí Rinn tonight at the expense of west Cork's Bantry Blues

RURAL Ireland comes out to play tonight at Páirc Uí Rinn in the two finals in the Cork county Junior B hurling and football championships on a very appetising menu.

In the overall scheme of things these finals might not generate the same level of interest as competitions above them do but for the participants involved it's a red letter occasion and one that means every bit as much as a senior or intermediate final does.

Shanballymore are one of the four teams heading for the Boreenmanna Road tonight and waiting in the opposite corner for them in the hurling final will be West Cork representatives, Bantry.

The North Cork club has a rich heritage going back the ages and whilst lean years have been encountered more recently, tonight's assignment provides the perfect opportunity to grab the limelight again.

On the road to the final, Lough Rovers, Araglen and Randal Og have fallen by the wayside and now it's the final frontier against the men from the West.

One of those hoping to be on the starting block here is club chairman Richard Burke, a member of the successful 1996 and 1997 North Cork Junior 'A' squads and he's eagerly looking forward to what is one of the biggest occasions in the club's history for quite some time.

"It's a big occasion for a small club like ours, there's no doubt about that and you don't get to play in a county final every day of the week.

"The club has a strong history and we won the county IHC back in 1951 and we won a couple of North Cork titles in the '96 and '97.

"But it's all about the here and now for us and since we reached the final there is a great buzz in the club and around the place and everybody is eagerly looking forward to the last match now with Bantry.

"We would not know a whole pile about them because it's been a case of concentrating on ourselves and making sure that we do our own business."

Getting into a county final is never an easy task and the team had to overcome a few formidable hurdles along the route before preparations could be undertaken for this final voyage.

Sixty three points have been amassed in their three outings against Randal Og, Araglen and Lough Rovers while three goals were secured as well.

"Yes, we have won our three games with a bit to spare in each of them and our point taking has been quite good but you'd be thinking that we'll probably have to do even better here again.

"The forwards have been doing the business and our defence hasn't conceded all that much but we were taking nothing for granted in any of those games because you never know what can happen.

"Overall, I would say that we have a good mix in the team of youth and experience and a couple of us, Paul and Vincent Burke, Kenneth Barry and myself were involved with the squad when we won the two North Cork junior 'A' championships back in the '90s.



Coach Jim O'Sullivan with the Shanballymore team during a training session ahead of their County JBHC final against Bantry Blues.

Picture: David Keane.

Shanballymore's date with destiny



Shaun Cronin and Brendan Hayes taking part in the Shanballymore team training session.

Picture: David Keane

Shanballymore achievements

Cork County SHC runners-up: 1902

Cork County IHC winners: 1943, 1951

North Cork JHC winners: 1996, 1997

Avondhu JH, Division 2 league winners 2007

Avondhu U21 C football: 2009, 2011

Avondhu U21 C hurling winners: 2009

Avondhu JBFC winners: 2011

Most notable players:

1. Conor Hannon was a major figure in the Avondhu 1996 county senior winning team.

2. Donie Curtin: Cork minor hurler in 1981.

3. Tom Mannix: Won a Cork SFC medal with Clonakilty in 1996, the same year as Shanballymore won the North Cork JHC.

4. Haulie Burke: Represented Avondhu in SHC.

5. Brian O'Reilly: Won Cork U16 Hurler of the year in 2009.

Path to the final: Shanballymore 1-28 Lough Rovers 1-8; Shanballymore 1-19 Araglen 1-8; Shanballymore 1-16 Randal Og 1-7

contested the Cork SHC final of 1902, losing to famed Dungourney that year.

"There's a great history there going back a long time and we would have won a fair bit down though the years and it would be great to add to that now because success is needed in every club to give the youngsters something to aspire to.

"We would have a vibrant underage section now, catering for the 10s, 11s and 12s in the club and they are the future of the club.

"Our facilities are good too and we are continuing to upgrade and we are installing new fencing at the moment. I would say that right now we'd be a progressive club and long may that continue.

"Maintaining a strong unit is hard work these days but here in the club we have some fantastic workers at all levels and it would be great if we could get a reward for them in this final.

"We have had lean years too but a lot of clubs encounter that and it's important that you stay positive all the way." And the support for tonight's big final?

"We'll have great support, we always do and that's very important for the young players on the team. It's not very often that you get into a county final and county medals certainly don't fall off trees.

"We'd be confident going into the game and we have been getting our scores from a good spread of players throughout the field but it's all about tonight now and seeing how we get on."

final."

The club, founded back in the late 1800s, has had many great occasions in the intervening years and in fact

"We have a good management team as well, led by Conor Hannon who was a key player for Avondhu when they won the 1996 county senior title. We also have Pat Walsh and Tom Palmer with us and there's a

strong structure in place throughout the entire club.

"Jim O'Sullivan from Castlemagner coaches the team and he is very experienced as well and has done a fine job in getting us into the