



Early bonus for AIB Club Semi-Finalists 10th February 2004

There is cause for some pre-match celebration for the eight clubs contesting the AIB All-Ireland club semi-finals over the next two weekends, with the announcement earlier today of this year's AIB Provincial Player Awards. Each of the eight provincial winners comes from the various clubs who will contest the Club semi-finals on the 15th and the 22nd of this month.

Speaking at the announcement of the awards, Billy Finn, Managing Director, Ark Life, said, "We welcome the opportunity to honour the performances of the players whose dedication and skill make the AIB Club championships such an exciting competition every year. These awards have become a prestigious element of the Club Championships, and this year's winners reflect the very high standard set in previous years."

As ever, the AIB Leinster Hurling award was hotly contested, though, for the first time in four years, the award has not gone to a player from Birr. Kilkenny star Martin Comerford saw off tough competition from within his own club, O'Loughlin Gaels, even beating his elder brother Andy to take the award. Both brothers were hugely significant in the O'Loughlin Gaels success over Birr to land their first Leinster crown.

Ben O'Connor took the Munster Provincial award, with his club Newtownshandrum up against Martin Comerford's O'Loughlin Gaels in the semi-final next weekend. O'Connor scored 0-8 for the Cork champions in their quarter-final clash against Fr. Murphy's (London), and was central to their success at bringing the provincial title back to Cork for the first time since 1987, when Midleton landed the crown.

The Connacht Provincial award went to Portumna's Ollie Canning with Darren Quinn from Dunloy named Ulster Provincial winner, the third consecutive year that this award has gone to a player from Dunloy.

In the football category, also honoured in the awards was Kerry star Tomás O'Sé, who was the overall winner from a very competitive Munster section. O'Sé and his brothers Darragh and Marc, plus fellow Kerry stars Dara O Cinneide and Aodan MacGearailt, helped An Gaeltacht to their first ever Provincial title.

It's a classic Kerry v Dublin semi-final on the 22nd February, with An Gaeltacht facing St. Brigids of Dublin for a place in the final. Leinster winner and Fermanagh star Rory Gallagher has been central to St. Brigid's success to date, alongside his brother Raymond and Dublin players, Peadar Andrews and Declan and Ken Darcy.

Johnny McBride was the clear favourite for the Ulster award, after helping The Loup to their first Derry title in 67 years, and the coveted Provincial title, while the Connacht Provincial award went to Michael Meehan of Caltra.

This is the eighth year of the AIB Provincial Players awards. The winners are selected from nominations made by the GAA media around the country, and are based on performances in the 2003 Provincial Championships. The winners will be presented with their awards at a function in AIB Bankcentre, Ballsbridge on Monday 1st March.

2003 AIB Provincial Player Awards

Football

Connacht – Michael Meehan, Caltra

Leinster – Rory Gallagher, St. Brigids

Munster – Tomás O'Sé, An Gaeltacht

Ulster – Johnny McBride, The Loup

Hurling

Connacht – Ollie Canning, Portumna

Leinster – Martin Comerford, O'Loughlin Gaels

Munster – Ben O'Connor, Newtownshandrum

Ulster – Darren Quinn, Dunloy

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