

Traditional white sliotar set to be replaced by luminous yellow 'smart' ball for 2020 hurling championships



The traditional white Sliotars will be replaced by a luminous yellow 'smart' ball



Michael Verney

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The 2020 hurling championship is likely to see the traditional white sliotar being replaced by a luminous yellow 'smart' ball as eight years of exhaustive testing by the GAA look set to come to fruition.

Pending approval at Central Council next month, the new sliotar will come into play for next year's Leinster and Munster SHC as well as the Joe McDonagh, Christy Ring, Nicky Rackard and Lory Meagher Cups.

GAA director of games development Pat Daly is delighted that all of their hard work looks set to pay off and stressed the importance of taking their time and ensuring the quality of the ball throughout the process.

"We had to try and make sure that we were happy with the ball and then we were happy with the technology and increasingly we're getting there," Daly told independent.ie.

"It's standing up to the type of tests that we've subjected it to. I remember when we started out with Hawk-Eye that people were saying 'you're pretty slow', we are because we want to make sure it works.

"That's the same with what we're doing here. We're tentatively talking about next year's championship but there's a few things that have to happen in January and February for that to happen as well.

"That's what we're proposing, we have been at it eight years and the time has come to press the button and push this on."

Daly is confident that the commentary around the ball's introduction will be positive given the benefits associated with visibility due to the radical change of colour, although he recognises that there will be some detractors.

"We used them in the Celtic Challenge competition last year and there was very good feedback on that. It's like anything, if you give something to 20 different people, you'll get 20 different pieces of feedback," Daly said.

"The feedback has been good, particularly around the colour, that has been very positive. It's very difficult to see a white ball under lights or in bright sunlight, it merges in with the background.

"All of the research would indicate from tennis and other sports, they had to move from white to yellow for those very reasons. You can talk about tradition but everything changes and times move on.

"Games are increasingly being played under lights and that wasn't the case in the past. If you want to see the ball, all the evidence from tennis in particular, the yellow is far better and that's the feedback that we have received from the players as well.

"They say it's easier to see and they prefer it. It's a change and change always causes a degree of disruption but I think it's change for the better and it should be seen in that context.

"What's being done here is being done for the right reasons and it's being done for the best interests of the game."

The smart sliotar – which is produced by Kilkenny company Greenfields Digital Sports Technology – will be standardised and will carry a chip to ensure that it is a "bona fide" ball.

Match-day balls can be scanned using a smartphone app to ensure their authenticity and Daly believes such practice will ensure that the integrity of the games are not being compromised, as well as reducing the likelihood of child labour.

"There are two reasons why we are going down this route. Number one is to eliminate the prospect of child labour and the likelihood of the sliotars being made through child labour," he said.

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"Number two is to ensure that the ball is not compromising the integrity of the game and travelling too far. The purpose of the chip is to prove that it is a bona fide ball.

"That chip will have a specific number and a specific identity and we'll be able to say that it's not a product of child labour and is one of the official balls. if you put up to the phone, it will tell you all that."

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