

A Date With Destiny -->

-->By Kevin McStay

DATES and figures. Figures and dates.

Sunday, February 18th 2001; winners by four points after leading by the same margin at the short whistle; no score of any description for 28 minutes; Kieran McDonald enters the fray with 18 minutes remaining and in that period becomes the top scoring forward with a haul that was twice as much as his nearest offensive teammate; a commentator describes the Crossmolina Number Five scoring his goal as “ a thunderbolt from 30 yards” when it is a toe poke from six metres; and anyway, what is a Number Five doing playing at Number Fourteen? Saint Patrick's Day, 17th March 2001.

And that is the story of how Crossmolina reached the Promised Land. In a strange yet wonderful outing they lifted their heads above the mediocrity to grab the bus to Croke Park. They were miles ahead of the opposition and the impression was of a team in cruise mode — one that had another level if required, but that will be for another day. The only black spot concerned the rambling Number Five; he was extremely lucky not to be sent on a different type of ramble that ends in the shower room before your mates get there. Indiscipline of this nature costs teams dearly, especially on the day of a final. A big following from the environs of Nephin made the trip but I had to settle for the TG4 offering due to Under 21 commitments. It was a game that Cross' were never going to lose and they looked in command. If not always total, command all the same.

I felt the win was a very professional effort characterised by proper planning and approach. Conservatism is not a word that springs to mind when the chosen subject is the Crossmolina management team. They should be praised for their bravery, not only in bold team selections, but in the manner of their training routines, build-ups and dealings with their players. Only a panel that was in total harmony can take on board controversial ideas and picks without a knock-on effect.

And once again they have proved that the team must always be greater than the individual sum. No man is irreplaceable and their high-risk strategy reaped a big harvest.

Of course they would be hung, drawn and quartered if the team had imploded in the absence of their most famous son but they must have had their reasons. I wish followers of teams could, for once, see the big picture when teams are selected. Have you ever known a manager to make a selection that deliberately lessened his chance of outright victory?

Tight wire or otherwise, the introduction of Kieran McDonald recharged the Crossmolina efforts at a time when they were approaching icy roads. His quicksilver contribution, both in scores and frees won, made for the winning gap and that must have been very close to the master plan.

Last week I wrote that Nemo Rangers had to be the team to beat but I am changing my mind. If anything I feel that the Mayo men have emerged from their winter hibernation in even better fettle than when they fell into slumber. Nemo looked sluggish and while they have very decent inter-county pedigree on board they are not exactly in the first flush of youth or in their most advantageous physical shape. I have seen Larry Kavanagh, the Nemo corner back that was sent to the line, play before and his sending off and likely suspension, while a disaster for him, is a big bonus for the opposition.

The reliance on Corkery is very stated and a plan to limit his opportunities is vital. Easier said than done of course as those who played against Cork in 1989 know only too well. In our desire to prevent scorable frees we stood off the extra few yards and allowed a big Cork total from play to be amassed. But there is a happy medium.

I thought Bellaghy were very poor. Lethargic and, followed closely by its first cousin, complacency. They are better but possibly not much. Their forward play featured the very worst of the modern game and if a Mayo side produced it the call would be for a Tribunal. And Crossmolina should prepare for the rollout of the 'Mayo in Croke

Park Factor'. It's mention by all and sundry is inevitable and thus I'll head it off at the pass.

Teams are not handed down or inherited. Tradition must have a startline. Teams are made, tended to carefully and lovingly and always nurtured.

Having seen both teams in action on a few occasions this past few months I am convinced that Crossmolina will win this Cup. Why? They are a far more mature and devoted team than their Saint Patrick's Day opponents are.