

A stroll for champions Crossmolina

Crossmolina 1-10 Corofin 0-5

It wasn't supposed to be this easy. Provincial finals are notoriously low scoring, tight affairs that are always in the balance right up to the final whistle.

Well, someone forgot to outline that scenario to Crossmolina. They so totally overwhelmed Corofin at their own ground on Sunday afternoon that the game was over as a contest five minutes after the restart.

By then the winners had a seven point advantage and were playing with such authority that there was simply no way back for the champions of Galway.

And they did it all despite having had to play for most of the game without their best forward, Kieran McDonald. He was injured after less than a minute, and though he tried to play on, the belt he received to his ribs rendered him largely ineffectual.

The also had to make do with just fourteen men for all but seven minutes of the second half after their half-back, Patrick McAndrew was dismissed, harshly in this reporter's opinion, for a second bookable offence.

Certainly, there could be no arguing with the first booking but the second card he received had more to do with bad timing than malice.

But Crossmolina never looked like a fourteen man team. Indeed, they upped their game to such an extent in that second period that it was Corofin who looked like they had a man short.

In truth, such was the case right from the first whistle. Crossmolina took control immediately and with Michael Moyles imperious at midfield the foundation was laid for another famous victory.

The game had a disjointed start with the star forwards of both teams picking up injuries that necessitated their departure. Derek Reilly fell awkwardly after thirty seconds and could play no further part while in the attack that followed, Kieran McDonald was injured after a clash with Ciaran Fitzgerald, for which the latter was booked.

Despite their dominance (Corofin didn't have an attack of note until the 18th. minute), Crossmolina made hard work of making their territorial superiority count. The fifth minute was barely up and they had already registered four wides. In that phase of play Martin McNamara also made an excellent save from Peadar Gardiner after Liam Moffatt had set the forward up for what was a great goal chance.

Indeed, the four thousand or so people who attended at St. Tiernan's Park, had to wait until the eleventh minute for the first score, a fine effort from play by Johnny Leonard.

Even that failed to kick start the Crossmolina forward machine. Despite the incessant promptings of Michael Moyles, and to a lesser extent, James Nallen, the home team were having trouble scoring.

But then, just when a wee bit of frustration was creeping in, up popped Liam Moffatt to fist home the only goal of the match. A goal never looked on when Peadar Gardiner gathered a searching crossfield ball from Paul McGuinness.

In attempting to score a point, Gardiner completely miskicked and the ball flew up in the air where Moffatt reacted quickest to fire into the empty net. An unusual goal but one that changed an entire game.

Now, Crossmolina were all fired up again, and though Corofin threatened a couple of times going forward, the defensive work of Crossmolina kept their return to a mere pointed free from Alan O'Donovan.

Moyles picked out Gardiner with one of those beautifully weighted passes that he turned into an art form on Sunday and the half forward opted to fist the ball over rather than risk losing the ball with a pass to the unmarked Liam Moffatt.

Few Scare Moments

Crossmolina survived a scary moment after twenty-three minutes when Barry Heffernan had to back pedal and change his feet at the last when a curling effort from Michael Donnellan suddenly looked as it was going to cross the line.

Just before the interval break, Michael Moyles and Michael Donnellan, interchanged points to leave the home team four ahead at the break, 1-3 to 0-2.

Three minutes into the second half and this game was as good as over. Paul McGuinness gave wind assisted Crossmolina the perfect fillip with a point after just thirty seconds and that was followed by two similar efforts from Peadar Gardiner and Michael Moyles.

Seven points separated the teams when Patrick McAndrew was dismissed, a factor that meant his absence from the game was not as noticeable as it could have been in a tighter affair.

But Crossmolina never panicked. They just upped the work ethic, brought Enda Lavelle out the field to play a more roving, linking role and they continued on as they had been. In total control.

Moyles and Nallen combined at midfield and the former galloped through to add to his tally. Substitute Michael Kenny kicked a fine score for Corofin but three points in as many minutes from Johnny Leonard, Damian Mulligan and Paul McGuinness set the seal on the home team's comfortable win.

To their credit, Corofin kept going to the end but their two late scores were of mere consolation value.

Another memorable day then for Crossmolina who now face the challenge of Bellaghy in the All-Ireland semi-final. A hard game awaits but that's for another day some time early next year.

Last Sunday, Crossmolina proved just how far ahead they are of the rest in the province with another display of all that's good in the game.

They defend with great discipline, they have midfield players who are prepared to work the entire length of the pitch for the duration of the game, and most importantly, they have players who can embellish the good work with scores in attack.

Barry Heffernan did all that was asked of him last Sunday while in front of him Tom Nallen superbly marshalled a back line that answered all the questions that were asked of them.

Michael Moyles turned in one of those performances that players dream about at midfield while the best thing that could be said about the attack was that Kieran McDonald was not missed. No more need be said.

Corofin were a huge disappointment. Much was made of their heavy schedule of late but don't players love playing games. No, their defeat last Sunday had more to do with too many players not playing to the best of their ability than it had to do with tiredness.

In fairness they kept going to the end and they never allowed the sense of frustration that they must have felt manifest itself in anything that would tarnish their good name.

Crossmolina: Barry Heffernan; Stephen Rochford; Tom Nallen (capt.) Colm Reilly; Patrick McAndrew; Damian Mulligan (0-1); Francis Costello; James Nallen; Michael Moyles (0-3); Thomas Loftus; Kieran McDonald; Peadar Gardiner (0-2); Paul McGuinness (0-2); Enda Lavelle; Johnny Leonard (0-2). Subs.; Noel Convey (for Leonard); Padraic Whittaker (for Rochford); Liam Moffatt (1-0) (for McDonald); David O'Donnell (for Reilly); Gabriel Walsh (for Loftus)

Corofin: Martin McNamara; Brian Silke (capt.); Kevin Newell; John Lardner; Michael Comer; Ray Silke; James Lardner; Aidan Donnellan; Ciaran Fitzgerald; Trevor Bourke; David Morris; Shane Conlisk; Derek Reilly; Kieran Comer (0-1); Alan O'Donovan (0-1). Subs.: Michael Donnellan (0-2) (for Reilly); Michael Kenny (0-1) (for Morris).

Referee: Bob McCormack (Roscommon).