

Glory, Glory, Crossmolina

By: Pdraig Burns

They'll be singing and dancing in the streets of Crossmolina tonight when the All-Ireland champions return home to celebrate this most momentous of all victories amongst their own people.

Who said that Mayo teams could not win All-Ireland finals at Croke Park?

Well, that myth was well and truly buried at the headquarters of the G.A.A. yesterday afternoon when the Mayo and Connacht champions claimed a memorable and quite superb victory over Nemo Rangers.

The greatest day in the history of Deel Rovers was marked by a remarkable display that had all the hallmarks of a team at the peak of its powers.

It was one of those days that will not be easily forgotten. How long (feels like forever) have we been waiting for a Mayo team to go to

Croke Park on All-Ireland final day and play with the swagger that Crossmolina displayed yesterday, particularly in the second half when they had all the answers to the questions that were asked of them by Nemo in the first thirty minutes.

Cork teams, in particular, have always seemed to have some type of hex on the Mayo representatives, and if yesterday's victory served as nothing more than ridding us of that perceived 'inferiority complex,' then the footballers of Crossmolina are owed a debt of gratitude by every footballer

from Mayo that togs out at headquarters.

All along, this particular Crossmolina team has looked as the one most likely to deliver the goods. Imbued with a rare sense of self-belief and confidence, they have showed throughout that they possess the requisite ability, and most importantly, mental strength to succeed at the highest level.

Yesterday, they got the better of a highly talented team from Nemo Rangers that contained the names of some of the finest practitioners of the art of gaelic football in the country.

They were fantastic throughout, combining their unquestionable ability with the type of commitment that has become very familiar to those of us who have observed them develop into the mean machine that they have become.

But Crossmolina, being from Mayo, did not allow us the comfort of a relaxing final few minutes. Four points up and time running out it was time to celebrate. Or so we thought. Colin Corkery had other ideas. He rifled in a goal in the last minute and suddenly the images of Ballina throwing away a title to Crossmaglen Rangers came flooding back.

There was time for even more drama. Corkery fired wide from thirty yards and from the resultant kick-out, the referee, John Bannon, adjudged that Tom Nallen had not been outside the twenty one yard line and he threw up the ball.

Mayo supporters looked at each other. Not again, they thought. Then the agon was all over. Crossmolina gained possession from the throw-up and the ball landed in the hands of the man of the match, the untouchable Kieran McDonald.

Then the final whistle sounded. Time to party. The players, management and club officials sang and danced their way back to the dressing room twenty minutes later. Everybody said it was the greatest day of their footballing lives. Tom Jordan, the manager, was just so, so happy. He's a quietly spoken character and you can see why his man gement style appeals to the thoughtful players that he has under his control.

"What can I say. I knew that we had that in us and it was just a matter of us

producing it on the day. We weren't out of it at half -time and it was a matter of us re-focusing and doing the things that we're good at.

"We said here in the dressing room that we had just thirty minutes of an All-Ireland club final left in which to play and we asked the lads for an extra special effort.

"And we got it. Everyone played out of their skin in that half and it was great to be able to produce that type of performance in the circumstances.

"It's hard to know where you go for here. I have a feeling that the players here will not be satisfied with this. They just love playing the game so much and I think that after a week or two they'll be back for more."

The captain, Tom Nallen, sat in the corner of the dressing room, in no hurry to get dressed.

Tom wanted to savour the moment "Last year," he said, " when we lost to Na Fianna I sat in the dressing room and I was disconsolate. I wasn't able to play and I remember thinking then that if we ever won a final I'd take my time and try to savour it.

"The danger is that you can let the moments go by too quickly and I don't want that to happen."

There's no fear of that happening. No Crossmolina footballer who was in Croke Park yesterday will ever be allowed forget the moments. Mark the day down in your calendar. Easter Monday, April 16th., 2001. The day that Crossmolina Deel Rovers were crowned All-Ireland champions.

Congratulations!