

Crossmolina advance after a few scary moments

Crossmolina 1-12 Bunninaden 1-6

Anything from a ten to a fifteen points' victory for the defending champions had been widely predicted, but at wet and windy St. Tiernan's Park, Crossmolina, on Sunday, the no-hopers, Bunninadden, brought their own script with them and made the Deel Rovers battle for survival for over fifty minutes.

The Sligo champions did themselves proud and would have returned home happy in the knowledge that they ran the warm favourites a lot closer than some experts had predicted.

The Deel Rovers would also have been happy with aspects of their performance, but a lot of tightening up in defence and cutting down on errors will be necessary if they are to become the first Mayo club to put titles back-to-back.

The champions will now have to wait until Saturday evening next to learn who their final opponents will be.

The Galway final was eventually played on Sunday with the 1998 All-Ireland champions, Corofin, emerging 1-3 to 0-3 win over Killanin to set up a semi-final meeting with Leitrim champions, Aughavas, at Carrick-on-Shannon on Saturday.

If Corofin qualify the final will be in Crossmolina, and if Aughavas emerge victorious the final on November 19 will be at Carrick-on-Shannon.

The real surprise on Sunday, to this observer anyway, was the awarding of the 'Man of the Match' accolade to Bunninadden goalkeeper Michael Finn.

Fine saves

No question about it, Finn did bring off a couple of fine saves in the first half to keep his side ahead but, for his excellent contributions in general play and for four great points, the honour should have gone to Crossmolina corner-forward Paul McGuinness.

A place in the provincial final hung in the balance for over forty five minutes, but then the Deel Rovers began to stamp their full authority on the trend and a plethora of points left them six points clear at the end.

Kieran McDonald's goal for the Deel Rovers four minutes from the break proved the spur Crossmolina needed and a score Bunninadden could not afford to have conceded so close to the break.

Crossmolina trailed 1-4 to 0-5 at that stage when McDonald struck after a quickly taken free by James Nallen to Enda Lavelle was put through to the unmarked McDonald by Thomas Loftus. The rest was simple for the experienced centre-half forward.

That goal put Crossmolina ahead for the first time by one point but the visitors responded positively with two further points to restore a 1-6 to 1-5 advantage at the break.

At times in the first half Crossmolina looked vulnerable and were rather fortunate not to have conceded a goal after three minutes. This was when the usually reliable custodian Barry Heffernan dropped a high centre on the goal line but managed to recover before the Bunninadden full-forward could capitalise of the error.

Overall, the Deel Rovers defence played well, particularly the half-back line of Patrick McAndrew, Damien Mulligan and Gerald Lavelle who contributed one point to the scoreboard.

More workmanlike

James Nallen and Michael Moyles turned in a more workmanlike performance in the middle of the field than that against Kilbride in the preliminary round.

All six Crossmolina attackers were very much involved in the play but McGuinness, McDonald, Gardiner and Enda Lavelle must come in for special mention.

Sligo team manager, Peter Ford, would have been encouraged with the performances of a number of Bunninadden players, particularly Paul Kerins, Pdraig Doohan, Liam O'Flaherty and Fergal O'Flaherty, and all four must have earned a chance in the county jersey at some stage during the current National League campaign.

Bunninadden, although failing to raise a flag against the elements over the final thirty minutes, caused a few Crossmolina hearts to flutter on a number of occasions and five minutes from the end Barry Heffernan was called on to make a fine save at the foot of the left upright.

A goal at that stage for the visitors would have put the homesters under a lot of pressure to hold out.

The Sligo champions, their first time competing in the championship, proved more than a match for the favourites when wind-assisted in the opening half, and they certainly raised a few eyebrows when slipping into a four points advantage after eighteen minutes, thanks to a goal by scorer-in-chief Fergal O'Flaherty who accounted for 1-3 of the side's total.

All through that opening twenty minutes, however, Crossmolina were guilty of so many errors, particularly having intended passes intercepted by alert Bunninadden players, and might well have proved the downfall of the champions.

Interceptions

The errors were mostly confined to the defence, where Francis Costello, Damien Mulligan and Tom Nallan all had intended passes intercepted.

For instance, the Sligo champions' goal was as a direct result of a Damien Mulligan pass blocked down by Pdraig Doohan and in a sweeping breakaway the ball ended up in the Deel Rovers net.

An earlier interception by Bunninadden half-back, Paul Kerins, resulted in a point by O'Flaherty.

In fairness, the conditions were absolutely terrible and mistakes were inevitable when playing the short passing game into the wind.

Bunninadden started confidently enough and were two point clear after eight minutes through Michael Gormley and Aiden Killoran.

Two points by McGuinness had the sides level by the 11th minute and all the signs were that Bunninadden were going to be swamped by the champions.,

Incidents at both ends of the field quickly changed the intended script and by the end of the first quarter Crossmolina were facing a four points' deficit.

Paul Kerins interception put Fergal O'Flaherty through for the lead score and three minutes later an attempted clearance by Damien Mulligan was aborted by Padraig Doohan before Emmett Gilhooley put the impressive O'Flaherty in for a goal to leave them 1-3 to 0-2 ahead.

That stung the champions into quick retaliation and some fine moves resulted in points by McDonald, Peadar Gardiner and Michael Moyles to narrow gap to one point again.

No mood

McDonald's goal six minutes from the interval put the homeside ahead by a point, but battling Bunninadden were in no mood the drop further behind. Instead they regained to the advantage from two frees by O'Flaherty.

Quick on the draw, Michael Moyles had the sides level again within twelve seconds of the restart Bunninadden failed to score in the final thirty minutes but came close to scoring two further goals, the first in the 34th minute and the second five minutes from the end.

Paul McGuinness restored the advantage for the champions in the 37th minute and further points were added by defenders Francis Costello and Gerard Lavelle before Gardiner, McGuinness and McDonald completed the scoring and a place in the final on Sunday week.

Crossmolina: Barry Heffernan; Francis Costello (0-1), Tom Nallen (capt), Colm Reilly; Patrick McAndrew, Damien Mulligan, Gerard O'Malley (0-1); James Nallen, Michael Moyles (0-2); Thomas Loftus, Kieran McDonald (1-2), Peadar Gardiner (0-2); Paul McGuinness (0-2), Enda Lavelle, Johnny Leonard, Subs used: Noel Convey and Liam Moffatt.

Bunninadden: Michael Finn; Stephen Roddy, Francis O'Dowd, David Flannery; John O'Flaherty, Kieran Brett, Paul Kerins; Padraig Doohan, Mark McGormley (0-1); Derek Gormley, Aiden Killoran (0-1), David Killoran; Emmett Gilhooley, Liam Og Gormley (0-1), Fergal O'Flaherty (1-2).; Subs: Joseph Scanlon and Kenneth Kerins.

Referee: E. Stenson (Leitrim).