

Crossmolina ready for final frontier

By Mike Finnerty

CROSSMOLINA will name their team for next Sunday's All-Ireland semi-final with Bellaghy of Derry tonight (Wednesday) and will choose from a full squad.

Despite injuries to Kieran McDonald (ankle) and Tom Nallen (shoulder), both will be available for selection according to Crossmolina manager, Tommy Jordan. "Kieran McDonald and Tom Nallen are both available for selection and it's the first time all season that we have everybody available and ready," said Jordan. "Ger O'Malley is back as well from the Lebanon and he looks a lot hungrier than he did when he left."

Their opponents Bellaghy however seem to have a dressing-room that resembles a casualty ward. That is if team manager Seamus Birt is to be believed. While he declined to mention individual names, he did say that "six senior players were unable to train last week". The Ulster champions are hopeful that most of the players concerned will pull through but selection of the side probably will be delayed until Saturday evening. One definite absentee from their Ulster final line-up will be half-forward Louis McPeake. "Louis has had a hernia problem and has tried to battle through it but he is ruled out, he needs to have an operation," said Birt.

Joe Cassidy replaced McPeake in the Ulster final victory but Birt said there would be "two or three players" in contention for the place. One of the injured players, who is doubtful for Sunday, is Derry senior full-back David O'Neill who received an injury in a recent challenge game against Queen's University. In fact, it was that game last weekend which caused most of the problems for Bellaghy.

"We picked up six or seven injuries and had to take off four defenders," said Birt. "It was a physical game but most of the injuries were down to bad luck. Perhaps it was the cold but players were hurting their hamstrings and different muscles." The team physio has been working day and night on some of Bellaghy's injured players but Birt has also been keeping an eye on Crossmolina's preparations.

"There's craic coming out of Mayo that Kieran McDonald is injured, on crutches even, but anyway we'll not change our team too much, stick to our own thing. I can't see David O'Neill coming out of the full-back line to deal with McDonald if he plays at centre half-forward." Crossmolina's midfielders have also caught his attention. "They've a very strong midfield with their two Mayo county men, Michael Moyles and James Nallen, who are very athletic, put in a lot of work and can score freely. They look a fairly steady team,

defensively gutsy and we are going to need a performance similar to that which won the Ulster final against Errigal Ciaran," said Birt.

(The match throws-in at Brewster Park, Enniskillen at 2.30pm.)