

Crossmolina take extra step in dour tie

AIB Club Championship

By Tom Humphries

Crossmolina 1-8 Bellaghy 07

19/02/01: Samuel Johnson once said of the Giant's Causeway that it was worth seeing but not worth going to see. So it was with this dour clash between Crossmolina and Bellaghy. If it was in your back yard, fine, you'd sit at the window. If you'd travelled to Enniskillen for it, well the journey home was going to be long and winding.

Crossmolina prevailed and deserved to do so by dint of a defiant defence, James Nallen's midfield contribution and an attack which, without being dazzling, at least managed to forage out enough scores to keep their team in front.

For Bellaghy, it was one of those strange semi-paralysed afternoons that football teams are sometimes prey to. Somewhere within themselves they knew there was another level of intensity and passion. Accessing it was the difficulty and, in the end, they turned in a pale and insipid version of their customary performances.

None of that should worry Crossmolina who know that semi-finals are seldom pretty and who came a step further yesterday than they did last year when losing at this stage to Na Fianna.

They began well yesterday, recovering from an early deficit with a string of useful scores which culminated with the gift of a goal in the 24th minute. Michael Moyles pumped a long ball, Patrick McAndrew their adventurous wing back latched on.

So pleased were Crossmolina that they declined to score for another half hour or so. The teams went to the break with the Mayo champions leading by 1-5 to 0-4

During that period the character of the game was volatile. Referee Aidan Mangan, perhaps more used to the purities of Kerry football, seemed to lose control of things and a couple of players from each side were lucky to stay on the field during a period when a circle of frees - each compensating for something which happened earlier - were given.

The game settled itself though as the Derrymen sensed that some of the edge had gone out of Crossmolina's play. The difficulty was that, while they smelled the opportunity, they hadn't the vibrancy to take advantage.

Several times Bellaghy attacks of considerable promise ran into cul-de-sacs merely for want of somebody to have a go rather than play another pass.

The measure of Bellaghy's difficulty is found in the fact that they didn't conceded a secondhalf score till the 22nd minute but, by then, had only clawed back two themselves, each from Gavin Diamond.

Even during that dry period, Crossmolina were never without hope. They found their forwards frequently with Enda Lavelle in particular winning a lot of ball and if that didn't mean scores at least it provided respite.

The game was effectively closed off to Bellaghy with 18 minutes left when Kieran McDonald was introduced. Not that McDonald is any cape wearing super hero, but he brought an element of pace and adventure to the party which had been wholly missing.

McDonald scored two points, attracted a couple of fouls and generally looked out of place in such a grinding, grey game. His scores were the last of the game and while Bellaghy threw subs and heart into the affair they were their own worst enemies. Several times lousy final passes cost Bellaghy goal chances. Danny Quinn was introduced as a target man full forward, but no long ball arrived for him to deal with. The game finished with Crossmolina four points to the good and with tempers growing ever shorter.

Of the fouls "we've no excuse whatsoever," said Ciarán McNally the Bellaghy captain with disarming frankness. "They deserved to beat us. We were a wee bit shakey, but you play as well as you are let and that was as well as they let us.

"We were just beaten by a better side. We won the Ulster final easy and played well, but before that we were struggling and we had our fair share of luck all year. The Ulster final was impressive but I don't know. I'm lost for words." Not for long one suspects. Bellaghy holiday in Tenerife at the end of next month by which time they will be ready for the county championship which begins weeks later. For Crossmolina, the big time is here and the sterile nature of yesterday's game was irrelevant.

"It's tough to assess a game when you are involved in it," said manager Tom Jordan . Maybe it wasn't a great game of football, we had to dig deep work hard and show character.

"We did that. We got a goal from a wing back. It's great when something like that happens, it hasn't been the one man or two that shows up when needed. We are a team, we are well balanced."

Which is precisely what the club championships call for.

CROSSMOLINA: B Heffernan; S Rochford, T Nallen (capt), C Reilly; P McAndrew (1-0), D Mulligan, F Costello; J Nallen (0-1), M Moyles (0-1); P McGuinness (0-1), J Keane](0-1), P Gardiner; J Leonard (0-1), L Moffat (0-1), E Lavelle. Subs: K McDonald (0-2) for Leonard (42 mins); G O'Malley for Gardiner (50); N Convey for Keane (64).

BELLAGHY: C Donnelly; P Downey, D O'Neill, P Diamond; K Doherty, C McNally (capt), C Diamond; F Doherty, J Mulholland; G Doherty, K Diamond, J Cassidy (0-1); G Diamond (0-6, three frees), C Scullion, F Glackin. Subs: Paul Diamond for O'Neill (34 mins); Eunan Cassidy for Scullion (42); D Quinn for J Mulholland (50); J Donnelly for Joe Cassidy (59).

Referee: A Mangan (Kerry).