

Cups and Downs -->

-->By Mike Finnerty

THE road to the All-Ireland Club Final has been long and winding; a bit like the road to Brewster Park, Enniskillen really.

Last Sunday morning, through Sligo, Leitrim, Cavan and Fermanagh, Crossmolina flags fluttered on the breeze and messages of goodwill adorned corners, fields and gateposts along the way. It seemed as though this entire pocket of the island had rowed in behind Tommy Jordan and his team. All-Ireland semi-finals have a tendency to unite certain sections of the geographical landscape and this was no different. Bellaghy had their own cause, but so too did Crossmolina. Never is a long time without an All-Ireland Club title. For both the club and the county. It was all about winning the game for the Mayo champions. They started well, faded a little, took their only clearcut opportunity of a goal, defended well, battled hard and chipped a few scores near the finish. Just like all season long, they did what they had to do. Enda Lavelle was named Man of the Match but Liam Moffatt and Tom Nallen could not have been too far behind. When it came time to roll up the sleeves and pump the elbows these men were at the top of the queue. The little extra spark was provided, not surprisingly, by Kieran McDonald.

Starting this enigmatic forward on the bench was a calculated risk. Tommy Jordan said that he preferred to bring him into a tight game rather than have to take him off in one. A sound argument. There is no doubt that he changed the direction of the match when he came in and his two points were crucial. The last, in injury-time, was a hallmark score from forty-five yards. His absence from the starting fifteen prompted much debate last week. Kieran McDonald, scorer of 2-28 in six games (an average of over 0-5 per game) had been dropped. Fit to play but left in reserve. It was a bold, daring decision. And it was proved right.

But what now? Four weeks remain to the All-Ireland Club Football Final and waiting in the wings is one of the most complete football teams in the country. Stephen O'Brien, Joe Kavanagh, Martin Cronin and Colin Corkery are their more recognisable names but they are strong up the middle and top heavy on experience.

Will Crossmolina go into battle without the top scorer in Mayo and Connacht for the biggest match in their 114 year history? They might if Sunday's selection is anything to go by. Joe Keane did nothing wrong and proved an able deputy while the tactic when McDonald is not there is to ferry the ball long and quick towards Liam Moffatt. If he start, then the gameplan is altered significantly. It may be a question of horses for courses. But McDonald is a thoroughbred