

Super Crossmolina leave ghosts seeking new haunt

CROSSMOLINA 0-16; NEMO RANGERS 1-12

THE ghosts of the many Mayo All-Ireland final defeats were wonderfully laid to rest at Croke Park yesterday when Crossmolina turned on a blistering second half performance to demolish Nemo Rangers and lift the AIB Club Football title in thrilling fashion.

It was no wonder that their dressingroom resembled a Ceili House, with singing and dancing the like that few have seen before.

The manager, Thomas Jordan, was ecstatic at their achievement. Garrymore in '82, Castlebar in '94, Knockmore in '97 and Ballina in '99 all suffered final defeats, but these past disappointments were all lost in the exuberance which greeted Crossmolina's historic achievement in bringing this prize to Mayo for the first time.

To have done so playing football of irresistible quality made it all the more memorable. And having to survive the drama in the final 90 seconds, added to the passion of the occasion.

Crossmolina looked home and dry as they enjoyed a four-point advantage with time almost up, only for Nemo to somehow engineer a goal from Colin Corkery after an inspiring drive through the middle from Stephen O'Brien.

Then, 30 seconds later, Corkery looked sure to force extra-time when he beat two defenders on the right only to shoot well wide to his left. His effort had his team-mates already dropping to their knees in disbelief before Damien Mulligan broke up the Cork's side's last opportunity to the delight of the success starved fans from the west.

This was a victory for club honour and sheer character, especially during the opening half when it seemed very much the old story as Nemo looked to be on the road for their seventh title. The Cork outfit cut through for a succession of scores which put them 0-7 to 0-3 ahead after just 20 minutes, as Corkery made them pay for indiscretions, while midfielders, Derek Kavanagh and Kevin Cahill, looked impressive.

All the time, however, Crossmolina were causing problems for the Nemo defence when they got past midfield, with Kieran McDonald running at O'Brien from the centre-forward berth and Joe Keane, on the left wing, and particularly Paul McGuinness, in the right corner, looking skilful enough to beat their men.

Furthermore, Crossmolina did not appear to be in any way overwhelmed by either the opposition or the occasion, bouncing back to outscore them by 0-4 to 0-1 with McDonald, Peadar Gardiner, the wing-back, McGuinness and Keane cutting the deficit to a point with scores of flair and style.

Nemo led 0-10 to 0-7 at the interval, but the margin would have been greater but for some trojan work among the Crossmolina defence, with the entire full-back line of Stephen Rochford, Tom Nallen and Colm Reilly very effective.

Crossmolina were a revelation during the second half and were, amazingly, level within five minutes of the re-start, the gifted McDonald scoring all three points in a show of panache.

Keane should have put them in front for the first time, but two minutes later McDonald fed the rejuvenated Nallen and the big midfielder found McGuinness with a reverse pass and he knocked it over for a point.

Gardiner pushed forward to extend their lead and McDonald split the uprights from a near impossible position.

Corkery kept Nemo's pot on the boil with a point from a "45", but Crossmolina were now growing in stature and the sensational McDonald put them three in front again before setting up McAndrew to make it four.

There were still seven minutes left and after Sean O'Brien brought the deficit back to three, Gardiner duly won a very competitive 50-50 ball and Liam Moffatt split the uprights to make it four again.

Now it was a question of nerve and if McDonald and his men had done their job up front, their defence also rose to the occasion with some great tackling to survive the brave Nemo comeback.

MAN OF THE MATCH K McDonald (Crossmolina).

SCORERS Crossmolina: K McDonald 0-7 (0-3f), J Keane 0-2. P McGuinness 0-2, P Gardiner, P McAndrew, M Moyles, L Moffatt, J Leonard 0-1 each. Nemo: C Corkery 1-6 (0-3f, 0-1 '45'), D Kavanagh, K Cahill, S O'Brien, D Niblock, A Cronin, J Kavanagh 0-1 each.

CROSSMOLINA B Heffernan; S Rochford, T Nallen, C Reilly; P Gardiner, D Mulligan, P McAndrew; J Nallen, M Moyles; J Keane, K McDonald, E Lavelle; P McGuinness, L Moffatt, J Leonard. Subs: G O'Malley for Leonard (53), T Loftus for Keane (59).

NEMO RANGERS D Heaphy; L Kavanagh, capt, N Geary, I Gibbons; K Connolly, S O'Brien, M Cronin; D Kavanagh, K Cahill; S O'Brien, L O'Sullivan, D Niblock; J Kavanagh, C Corkery, A Cronin. Subs: J P O'Neill for Niblock (inj 28), M McCarthy for Cahill (41), A Morgan for O'Sullivan (55).

REF J Bannon (Longford).

TOM O'RIORDAN