

# Mayo men take it home at long last

**Keith Duggan** at Croke Park

**Crossmolina 0-16**  
**Nemo Rangers 1-12**

17/04/01: The hex is broken. Yesterday in Croke Park, Crossmolina demonstrated to the rest of Mayo that All-Ireland finals do not necessarily end in a long trail of tears down the N4.

In a dynamic second half, the western side delivered the county its first AIB club championship against a team with a distinguished history at this level.

There were tremors, of course - a Colin Corkery goal in the last minute reduced the deficit to a point and threatened to visit upon Crossmolina the cruellest chapter in the recent history of painful Croke Park memories.

But Crossmolina's conviction was absolute and their nerve held in the fraught final seconds that saw Corkery screw an ambitious equalising shot wide of the Canal End posts.

It was not one of Nemo Rangers' more memorable afternoons, however, and they looked a pallid, unimaginative force in comparison to Crossmolina's spirited and brave second half attitude.

Trailing by 0-7 to 0-10 at the break, the Mayo team returned with a free-flowing, aggressive mindset and embarked on an open and courageous game plan that led to the execution of five unanswered points.

Although it was a resoundingly positive team effort, the charismatic Kieran McDonald had a tremendous bearing on the outcome of this final. Drilling two points that kept his team in touch through a dull first half, he was on fire after the break, curling an early point before converting two frees to level the game.

His final point from play, a wonderful left footed shot on the run, gave Crossmolina a 0-13 to 0-10 lead and it was at that point that the team's flaming belief was apparent.

But it was McDonald's pinpoint distribution that was as impressive as his score taking. The entire Nemo half-back line took turns in shadowing him, but each found him an elusive customer.

Often playing deep, he found willing target men in the impressive Joe Keane and Paul McGuinness. Keane's contribution of three first-half points was vital at a time when Nemo was constructing its brightest phase of play.

The Cork team's overall philosophy was confounding. In the flat, opening period, they seemed to be on the verge of gently obliterating their opponents. David Niblock and Joe Kavanagh were in lively mood and Colin Corkery enhanced the enigma with another show of casual skill and little movement.

The Big Easy of gaelic games nailed 1-6 over the hour, but, as always, there was the sense that within that massive frame lurks a reserve of brilliance. When he ventured out

field in the first half he worried Tom Nallen, but cut a remote colossus after the break when his team was back-peddalling.

With Michael Moyles and James Nallen the superior unit at midfield, Crossmolina ran at Nemo in waves. Wing backs Patrick McAndrew and Peadar Gardiner were rewarded for repeated scouting up front with a point each from play. Enda Lavelle dropped deep to sweep up in a defence that looked more composed with every passing minute.

Crossmolina's early jitters could have had fatal consequences but for two alert stops from Barry Heffernan, who blocked a Niblock shot after 10 minutes and deflected Seán O'Brien's snap-shot six minutes later. Nemo were in the ascendant in this period, up 05 to 0-2, comfortable at the back and generating a useful attack through Corkery.

When that avenue was closed off, however, they looked bereft of alternative ideas. The loss of David Niblock weakened them and although Kavanagh tried to kick-start things in the second half, he lacked the support.

Down by 0-15 to 0-11, their increasing worries were heightened when Corkery misfired on a free that was standard by his own lofty abilities and also saw Kavanagh blaze a pointed effort wide.

With classic Cork stealth, though, they maintained composure and a lifeline with a nice Seán O'Brien point before Stephen O'Brien initiated the move that ended with Corkery's goal.

Most of Connacht paled as they came hunting for a reprieve, building patiently from Martin Cronin at the back before Maurice McCarthy lobbed a fine ball to the out-rushing Corkery. The big fella steadied himself, eyed the target and triggered well but his effort drifted wide.

Crossmolina had lived a little dangerously for all the football they were playing, with a series of sweeping build-ups ruined by five second-half wides. But, in truth, Nemo simply couldn't live with Crossmolina's ferocious and persuasive rebellion against the sorry history that has racked their county. This result will mean much more than just silverware to the martyred devotees of Mayo football. At last, somebody Up There is listening.

**CROSSMOLINA:** B Heffernan; S Rochford, T Nallen, C Reilly; P Gardiner (0-1), D Mulligan, P McAndrew (0-1), J Nallen, M Moyles (0-1); J Keane (0-3), K McDonald (0-7, three frees), E Lavelle; P McGuinness (0-1), L Moffat (0-1), J Leonard (0-1). Subs: G O'Malley for J Leonard (56 mins).

**NEMO RANGERS:** D Heaphy; L Kavanagh, N Geary, I Gibbons; K Connolly, S O'Brien, M Cronin; D Kavanagh (0-1), K Cahill (0-1); S O'Brien (0-1), L O'Sullivan, D Niblock (0-1); A Cronin (0-1), C Corkery (1-6, 3 frees, 45), J Kavanagh (0-1). Subs: J O'Neill for D Niblock (28 mins, inj), M McCarthy for K Cahill (42), A Morgan for L O'Sullivan (58).

**Referee:** J Bannon (Longford).