

Bench Mark

Connacht Club Final Reaction/Liam Moffatt Interview

By Mike Finnerty

A MAN like Liam Moffatt is not easy to lose. When you stand 6' 1" and weigh fourteen stone, more often than not, you're easy to locate. But on Monday, it was easier said than done to track down the newest flavour of the month in Crossmolina. On Sunday, Liam Moffatt announced his official return to competitive football. In the space of three years he has played for just thirteen months due to an alliance of injuries, exams and red tape.

Eight minutes into the Connacht Club Football Final, on his home field, Moffatt was given a second chance. The 26 year old former full-back takes up the story. "When I saw K Mac [Kieran McDonald] on the ground and he couldn't get up. That was the first inkling I got that I might be needed" he recalls. "Kieran is tough, he can take abuse, and I knew how much he was up for the game. When I saw he was shook, I thought he looked hurt but I didn't think he'd come off. Knowing him personally he's so tough and stubborn that he'd never come off unless he was dyin'." McDonald wasn't quite on his deathbed but his ribs were hurting badly. Nothing else for it but to turn to Liam Moffatt. The manager, Thomas Jordan, turned to his bench and whispered in number eighteen's ear. The instructions were simple concedes Moffatt. "Going on like that was a bittersweet thing. You're delighted to get on but sorry for the person who goes off. When I went on the lads knew from previous games that you just let the ball in on top of me in the air. In the first half the last day though, against the wind, those tactics didn't work and I was told to come out a bit further for the ball.

"Before the goal I felt things were going okay. We were running the ball into the wind and I felt, in hindsight, that I did okay until we lost Pat McAndrew. After that I felt I made no contribution because I spent the whole time chasing the extra man. I'm not the most mobile so that just took the legs out of me," he chuckles deviously. The first quarter had just tapered to a close when the game swung open. Crossmolina had been camped in Corofin's half but had contrived to kick only a surplus of wides. Then, a quick move played in Liam Moffatt for the first time. The ground swooned as a consequence.

"The goal..." remembers the scorer aloud. "I think with the elements the way they were we just worked the ball up the pitch, overlapping it and I stayed around the square. Paul McGuinness played a great ball in behind to Peadar Gardiner; Gardiner went for a shot and it spun up in the air and it was just dropping, dropping, dropping. I just ran in and thumped it into the net past Martin Mac. Up in UCG I'd usually be fisting the ball the other way - down here I wouldn't," laughs Moffatt in reference to his rebirth as a forward outside the confines of Sigerson football. He hasn't had much to smile about recently and intends to savour these moments.

"Last year I played only fifteen minutes of the county final. While you're part of it and people try to make you feel part of it, when you're not playing you don't feel that you've contributed anything," he says. "In fairness though, the minute I came back from America this summer the lads made me feel part of the team again. Personally, Sunday meant a little more to me though because I felt that I had contributed to us winning the game in a small way. We've beaten a team of All-Ireland winners and anytime you beat a team of champions it gives a team a lift," adds Moffatt candidly.

Back in 1993 Liam Moffatt was a fresh new face and admirers were two a penny. He was a full-back with club, college and county and was blessed with power, good hands and a ferocious strike of a ball. This was the new, improved Peter Forde of the future. That was before fate intervened and injuries arrived at an alarming rate. Right now the goals have changed a little, if you pardon the pun. Moffatt's new home, for the moment at least, would seem to be in attack and last Sunday was a turning point; he hopes. The dark days have been far too common he agrees. "I was working in the college bar in UCG one night last year and this particular guy said to me: 'Jeez, what happened to you?' It does happen and when you're out of sight you're out of mind," reflects Moffatt.

Not any more.

