

# The Greatest Football Club in the Land -->

-->**A.I.B. All-Ireland Club Senior Football Championship Final**

**Crossmolina Deel Rovers 0-16**

**Nemo Rangers 1-12**

**Report by Stephen O'Grady**

Where others faltered, Crossmolina conquered. Tommy Jordan's side erased from the minds of the 20,025 at Croke Park a disjointed, somewhat lifeless first half performance which had concluded with the Deel Rovers clinging desperately to the coat-tails of the six-time champions, replacing it with a glorious tenacity which broke Rangers resistance.

"We have threatened to do that. Maybe occasionally we got glimpses of it in games. During this last year or two, we've played that type of football. It's very difficult to sustain that type of football over a full hour but it was delightful to watch there for fifteen or twenty minutes," Jordan commented in the aftermath of the purple patch to discolour all other purple patches.

Trailing 0-10 to 0-7 at the close of the first thirty minutes during which Nemo scored with alarming ease, Crossmolina returned a side possessed, consigning first half lethargy to the dugout.

They suddenly discovered the edge in practically every department, but most importantly Crossmolina were transformed to a cohesive, galvanised, renewed force.

It is nigh on impossible to single out individuals. The beauty of this success is that no one played below par. In the full back line Tom Nallen put a difficult first quarter behind to ultimately rule his roost, Colm Reilly offered a consistently high level for the hour, while Stephen Rochford was inspired at No. 2. Further forward, Damian Mulligan was an understated colossus at the heart of the defence, while Pat McAndrew battled mightily with Seán O'Brien out on the wing.

If there was a defender who outshone others, it was arguably Peadar Gardiner whose cavalier raids up the right wing caused Nemo countless problems and which probably should have precipitated a few more scores during Crossmolina's period of utter dominance.

This period was also underlined by the contributions of Enda Lavelle and Paul McGuinness. Somewhat anonymous during the first half, they dictated much of the second half pattern, forcing back a Nemo defence which had previously marched forward inexorably. At midfield, Michael Moyles and James Nallen - whose copybook had been blotted by some uncharacteristic errors in the first half - bossed the engine room, turning the tide decisively.

The forward sector benefitted and reaped the rewards with Joe Keane, Johnny Leonard and Liam Moffatt all building on the good work of their individual first half showings.

At centre forward, Kieran McDonald displayed a character to couple with his wonderful skill. After less than ten minutes of the Easter Monday Final, it seemed that the mighty expectations which had been heaped on the charismatic attacker's shoulders might be weighing a bit heavily. The words 'mare' and 'night' feathered the lips of followers as McDonald failed to prosper on four out of five occasions. Within a minute of the start he misdirected a pass to Moffatt when he might have pulled the trigger himself. He followed this with a bad pass to Leonard. On seven minutes, he dropped a great chance of the opening score into Dan Steaphy's arms after Moffatt had won great possession, and when a 50 yard attempt dropped harmlessly wide a minute later, signs were ominous for Crossmolina's talisman.

McDonald has matured with this club campaign however, and his genuine character would win through. In spite of all these early difficulties, he continued to demand possession, and never relented in taking the game to Stephen

O'Brien and company.

After Joe Keane had opened the Crossmolina account on 11 minutes, McDonald added the second on 16 to make it 0-4 to 0-2. His fine fetch and timely pass set Michael Moyles up for number three after seventeen minutes, and it was his sweeping pass to Paul McGuinness' chest which led to Peadar Gardiner's fisted score on 23 minutes. That made it 0-7 to 0-5 as Crossmolina hung in there despite playing second fiddle to the Cork and Munster champions. McDonald was the link in the chain on 25 minutes, following Johnny Leonard's remorseless 75 yard surge up the right wing, and leading to a McGuinness point with a goal on offer.

A minute later Enda Lavelle collected a break and stroked over to close the margin to 0-8 to 0-7 but before half-time Joe Kavanagh and Alan Cronin had slotted over for Nemo, giving them a lead which hardly flattered their comfortable dominance.

Within five minutes of the resumption, Crossmolina were level, McDonald firing over on all three occasions. The third followed a magnificent pass to McGuinness which pre-empted a free. He turned provider for McGuinness' intelligently fisted lead score on 38 minutes, cutting in and driving in along the endline before off-loading to a maroon shirt. Soon it was 0-12 to 0-10 as Johnny Leonard took advantage of Enda Lavelle's delightful crossfield ball, and it was archetypal McDonald when he angled over in the 41st minute as the Rovers devoured possession.

With their destiny in their hands, they almost handed the initiative back to Nemo when Colm Reilly inexplicably left Alan Cronin's right wing ball, leaving Barry Heffernan flat-footed and Stephen Rochford knowing little as his deflection drifted just wide of the post. Colin Corkery pointed the '45 and briefly Crossmolina threatened to kick it away as Moffatt and Keane spurned chances at the other end.

Keane atoned within minutes, brilliantly winning possession and a free after Liam O'Sullivan's initial slide went unpenalised by John Bannon. McDonald exorcised some ghosts of '97, slotting home decisively and a minute later, the game's 52nd, Pat McAndrew landed one from 45 yards to open a 0-15 to 0-11 lead. Seán O'Brien and Liam Moffatt traded points inside the next five minutes and at 0-16 to 0-12 and only three minutes remaining, the title seemed destined for Mayo for the first time.

Corkery didn't see it that way and after Stephen O'Brien's drive to the heart of the Crossmolina defence, his 16 stone All-Star framed side-stepped the western defence and the ball nestled the net.

The same player, however, surprisingly skewed two chances as Nemo amassed four wides inside the last quarter. They were presented with an injury time opportunity to steal a draw when Barry Heffernan chose imprudently to kick-out short to Stephen Rochford and was penalised when the ball failed to breach the 21-yard-line. Following the ensuing 'throw-up', Ger O'Malley emerged with the ball, replicating a similar intervention by Damian Mulligan only moments previously.

Heffernan was easily excused his moment of madness, as he was the one who ran McDonald closest in the man of the match stakes. The former Mayo custodian pulled off three first class saves as Nemo threatened to put daylight between the sides during the first half. He first denied Corkery a certain goal, granting him a second point as he drifted in behind the cover. Corkery then added his third point of the game to make it 0-3 to 0-1 after 12 minutes, and then sliced a beautiful ball into the path of Alan Cronin who fed David Niblock. Heffernan's reaction was remarkable. Corkery added another two points before Niblock and the influential Derek Kavanagh got in on the act to make it 0-7 to 0-3 after 19 minutes, followed in the 23rd minute by a point from his midfield partner, Kevin Cahill, following a magnificent crossfield pass from the otherwise anonymous Joe Kavanagh.

Two minutes previously, Kavanagh's attempted pass had been deflected into the path of Sean O'Brien in front of goal, but again the inspirational Heffernan proved equal to the task. Before half-time, Nemo suffered the loss of strong attacker, Niblock, and this undoubtedly had a bearing on Rangers' failure to fire after the break. But in truth, only a natural disaster might have stemmed the flow of sublime, triumphant football which illuminated and justifiably won this All-Ireland Final for Crossmolina.