

Enda The Game -->

-->A.I.B. All-Ireland Club Football Championship Semi-Final/Enda Lavelle Interview

By Mike Finnerty

TUESDAY morning and just one hour until the real world comes calling for Enda Lavelle. He is not long out of bed but duty calls. Man of the match in the All-Ireland semi-final on Sunday counts for little when there are blocks to be laid on Tuesday. The body is adorned by a few bruises and Enda agrees that it was a tough battle — in some ways. “It was and it wasn’t like I expected it to be,” he explains. “We were expecting a tougher, more physical side but we were well able to match them physically. We got off to a great start as well which is unusual for Crossmolina. That meant we always had the upper hand on them.

“We were hungrier than they were at the start,” he reasons. “But then they brought it back a little and Pat’s [McAndrew] goal was just what he needed. It was a long free in and they made a complete slobber of trying to clear it. It was badly needed and it put a bit of daylight between the teams. That’s what you want.” What Bellaghy wanted, and decided to do after half-time, was to mix it. Referee Aidan Mangan backed off a little and indulged the mood. Enda Lavelle was at the coalface of the action. He recalls it well.

“Just after half-time, Johnny [Leonard] got ‘the belt’ and there were two hop-balls. Whether you were near the ball or not you were hitting something. Bellaghy decided to mix it and lucky enough we didn’t react and get involved in anything off the ball. “But any team that brings in Kieran McDonald, club or inter-county, they’ll get a lift. We could chalk down another point or two as soon as he came in. He was unfortunate not to be starting but that’s the way it goes...”

Lavelle was unaware until afterwards that Crossmolina had gone a long time without troubling the umpires. He knew they were working hard, creating chances and applying the elbow grease. Putting points on the board must be addressed before March 17th but one stood out from last Sunday.

“Liam Moffatt’s point was the score that really clinched it for us,” remembers Lavelle. “It put three points between the teams. It was only after the match that I realised that we went over 35 minutes without a score and that would worry any team. We kicked a lot of wides and you won’t win an All-Ireland Final going over half an hour without a score. But it’s something we’ll have to work on at the training pitch for the next month.”

The final whistle is a blur. Danny Quinn whispered something about ‘going all the way’, his sisters arrived shortly before TG4’s envoy and then Pat McAndrew came smiling in his direction. A haze has fogged the exact sequence however. Being named Man of the Match included. “When I saw the security lads coming on to the pitch I knew, unless we flopped altogether, that we’d win it,” says Lavelle. “I was just thinking ‘kick the ball away, hide it, anything’.

“I knew I’d played fairly well but maybe not as well as some days last year. Personally, I don’t believe in man of the match but the likes of Liam Moffatt played very well. There should be eighteen man of the match awards for Crossmolina.”

And what of the final? A little too early to be rhyming off Nemo Ranger’s statistics but one or two names are familiar to Crossmolina’s 22 year old dynamo.

“Nemo are very strong up the middle and Colin Corkery — he’d nearly kick the kick-out over the bar. We’ll have to cut down on the frees with him around. It’s a really tough challenge. They’ve been there before and they’ve won it but we won’t be lacking anything in hunger. We know what a win would do for Crossmolina.”

He goes to get ready for work and leaves with his own interpretation of the situation. “We’ve a better chance than Bellaghy anyway!”