

County Senior Hurling Championship 2020

By Seamus J. King

It was third time lucky in five years for Kiladangan when they won the 2020 county senior hurling championship at Semple Stadium on September 20, snatching victory from the jaws of defeat in the final seconds of one of the greatest finals for years. Loughmore-Castleiney were ready to reach for the Dan Breen cup following John McGrath's point from a sixty-five, which gave them the slenderest of leads at the end of one of the closest of encounters, but a quick puck-out found its way to Bryan McLoughney, who worked his way through the Loughmore defence and gave the hapless goalkeeper no chance with a well-taken goal. At the end a neutral was torn between admiration for the audacity of McLoughney in going for the jugular rather than being content with an equalising point, and sympathy for Loughmore, who had the spoils of victory snatched so dramatically from their grasp in the final of final seconds.

Divisional Champions Excluded

The only difference from the previous year in the running of the Dan Breen Cup was the exclusion of the divisional winners. These had been allowed previously to enter at a preliminary quarter-final stage if they had failed to qualify from the league stage of the competition.

The sixteen teams that qualified for the Dan Breen were as follows: Drom Inch, Roscrea, Kiladangan, J. K. Brackens, Eire Óg Annacarty, Clonoulty/Rossmore, Nenagh Éire Óg, Holycross/Ballycahill, Thurles Sarsfields, Kilruane MacDonaghs, Moycarkey/Borris, Loughmore/Castleiney, Toomevara, Borris-Ileigh, Burgess, Upperchurch-Drombane.

The teams were divided into groups of four. They played off on a league basis with the top two teams going forward to the play-off stage. These games took place on the weekend of 25/26 July and, like all other games in the championship, had to be played under Covid 19 crowd restrictions.

In Group 1 Drom/Inch and Kiladangan came through to the exclusion of Roscrea and J. K. Brackens. In Group 2 Nenagh Éire Óg and Clonoulty/Rossmore came out on top over Éire Óg Annacarty and Holycross/Ballycahill. In Group 3 Thurles Sarsfields and Loughmore/Castleiney were successful over Moycarkey Borris and Kilruane MacDonaghs. In Group 4 Toomevara and Borrisileigh qualified with Burgess and Upperchurch-Drombane losing out.

Quarter-Finals

The quarter-finals took place on the weekend of 29/30 August, with all games played at Semple Stadium. In the first of the games on August 29 Kiladangan defeated Toomevara 3-16 to 0-18 laying

down a marker on their intentions for the year. In the second game Nenagh Éire Óg produced a powerful game of hurling to dump some pundits' favourites, Thurles Sarsfields, out of the championship by 3-12 to 1-8. On the following day Loughmore-Castleiney defeated a disappointing Clonoulty-Rossmore by 2-21 to 0-20. In the final game county champions, Borrisileigh, were defeated by Drom-Inch in a brilliant local derby. Drom Inch led by a point at half-time, Borris-Ileigh by a point after three-quarters of an hour, the sides were level at full time, still level after extra time, 4-19 to 1-28, and Drom-Inch won the penalty shoot-out by 3-1 for a dramatic victory.

Semi-Finals

The semi-finals were played in Semple Stadium on the weekend of October 5/6. Loughmore-Castleiney played Nenagh Éire Óg and won by 1-22 to 1-12. Nenagh came to this game full of confidence following their demolition of Thurles Sarsfields the previous weekend but they were outplayed by a superb Loughmore side, that showed a hunger and aggression that the North representatives lacked. Leading by 1-14 to 0-6 at the break, they were ahead by 1-18 to 0-10 when Nenagh's Jake Morris got his marching orders and their 10-point margin of victory could have been even greater.

In the second semi-final Kiladangan's margin of victory over Drom Inch was way beyond expectations with a scoreline of 1-21 to 0-9. The losers appeared to leave all of their brilliance behind them against Borris-Ileigh and failed to turn up for this game. In contrast Kiladangan raced into an early lead, were ahead by 1-11 to 0-7 at half-time, were 1-18 to 0-9 in front going into the last quarter and left Drom-Inch scoreless in the final period.

The Final

The final was played at Semple Stadium on October 20, with Kiladangan installed as favourites. However, the predictions were way off the mark as Loughmore-Castleiney matched them for every minute of an enthralling contest. In fact it was very much Loughmore's game in the opening half. Following a close opening quarter at the end of which the sides were level at 0-6 to 1-3, Loughmore shot ahead with two goals in as many minutes immediately after the first water break. However, Kiladangan finished the opening period strongly to leave the half-time score 0-12 to 3-3. They probably got a good telling off at the interval for the ten wides they were guilty of as against Loughmore's two.

Kiladangan had the slight edge in the third quarter and were level, 0-18 to 3-9, at the second water break. It was a close contest during the final quarter and with two minutes left Loughmore



Kiladangan players, mentors and supporters celebrate their first County Senior Hurling win.



Reaction to late Kiladangan goal that won the day for the Shannonsiders in the County Senior Hurling final.

were two points ahead, but Billy Seymour, Decky McGrath and Paul Flynn pointed in rapid succession to push Kiladangan ahead by a point. Then, in the 63rd minute John McGrath levelled the game with a point from a sixty-five.

Before the whistle could be blown for the puck-out or the final whistle, Kiladangan's goalkeeper, Barry Hogan, had the ball sailing over the heads of the centrefield players into the hand of Bryan McLoughney, who raced towards the Loughmore goal and put his blistering shot out of the reach of the goalkeeper for a sensational victory.

KILADANGAN: Barry Hogan, Darragh Flannery, James Quigley, Fergie Hayes, Decky McGrath (0-1), David Sweeney, Alan Flynn (0-3), Willie Connors (0-4), Tadhg Gallagher, Sean Hayes (0-4), Joe Gallagher, Billy Seymour (0-8), Dan O'Meara (0-1), Paul Flynn (0-7), Bryan McLoughney (1-2). Subs: Andy Loughnane (0-1) for Bryan McLoughney, Martin Minihan for Dan O'Meara, Bryan McLoughney for Willie Connors, Darren Moran for Decky McGrath.

Also: Darragh Egan, Jack Loughnane, Ruairí Gleeson, Johnny Horan, Ciaran Kelly, Tom O'Meara.

Management team: manager, Brian Lawlor, selectors, Sean Treacy, James Flannery, Martin Nolan, John Meskill, kit man, Mike Carmody, physio, Eoin Higginbottom.

Loughmore/Castleiney: David Kennedy, Lorcan Egan, Joseph Hennessy, Willie Eviston, John Ryan, John Meagher, Aidan McGrath, Brian McGrath (0-1), Ciaran Connolly, Joseph Nyland (0-2), John McGrath (1-10), Noel McGrath (0-5), Tomás McGrath (1-0), Ciaran McGrath, Evan Sweeney (1-0). Subs: Conor McGrath for T. McGrath, Liam Treacy (0-1) for Ciaran Connolly, Ciaran Connolly for Ciaran McGrath, Tommy Maher (0-1) for A. McGrath. Also: Michael McGrath, Peter Nyland, Edmund Connolly, Eoin Ryan, Eamon Connolly, Henry Maher.

Management team: manager, Frankie McGrath, maor foirne, Murtagh Brennan, selectors, Taffy McGrath, Maureen Connolly, coach, Eamonn Sweeney, physio, Cathy Doran.

Referee: Michael Kennedy (Newcastle)

Senior Hurling Relegation

The teams that came last in the four groups of the league stage of the competition took part in the relegation play-off. The semi-finals were played on August 29. Roscrea defeated Eire Óg Annacarty by 2-19 to 1-14 at Drombane, and Moycarkey Borris defeated Burgess by 1-24 to 1-22 at Templederry. The final, which was played on September 12, saw Eire Óg Annacarty survive by 1-17 to 0-16 at the Ragg and Burgess relegated to the O'Riain Cup.

The O'Riain Cup

The O'Riain Cup had a full complement of sixteen teams and they were: Carrick Swan, Ballingarry, Cashel King Cormacs, Killenaule, Portroe, Kiladangan, Lorrha, Thurles Sarsfields, Newport, Clonakenny, Sean Treacys, Mullinahone, Templederry Kenyons, Silvermines, St. Marys, Ballina.

The teams were divided into four groups of four to play off on a league basis, with the top two teams going forward to the play-off stage.

In Group 1 Carrick Swans and Killenaule came through to the exclusion of Cashel King Cormacs and Ballingarry. In Group 2 Lorrha and Thurles Sarsfields got the better of Portroe and Kiladangan, In Group 3 Newport and Mullinahone came out on top over Clonakenny and Sean Treacys. In Group 4 Silvermines and Templederry Kenyons came through against Ballina and St. Marys.

Quarter-Finals

The quarter-finals were played on the weekend August 29/30. Mullinahone defeated Carrick Swans by 1-18 to 0-14 at Clonmel on Saturday. Mullinahone won this with a powerful first-half display which had them in front by 0-14 to 0-6 at the interval. The remaining three games were played on Sunday. Newport enjoyed an overwhelming victory over Silvermines at Nenagh, winning by 1-29 to 0-9, after leading by 1-15 to 0-6 at the break. Lorrha gave a great second-half display to defeat Templederry Kenyons 4-21 to

2-22. Templederry appeared to have the game in hand as they led by five points coming up to the break, but took their foot off the pedal. Killenaule defeated Thurles Sarsfields by 0-23 to 3-12 at Cashel in spite of conceding three goals: they scored three of the last four points to secure victory.

Semi-Finals

The semi-finals were played at Semple Stadium on the weekend of September 5/6. Mullinahone and Newport played an exciting contest on Saturday afternoon, with the South representatives coming through by the minimum of margins on a scoreline of 1-22 to 1-21. Newport appeared the better side in the opening quarter, racing into a seven-point lead. Mullinahone were slow to settle but recovered themselves and trailed by only two points, 1-12 to 0-13 at half-time. Newport went further ahead in the second half but Mullinahone came back strongly with 1-2 from Martin Kehoe and after a very exciting final quarter they came through by the minimum of margins.

Lorrha had a much easier passage to the final on Sunday when they had ten points to spare over a poor Killenaule performance on a scoreline of 3-20 to 2-13. The winners were slow to start but got momentum after Colm Fogarty scored a goal after ten minutes to put them in front. They led by 1-7 to 1-3 at the first water break and 1-10 to 1-6 at half-time. They went further ahead in the second half, leading by six points at the three-quarter stage and were well worthy of their 3-20 to 2-13 victory.

Final

The final was played at Semple Stadium on September 19. Three goals in the final quarter established Mullinahone as worthy champions by 4-18 to Lorrha's 2-19. While Mullinahone entered the game as favourites on the basis of their experience, it was expected that the lively Lorrha forward line might cause them some problems. But the winners had prepared well, had studied the opposition in detail and shackled their best efforts in the course of the hour.

Lorrha did have a flying start and were in the lead by 1-3 to 0-3 after seven minutes, but Mullinahone struck back with a goal after nine minutes to go into a lead they never after relinquished. They led by 1-13 to 1-8 at the interval. Lorrha's best performance was in the third quarter when they cut the lead to three points,

but they were finding it harder to get scores. Even after Owen Kelly got the first of his goals Lorrha came back to trail by only two points after 53 minutes. But the effort was too great and Mullinahone hit two goals in two minutes to shatter Lorrha's hopes. The losers never gave up but it was Mullinahone's day and a well-deserved victory by five points.

Mullinahone: Alan Walsh Daire O'Brien, Paul Curran, Colin Shelly, Eanna Ryan, Eoin Fennelly, Alan Curran, Sean Curran (0-6), Kevin Walzer, Martin Kehoe (0-2), Jack Shelly (0-1), Enda Keane (0-2), Eoin Keane (2-5), Mikey O'Shea (0-1), Michael Dunne (2-1). Subs: Kevin Bolger for Keane, Gary Cronin for Walzer.

Also: Brendan Kearney, David Walzer, Sean Walzer, Oisín Drennan, Michael Cody, Shane Morris, Liam Fennelly, George Browning.

Management team: manager, Sean O'Meara, selectors, Micheál Cahill, Martin Costello, coach, Pat Croke, physio, Kari Laaksonen, statistics, Eoin Egan, logistics, John Murphy.

Lorrha-Dorrha: Paddy Reddin, Michael Dolan, Conor Hogan, Graham Houlihan, Ciaran Hough, Brian Hogan (1-1), Eoin Cleary, Daniel O'Donoghue (0-1), Niall McIntyre (0-1), David Fogarty, Cian Hogan (1-1), Eoin McIntyre (0-3), Chris Fogarty (0-2), Patrick Maher, Colm Fogarty (0-8). Subs: Denis O'Meara for Graham Houlihan, Alan O'Meara for David Fogarty, Donal O'Sullivan for Eoin Cleary.

Also: Kevin Hough, Tom Duggan, Ger Lamb, James Guinan, Padraig Kennedy, Ollie Cleary.

Management team: manager, John McIntyre, maor foirne, Eamonn Maher, selectors, Martin Young, James O'Meara, physio, Triona Cleary, stats, Niall Brophy, kit men, Davy Dunne, Tommy Houlihan.

Referee: Seamus Delaney (J. K. Brackens).

Seamus Ó Riain Relegation

The bottom team in the four groups after the league section played in the relegation competition. St. Marys defeated Sean Treacys by 0-19 to 0-17 in one semi-final at Cahir on August 30. One the same day at Templetuohy, Kiladangan defeated Ballingarry by 0-26 to 0-23 after extra time.

The final was played at Cashel on September 5 and Sean Treacys defeated Ballingarry by 2-27 to 2-17 to retain their status, while Ballingarry were relegated to intermediate.



The Curran brothers from Mullinahone - Sean, Alan and Paul celebrate the Ó Riain Cup win.