

County Senior Hurling Championship 2017

By Seamus J. King

Thurles Sarsfields claimed their fourth County Tipperary senior hurling championship-in-a-row when they defeated Borris-Ileigh by 1-24 to 0-11 in a facile victory at Semple Stadium on October 8. The winners justified their odds of 2/7 in a game which saw matters fairly even for the opening five minutes after which the winners raced to a 10-2 lead, before Borris-Ileigh struggled back into the game and had reduced the margin to 11-7 at the interval. On the resumption Thurles Sarsfields popped over three points without reply and any hope that Borris-Ileigh might have entertained was dashed midway through the half when a Conor Stakelum goal confirmed Sarsfields' undoubted superiority and the weakness of the Borris-Ileigh challenge. Sarsfields went on to win with ease on a scoreline of 1-24 to 0-11 before a fine crowd of 8,376 in attendance. It was the first four-in-a-row in this championship since Toomevara accomplished the feat during the years 1998-2001, and it gave the Thurles men their 36th senior hurling championship title.

There was a major change in the running of the Dan Breen Cup. In the previous year, the teams in the Dan Breen Cup were divided into Roinn 1 and Roinn 2, with both Roinns providing qualification for the play-off stages. The change in 2017 was that Roinn 2 no longer provided such qualification. The only way a team in Roinn 2 could gain entry to the Dan Breen Cup was by winning the divisional championship. There was also the enticement that the two teams that qualified for the final would gain entry to the following year's Dan Breen Cup, filling the places left vacant by the two relegated teams.

Dan Breen Cup

The Dan Breen Cup had sixteen teams, Kiladangan, Borris-Ileigh, Loughmore-Castleiney, Upperchurch-Drombane, Drom Inch, Portroe, Clonoulty-Rossmore, Ballina, Thurles Sarsfields, Carrick Swan, Kilruane MacDonaghs, Nenagh Eire Óg, Killenaule, Burgess, Eire Óg Annacarty, Mullinahone.

Divided into four groups, they played off on a league basis and the top two teams in each group qualified for the playoffs.

In Group 1 Loughmore-Castleiney qualified in first place with Borris-Ileigh as runners-up. In Group 2 Clonoulty-Rossmore came through with Drom & Inch in second place. In Group 3 Thurles Sarsfields came out on top with Kilruane-MacDonaghs

in second place. In Group 4, Eire Óg had the highest number of points with Mullinahone in second place.

Divisional Championship Winners

In the meantime the following teams had won the divisional championships: Thurles Sarsfields (Mid), Borris-Ileigh (North), Carrick Swan (South), Clonoulty-Rossmore (West). Three of these teams – the exception was Carrick Swan – had already qualified. Carrick Swan had to play one of the runner-up teams in the group stage of the Dan Breen Cup, and Borris-Ileigh drew the short straw. They played in a preliminary quarter-final at Cashel on September 10, coming out on top by 3-17 to 2-5. Two goals in a four-minute spurt at the start of the second-half put the winners in a commanding position, having led by 1-12 to 1-4 at half-time after playing with a strong breeze.

County Quarter-Finals

The county quarter-finals were played at Semple Stadium on the weekend of 16/17 September. On Saturday Eire Óg Annacarty took on a fancied Mullinahone a week after losing the West final. Their chances looked slim following the sending off of Patrick Aherne and team captain, Conor O'Brien, before half-time. However, in spite of the numerical disadvantage and the fact that they were three points behind at the second sending-off, they never lost their composure and produced a display that will long be remembered in the parish. Mullinahone were ahead by 0-9 to 0-6 at the break but Eire Óg battled against the odds in the second half for a marvellous victory of 2-13 to 1-15.

In the second game Thurles Sarsfields took extra time to defeat a spirited Kilruane MacDonaghs performance. The latter paid little respect to the champions favourite's tag and forced extra-time following a late Cian Darcy point. Following a whirlwind start Sarsfields looked set for an easy victory but Kilruane fought back and were only three points behind, 1-11 to 1-8, at the break. Eleven minutes into the second-half they were level and, helped by great goalkeeping from Thomas Williams, they survived the best that Sarsfields could throw at them to draw on a scoreline of 1-20 each. The story of the extra-time is easy to relate. Sarsfields showed what they are capable of, scoring 2-6 to Kilruane's 0-2 for a final tally in their favour of 3-26 to 1-22.

On Sunday, Drom Inch produced their best display of the year



Thurles Sarsfields senior hurlers - County SHC winners for the 4th year in succession.

Standing: (from left) Willie Tierney, Lar Corbett, Michael Purcell, Kevin O'Gorman, Jack Derby, Rory Dwan, David Corbett, Seanie Butler, David Maher, David Kennedy, Michael Cahill, Padraic Maher (Captain), Billy McCarthy, Ronan Maher, Cathal Moloney, Tommy Doyle, Declan Ryan, Denis Maher, Pa Dunne.
Kneeling: Bary Dwyer, Aidan Ryan, Rory Purcell, Mossy McCormack, Cian Treacy, Paul Maher, Conor Stakelum, Stephen Maher, Stephen Cahill, Stephen Lillis, Patrick McCormack, John Maher, Aidan McCormack, Michael O'Brien, Richie Ruth, Conor Lanigan, Pa Bourke.

to score a comprehensive victory over Clonoulty-Rossmore. Whereas the game was even enough in the first half, with the score 0-12 to 1-7 in Drom's favour at the interval, the Mid side really increased the pace in the second half and were in front by 0-19 to 1-9 after 38 minutes. Ten minutes later the margin was 2-20 to 1-12 and at the final whistle Drom & Inch were well-deserving of their 2-26 to 1-14 victory.

Borris-Ileigh claimed the last of the semi-final slots when they held out against a late Loughmore-Castleiney rally to win by 1-18 to 1-17. Following a close opening half, Borris-Ileigh began to pull away in the middle of the second-half and opened up a seven-point margin with five minutes of normal time to go. During this final period Loughmore fought hard to reduce the margin and got to within a point of the winners with a goal from John McGrath in the 34th minute. But time ran out on them.

County Semi-finals

The county semi-finals were played at Semple Stadium on September 24. Borris-Ileigh faced neighbours Drom & Inch and what should have been an exciting derby game turned out to be a poor encounter, which was rescued somewhat by an exciting finish. In what was a defensive game from the start, scores were slow coming and Borris-Ileigh shaded it in the first half to lead by 0-8 to 1-4 at the interval. Borris-Ileigh pushed further ahead in the second half with four unanswered points. They carried a six-point advantage into the final quarter and it was only at this stage that Drom & Inch rallied and reduced the margin to a point. They made a desperate effort to get the equaliser and in doing so left themselves exposed at the back and a fine Borris-Ileigh move led to a clinching Dan McCormack goal and Borris-Ileigh's qualification for the county final for the first time since 1988.

In the second semi-final Thurles Sarsfields had nine points to spare over Eire Óg Annacarty following a very fine display of point scoring. They led by 0-12 to 0-1 at the end of the first quarter. Eire Óg came into the game after that and trailed by 0-18 to 0-9 at the interval. In the second half there was an even split in the scores with each side adding nine points. Eire Óg may rescue some consolation from this fact but there was never a doubt that there would be only one winner and the final score was 0-17 to 0-18 in favour of Sarsfields.

County Final

Thurles Sarsfields were firm favourites going into the final at Semple Stadium on October 8 with the bookies favouring them by as much as 2 to 7. In contrast their opponents were 11-4. In spite of that Borris-Ileigh's performances during the year and the tradition they brought with them inclined some few to give them a chance.

The game itself proved beyond a shadow of doubt that the bookies were right. Thurles fully deserved their 1-24 to 0-11 victory. There was one period when Borris-Ileigh created a vestige of hope, just before the half-time whistle, but this evaporated early in the second half. Thurles had done their homework well, targeting and neutralising Borris-Ileigh's key men and preventing the team from ever getting a momentum. They were helped by Borris-Ileigh's negative game plan of playing deep and leaving a free defender to clear at will from the opposition's half. When that defender was Padraic Maher, the game became a ping-pong contest in the second-half.

The result was a very disappointing performance by Borris-Ileigh who succeeded in scoring only six points from play. They didn't do themselves justice on the day and are obviously a better team than we saw in the final.

Borris-Ileigh's poor display cannot detract from a very impressive Sarsfields performance. It was probably their best of the year, and it confirms their dominance in Tipperary. It is also true to say that they are becoming the team that may challenge the great sides in the nineteen-fifties and -sixties as the greatest team to represent the club. Before they can reach that status they



Thurles Sarsfields captain Padraic Maher lifts the Dan Breen Cup presented by County Board Chairman Michael Bourke.

will have to seriously challenge for provincial and All-Ireland Club honours.

Thurles Sarsfields: Patrick McCormack, Stephen Maher, Cathal Moloney, Michael Cahill, Ronan Maher (0-1), Padraic Maher (0-1), Stephen Lillis, John Maher, Stephen Cahill (0-1), Billy McCarthy (0-3), Aidan McCormack (0-9), Pa Bourke (0-2), Conor Stakelum (1-2), Denis Maher (0-3), Lar Corbett (0-2). Subs: Mikey O'Brien for Pa Bourke, Tommy Doyle for Denis Maher, Rory Dwan for Stephen Maher, Conor Lanigan for Conor Stakelum, Rory Purcell for Cathal Moloney. Also: Willie Tierney, Pa Dunne, Jack Derby, Mossy McCormack, David Corbett, David Kennedy, Paul Maher, David Maher, Kevin O'Gorman, Barry O'Dwyer, Cian Treacy, Seanie Butler, Aidan Ryan, Michael Purcell.

Selectors: manager – Tommy Maher, coach – Paddy McCormack, Eoin Kelly, Johnny Enright.

Borris-Ileigh: Jack Bourke, Thomas Fahy, Paddy Stapleton, Matthew Stapleton, Liam Ryan (0-2), Ciaran Cowan, Sean McCormack, Brendan Maher (capt.), (0-5), Seamus Burke, Niall Kenny, Dan McCormack (0-3), Jerry Kelly, Jack Hogan, Conor Kenny, Kieran Maher. Subs: Jody Harkin for Matthew Stapleton, Keith Ryan for Jack Hogan, Vincent Stapleton for Kieran Maher, Maurice Ryan for Thomas Fahy. Also: James McCormack, Tommy Ryan, Shane Kenny, David O'Conner, Shane McCormack, Cathal Bourke, Aaron Reid, Eoin Stapleton, Aidan Cowan, Rory Kinane, Michael Ryan.

Selectors: manager, Johnny Kelly, Philip Kenny, Philip Maher, John McGrath.

Referee: Fergal Horgan (Kickhams).

Man of the Match Award: Padraic Maher (Thurles Sarsfields).

Dan Breen Cup Relegation

Relegation is an important part of the senior hurling championship, with two teams going down to the O'Riain Cup and the finalists in the latter getting promotion to the Dan Breen.

The bottom team in each of the four groups went into the

relegation battle. The teams were Kiladangan, Ballina, Carrick Swan and Burgess. However, Carrick Swan avoided relegation by virtue of winning the South championship so the contest was between Kiladangan, Ballina and Burgess, with two to be relegated. In the three-way play-off, Kildangan had two victories and survived, while Burgess and Ballina were relegated..

Seamus Ó Riain Cup

There were thirteen teams in the Seamus Ó Riain Cup, Newport, Ballingarry, Roscrea, Toomevara, Templederry Kenyons, Silvermines. Moycarkey-Borris, J. K. Brackens, Borrisokane, Clonakenny, Holycross-Ballycahill, Lorrha, Knockavilla Kickhams.

They were divided into four groups with four teams in Group 1 and three teams each in the other three groups. The winners in each group were as follows, Roscrea, Templederry Kenyons, J. K. Brackens and Holycross-Ballycahill. The respective runners-up were Toomevara, Silvermines, Clonakenny and Lorrha.

In the quarter-finals, played on September 10, Toomevara defeated Silvermines by 0-22 to 1-6, Holycross-Ballycahill defeated Clonakenny by 2-18 to 2-14, J. K. Brackens beat Lorrha by 2-19 to 2-16, and Roscrea defeated Templederry Kenyons by 4-19 to 2-19.

The semi-finals were played on September 23/24 and the attractive prize for the winners was a place in the following year's Dan Breen Cup. Toomevara and J. K. Brackens met at the Ragg in the first semi-final on September 23. Toomevara quickly asserted their superiority in this encounter, leading by 2-13 to 1-5 at the break and comfortably in front by 2-24 to 3-14 at the final whistle. Holycross-Ballycahill were favourites against Roscrea in the second semi-final at Borrisileigh on September 24. Even though they dominated the first half they led by the minimum margin, 0-10 to 1-6 at the interval. Roscrea got a goal early in the second half and this gave them a slight lead, which they never relinquished, and they won in the end by 3-14 to 0-20..

The Seamus Ó Riain Cup final between Roscrea and Toomevara was played at Semple Stadium as a curtain-raiser to the Dan Breen Cup final on October 8 and ended in a draw. For a long period of the game Toomevara seemed to have the upper hand but a goal by Roscrea ten minutes from the end, when they trailed by six points, resurrected their act and they added three more points, without reply from Toomevara, to grab an unlikely draw.

Toomevara led by 1-7 to 0-4 at half-time, were seven points up after 46 minutes and the game looked over five minutes later when they led by 1-12 to 0-9 and appeared in command. However, Roscrea resurrected their act with a penalty, which was converted by goalie, Daryl Ryan, in the 53rd minute, which reduced the margin to 1-12 to 1-9. In the final minutes Roscrea had a flurry of points, while Toomevara failed to score to leave the final tally 1-12 each.

Toomevara: Darren Cuddihy, Cathal Kennedy, Andrew Ryan, Liam Ryan, Jake Ryan, Jason Ryan, Darren Delaney, Josh McCarthy, Paul Ryan, Colm Canning (0-1), Ken Dunne (0-3), Conor O'Meara (0-2), Sean Flaherty, Mark McCarthy (1-0), Jack Delaney (0-5). Subs: Alan Ryan for Mark McCarthy, John Delaney for Paul Ryan, Colm Hall for Conor O'Meara, Eoin Grace for Josh McCarthy.

Roscrea: Daryl Ryan (1-0), David Buckley, Michael Champion, Conor Bergin, Shane Davis, Joe Carroll, Keith McMahon, Evan Fitzpatrick, Lee Cashin, John Ryan, Liam England (0-1), Davin Flynn (0-2), Conor Sheedy (0-6), Sam Conlon (0-2), Shane Fletcher. Subs: Fergus Hannon for John Ryan, Jason Fitzpatrick for Conor Sheedy, Jason Gilmartin for Lee Cashin, Padraic Carroll for Joe Carroll, Conor Sheedy for Liam England.

Referee: Johnny Ryan (Boherlahan-Dualla).

Relay

The replay was in Moneygall on November 5. Toomevara scored a double-score victory, 2-18 to 0-12, over a disappointing Roscrea side. Playing with the breeze in the first half, the winners led by



Conor Kenny (Borris) battles with Ronan Maher (Thurles Sarsfields) in an aerial duel.

1-11 to 0-7 at the interval. Any hopes Roscrea had of gaining momentum with the breeze in their back, were dashed when Ken Dunne gold for Toomevara soon after the resumption and it was one-way traffic for the remainder of the half.

Toomevara: Darren Cuddihy, Cathal Kennedy, Andrew Rytan, Liam Ryan, Jake Ryan (0-1), Hason Ryan, Darren Delaney (0-1), Joey McLoughney, Josh McCarthy (0-1), Paul Ryan (0-1), Ken Dunne (1-9), John O'Brien (0-2), Jack Delaney (0-1), (Mark McCarthy (1-0), Conor O'Meara (0-2). Subs: Colm Canning for Josh McCarthy, Benny Dunne for John O'Brien, John Delaney for Benny Dunne, John Delaney for Conor O'Meara, Colin Hall for Cathal Kennedy, Sean Flaherty for Jack Delaney.

Roscrea: Daryl Ryan, David Buckley, Michael Champion, Conor Bergin, Shane Davis, Joe Carroll, Keith McMahon, Fergus Hannon, Evan Fitzpatrick (0-1), Jason Fitzpatrick (0-4), Sam Conlon, Conor Sheedy (0-5), Shane Fletcher (0-1), Davin Flynn, Liam England. Subs: Padraic Carroll for Davin Flynn, John Ryan for Conor Sheedy, Jason Gilmartin for Sam Conlon, Lee Cashin for Evan Fitzpatrick.

Referee: Paddy Ivors (Ballingarry).

Relegation

Two teams were relegated to intermediate grade and they were decided on in a play-off between the last teams in each of the four groups. These were Ballingarry, Moycarkey-Borris, Borrisokane and Knockavilla Kickhams.

In a series of matches Ballingarry beat Kickhams, Moycarkey beat Borrisokane, Kickhams beat Borrisokane, Moycarkey beat Ballingarry, Ballingarry beat Borrisokane and Kickhams beat Moycarkey.

As a result Borrisokane were relegated having won no game. The remaining three teams ended up with two wins each and it came down to score difference to decide on the second team to be relegated. This was Kickhams.

Whereas two teams were relegated only one was promoted from intermediate ranks and that was St. Mary's, who won the intermediate championship when they defeated Gortnahoe-Glengoole.