

## Defensive errors cost Deise dear as Tipperary retain crown



Bloodied but unbowed: John Mullane about to get some repairs to an ear injury from team doctor Mark Rowe last Sunday.  
Photos: Michael Kiely

### Tipperary 4-14; Waterford 2-16

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Waterford hurling historians will recall Sunday's Munster final defeat in the field of legends as the one that got away.

From a seemingly hopeless position when Lar Corbett blasted home Tipperary's fourth goal to send the Premiermen 11 points clear after 41 minutes, Waterford ended this contest just four in arrears.

As the cliché goes, another five minutes and the impossible may have been made a sensational reality in front of 40,430 fans.

A second half full of slipshod hurling, basic handling errors and askew shooting betrayed the quality of the opening half, during which Tipperary produced another match-winning purple patch.

But worryingly for Tipp boss Liam Sheedy, for the third successive Championship outing, his team again faded alarmingly, adding only 1-4 to their half-time total.

But to their credit, when the champions hurled well, they hurled very well, with all six forwards contributing heavily.

They also capitalised on Waterford's defensive errors, with two of their goals directly stemming from lapses on Tony Browne and Declan Prendergast's behalves.

The scoring in a frenetic first half, whose flow was unfortunately broken too often by referee John Sexton's whistle, was initiated by a trademark John Mullane effort inside the first minute.

Tipperary's response was instant, as Pat Kerwick bisected the Town End uprights during a breathless opening to this 121st provincial final.

In the third minute, thanks to a fine pass by Kevin Moran, Eoin Kelly bore in on goal only to see his blistering shot breeze wide of Brendan Cummins' right hand post.

Barely 90 seconds afterwards, both sides produced a sensational passage of end-to-end hurling, arguably the best of the summer, which had fans hopeful that a classic was about to unfold.

Passage's Noel Connors superbly blocked a goal-bound Noel McGrath inside the 13-metre line and within seconds at the other end, Eoin Kelly had the scent of a green flag again, only for Brendan Cummins to brilliantly deny him.

But back came Waterford, full of vim and fleet-footed play, exemplified by the lionhearted Mullane, who won a sixth minute free on the 21-metre line.

Up stepped Eoin Kelly, who, Paul Flynn-like, rifled the ball into the Killinan goal to send the Deise four points clear. It looked as if Waterford were poised to surge clear: Davy Fitzgerald's team then failed to add to their tally over the next 16 minutes.

During that barren patch, Tipperary picked off a series of excellent points, including a monstrous free off the stick of Conor O'Mahony and a beautiful catch, run and strike by Shane McGrath.

In the 22nd minute, the all-action Mullane blasted home Waterford's second goal after a Jamie Nagle pass and, against the run of the play, the Deisemen edged ahead once more.

But after that score, Tipp went into overdrive as their forwards made a series of excellent attacking forays due in no small part to the tremendous midfield efforts of Shane McGrath.

Within seconds of a John O'Brien point, Mullinahone's Eoin Kelly rammed the ball beyond Clinton Hennessy to restore Tipp's advantage.

Moments after Mullane had scored another peach of a point; Kelly capitalised on Tony Browne's error and slammed the ball home for another goal.

In the blink of an eye, Tipperary had established a five-point lead. Suddenly, Waterford looked on the ropes.

As half-time beckoned, things went from bad to worse from a Waterford perspective when Lar Corbett slammed the ball home from point-blank range for a third Premier goal.

Nine down at half-time, it looked a hell of a long way back for the Deise, and Corbett's early second half goal made it look even longer.

But, to Waterford's credit, when a capitulation could have been on the cards, they stuck gamely to their task and inched themselves nearer to Tipp, without getting the goal that could have caused a sensation.

From the 44th minute on, mainly thanks to the free-taking of Eoin Kelly, Waterford scored seven of the game's remaining 10 points.

Twice Dan Shanahan found himself in a goalscoring position; one shot flying narrowly over for a point, the other a tame effort which Cummins easily dealt with.

At centre-back, Michael 'Brick' Walsh was magnificent, producing a man of the match winning performance in the second half.

Time and time again the Stradbally man plucked high ball and excellently distributed the ball to his team mates as he took the challenge to Tipp while steadying nerves among his defensive colleagues.

Ahead of him, Eoin Kelly was literally all over the field, particularly when it came to taking frees, but he never let his head drop for a second.

The same can be said of the wonderful Mullane, whose 1-5 on Sunday brought his total to 1-15 in this year's Championship - all from play.

But Mullane's attacking colleagues will have to remove some of the burden resting on the De La Salle man's shoulders, because even one man playing as well as this can't win a match on his own.

The prodigious Noel McGrath again caught the eye for Tipperary as he has on each outing this summer, while Shane McGrath enjoyed an excellent opening 40 minutes.

Callanan again looked lethal during Tipp's most prosperous period, while their half-back line of Declan Fanning, Conor O'Mahony and Padraic Maher put in an excellent shift.

While Tipperary deserved their win (just about!), Waterford will curse their profligacy in front of goal as well as the two gifted green flaggers they provided Sheedy's side with.

A quarter-final clash with either Cork or Galway now beckons for the Deise, with their faithful support hoping that the senior XV will join the minors in the All-Ireland's last four. But there's much work yet to be done by Fitzgerald and co.

Waterford: Clinton Hennessy; Eoin Murphy, Declan Prendergast, Noel Connors; Tony Browne, Michael Walsh, Aidan Kearney; Kevin Moran, Shane O'Sullivan; Seamus Prendergast, Stephen Molumphy, Jamie Nagle; John Mullane, Eoin Kelly, Jack Kennedy.

Scorers: Eoin Kelly (1-7f); John Mullane (1-5), Stephen Molumphy (0-2), Richie Foley and Dan Shanahan (0-1 each).

Substitutes: Dan Shanahan for Kennedy (28 mins), Eoin McGrath for Jamie Nagle, Richie Foley for Moran (45 mins), Maurice

Shanahan for Seamus Prendergast (55 mins).

Tipperary: Brendan Cummins; Paddy Stapleton, Paul Curran, Conor O'Brien; Declan Fanning, Conor O'Mahony, Padraic Maher; James Woodlock, Shane McGrath; Pat Kerwick, Seamus Callanan, John O'Brien; Noel McGrath, Eoin Kelly, Lar Corbett.

Scorers: Lar Corbett (2-2), Eoin Kelly (1-3, 0-02f), Seamus Callanan (1-1), Noel McGrath (0-3; 0-01f), Pat Kerwick, Conor O'Mahony (0-1f), Shane McGrath, John O'Brien and Benny Dunne (0-1 each).

Substitutes: Brendan Maher for Paul Curran (35 mins), Willie Ryan for Eoin Kelly (HT), Benny Dunne for James Woodlock (46), Hugh Maloney for Pat Kerwick (56), Micheál Webster for John O'Brien (69).

Referee: John Sexton (Cork)