

Maiden crown for Mullinavat



Mullinavat's Under-21 hurlers claimed a historic first Roinn 'A' Hurling title in dramatic fashion in Nowlan Park recently.

Having led for most of the game, Mullinavat found themselves behind with nine minutes remaining as O'Loughlins forged ahead by a point. Mullinavat looked in trouble but this team has shown character right throughout this competition and Mark Mansfield steadied the ship with a point following a good pass from Liam Fennelly. John Walsh then put Mullinavat in front with a wonderful point from 50 metres. It was still all to play for as the game entered stoppage time. Then came the clinching score. John Walsh's line ball was fielded by Pat Mulhearn and his handpass forward was latched onto by Darren Waters. The ball looked to be cleared but Darren's determination saw his one handed strike find the net from an acute angle. Mullinavat's supporters erupted and Mark Mansfield put the icing on the cake with a converted '65 to ensure his sides first ever victory in this grade. It was a thrilling end to a competition which has seen this team battle its way through a succession of opponents to prove themselves worthy winners. The disappointment of losing the 2012 final was a powerful motivating force all through the campaign.

O'Loughlins got off to a flying start when Paddy Deegan pointed after 30 seconds. Ger Malone levelled for Mullinavat within a minute and the hurling was fast and furious. The sides were level at three points apiece after seven minutes. Mullinavat then opened a four point gap with points from Mark Mansfield, John Walsh and two from Ger Malone. Jack Nolan and Mark Mansfield traded points and O'Loughlins added two from Paddy Butler and Paddy Deegan. The work rate of the Mullinavat forwards was preventing O'Loughlins from implementing their usual short passing game and Mullinavat added four excellent points to their tally before the break. John Walsh scored two classic scores off the stick and Mark Mansfield added two fine efforts to leave Mullinavat with a useful five point lead 0-12 to 0-7.

O'Loughlins began the second half with a fine point from Jack Nolan. Mark Mansfield replied with a point for Mullinavat in the 34th minute. Mullinavat were held scoreless for the next twenty minutes as O'Loughlins began to turn the screw on their opponents. They went on a scoring spree which yielded six points without reply and they went ahead in the 51st minute with a point from Jack Nolan. The game looked to be heading for the city side but then Mullinavat displayed the character which had got them to the final as they worked their socks off during the final quarter. Every man was prepared to fight with all their might and when Mark Mansfield leveled the game the tide began to turn again. The final minutes were hugely exciting but Darren Water's all important strike ensured that the cup was heading south.

Mullinavat: Conor Frisby, Mikey Jones, Thomas Aylward, Conor Duggan, Brian Phelan, Simon Aylward, Robbie Malone, Darren Kenneally, Mark Mansfield (0-8, 0-4 frees, 0-1 '65), Ger Malone (0-4), Pat Mulhearn, John Walsh (0-4), Mossy Jones, Liam Fennelly, Darren Waters (1-0).

Subs: Adam Mansfield, Nathan Malone, Ryan Bland, Killian Dunphy, Damien Aylward

O'Loughlin Gaels: Sammy Johnston, Dan O'Driscoll, Paddy Butler (0-1, 1f), Shane Parsons, Paddy Deegan (0-2), Huw Lawlor, Padraig Meany (Capt), David Bourke (0-3), Vincent Wallace, Danny Lenehan (0-1), Jack Nolan (0-2, 2f's), Jason Quan, Billy Leydon, John Doyle (0-4), Fergal Brennan,

Subs : Seamus McGrath (0-1) & Ben Leydon