

## Home Comfort for Waterford Hurlers



Kevin Moran is pumped after riffling over a long-range point.

Footballers apart, that was a successful week for Waterford GAA with the senior and minor hurlers both recording good wins while the Ken McGrath All-Star Challenge was a tremendous success.

Our senior hurlers gave a very competent display when dispatching Laois by 10 points on a lovely evening for hurling last Saturday night, incidentally, the very margin Ken predicted the Deise would win by 24 hours previously.

It was a confident display and Waterford were just the better team with better players and after a competitive first quarter the home side got control of the game and never looked back.

Both teams played with two man full-forward lines leaving the opposing defences with an extra defender. Tadhg De Búrca was the free man at the back for Waterford and he performed his duties very capably mopping up a lot of loose clearances from the opposition.

Laois carried a lot of ball into the contact area but running into players like Michael Walsh and Kevin Moran is never a good idea and Laois spilled a lot of possession which was seized upon and made good use of by the likes of Jake Dillon and Pauric Mahony.

Tactics are very much part of the current game and against poorer opposition Waterford have used the two man full forward line and a withdrawn half-forward line to good effect. Waterford started with Shane Walsh and Ryan Donnelly as their two front men and that mix wasn't quite right.

If you are going with a two man full-forward line you need pace to cover the ground and both Donnelly and Shane Walsh are too similar to compliment each other.

Colin Dunford, when switched to the inside line, made his speed count burning the corner back before placing Shane Walsh for his first goal.

A Kevin Moran sortied into the Laois half was the catalyst for Walsh's second green flag not long after to put Waterford firmly in the driving seat and give them a firm grip on the game that they never lost there after.

There was plenty of honest endeavour and some good play from our lads throughout the 70 minutes.

A purple patch by the visitors mid way through the second half reduced their deficit to six points but that was as close as they got and they never threatened Stephen O'Keeffe's goal in the second half.



Waterford captain Michael 'Brick' Walsh is fouled by Laois's Tom Delaney.

The Ballygunner custodian was at fault for the Laois goal as he failed to deal with a high ball to when he fell to the turf it allowed Neil Foyle the opportunity to hunt the ball into an unguarded net.

O'Keeffe will also be reviewing the puck-out strategy this week which coughed up another three handy points to the Leinster side. It's not easy hitting into traffic but it's a necessary evil with the current game plan.

Austin Gleeson is another player who looked ill at ease with his tactical duties. The young Mount Sion man played very far from the opposition goal and often behind rather than in front of his midfield colleague Shane O'Sullivan.

Perhaps placing Gleeson closer to the opposition goal than his own goal might pay better dividends in the long run.

It was great to see Darragh Fives back into the team and he will add strength and ability to a back line against any opposition.

Another to catch the eye was Roanmore's Gavin O'Brien who hit two lovely points on his introduction having received very little game time so far this year.

All in all it was a good night for the team and an ideal run into the next round which, unless we draw Offaly, will be against much stronger opposition.

Laois have certainly improved in recent years but need more regular competition against division one sides to move further up the ladder.

The minors continued on their winning way again benefiting from home comforts and familiar surroundings in Fraher Field when beating Clare by the minimum to qualify for another Munster minor hurling final.

This was a crazy game. After the first quarter Waterford led 1-6 to 0-0 and my mind was drifting to the World Cup and whether I'd be home in time for the 9pm game.

All of a sudden Clare hit two goals and it was game on. Indeed both sides missed a hatful of goal chances in the opening half and it should have been five or six goals each.

Despite being down to fourteen players Clare hit eight points in a row during the second half to lead by two. Amazingly when awarded a 21-yard free they opted to go for goal when surely a point was the sensible option.

It was saved and points by Patrick Curran and Shane Bennett got Waterford back in front. The drama wasn't finished yet as almost on full time the Clare full-forward caught a high ball on the edge of the square and as he turned he dispatched a fierce shot destined for the net. However Billy Nolan made what I can only describe as a miraculous save to keep Waterford in the championship and garner a place in another Munster final.

Fortune favours the brave and luck seems to be with our minors. Best not to rely on miracles in the future though.

Full-back seems to be a problem position with MJ Sutton the latest to try out in the number three shirt.

I'd prefer to see Shane Bennett in the half-back line with Colm Roche in attack which might give a better balance to the team.

Far too often we are trying to solo through the opposition from quite a distance only to turn over position and spurn the opportunity available.

Quick ball to the likes of Patrick Curran might be a better tactic than soloing into traffic from distance.

It will be Waterford's fifth Munster Minor hurling final in six years which is a good achievement. We will need to be more

ruthless on July 13th against Limerick to secure the title though.

Finally a huge thank you to all who contributed to the Ken McGrath All- Star challenge which was a fantastic tribute to a great man and the goodwill alone displayed last Friday night will greatly help 'Mac' in his recovery to full health.