

Deise Get the Job Done



Austin Gleeson surges past Laois's John A Delaney at Walsh Park on Saturday last.

Waterford - 2-22
Laois - 1-15

Job done. Waterford ensured their 2014 Hurling Championship campaign progressed into July when overcoming a determined Laois unit on a sun-kissed Saturday evening at an increasingly well-appointed Walsh Park.

A brace of Shane Walsh goals and the reliability of free-taker-in-chief Pauric Mahony helped the hosts extract at least some of their Munster Championship disappointment from the system in front of a gate of 5025.

On a night when Kevin Moran produced some of trademark, defence-splitting runs, when Tadhg De Búrca hoovered up a truckload of ball in his sweeper role, and with attackers Shane Walsh, Jake Dillon and Colin Dunford looking lively, there was much to enthuse about.

As for Laois, whose progress under Seamus 'Cheddar' Plunkett has been the best news story in inter-county hurling of the past 18 months, their progress has been as undeniable as it is welcome.

And throughout their team, be it goalkeeper Eoin Reilly, centre-back Matthew Whelan and stylish centre-forward Willie Hyland, who struck five points from play, they possess future match winners and All-Stars.

And it was the visitors, whose renaissance was evidenced by a sizeable travelling support from the midland, who got off to the perfect start after just 57 seconds.

A high ball despatched into the goalmouth by midfielder Paddy Purcell placed Waterford goalkeeper Stephen O'Keefe under considerable pressure, and he was legally bundled off the ball by corner-forward Neil Foyle, who scooped the ball into an empty net.

A brace of Pauric Mahony frees in the third and fifth minutes respectively eased the palpable nerves among the home support before Stephen Maher (a free) and full-forward Charles Dwyer added to Laois's tally.

But Waterford didn't have to wait too long for a green-flagged reply. Come the ninth minute, speedy corner forward Colin Dunford rounded Laois corner-back Brian Stapleton, releasing Shane Walsh who struck the ball beyond Eoin Reilly and into the Keane's Road net.

Willie Hyland, Laois's best performer on the night, opened his account just shy of the quarter-hour to level matters, before Mahony found his range with another free only moments later.

Joe Campion struck impressively to level affairs once more in the 16th minute before Michael Walsh released Mahony for an equally impressive white flagger at the opposite end during the most end-to-end phase of proceedings.

Inside forward Tommy Fitzgerald showed great strength when holding off Shane Fives, before releasing the silken Hyland for another Laois leveller, before Shane Walsh struck his second goal in the 22nd minute.

Following another surging run by Kevin Moran, demonstrating the power and efficacy that won him a 2012 All-Star, the De La Salle man was twice denied brilliantly by Laois goalkeeper Eoin Reilly.

But Walsh was on hand to bat the ball into the net following Reilly's second save to put three points between the sides for the first time. One sensed Waterford were warming to the task by then and had just about gotten a handle on Laois, and they went on to illustrate that contention between then and half-time.

Waterford began to welcomingly glide through the gears, as points from Darragh Fives, Jake Dillon and three Mahony frees left them 2-10 to 1-5 up at the break.

While never quite re-establishing the groove they'd created in the closing 10 minutes of the opening half, Waterford did what needed to be done thereafter to ensure their progress.



Shane Walsh celebrates after scoring his second goal of the match.

However, Cheddar Plunkett will have taken solace from the effort produced by Laois after the interval, with young substitutes John Purcell and Ross King striking a brace of points each during a well-contested second half.

Indeed, Laois enjoyed a purple patch between the 54th and 57th minutes, rapidly converting four points and got back to within six points of Waterford with just 11 minutes remaining.

But, in truth, a major Championship shock never really looked on despite Laois's strong showing, as the Deise outscored their visitors 0-5 to 0-1 in the closing stages of a game played in great spirit.

Pauric Mahony kept the scoreboard ticking over for Waterford, as did Jake Dillon who added two more points to his tally, while substitute Seamus Prendergast struck the hosts' score of the match after 39 minutes.

For Laois, the aforementioned John Purcell made a dynamic introduction, while Willie Hyland, who impressed under Davy Fitzgerald's watchful eye at Limerick IT, caught the eye of many home supporters.

This was never going to be a 'gimme', and Laois provided a test that would have been made all the stiffer for Waterford had it involved a trip to O'Moore Park.

While the Deise struck 15 wides for the second successive Championship match, the fact that they created almost 40 scoring opportunities against a team that came within a whisker of beating Galway cannot be sniffed at.

By the way, Gavin O'Brien, reported playing the proverbial stormer at training in recent weeks, caught the eye with a brace of second half points after replacing Austin Gleeson – very much a 'watch this space' cameo on the Roanmore man's behalf.

For Cheddar Plunkett, there was much to be proud of despite the disappointment of his team's Championship exit.

"It'll certainly take a little while to get consistent winning performances against these teams but I've no doubt that that's what the lads want to do – it just takes some time to get there.

"But to do that we need to beating these teams and getting results under our belt and that's the next step for Laois hurling."

Said Deise boss Derek McGrath: "Obviously we were on the end of a bad start so it was good to see the way we refocused and just went for it.

"But look, we know we've a lot to improve on and it's great to be back to (at least) the same stage that we exited the Championship last year."

Job done. Time to move on.

WATERFORD: Stephen O'Keeffe; Shane Fives, Liam Lawlor, Paudie Prendergast; Darragh Fives, Michael Walsh, Tadhg De Búrca; Kevin Moran, Shane O'Sullivan; Jake Dillon, Pauric Mahony, Austin Gleeson; Ryan Donnelly, Shane Walsh, Colin Dunford.

SUBSTITUTES: Seamus Prendergast for Ryan Donnelly (31 mins), Gavin O'Brien for Austin Gleeson (51), Martin O'Neill for Shane Walsh (63), Jamie Nagle for Shane O'Sullivan (66), Richie Foley for Darragh Fives (68).

SCORERS: Pauric Mahony (0-11; 0-10f), Shane Walsh (2-1), Jake Dillon (0-3), G O'Brien (0-2), Darragh Fives, Kevin Moran, Austin Gleeson, Colin Dunford and Seamus Prendergast (0-1 each).

LAOIS: Eoin Reilly; John A Delaney, Brian Campion, Brian Stapleton; Joe Fitzpatrick, Matthew Whelan, Tom Delaney; Dwane Palmer, Paddy Purcell; Joe Campion, Willie Hyland, Stephen Maher; Neil Foyle, Charles Dwyer, Tommy Fitzgerald.

SUBSTITUTES: James Walsh for Joe Champion and Darren Maher for Brian Stapleton (both HT), John Purcell for Paddy Purcell (51 mins), Ross King for Stephen Maher (54).

SCORERS: Willie Hyland (0-5), Neil Foyle (1-0), John Purcell (0-2), Matthew Whelan (0-2 65), Stephen Maher and Ross King (0-2f each), Joe Champion and Charles Dwyer (0-1 each).

REFEREE: Alan Kelly (Galway)