

Deise Maintain Push For Instant 1A Return



Shane Fives and Philip Mahony ensure that Offaly's Sean Ryan and James Mulrooney didn't gain possession.
| Photos: Noel Browne

National Hurling League Division 1B

Waterford 2-18
Offaly 1-14

Waterford hurlers promotion bid remains firmly on course after a seven-point victory over a disappointing Offaly side at O'Connor Park Tullamore.

For all bar the opening quarter, Waterford completely dominated this game and only wayward shooting prevented the visitors from putting the Faithful County to the sword.

Both sides showed a number of changes from the announced match day team with Colin Dunford and Shane Bennett replacing Tom Devine and Michael Kearney in the Waterford line-up.

While Waterford began the game with a strong breeze at their backs surprisingly it was Offaly who were quickest out of the blocks.

The home side hit seven unanswered points in the opening quarter, six of them from talisman Shane Dooley and 1 from the

experienced Brian Carroll.

It's not as if Derek McGrath's side didn't have chances but it took them some time to shake themselves from their Saturday afternoon lethargy before finally finding their range. The switch of Kevin Moran to half-back and Austin Gleeson to centrefield too helped establish greater possession.

Pauric Mahony who was guilty of a number of early wides eventually opened the scoring for Waterford with a pointed free after 18 minutes.

Tadhg de Búrca, now dominating at centre back and with former All-Star Michael Walsh bossing the game on the 40, Waterford finally began to make their superiority count on the scoreboard. The visitors took Offaly for 1-7 in total during the second quarter with two points from Shane Dooley the lone response from the Leinster side.



Waterford's Shane Bennett tries to control the sliothar under pressure from Offaly's David King.
| Photos: Noel Browne

Waterford's all-important goal came after 27 minutes when Colin Dunford gained possession 40 yards from goal, burned his marker for pace on the turn before drawing the last defender and leaving Ballysaggart's Shane Bennett the easiest of opportunities to find the net from close range.

Waterford went to the break leading by a point, 1-7 to 0-9 but with 13 opening half wides to Offaly's three, it could and should have been so much more.

Early second half points from Jake Dillon, Pauric Mahony and Brian O'Halloran put the favourites four points ahead, but Offaly weren't throwing the towel just yet and after 44 minutes it was Shane Dooley again to the fore.

This time, Dooley finished the ball to the net after a shot by wing forward James Mulrooney was deflected into this path.

Soon after a poorly struck clearance from Jamie Barron was seized upon by Offaly half back Cathal Parlon and from his own 45-metre line Parlon bisected the posts to level the game (1-11 apiece) and to give the few home supporters in the almost

empty O'Connor Park something to shout about.

The home team's resurgence was short lived. Pauric Mahony responded with a point from a free and after 49 minutes Michael Walsh scrambled the ball over the Offaly goal line for Waterford's second major and it was no more than the Stradbally man deserved after a barnstorming performance.

Further points from Colin Dunford, Shane Bennett, Pauric Mahony and substitute Martin O'Neill meant Waterford were out of sight (2-16 to 1-11) by the 60th minute.

Only some excellent goalkeeping from Offaly custodian James Dempsey and poor finishing (22 wides in total) from the Déise prevented this from becoming a complete rout.

So this was a case of mission accomplished then for Derek McGrath and his side, with another valuable brace of League points gained.

Shane Fives, Tadhg de Búrca and Jake Dillon were outstanding with Michael Walsh and the returning Colin Dunford both vying for the man of the match accolade.

Antrim, who roll into Walsh Park this Sunday (throw-in: 12.45pm) are unlikely to break this momentum while Wexford await in the final round with promotion now a real possibility.

Waterford: Stephen O'Keeffe; Shane Fives, Barry Coughlan, Noel Connors; Philip Mahony , Tadhg de Búrca, Austin Gleeson; Jamie Barron, Kevin Moran; Colin Dunford, Pauric Mahony, Michael Walsh; Brian O'Halloran, Jake Dillon, Shane Bennett.

Substitutes: Martin O'Neill for Austin Gleeson (29 mins), Gavin O'Brien for Brian O'Halloran (52), Shane O'Sullivan for Jamie Barron (57), Stephen Bennett for Colin Dunford (60) and Maurice Shanahan for Pauric Mahony (67).

Scorers: Pauric Mahony (0-7; 0-6f), Shane Bennett and Michael Walsh (1-1 each), Jake Dillon (0-3), Colin Dunford (0-2), Austin Gleeson, Brian O'Halloran, Martin O'Neill and Shane Fives (0-1 each).

Offaly: James Dempsey; David King, Dermot Shortt, Stephen Wynne; Emmett Nolan, Eanna Murphy, Dermot Mooney; Cathal Parlon, Sean Ryan; Shane Dooley, Dan Currams, Sean Cleary; Joe Bergin, James Mulrooney, Brian Carroll.

Substitutes: Stephen Quirke for Joe Bergin (53mins), Chris McDonald for Eanna Murphy (62) and Colm Mulrooney for Sean Cleary (67mins).

Scorers: Shane Dooley (1-10; 0-8f), Brian Carroll (0-2), James Mulrooney and Cathal Parlon (0-1 each).

Referee: Barry Owens (Wexford)

Brian Flannery at O'Connor Park