

Blitzed By The Banner



Clare's Evan Courtney peels away from Waterford's Conor Walsh during last Wednesday's Munster Under-21 Quarter-Final at Miltown Malbay. | Photo: With thanks to the Clare People

Munster Under-21 Football Championship Quarter-Final

Clare 2-11
Waterford 0-3

Another one of those nights for Waterford Under-21 football. In a town synonymous with music, Ger Power's well-prepared side sadly didn't find the tune they needed as a powerful Clare side led them a merry dance during a disappointingly one-sided contest.

The first half saw the hosts firmly in the ascendant, as Waterford found themselves having to graft a great deal without the ball, tracking the deep runs of Banner wing back Cian O'Dea and midfielder Jamie Malone in particular.

Despite the slight albeit fresh Atlantic breeze blowing in their favour, Waterford struggled to make any early headway as a well-drilled Clare side made all the early running.

Full-forward Keelan Sexton opened the scoring via a third minute free, and while Clare had much the better in terms of possession, Waterford's hard working backs restricted them pretty well.

A second Clare point was registered six minutes later by the lively Evan Courtney, despite Deise centre-forward Fearghal Ó Cuirrín shipping an elbow which led to a blood replacement appearance for Paul O'Connor.

Sexton added a third via a free on 12 minutes after Seamus Keating had impeded the impressive Malone and even at that early stage, one feared the worst for the visitors.

Jason Gleeson finally got Waterford off the mark in the 21st minute with a well-struck point, but the men in white and blue really needed to find another score quite quickly to establish some form of foothold in the contest.

Alas they didn't, and their failure to deal with a high ball in the 24th minute led to Jamie Malone's first goal, as he palmed home following a cross-goal pass from Martin O'Leary.

Pacy Banner corner-forward Evan Courtney pointed a minute later, followed by Waterford's second point via the boost of Conor Murray after a fine Conor Gleeson pass. At half-time, Clare led by 1-4 to 0-2, and Waterford weren't out of the contest by then, it was, even at that juncture, hard to see them mounting a comeback such was the power of Jamie Malone and the inventiveness of Clare's inside line of forwards.

And that's exactly how the second half played out on a night which would see some of the Deise panel turning in as late as 2am the following morning due to this match being, let's face it, ridiculously staged in West Clare.

After a couple of early Waterford attacks failed to yield a score at a time when such scores were desperately needed, Clare's two offensive forays yielded 1-1 and killed the game off in so doing.

Keelan Sexton, a menace at full-forward all night, found his range again three minutes after the restart, before the rampaging Malone surged 40 yards upfield, unimpeded, before slotting the ball under Deise skipper David Whitty to send the Banner nine points clear.

That long trip home was getting longer by the minute on a night when Waterford's performance betrayed the excellent levels of preparation this panel had put in over the past few months.

Clare, who were, no doubt about it, very impressive on the night, would add on a further five points before Waterford mustered their last response of the night off the boot of the hard working Seamus Keating in the 50th minute.

Outgunned, outfought and outmuscled, Waterford could have no complaints come Kevin Murphy's full-time whistle, as the optimism expressed in the build-up to this fixture felt oddly and unfortunately misplaced.

In the post match commentary on social media, some suggested that Waterford should pull down the shutters when it comes to inter-county football.

I couldn't disagree more. We play Gaelic Games in Waterford, and not only hurling, and that should never, ever be amended.

Clare: Killian Normoyle; Cian O'Mahoney, Jack O'Dea, Conor Brennan; Darren Nagle, Conor O'Brien, Cian O'Dea; Dara Walsh, Jamie Malone; Liam Corry, Paddy O'Malley, Dale Masterson; Martin O'Leary, Keelan Sexton, Evan Courtney.

Substitutes: E Hanrahan for Dara Walsh (HT), Maccon Byrne for Liam Corry (37 mins), Conor Cleary for Dale Masterson (39), Conor Mac Nelis for Cian O'Dea (47), Jim Downes for Keelan Sexton (54) and Eoin O'Connor for Jamie Malone (58).

Scorers: Jamie Malone (2-1), Keelan Sexton (0-6; 0-3f), Evan Courtney (0-2), Conor Cleary (0-1) and Paddy O'Malley (0-1f).

Waterford: David Whitty; Stephen Dalton, Conor Walsh, Jamie de Barún; Jack Mullaney, Tom Devine, Jonathon Fenton; Dermot Ryan, Seamus Keating; Michael Curry, Ferghal Ó Cuirrín, Jason Curry; Conor Murray, Jason Gleeson, Conor Gleeson.

Substitutes: Liam Mulligan for Jonathan Fenton (42 mins), Paul O'Connor for Jason Curry (44), Brian Looby for Jack Mullaney (47, Black Card), Caomhán McGuire for Jason Gleeson (52), Michael Troy for Fearghal Ó Cuirrín (59) and Kenneth Brazil Conor for Murray (59)

Scorers: Jason Gleeson, Conor Murray and Seamus Keating (0-1 each).

Referee: Kevin Murphy (Cork)

Dermot Keyes in Miltown Malbay