

## Deise's Instant Return



Waterford's Brian O'Halloran and Wexford's Brian Moore tussle for possession at Wexford Park on Sunday last. | Photos: Noel Browne

### National Hurling League Division 1B

**Wexford 0-16**  
**Waterford 0-22**

Well how about that? A set of fixtures that looked decidedly difficult at the outset didn't prove nearly as insurmountable as some of the winter soothsayers had predicted. Four wins and one draw means an instant return to Division 1A for the hurlers of Waterford, and no-one can say that this young side didn't deserve it.

And while Sunday's match was far from a classic, not helped by a pock-marked surface which betrayed the excellent venue (supporters would also have been home from Croke Park with greater ease such were the traffic delays), there was much to admire in Waterford's display.

As in all their NHL outings this season, the team's tigerish commitment to compete for possession, to close down space and their constant willingness to hook, block and harry saw them, as John Mullane put it, bully Wexford over the 70 minutes.

Rarely, over the five matches played to date, has a Waterford man been swatted off a ball. This team is standing its ground collectively, with some of its younger members growing up very quickly indeed on the job. Excited? Damn straight I am.

Waterford dominated this match and emerged as deserved victors. They were never behind over the course of the 70 minutes, out-hurling and outmuscling their hosts, and were superb value for this six-point win. Indeed, their margin of victory ought to have been greater.

Pauric Mahony and Conor McDonald exchanged points in the second and fourth minutes respectively before Colin Dunford bisected the uprights from outside the 45-metre line come the sixth minute. Mahony's second free a minute later extended

Waterford's lead, only for Ian Byrne to send over a placed ball within two minutes.

A superb passing move in the 11th minute involving the outstanding Noel Connors and Stephen Bennett released Dunford for a point before a Byrne free and a fine score by Liam Óg McGovern levelled matters within two minutes.

Dunford, full of running, restored Waterford's lead come the quarter hour, and Stephen Bennett was beaten to the goal-bound chase for the sliothar by Wexford goalkeeper Mark Fanning only moments afterwards.

A scrappy five minutes of hurling followed, but following a brilliant hook by Connors, Jake Dillon latched into possession down the left channel to point well from distance. Diarmuid O'Keeffe found an instant reply for Wexford from the subsequent puck-out in the 22nd minute but the remainder of the half was dominated by the Deisemen.

Points from Mahony (three), Colin Dunford, Jake Dillon and a magnificent catch and shot from Austin Gleeson sent Waterford seven points clear by the 31st minute. Ian Byrne's 33rd minute free was soon followed by McGovern's second point, but a Mahony free completed the first half scoring to leave Waterford 0-13 to 0-7 ahead.

After the break, Waterford remained in control, with a brace of Mahony points in the 40th and 42nd minutes extending their lead, after Wexford's Paudie Foley had opened the account a minute after the restart. And when Jake Dillon added another come the 43rd minute, the fixture looked home and hosed. But Wexford mounted a mini-recovery, kickstarted by a point from substitute Jack Guiney on the three-quarter hour mark.

Mahony sent a free over from just inside his own half less than a minute later, and things would have taken a most interesting turn had Diarmuid O'Keeffe sent the ball into the Deise net from the next Wexford attack.

But the Models' wing-forward sent his shot wide of Stephen O'Keeffe's right-hand post, much to the home crowd's frustration.

O'Keeffe did find his range with a 48th minute point, while a Guiney free 90 seconds afterwards reduced Wexford's arrears to six points. McGovern saw a shot saved well by Stephen O'Keeffe come the 51st minute and that was to prove as good as it would get for the hosts.

Jamie Barron, fed well by Dillon, struck a ball high and true between the posts with 15 minutes remaining, before Diarmuid O'Keeffe and Pauric Mahony exchanged points.

Guiney's 58th minute free was instantly replied to by Pauric Mahony before fine spadework by Maurice Shanahan released fellow substitute Tom Devine for an excellent 62nd minute point.

Guiney tagged on three frees in the 63rd, 65th and 68th minutes while Pauric Mahony completed the Deise's scoring four minutes from time.

And Wexford were denied a certain goal three minutes from time after Stephen O'Keeffe's supreme reflexes repelled Liam Ryan's kicked effort from point blank range.

There were several superb displays last Sunday, with Noel Connors at his All-Star winning

best, restricting Liam Óg McGovern to just two points.

Tadhg De Búrca was the pick of our half-backs with some superb fielding, while Austin Gleeson and Philip Mahony put in massive shifts respectively.

Ahead of them, Jamie Barron was terrier-like, particularly in the second half, Jake Dillon's hurling was crisp, Pauric Mahony again stepped up to the plate, Colin Dunford demonstrated flashes of his trickery while Brick Walsh was sublime.

Next up? The visit of Galway in Sunday's quarter-final; opponents whom have rarely relished their forays down Keane's Road. The step up required against 1A opposition is undoubted, but one expects Waterford to rise to the challenge in front of a bumper Walsh Park audience.

**Wexford:** Mark Fanning; Liam Ryan, Matthew O'Hanlon, Eoin Moore; Paudie Foley, Eoin Conroy, Andrew Shore; David Redmond, Lee Chin; Diarmuid O'Keeffe, Daithi Waters, Ian Byrne; Podge Doran, Conor McDonald, Liam Óg McGovern.

**Substitutes:** Kevin Foley for Podge Doran and Jack Guiney for Ian Byrne (both HT), Garrett Sinnott for Eoin Moore (48 mins) and Shame Tomkins for Daithi Waters (62).

**Scorers:** Jack Guiney (0-6; 0-5f), Diarmuid O'Keeffe (0-3), Ian Byrne (0-3f), Liam Óg McGovern (0-2), Paudie Foley and Conor McDonald (0-1 each).

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

**Substitutes:** Maurice Shanahan for Stephen Bennett (51 mins), Tom Devine for Brian O'Halloran (59), Michael Kearney for Colin Dunford (65), Martin O'Neill for Jake Dillon (68) and Shane O'Sullivan for Jamie Barron (70).

**Scorers:** Pauric Mahony (0-13; 0-11f), Jake Dillon (0-3), Colin Dunford (0-2), Austin Gleeson, Stephen Bennett and Tom Devine (0-1 each).

**Referee:** Colm Lyons (Cork)

Dermot Keyes at Wexford Park