

## DEISE UNDONE AT THE DEATH

Devastating sometimes, isn't it? But that's what sport does to you. It toys with your emotions, sending you to the ecstatic summit of Everest, while being equally capable of sinking you into a Marianas Trench of despair. The cruellest of mistresses.

It may be of little consolation to Waterford's players and management that their best display of the National Hurling League ended in the most agonising of defeats, as Tony Kelly's injury-time winner secured a first NHL title in 38 years for Clare.

Patrick Curran, just a day after the burial of an uncle in Dublin, produced some sublime hurling when running up 1-9, including a goal within 20 seconds of the throw-in.

Darragh Fives produced another excellent 70 minutes of defensive mastery, Barry Coughlan contained Shane O'Donnell during another fine performance at full-back, while Austin Gleeson was, at times, sublime. Both he and Clare's David Fitzgerald provided exhibitions of fielding, which left many among the 14,210-strong attendance slack jawed.

Conor McGrath, despite uncharacteristically missing three frees, more than did his bit for the Banner cause, while Tony Kelly, as is his wont most Sundays, was outstanding for the new champions yet again.

Forty-five scores in 70 minutes, having mustered 44 in 90 between them the previous Sunday, this League Final replay wiped the eye of many who suggested that both managers have mugged the game we love. Nonsense.

The 'we don't do tactics' brigade must only have started tuning into hurling in the past handful of years if they genuinely believe that players have not, for years, been sent out to do specific jobs to help haul their team to victory.

As if there was never a poor match of hurling played in previous eras, a time when every pass, hook and shot wasn't analysed to the nth degree, a time when the game wasn't assessed nor analysed as microscopically as it is today.

And if Sunday's dramatic replay didn't raise your pulse, if one didn't realise that the development of a new hurling rivalry is clearly burgeoning, and if one isn't increasingly pumped about the pending Championship, then please accept my sympathies.

So I've managed 380 or so words before referring to the refereeing. Immediately after the match, for example, Diarmuid Kirwan's performance had initially prompted a much different headline to the one running across the top of this page.

It's always a source of regret to this long-term observer of inter-county hurling that an official can, unfortunately, have all too direct a bearing on the outcome of a match.

I didn't need a television replay to know that Jamie Barron, again outstanding on Sunday, had been fouled in injury-time, when Waterford still led by a point.

But Kirwan, as Derek McGrath calmly stated afterwards, made a mistake, awarded a free to Clare, which Tony Kelly made no mistake from, in what was their 22nd free of the match (Waterford were awarded 11).

From the next puck-out, the Banner regained possession, and with only enough time left for one more attack, Tony Kelly sent the Clare fans into delirium. The title was theirs.

Both managers were justly proud of their charges' efforts, and so they should be. It was a belter of a match, but one which didn't deserve to be determined by a mistake. Roll on June 5th. A tantalising summer awaits.



A crestfallen Kevin Moran reflects on a dramatic, controversial finish to a superb NHL Final replay