

## Munster Football Semi-Final

Kerry win in a canter

Kerry 2-15; Waterford 0-4

A much bigger crowd than expected made tracks for Fraher Field Dungarvan on Sunday afternoon last, the vast majority of them from every corner of the Decies hinterland, most hoping to see history repeating itself-but it was not to be. The Kingdom came, saw and conquered in their own renowned clinical manner and in the process ensured a traditional old firm Munster Final meeting with arch rivals Cork at Killarney's Fitzgerald Stadium on Sunday July 1st. Such initial statistics plus a score line of 2-15 to 0-4, tells the story of how history failed to repeat itself at the famed Old Boro venue last week end, and Kerry take the first step towards winning their 72nd senior provincial big ball crown and Waterford remain chasing a second title to add to only one achieve one hundred and nine years ago.

Exactly half a century ago, the men from the Decies took on their honours laden opponents at the same stage of the championship, and created history by dethroning the reigning All Ireland champions at the initial defence of their title-this time there was no repeat, and notwithstanding the fact that the current Waterford standard bearers mounted a gallant effort, it was all in vain, as Kerry in most convincing fashion romped home comprehensive seventeen points winners and a side to be feared by all those who seek to deny them continued possession of the Sam Maguire.

Tactically went wrong again

After a morning of heavy rain, the clerk of the weather relented and both teams came out early onto the Dungarvan pitch for the now customary pre-match warm up exercises, and as the crowds flocked into the historic Shandon arena, there was a feeling in the air, that something approaching the unexpected might be about to take place. Both teams had prepared well for this eagerly awaited showdown-Waterford with a first round win under their belt at the expense of Clare, had realistic notions about providing the champions with an infinitely closer match, than they did at Killarney twelve months ago, when they extended the Kingdom stars to the limit, before finally losing out on a respectable score line of 0-16 to 0-8. For some reason the customary pre-match parade was dispensed with and another slice of the pre-contest nerves was removed from the equation, and rarely has one heard the National Anthem sung so well by followers of rival sides. Just before hand the toss of the coin had taken place, the home captain Brian Wall calling correctly opted to play against the strong prevailing wind and to defend the road-end goal during the opening thirty five minutes. Quite obviously the intention was to hold the lines as well as possible before the opposition could get into their stride, and then to make the most of the help from the elements on the resumption, but not for the first time this season, the tactics backfired in a big way, and wasn't help by the obviously dictated decision of playing the listed full forward as a third midfielder, and this was something the Kerry opposition relished to their utmost satisfaction.

Even so for a short while it showed palpable indications of working, until the Kingdom juggernaut started to really motor. A quarter of an hour's play gave the champions a lead of three points to nil, and a further four minutes sped past and the homesters found themselves five points adrift-then the flood gates were finally prised open, and the rest is really history.

New Kerry boss Pat O'Shea taking over from the highly successful Jack O'Connor appeared anonymous outside the stand side dug-out as he watched his charges build up steam before pulverising the opposition into subjection. As the half wore on and the visitors became more pronounced, the inevitable happened. With all of their forwards anxious to impress the new team-management, it simply became a case of who would get the inevitable green flags first. As it turned out only one such individual ended up with that distinction, but my goodness, the two magnificent strikes in the 20th and 27th minutes by Dr.Crokes clubman Eoin Brosnan, were worth the admission price alone and really left the Waterford cause shattered. More especially as up to that stage, the home side had yet to raise a flag and were actually a dozen points in arrears, when eventually the challengers made their mark. That initial and only first half reply came from the industrious Michael Ahearne of Kill in the 31st minute, and understandably it raised one of the biggest cheers of the day.

## In cruise control

Few envied Waterford's task as the game went into recess, and as specially as they made their way to the dressing rooms, and the electronic scoreboard over-head showing a deficit situation of 2-9 to 0-1. Here surely was a mammoth task of unenviable proportions, and perhaps one no other county team in the land would face with any semblance of confidence. Yet to their ever last credit, the homesters resumed with renewed vigour and the manner in which they subsequently carried the game to the games, unquestionably won for them praise and even genuine applause from the sporting Kerry onlookers. This was a task to which many a team would have capitulated in similar circumstances, but not those dedicated Decies footballers-outclassed they may have been on the scoreboard, but they steadfastly remained committed to upholding their county's honour, and had lady luck smiled a little more benignly on their second half efforts, the ultimate intimidating score board position would have looked a lot better.

Territorially they shaded the degree of possession available, and a number of excellent chances test Diarmuid Murphy in the Kerry goal more extensively, but some woeful finishing and lack of confidence in front of goal told heavily against the challengers. Waterford only succeeded in improving their scoring ratio marginally in the concluding period, and a lot of this stemmed from the fact that with only two inside forwards endeavouring to cope, it was always easy for the Kerry rearguard to clear their lines at will.

## Second-half replacements shine

As the challengers tried everything in their power to minimise that second half widening gap, Kerry added a new dimension to their win by making a number of shrewd substitutions, which in the full light of day, will surely make their first choice fifteen for the Munster Final exceedingly more difficult. On the surface none of the replacements seemed necessary and all starters could very well have been preserved with, but the strength in depth of the Kerry panel demanded that the four newcomers be afforded an opportunity to stake claims for the future, and my goodness did each of them respond.

Getting the most out of the ball wasn't Waterford's best forte with the breeze at their backs-they shot an inordinate tally of wides in that second half-three inexplicably bad one's on the trot would break the hearts of any team, while a major gilt-edged goal scoring chance was foiled by a variety of circumstances, not least being the woodwork, which came to Kerry's rescue not once-but twice. First it was the tireless home captain Brian Wall who first tried to beat the Kerry goalie, but his effort came back off the upright, and the rebound fell invitingly in the path of the outstanding Gary Hurney whose fisted effort came back off the crossbar and was scrambled away to safety. A goal had it come at that stage would have been a bit late in the game and would have made no appreciable difference, but it would surely have been more than the brave challengers deserved, and would have put a much better appearance on the end result.

The notion that the champions may have taken their foot off the pedal once it appeared that they had the issue sewn up doesn't stand up on closer inspection-this was Kerry on the championship trail, under a new team management, the bones of some twenty players striving to hold down fifteen places for the Munster Final showdown with Cork, and inevitably perhaps a return to Croke Park. How else can one explain the manner in which so many of their well established names, such as Tomas O Se, Colm Cooper, Eoin Brosnan, Mark O Se and Darragh O Se were going as strong at the finish as at the beginning and the net result of it all was a handsome 2-15 to 0-4 victory and the first of the 2007 challengers summarily dismissed.

## Free scoring pattern

The pattern of the scoring of course outlines a relatively easy day at the office for the Kingdom men-it took them six minutes to open their account and significantly the brilliant Tomas O Se initiated the build up, and after Colm Cooper was impeded by his marker, the Killarney man, duly obliged from the resultant free. The last mentioned was on hand to repeat the process a minute later, and oddly enough it was Waterford who scorned a couple of scoring chances before Kerry increased their points lead to three in the 14th minute. The ever menacing Eoin Brosnan and Paul Galvin later chipped in with a brace of points-to leave Waterford trailing by five, with sixteen minutes left for the break.

Then the brilliance of new half back Killian Young, and the enterprising run of Paul Galvin, successfully paved the way for the first of the Kerry goals in the 20th minute, as Eoin Brosnan's clinical finish from 25 metres, gave Tom Wall no chance in the Waterford goal – the second seven minutes later was almost a replica of the first, with the build up even more compelling, before Brosnan's pile-driver of a shot deposited the ball in the home net, and as yet Waterford hadn't registered at the other end with just seven minutes left before the short whistle. Paul Ogle came closest to rectifying that situation ninety seconds later, but the Tramore man's effort proved to be the losers third wide of the half. Then in the 31st minute and a well worked effort up the field, resulted in a super Mick Ahearne point, and Waterford might have added another a minute later, with Gary Hurney setting up Liam o Lionain, whose hasty effort fell short and was cleared. Kerry had no intention of allowing their opponents back into contention, and they rounded off the opening half in style-with three additional points in a little over as many minutes from Colm Cooper (two) and Mark O'Shea, to go into recess 2-9 to 0-1 ahead and looking mighty good for that Munster Final slot.

## Defensive changes

The homesters resumed with Ballinameela's Eamon Walsh coming into defence instead of Paul Ogle, and straight away the challengers response looked encouraging. They forced an early fruitless '45', and sustained pressure was rewarded after six minutes play when Gary Hurney already emerging as one of the outstanding footballers on view, set up his industrious midfield partner Mick Ahearne, for the Killman's second point. The latter might have scored again, before Kerry finally took up the running again and with another Colm Cooper point in the 43rd minute, but Waterford's persistence paid off shortly afterwards, when Brian Wall came up with their third point from a free.

For the next eight minutes or so, the losers enjoyed a fair deal of possession, but quite candidly failed to turn this trend to full advantage-another Brian Wall free sailed wide of the mark, and a Gary Hurney delivery went to the wrong side off the Kerry upright

The introduction of substitute Paul O'Connor in the 42nd minute, commenced to pay real dividends for the Kingdom-the Kenmare clubman pointed a free in the 52nd minute, and had another before the finish, but his invaluable work rate on his introduction was far more beneficial for the champions as way the form displayed by Sean o'Sullivan, Seamus Scanlon and Mossie Lyons on their subsequent introduction. Colm Cooper completed his day's scoring tally of five, before Andy Hubbard had the homesters last point from play in the 59th minute, but the losers opportunities didn't end there, as successive attempts from Brian Wall, Wayne Hennessy and Andy Hubbard came unstuck, with Kerry putting further gloss on their comprehensive victory in the closing stages with three more extra points from Sean O'Sullivan, Paul O'Connor and Tomas O Se, leaving the visitors well to the fore at the final whistle, and comprehensive winners on a final score line of 2-15 to 0-4.

## What now?

Well as Kerry look forward to a Munster decider with Cork on the first day of next month, they can be happy in the knowledge that they possess the strength in depth to reverse last year's result with the Leesiders at Pairc Ui Chaoimh – indeed scarcely a solitary weak link manifested itself last Sunday, with a well marshalled defence spear headed by the O Se brothers-Marc and Tomas, Tom O'Sullivan soundness personified at full back and newcomer Killian Young having an outstanding championship debut. Darragh O Se was most influential in the middle of the field, when another newcomer Michael Quirke, won a fair share of admirers around the same area as well. But it was of course the lethal thrust of the forwards which really prove the real adornment of this excellent Kerry combination-Eoin Brosnan, Paul Galvin, Colm Cooper and team captain Declan O'Sullivan, cause endless problems for an over worked Decies defence, but not 2006 Footballer of the Year Kieran Donaghy, who more than found his match in Nire man Thomas O'Gorman, who was way and above the losers most consistently best performer.

Waterford's first ever live television football championship match proved a chastening experience, yet the level of commitment could not be disputed-lacking the same cohesive efforts as the champions, they never once threw in the towel-showed some nice touches and unquestionably deserved a far bigger dividend on the score sheet. They are bound to benefit substantially from the experience, and should make a right good bid to win the Tommy Murphy Cup-they certainly showed the Kerry men far too much respect and the quality of their efforts suffered accordingly. Still over all, they managed to come up with some really first class performances such as that of Thomas O'Gorman at full back-his Nire club colleague Justin Walsh on his immediate right, Shane Briggs, Mick Ahearne, Gary Hurney, Wayne Hennessy and Brian Wall-and provided the incentive remains, we haven't heard the last of this team, and their future displays will surely be watched with special interest.

## Scorers

Kerry: Cooper 0-5 (0-3 frees), Paul Galvin and Paul O'Connor 0-2 each, Marc O Se, Mike Frank Russell , Sean O'Sullivan and Tomas O Se 0-1 each.

Waterford: Mick Ahearne 0-2, Brian Wall 0-1 (free), Andy Hubbard 0-1.

## Teams

Kerry.:- Diarmuid Murphy, Pdraig Reidy, Tom O'Sullivan, Marc O Se, Tomas O Se, Aidan O'Mahoney, Killian Young, Darragh O Se, Michael Quirke , Declan O'Sullivan, Eoin Brosnan, Paul Galvin, Colm Cooper, Kieran Donaghy, Mike Frank Russell.  
Subs-Paul O'Connor for M.F.Russell, Darren O'Sullivan for Declan O'Sullivan, Sean O'Sullivan for P.Galvin, Seanus Scanlon for M.Quirke , Mossie Lyons for K.Young.

Waterford: Tom Wall, Justin Walsh, Thomas O'Gorman, Shane Briggs, John Phelan, Edmond Rockett, Paul Ogle, Mick Ahearne, Gary Hurney, John Hurney, Andy Hubbard, Ger Power, Wayne Hennessy, Brian Wall, Liam O Lionain. Subs-Eamonn Walsh for P.Ogle, Aidan Ahearne for J.Hurney, Liam Lawlor for Liam O Lionain, Maurice O'Gorman for G.Power, Jason Ryan for J.Phelan .

Referee-Ger Kinneavy ( Galway ).

In the Junior Football semi final played after the senior game, Clare surprised a fancied Kerry side in booking a place in the Munster Final on a score line of 0-8 to 0-6, when their opponents will be Cork who got the better of Tipperary over the week end .The game proved a personal for Doonbeg's David Tubridy who accounted for all except one point of the Banner County's winning total.

In the second Munster Senior Football semi final played at Limerick last Sunday, Tipperary after a promising start, eventually had to give way to Cork by a margin of fourteen points-2-18 to 0-10, and in the process cleared the way for a mouth watering showdown with Kerry on July 1st.