

## Comeragh men reach 'B' Summit

By Tony Ryan



Pic4: Comeragh Gael's Jason Dunford and P.J Coffey in this aerial contest with St. Mary's Alan Fitzsimmons.

Western champions Comeragh Gaels played their divisional final on the 26th of April and it certainly showed in the first half of the county final in this grade which was played in the Fraher Field last Sunday morning.

On the other hand, St Mary's played the Eastern final as recently as the 5th of July and after a tough encounter then against Portlaw/ Ballyduff which they won by 1-17 to 3-9, they were the better prepared side for Sunday's game.

St Mary's looked a class apart in the first half and led by a whopping 0-10 with 24 minutes on the clock on a scoreline of 2-9 to 1-2.

At this stage it was difficult in the extreme to see the Gaels making any impact, let alone winning the match.

Three late points before the short whistle by Gavin Dalton put a slightly better look on the scoreboard for the westerners as the teams welcomed the reprieve from the 20 plus degrees of heat at the Shandon venue, 2-9 to 1-5.

St Mary's were far more alert from the outset and centre back Ryan Gallagher had the first score of the hour inside three minutes. Four different players produced the first four points for Des Stafford, Conal Queally and John Sheehan's charges in Gallagher, Ciaran Kirwan, Dylan Power and Jack Dee.

Despite carrying an injury Mike Kearns was to play a big part in this final and he scored early on for his side but a key moment arrived at the end of the first quarter after Reece Stringer had saved at point blank range from Niall Dunphy, Dylan Power followed up to slam the ball into the net at the country end of the grounds, 1-4 to 0-2.

It became worse before it got better for the Western champions when Alan Fitzsimmons placed Ciaran Kirwan for a second St Mary's goal and just 20 minutes played.

Points followed before the break from Ciaran Kirwan (2), Alan Fitzsimmons and Niall Dunphy while a goal for the winners by Cian O Byrne from a pass by his captain Rian Reddy didn't at this stage seem to make any impact on proceedings.

Trailing by 2-9 to 1-5 at half time Comeragh Gaels were in a much better position as early as four minutes into the second half.

Ciaran Kirwan opened the scoring for Mary's but a pointed free by Gavin Dalton was followed by a penalty goal by the same player after Mike Kearns was upended in front of goal, 2-10 to 2-6. Kearns was central to Comeragh Gaels second half comeback.

He won ball after ball when placed at full forward and he made a goal and scored a goal that were crucial to his team winning this game.

Credit St Mary's, they responded well to Comeragh Gaels bright start to the second half. After missing a pointed free attempt,

they kicked three of the next four scores via Alan Fitzsimons, Ciaran Kirwan and Adam Walsh with Corey Kennedy and Dan Cusack dominating the midfield fielding from kickouts up to this point, 2-13 to 2-7 and forty minutes on the clock.

Entering the final quarter St Mary's still held their 0-6 advantage but Comeragh Gales won the remaining period of time by 2-2 to 0-1 as the game climaxed in a welter of excitement. Excellent freetaker Gavin Dalton pointed at one end and St Mary's missed at the other. The game was really in the melting pot after the 49th minute when Mike Kearns somehow found room to blast the ball to the net and there was now just 0-2 the difference at 2-14 to 3-9.

What proved to be St Mary's final score came in the 50th minute from Alan Fitzsimons but there was no holding Comeragh Gaels now and after St Mary's failed to take a goal scoring chance, Nicky O' Donovan scored a peach of a point for the winners, 2-15 to 3-10. The western champions took the lead for the first time with seven minutes of normal time remaining. Mike Kearns fielded yet another high delivery in front of the country end goal and he put Cian O Byrne in for his second green flag of the day, 4-10 to 2-15.

There was a further eleven minutes of play including a row in front of the Comeragh Gaels goal but there was no further scoring which added greatly to the tension. St Mary's kicked two point scoring opportunities wide and the Gaels held out for a thrilling victory in the most dramatic of circumstances.

COMERAGH GAELS: Reece Stringer; Richie McGrath, Gearoid Hallinan, Jack Skehan; Ronan Gleeson, Dylan McCarthy, Sam Murphy Nix; Jason Dunford, Mike Kearns; Rian Reddy, PJ Coffey, Cian O Byrne; Killian Tobin Gavin Dalton, Nicky O Donovan.

SCORERS: Gavin Dalton 1-7 (1-4f, 1'45'), Cian O Byrne (2-0), Mike Kearns (1-2), Nicky O Donovan (0-1).

SUBS: Keith Hickey for Richie McGrath, Charlie Whelan for Killian Tobin, James Walsh for Charlie Whelan.

ST MARY'S : Mike Dunphy; Conor Keane, Cian Hally, TJ Veale; Jeff Hally, Ryan Gallagher, Luke Foran; Corey Kennedy, Dan Cusack; Adam Walsh, Ciaran Kirwan, Alan Fitzsimons; Niall Dunphy, Jack Dee, Dylan Power.

SCORERS: Ciaran Kirwan (1-6), Dylan Power (1-1), Alan Fitzsimons (0-4), Ryan Gallagher, Jack Dee, Niall Dunphy and Adam Walsh (0-1 each).

SUB: Brian Walsh for Niall Dunphy.

REFEREE: Noel Kelly (Erin's Own).