
Athy Secure Final Spot after Convincing Display at the County Grounds

Kildare Senior Football Championship Semi-Final

Saturday 3rd Oct 2015 at St. Conleth's Park Newbridge

Athy 0-18 Johnstownbridge 1-07

In the week running up to this much anticipated game in our little village of Johnstownbridge, there were celebrations after the Senior Camogie team secured their fifth Kildare Championship in a row. The football team although delighted for their counterparts, never lost focus and preparations were thorough, training was fierce, and no stone was left unturned. As people began entering the venue to see the first semi-final between Sarsfields and Celbridge, news trickled out around the ground and beyond that Kildare GAA had proposed a new Senior Football Manager, a native of Newbridge from Moorefield GAA, Cian O'Neill. All supporters seemed optimistic and regardless of their Club allegiances were united in the news and what this would bring to our diminished county aspirations. Cian himself sat at the back of the stand along with his father to look at the last four teams doing battle for their respective clubs. Sarsfields finished their job with relative ease and the curtain raiser was over as far as those with the green white and blue of the 'Bridge and red of Athy were concerned.

The game started at pace and Athy set out their stall immediately with a score in the first minute by David Hyland followed straight after by a shot from Paul Cribbin unlucky to graze the right upright to register a wide. Niall Kelly had a goal chance soon after for Athy but Paul made certain of his next chance after a bursting run from midfield to send it over from 30 yards with his left foot into the Kilcullen end to level the match at one point apiece. Paul had another effort from a free 45 metres out a minute later but again just marginally wide. In the 7th minute Athy's number 12 Hughie Mahon cut through the Johnstown defence to fist the ball over the bar and open his side's lead to a point. Niall Kelly took his next chance in the 8th minute from the right hand side of the D after an inch perfect pass from midfield opening the gap to two points Athy 0-03 JTB 0-01. Paddy Dunne from Athy collected a great pass from his half back line a minute later to add another point to his team's tally followed by a wide effort from Eoin O'Donoghue. In the 11th minute Kelly got his second point after another great pass from former inter county Kildare footballer and All-Star Mick Foley, and it must be said even at this early stage it seemed that the game was slipping out of our grasp. However a chink of light appeared a minute later when Daniel Flynn burned the aforementioned All-Star, left him behind and took a wonderful score to bring the scoreboard 0-05 to 0-02 in the 14th minute. Niall Vaughan had a chance on goal and unfortunately didn't convert which to be fair isn't like him the goal machine that he is!

James Eaton converted a free off the ground a couple of minutes later to open the gap again to 4 points. Ian McKeown pointed soon after when Seamus McNally won a fantastic ball in midfield and sent it in to his brother Barry who found Ian to his right. Ian as clinical as always took his opportunity well. However Kelly had other ideas and halted the 'Bridge gallop knocking over his third point in the 19th minute from 39 metres out and to Niall's credit was practically unmarkable. James Eaton added another to leave the score at 0-08 to 0-03 after he fouled the ball by a double hop unnoticed by the referee. Kelly added his fourth on 21 minutes to give his side a six point margin. Niall Vaughan had another effort on goal after a lovely pass from Paul but the Athy goalkeeper Stephen Davis got his hand to the ball with a vital touch. The resulting 45 metre kick was pulled to the left from the boot of Luke Flynn. Athy capitalised again from James Eaton after a great move down the right wing ending in a fine point, seven points now separated the teams. Niall had a third chance on goal with a soccer style effort saved and ended up in the hands of Daniel who wasn't given a split second to compose himself before the dogged Athy defence turned over the ball and broke at speed away in the direction of the town end. Eaton added to his tally shortly after followed by another Niall Kelly point leaving nine between the sides. Eaton missed a free just before the break and the teams went in to the dressing rooms 0-12 Athy 0-03 JTB.

The second half began with Johnstownbridge making three changes, Cian Farrell, Kelvin McNally and Eoin O'Donoghue replaced by Glen Doran, Sam Doran and Jimmy Farrell. Sam made an immediate impact scoring the first point of the half with a well taken free 22 metres out, 0-12 to 0-04. Liam McGovern cancelled it out shortly after with a point from play after an error gifted him a chance. McGovern pointed again two minutes later from a free after Mick Foley was brought down by Jimmy Farrell on the edge of the D, there was 10 points now between the teams and 25 minutes on the clock. Jimmy made amends a minute later and sent Cathal McNally through on goal. Cotzy couldn't keep it down and the ball went over the bar, although the referee had to make the call as the linesmen were of differing opinions! 0-14 to 0-05. Athy registered 3 wides, a testament to the more focused JTB defence, before Sam had a close effort also wide followed by yet another Athy wide. Ross Bell however steadied the Athy attack with a point in the 45th minute from play to leave a 10 point gap. Ian McKeown registered his second with a 45 metre kick a minute later. Sam got his second from another free 40 metres out to close the gap to 8 points in the 50th minute, 0-15 to 0-07. Darroch Mulhall registered a point from play not long on the field. McGovern pointed twice with less than 3 minutes on the clock 0-18 to 0-07 in favour of the men in red. McGovern having a great game replacing the much talked about Kevin Feely who was unable to start the game. The last score of the match came from the penalty spot after Cotzy was brought down in the penalty area. Daniel Flynn stepped up and blasted the ball into the centre of the goals sending Athy's number 1 to his left. The final whistle came soon after a scuffle in the penalty area almost leading to another JTB goal but it wasn't to be, final score Athy 0-18 JTB 1-07.

It must be said there were many disappointed people leaving St. Conleth's Park, but this must be put into context. Disappointment with the result yes but not the players or their effort. I'm sure most of the players will admit that the overall performance wasn't where they wanted it to be on the day and in sport there will be days like that. To give

Athy their dues they came out of the traps well and Niall Kelly in particular was untouchable. Remember Athy have been close a number of years now and this stood to them on the day. Our players took to the field with 100% commitment and that is for sure. OK it may be cliché but sometimes disappointments like this have to be experienced before the better days can arrive. There's an old saying that 'It's always darkest just before the dawn' and please God the dawn is not too far away.

I look at it another way, just over two years ago we entered an Intermediate Championship and came out on top – just two years ago. Last year (and the first year in a while in the top flight) we made it to the quarter final. This year we bow out in the semi-final. Who wouldn't have jumped at that statistic back at the start of 2013? If nothing else, this is steady progress not to mention losing our captain Keith early in the season due to a serious knee injury, and in a small Club like ours these things make a difference.

Well done Emmet, Shane, Red and all the backroom team. Well done to the committee who worked tirelessly to ensure the right set up was in place behind the scenes, but most of all well done to the players. You inspire everyone in the Parish who follows GAA particularly our underage players who look up to you, wanting to emulate your success, effort and ethics. As far as Senior teams go, we have a young squad and there are many more days ahead when perhaps the little things won't go wrong and outcomes will be different, this is just another chapter along the way to greater things.

#DroicheadBaileSheáinAbú

Is Mise,

Seánie Bennett

JTB GFC

Club PRO.

Johnstownbridge 1 I Farrell, 2 D Holton, 3 L Flynn, 4 J O'Connor, 5 S McNally, 6 C Farrell 7 M Donnelly, 8 B McNally, 9 P Cribbin 0-01, 10 E O'Donoghue, 11 K McNally, 12 I McKeown 0-02 (1 45) 13 N Vaughan, 14 D Flynn 1-01 (pen) 15 C McNally 0-01 Subs 21 G Doran for C Farrell 18 S Doran 0-2 (2 frees) for K McNally J Farrell for E O'Donoghue
