

Johnstownbridge Intermediate Champions 2013

Johnstownbridge finally ended a 24 year famine by winning the Intermediate County Championship, and regaining Senior status for the 2014 campaign. Having not been at the top flight for some 17 years, this was a huge achievement for the club and indeed treated as such by all concerned. A team of this calibre had been seen in recent years by outsiders as under-achievers, and to be fair they hadn't been as fortunate as they deserved, given the work and commitment by the team and management. This year however things went as planned.....

The first round played in May, the 'Bridge comfortably beat their opponents by double scores to lay down the gauntlet and set the bar for the campaign ahead, on a score line – Johnstownbridge 2-12 Castledermot 1-06.

Round 2 brought the charge of Round Towers and ended a draw JTB 1-10 Towers 2-07, after a tough battle between the sides on August 11th in St. Conleth's Park. The replay was held just three days later in Hawkfield which was also an epic encounter particularly in the second half, when Towers threw everything they had at the 'Bridge. The final score read JTB 1-14 Round Towers 0-14, resulting with a place in the Quarter-Finals against Caragh. A contest which perhaps bonded a team who had only regrouped after the Inter-County campaign had ended.

Allenwood was the venue for the Quarter-Final September 7th, on a miserably wet evening unlike the excellent summer we had enjoyed prior to that particular week. Johnstownbridge took no prisoners and went hell for leather from the throw-in. Caragh couldn't compete in any facet of the field and lost the game 3-16 to 0-04 scoring only twice from play!

The Semi-Final threw up Ellistown under lights in Naas Friday 20th September, and again Johnstownbridge set the tone early muscling their way into an early lead and won the match comfortably – JTB 2-14 Ellistown 0-03, it should be noted Ellistown did not score from play at all!

The draw was made, and the Final would be played in St. Conleth's Park against the first round opponents Castledermot on a warm sunny afternoon October 5th. Castledermot had time to regroup and learn from their earlier defeat to put up a firmer challenge, however they could not stop the fitness, power, skill and most importantly team ethic and momentum of their opponents.

In the week running up to the game the village was dressed in bunting, flags etc. which created a wonderful atmosphere for everybody, a real sense of pride could be seen in people's faces. A facebook 'Ask not what your club can do for you?' campaign was launched inviting pictures of the club colours to be posted, with some fantastic results. Pictures came in from Australia and out the window of an Aerlingus Jet to mention just a few! (The album is still there to view).

Johnstownbridge set out their stall early when corner-forward Cathal McNally rattled the post after just 30 seconds. A free was subsequently won from that attack 35 yards out, which Seán Hurley kicked over from his hands to get his team off the mark early into the second minute. It was nip and tuck to begin with and Castledermot went ahead in the 9th minute when Eugene Mahon kicked over on his left foot from play, they weren't buying into the favourite's tag which had been heaped onto the men from the 'Bridge. Stats and history went out the window at this stage and Castledermot had a plan they looked intent on executing in full. However, thirty seconds into injury time in the first half with JTB just 2 points ahead, Niall Vaughan found the right corner of the net, after a pin-point pass supplied by Keith to leave the score JTB 1-07 to Castledermot's 0-06 going into the break.

The JTB followers were happy with the timing of the goal which was just what their team needed in this battle which was only half over. This game was a true test of the teams' resolve, as the hand of history firmly hung over them in the weeks leading up to the game.

The second half began with a flurry as Niall Vaughan put the ball into the net again only for the umpire to disallow the goal maintaining the ball had gone out of play prior to the shot being taken. Halfway through the second minute of the half, Seamus McNally was dragged down 55 yards out from goal after plucking a super ball out of the sky. Seán Hurley took the free out of his hands and kicked it over with at least 15 yards to spare, a feat which was admired by both sets of supporters. In the 5th minute Niall Vaughan found the net for the second time after the ball came off the upright from a Paul Cribben attempt. The scoreboard now read JTB 2-08 Castledermot 0-06 with 25 minutes remaining. Less than a minute after the goal, Seán and Daniel linked up again over and back several times before Seán sold his now trademark 'Dummy-Solo' to the full-back Seán Murphy. Once again he popped it over the bar with ease to leave 9 points between the sides. Castledermot replied with two frees to close the gap to 7 points. They added a goal to their tally in the 11th minute leaving just 4 points between the sides with less than 20 minutes remaining, this game wasn't a done deal

yet. Castledermot's tactic was to flood midfield with bodies and try and pick up the breaking-ball, to their credit this worked quite well at times, as trying to win clean ball in mid-field against the pairing of Barry McNally (Team Captain), and Seán Hurley was never going to happen for them. When the pressure came on, Johnstownbridge rallied around helping out in areas where they would not normally be required. The 6 backs provided a great platform for attacks, keeping possession under immense pressure at times.

The 'Bridge men worked tirelessly in the last 5 minutes with only one Castledermot point claimed during this time. After 3 minutes of injury time the referee called an end to proceedings which saw the 'Bridge heroes lifting the Hugh Champion Cup with a score line of JTB 2-14 Castledermot 1-10. Seán Hurley was honoured as a well-deserved 'Man-of-the-Match' on the day too, to add to his 8 point haul during the game.

Johnstownbridge 1 I Farrell, 2 J O'Connor, 3 L Flynn, 4 P Mooney, 5 S McNally, 6 Cian Farrell, 7 E O'Donoghue, 8 B McNally(C), 9 S Hurley 0-08 (5 frees), 10 D Flynn, 11 K Cribben 0-03, 12 P Cribben 0-02, 13 J Farrell, 14 N Vaughan 2-00, 15 C McNally 0-01.

Subs 20 I. McKeon for J Farrell (28 mins) 18 M. Donnelly for 4 P. Mooney (29mins) 21 S. Flanagan for 14 N Vaughan (30 mins)

The determination from every member of the team was on show that day in Newbridge. These lads went out on the field to do battle for themselves and for our club. It was obvious early on they weren't coming home without a victory.

Emotions were high after the game and tears of joy were shed from many, remembering the good times of football days gone by, and looking forward to future battles at Senior level, back where players of this calibre deserve to be. I'm sure there will be many teams who will want to avoid our lads next year.

Barry's speech was heartfelt too after he lifted the Cup, modest and emotional, representing himself and his teammates with first class honours.

Barry mentioned in an interview a few weeks previous, that his most inspirational moment as a child was seeing the cup being brought into the village by Declan Kerrigan, well this time it was his turn to inspire the youngsters.

The cup landed in the Hamlet back door in style with the whole team in the back of a tipper truck painted with the club colours (thanks to Niall Flanagan). They were cheered in by hundreds of delighted fans. A great night's celebrations were had by all!

Fair play to the Squad and Management team – This won't be forgotten for a while!

Unfortunately the lads were beaten in the preliminary round of the Leinster Championship by Naomh Ólaf (Dublin) on a day when things didn't go well for them at all. Disappointing as it was, the 'Holy Grail' had been captured which was priority number 1 for the club, and we feel things can only improve from here on in! #DroicheadBaileSheáinAbú

Is Mise,

Seánie Bennett Club PRO

Johnstownbridge GFC