

Pettitt's SHC quarter-final - September 7, 2013

Ferns St. Aidans 2-22, Rathnure 3-12

WHISPER IT quietly: pretenders to the throne Ferns are rounding into tip-top shape just in time.

Saturday brought further evidence of their growing belief, and maybe moreso, of their hurling class. The group A table-toppers dismissed 2011 finalist Rathnure with plenty to spare in the Pettitt's Senior Championship quarter-final at Bellefield.

In truth, despite Paul Codd's hat-trick heroics, there was always only one winner. The Gorey District side shot 2-20 of their scores from play, swatted just five wides, three of which came in the final ten minutes, and were full value for the seven point victory that they eventually claimed.

Rathnure attempted to keep it tight, operating with an extra defender for much of the contest, but that only serves proof of their opponents attacking prowess. With Ian Byrne exceptional, Paul Morris playing creator and point-taker and the rest of the front eight all chipping in with scores there was no stopping the victors.

Indeed, it took just two minutes for Christopher 'Bitsy' O'Connor to screech away down the left wing and goal and from that point on Rathnure could never get back on terms. It was mainly the dead-ball skills of Jack Guiney that kept Rathnure in touch throughout the first half - although he did have a twenty meter free stopped on the line by Gavin Bailey.

Leading 1-4 to 0-3, Ferns' second goal arrived at the end of the opening quarter and did have an element of fortune attached to it. Byrne's searching long ball was in the vicinity of O'Connor, who was loitering just inside the square. However nobody got a touch on the sliothar as it bypassed the corner-forward, and Rathnure goalkeeper Jim Morrissey, and settled in the net.

The teams traded points for much of the remainder of the half but just as Ferns looked set to carry a comfortable lead in at the break veteran goal-getter Paul Codd popped up to kick home the first major of his hat-trick.

A superb Morris ball saw Brendan Jordan flash narrowly over seconds after the interval (2-10 to 1-8) but it took just two further minutes for Rathnure to pull within one after Declan Foley pointed and Codd goaled after a penetrating Sean O'Neill run. Such is the level of composure the St Aidan's men play with that the goal didn't shake them. Actually, Ferns rose to the challenge and picked off six of the next seven points with Jordan (3), Byrne, O'Connor and Morris all on target.

Again the Blackstaires men responded with a Nigel Higgins point and Codd's third goal, from his knees after he looked to be fouled, to once close the deficit to two (2-16 to 3-11). However, only one further Rathnure point would follow in the final seventeen minutes, Ferns didn't have the same problems and closed out their victory to book their semi-final spot with minimal fuss.

Ferns St Aidans: Mick Walsh; Declan Byrne, Edward Walsh, Niall Maguire; Gavin Bailey (0-1), James Tonks, Ciaran Roberts; Brendan Jordan (0-4), Tommy Dwyer (0-2 frees); Ian Byrne (1-6), Paul Morris (0-4), Johnny Dwyer (0-1); Patrick Farrell (0-1), John Breen (0-1), Christopher O'Connor (1-2). **Subs:** Colin Leacy for Maguire, Jamie Whelan for Farrell, Derek Thorpe for J. Dwyer, Johnny Dwyer for Byrne, inj.

Rathnure: Jim Morrissey; Chris Redmond, Brendan O'Leary, Anthony O'Connell; Paddy Whitley, Mick O'Leary, Aidan Redmond; Nigel Higgins (0-1), John O'Connor (0-1); Dermot Flynn, Declan Foley (0-2), Jack Guiney (0-7, 4 frees, 1 '65); Sean O'Neill, Paul Codd (3-1), Syl Barron. **Subs:** Richie Flynn for Barron, Shane Murphy for O'Connor, Trevor Hogan for Higgins, Michael Redmond for C. Redmond.

Referee: James Owens (Askamore)