

Pettitt's SHC quarter-final - September 20, 2014

Ferns St. Aidans 1-25 Rathnure 2-17

Ferns St Aidans took another giant step towards that elusive senior title, striking six points to their opponents' one through the closing eight minutes to brush aside a stern Rathnure challenge in this bruising Pettitt's Senior Hurling Championship quarter-final at Bellefield on Saturday last.

The uncompromising nature of the exchanges saw this game hang in the balance right up to that closing spell, a spell where the superior stickwork and fitness of Ferns eventually won through to a deserved victory, albeit by a somewhat flattering six point margin in the end.

The foundations for the Ferns victory through that closing spell were laid through the accuracy of Tommy Dwyer's free-taking, while both Paul Morris and Ian Byrne suddenly imposed themselves on proceedings as they created a gap against a tiring Rathnure outfit whose challenge faded in the closing exchanges, as last year's beaten finalists and this year's league winners suddenly pulled clear.

But for lengthy periods of this game, a shock looked on the cards as Rathnure took on the challenge, imposing their own direct brand of hurling on the game. They dug deep, particularly during a spell in the second half after they had fallen four points adrift (1-14 to 0-13) after 41 minutes.

They got back level in a three-minute spell, while a Jack Guiney pointed free one minute later had them amazingly one point in front.

Rathnure had set the tone, and when a 47th minute Richie Flynn goal had them 2-15 to 1-15 ahead, the challenge was laid down for Ferns.

They got the wake-up call, responded positively with a powerful closing 13 minutes as they broke up the Rathnure resistance with some excellent point-taking that ultimately got them over the line.

After John Breen and Jack Guiney ('65') had exchanged opening points, Rathnure led by 0-5 to 0-3 at the end of the opening quarter. With Anthony O'Connell picking off some excellent points from his new wing forward role, Rathnure built up a 0-8 to 0-5 lead by the 24th minute, but a flurry of points from Ian Byrne, Johnny Dwyer, Tommy Dwyer and Paul Morris saw Ferns respond and left them leading by 0-10 to 0-9 at the interval.

When the need was greatest, veteran Robbie Codd stepped in with two early second half points for Rathnure, with a further Shane Lalor point giving them a 0-12 to 0-10 lead three minutes into the second period.

Two Tommy Dwyer pointed frees kept Ferns in contention, but a dreadful defensive error after 37 minutes handed Ferns the game's opening goal, with two defenders colliding under a dropping ball and leaving Christopher O'Connor in a one-on-one with the Rathnure goalkeeper, Dermot Flynn. The diminutive corner forward crashed to the net, giving his side a 1-12 to 0-12 lead.

Many a team would have been sunk by this mistake, but Rathnure powered back, with Robbie Codd crashing home a great 44th minute goal to level the sides, and then came Flynn's goal two minutes later from a Codd lay-off to power his side to a 2-15 to 1-15 lead.

Ferns needed someone to step up to the mark and it was the excellent free-taking of Tommy Dwyer that led the way as he struck five points during that closing twelve-minute spell, two from play via the middle of the field.

During the closing 13 minutes Rathnure could only muster a further two points through two Jack Guiney efforts, one from a free, and this was no way near enough to hold off that Ferns victory surge.

This was the second year in a row for the Gorey District side to deny their black and amber rivals at the quarter-final stage.

And with their conquerors in last year's final, Oulart-The Ballagh, now departed from the race, Ferns will be fancied by many to go that one step further and bring home a cherished senior hurling championship crown.

Ferns St. Aidans: Michael Walsh; Niall Maguire, Pádraig Ryan, Colm Whelan; Gavin Bailey, James Tonks, Declan Byrne; Brendan Jordan (0-1, free), Tommy Dwyer (0-11, 0-6 frees, 0-1 '65'); Pádraig Bolger; Ian Byrne (0-3), Jonny Dwyer (0-1); Paul Morris (0-4), John Breen (0-1), Christopher O'Connor (1-2). **Subs:** Ciarán Roberts for Declan Byrne; Ryan Nolan (0-1) for Bailey; Jamie Whelan (0-1) for Jordan; Ben Cowman for O'Connor.

Rathnure: Dermot Flynn; Chris Redmond, Brendan O'Leary, Michael O'Leary; Brian Quigley, John O'Connor, Podge Doyle; Paddy Whitley (0-1), Aidan Redmond (0-1); Shane Lawlor (0-1), Michael Redmond, Anthony O'Connell (0-4); Ciarán O'Connor, Robbie Codd (1-3), Jack Guiney (0-7, 0-4 frees, 0-2 '65'). **Sub:** Richie Flynn (1-0) for Michael Redmond.

Referee: Sean Whelan (St Martins)