

Pettitt's SHC semi-final - October 5, 2014

Shelmaliers 1-11, Ferns St Aidans 0-11

Emerging from years of underage success, this current crop of Shelmaliers players have put the club on the map as they shocked championship favourites Ferns St Aidans with a dramatic three-point victory in this exciting Pettitt's Senior Hurling Championship semi-final at Wexford Park on Sunday last.

Shelmaliers are still on course for the greatest year in the club's history, as their dream of the senior double is still very much alive thanks to an opportunist 46th minute goal from the impressive Joe Kelly, who is enjoying a rich vein of form in recent games.

Times have changed for the Over the Water men. Having found it difficult to bring their underage talent through, this victory will come as a huge boost for a club that is making so much progress on the field over the past few matches.

While it's not their first time contesting such high-stake games, it was their ability to finally deliver on all that rich underage promise that has eventually caught the eye. It has been a stunning period for the club and now they are just sixty minutes away from their first-ever county senior hurling title.

For Ferns, it was the ultimate collapse. They seemed to be plodding their way through this game, but their tally of wides - 14 in all - came back to haunt them, particularly after Kelly had struck for the game's only goal.

From the perspective of a gameplan they totally lost their way in the final quarter, a period when they had just three attackers placed down the centre after falling behind, with no options down either flank. Midfield had drifted deep back into the half-back line, leaving the Shels to grasp the situation, and how they relished their new-found dominance as they drove on for a fully deserved three-point victory in the end.

All year, Shelmaliers had been struggling to bring consistency to their game. This they managed to achieve in recent outings as many of their players finally stood up to the challenges, none more so that centre back Clive Lawlor, who had an outstanding sixty minutes, while the Doyle brothers, Eoin and Brian, grasped the game in midfield.

This proved the inspiration as Joe Kelly's coring flourish unhinged the Ferns defence, along with Brian Malone's ability to win possession and use it well.

This defeat will be a huge blow for Ferns as, having lost last year's final, and given the make-up of the semi-finalists with Oulart/The Ballagh gone, they were everyone's favourites to finally get over the line. But their final quarter collapse was totally unexpected as their game fell into total disarray, with no composure or plan to their approach as the players seemed lost for alternatives once the Shels struck with their victory effort.

Still, it was Ferns who had begun the stronger. Just two minutes into the game, Ian Byrne forced a great save out of 'keeper Brian Murphy, with Paul Morris shooting the game's opening point after six minutes. Joe Kelly and Tommy Dwyer exchanged pointed frees, before Ferns swept into a 0-5 to 0-1 lead by the 13th minute through points by Paul Morris, Jonny Dywer and Ian Byrne.

The accuracy of Joe Kelly along with points from Brian Malone and a long-range Brian Doyle effort kept Shels in touch, while Ferns responded with points from Paul Morris and a Dwyer free, leaving the North Wexford men ahead by 0-7 to 0-5 at the interval.

Ferns, mainly through their lack of a goal-scoring forward, have been struggling to put teams away. During the opening exchanges on the resumption, John Breen and Benny Jordan tagged on Ferns points, while Joe Kelly (free) and Eoin Doyle chipped in with points for Shels in between.

After 41 minutes, Ian Byrne stretched Ferns into a 0-10 to 0-7 lead, but amazingly they could manage only one further point for the remainder of the game: a Dwyer free from the sideline with five minutes remaining.

The Shels still scented victory. Clive Lalwor and Eoin Doyle were continually driving their side forward. Joe Kelly pointed a free, and then came the goal on 46 minutes that changed the whole course of the game.

A long ball was floated in by Conor Walsh and when Simon Donohoe's shot was smothered, the break fell into the path of the inrushing Joe Kelly, who had switched to corner forward, and he coolly drilled a ground shot to the net to give his side a 1-8 to 0-10 lead - the first time they were in front in the game.

Shelmaliers now exploded into the game, with Kelly sending over a huge 75-metre free to extend the lead. While Dwyer's pointed free reduced the deficit to the minimum (1-9 to 0-11), Kelly once again stamped his class on the game by lofting over an 80-metre free, with Ciarán O'Shaughnessy completing the scoring two minutes into injury time.

It was joy for Shels on the final whistle, but soul-destroying for Ferns.

Ferns St. Aidans: Michael Walsh; Niall Maguire, Pádraig Ryan, Colm Whelan; Gavin Bailey, James Tonks, Ciarán Roberts; Brendan Jordan (0-1), Tommy Dwyer (0-3 frees); Ian Byrne (0-2), Paul Morris (0-3), Jonny Dwyer (0-1); Ryan Nolan, John Breen (0-1), Christopher O'Connor. **Subs:** Jamie Whelan for J Dwyer (45); Derek Thorpe for Nolan, inj. (52); Pádraig Bolger for Jordan.

Shelmaliers: Brian Murphy; Simon Donohoe, Aidan Murphy, André O'Brien; Conor Walsh, Clive Lawlor, Aidan Cash; Eoin Doyle (0-1), Brian Doyle (0-1); Joe Kelly (1-7, 0-7 frees), Brian Malone (0-1), Benn Barron; James Cash, Stephen Banville, Ciarán O'Shaughnessy (0-1). **Sub:** Noel Mythen for Banville (60)

Referee: Pat Kehoe (Rathgarogue-Cushinstown)