

GAA UNDER-21 HURLING ROINN 1 CHAMPIONSHIP FINAL

Fethard feel full force of strong Ferns show

ALAN AHERNE

in Wexford Park

FERNS ST. AIDAN'S	2-11
FETHARD	0-7

THE TWO clubs experiencing the pain of county Senior championship final loss met in the Under-21 hurling Roinn 1 decider in Wexford Park on Saturday last, with Ferns St. Aidan's collecting this notable consolation prize with an emphatic victory over a disappointing Fethard side.

The Gorey District outfit had a lot of the hard work done by half-time when they led by 1-4 to 0-4 after playing into a strong wind blowing towards the town end, and they had nothing to worry about after their triumphant Minor captain from six days earlier, Andy Cash, grabbed their second goal within two minutes of the re-start.

It was merely a matter of what they would win by at that stage, with county Under-21 Ian Byrne showcasing his vast repertoire of skills as he fired over a string of points to leave ten between the sides at the finish. Byrne also struck seven of the winners' 13 wides but Fethard had 14 misses themselves and could only muster a solitary point from play.

No fewer than nine of their first 15 had started in the previous weekend's Senior football final, and they seemed to be feeling the after-effects as they never got going in a very lethargic opening half.

Ferns also had the advantage of playing a lot more hurling than their rivals since their respective penultimate round victories thanks to their Senior and Minor exploits. And it clearly showed as they were sharper from the outset, taking a decisive lead as early as the fourth minute when a high delivery from Ian Byrne broke around the square and full-forward Oisín MacPartlin was on hand to pull first-time to the net.

Free-taker Graham O'Grady got Fethard off the mark but they made no inroads with the wind in their favour and never threatened a goal as Ferns captain Declan Byrne capably marshalled a strong back line.

Ian Byrne hit a brace of points midway through the first quarter, one from a free and the other from a short '65 taken by Gavin Bailey after the former's low shot was well saved by Kieran Furlong.

It was 1-2 to 0-2 by the 15th minute after Graham O'Grady converted another free, and the gap remained the same at the break as Byrne added two more points, one from a free, while O'Grady sent over his third placed ball and Ciarán Dwyer got the sole Fethard score from play in the 25th minute (1-4 to 0-4).

Andy Cash, one of five Minors to feature before the game was over, really knocked the wind out



■ Declan Byrne, the Ferns St. Aidan's captain, receives the cup from Margaret Doyle (Co. Secretary).

of Fethard's sails 90 seconds into the new half when he goaled at the second attempt via a

FERNS ST. AIDAN'S

Gavin Collier; Pádraig Bolger, Aaron Collier, Brian O'Neill; Patrick Breen, Declan Byrne (capt.), Pádraig Walsh; Gavin Bailey, Paddy O'Leary, Peter Codd, Ian Byrne (0-9, 4 frees), Andy Cash (1-1); Keith Breen, Oisín MacPartlin (1-0), Ben Cowman. **SUBS:** Jason Collier (0-1) for MacPartlin (46), Gearóid Bennett for K. Breen (59), Robert Murphy for O'Leary (59), also Ger Turner, Darren Dwyer, Dean Collier, Colm O'Hagan, P.J. O'Neill.

FETHARD

Kieran Furlong; Andrew Whelan, Cathal Walsh, Seán Donohoe; Martin O'Hara, Darren Foley, Daire Barden; Garrett Foley (0-1 free), Edmund Power; Conan Murphy (capt.), Graham O'Grady (0-5 frees), Noel Colfer, Ciarán Dwyer (0-1), John Tubritt, Jeff Barry. **SUBS:** Adam Swan for Barry (35), also Peter Mullan, Stephen Barry, Niall Roche, Evan Rowe, Ricky Rowe, Seán Sutton, Rúairí Tubrid, Brian Power.

VENUE: Wexford Park.

REFEREE: Brendan O'Brien (St. Fintan's).

ground stroke following an Oisín MacPartlin handpass.

The sides went on to share six points in the third quarter as Ferns remained in a comfortable position, with Cash and the prolific Ian Byrne on target from play.

A bad day got worse for Fethard in the 47th minute when centre-back Darren Foley was dismissed for his second yellow card offence on Byrne, and the seaiders didn't score again although Edmund Power's goal effort had gone narrowly wide shortly before that incident.

Ian Byrne brought his own tally to nine points before the finish, with the pick of his strikes coming from close to the right touchline after a solo run in the 54th minute.

Substitute Jason Collier closed the scoring for the victors who will be in Premier football action now next weekend against near neighbours Starlights.



■ Ferns St. Aidan's netminder Gavin Collier follows the trend started by Oulart-The Ballagh's Ben O'Connor as he dives into the after-match photograph.

DEMPSEY



TOM'S HURLING ANALYSIS

Storey will need no reminding of prestige of Offaly champions

I TOOK the lazy option on Sunday and took to the sofa to watch the deferred coverage of Oulart's impressive victory over Kilkenny's finest in an entertaining game.

Diarmuid Lyng, who is carving an excellent career in media, co-commentated and I can only guess that he gave excellent analysis as my mastery of the native language was never my strong point at school despite the valiant efforts of my dedicated teachers.

I have a lot of admiration for the support and coverage the people at TG4 dedicate to our national games, but quite frankly I was disappointed with the level of camera work on display on Sunday. With a number of games to be covered each weekend I presume resources (and cameras) are scarce, but at times you would have needed to have a magnifying glass to ascertain exactly what was happening on the pitch, particularly in relation to goalmouth action.

The pre-occupation with action replays while the ball was in play was particularly frustrating. Maybe my eyesight is deteriorating as I move rapidly towards the big 50, but suffice it to say that nothing beats being at the game if you want the complete picture.

Oulart have now beaten the cream of Kilkenny three years in a row and this can only be a positive sign for the state of hurling locally. On top of this I would venture to guess that Martin Storey would acknowledge that this year's biggest challenge to the men in black came from within the county (Harriers and Ferns) rather than from across the border, and this for me is a real plus when analysing the state of the game here.

Clara put up a tremendous challenge and have undergone a fairytale story over the past 18 months, but for me 20 scores to 13 adequately summarises the fact that the Wexford men were full value for their win.

Things were tricky at the start with the men in maroon showing a serious stomach for battle, with Lester Ryan, Liam Ryan and Keith Hogan all causing problems, but when Oulart settled their experience really showed and in Garrett Sinnott they had a player that certainly wasn't going to settle for second best.

The bearded Oulart man was outstanding all through and continued the form that must leave him as the stand-out candidate for hurler of the year in this county. Des Mythen also popped up everywhere and these two players did more than most to fashion victory. Paul Roche also showed what an iron man he is, and particularly in the second-half he manned the centre-back position in a way that the injured Darren Stamp would have approved of. Young Conor O'Leary (who would easily make any other Senior team in the county) caused problems and scored a vital point from an acute angle when really needed.

Martin Storey will be well pleased with the victory but will need no reminding of the Offaly dangers that lie ahead from past experience. However, with the likelihood of Eoin Moore and Darren Stamp returning for the semi-final, this group of players look very well equipped to have a serious go at landing the Leinster trophy, and it is never any harm to have the Kilkenny challenge out of the way at this stage of proceedings.

In the semi-off-season the rules of hurling are often discussed and I remember talking to the great Tim Flood a while back when he suggested that it should be compulsory that the man fouled should take the free himself. It certainly is worth thinking about and it would ensure that every player would need to up skill in this area.

Finally, congratulations to Eddie Maloney on once again bringing success to Our Lady's Island. Passion, love for the game, love for the parish and dedication all come in the package that is Eddie. He is indeed the type of man that makes the G.A.A. great. I'm sure Leo was smiling down on you lads. Up the Island.