

Saturday July 15th 1995

Daingean 0-10

Clara 0-9

### **Daingean Turn Tables On Clara In Play-off**

For the second time in two weeks Daingean and Clara clashed in Group B of the Offaly Senior Football Championship in Cappincur on Saturday evening. Having finished level at the top of the table this second meeting was a play-off to determine first and second place, and Daingean avenged a fairly hefty 3-16 to 1-8 defeat last time to upset the form book with a deserved 0-10 to 0-9 victory.

Although both sides were certain of advancing to the quarter-finals it would be untrue to say that they lacked incentive on Saturday, for whereas group winners Daingean will now meet either Gracefield or Belmont, runners-up Clara face the more formidable task of taking on Ferbane, holders and favourites to retain the title.

Heavy showers before and during the game left ground conditions as precarious as a foothold on jelly and led to much slipping and sliding, but for supporters of Daingean their inner warmth of pleasure at the final whistle could not be externally dampened. The Maroon's winning margin may have been slender, but few could begrudge them a victory that was gained despite some shoddy finishing, particularly in the first half. Victory was deserved by a team which remained exuberantly defiant and determined, even when things were not going their way.

With two-thirds of the first half spent Clara, playing up the slight incline, were ahead 0-5 to 0-2 and apparently taking control against opponents who were conceding more frees than was good for them. No sooner had the opinion been formed than it was proved false by the gritty determination of a Daingean side which battled back to notch four of the last five points and so reach the interval on level terms at 0-6 each.

Indeed, Daingean would have been ahead at that stage if their forwards had made better use of the possession which came their way. In addition to shooting nine wides they were denied two gilt-edged goal opportunities, one through a glaring miss by full-forward Mark Whittle and another by an outstanding save by goalkeeper Darragh Scully from Sean Farrell.

### **Under Siege**

The third quarter saw Clara lay siege to their opponents goal, but 15 minutes of almost incessant pressure yielded the meagre return of just one point – and even that was scored from a free in front of the posts. For the rest it was miss after miss, sometimes through downright poor finishing, but more often than not due to some excellent defending by Daingean.

Thus, the outcome remained locked in a freeze-frame, with the pendulum vacillating between victory and defeat. As the Daingean defence soaked up the kind of pressure that should have spawned scores the side grew in confidence. Going into the final stanza the outsiders were no longer seeking respect, but rather demanding it, and as Clara's frustration increased Daingean took up the running with a trinity of points that gave them a 0-10 to 0-7 lead with seven minutes remaining.

The heavens really opened at that stage, and with the rain literally bucketing down it became next to impossible to scribble notes. Instead, one had to rely on memory to recall that the last two scores of the game fell to Clara. By then, however, time had become their greatest enemy, and a gallant Daingean defence held out for victory in what, despite the conditions, had been an exhilarating and enthralling encounter.

### **Reputations Enhanced**

Many a Daingean reputation was enhanced during the course of these gripping 60 minutes in Cappincur. J.J Stapleton emerged as king of his penalty area, forcing David Reynolds to roam ever further afield before finally switching places in the second half with Pdraig Moran, who proved no more successful on the edge of the Clara square.

Brendan Donagher was another cornerstone in the winner's defence, and with Joe Gallagher, J.J. Hanlon, Mark Smyth and Seamus McEvoy all coming up trumps goalkeeper Mick Wright's task in keeping a clean sheet was simplified.

Compelling as were the claims of several defenders, however, it was the outstanding performance of midfielders Tony Kenny and Martin Daly that really personified the spirit of the Maroons. Apart from a spell shortly after the interval when they drifted out of the picture, their combined efforts gave Daingean control. Between them they sprayed passes like buckshot as they tried to get their forwards moving, but Daingean have problems up front that must be remedied if they hope to make further progress. Paul Jordan, both from play and as a place-kicker, proved the most effective of the front six, with John Kenny and Sean Farrell the best of the remainder.

### **Morale Damaged**

Clara may still be in the hunt for championship glory, but this defeat must have a damaging effect on their morale. Like their opponents, they had their best players at the back, where Larry Carroll, Paddy Maher, Tony Dalton and Derek Coyne were the pick of the crop and Darragh Scully paid his way with two fine saves. However, midfielders Mark Meehan and Mark Daly were always struggling, thus denying the likes of David Reynolds, Robert Dunne and Mark Scanlon the type of back-up support that they required.

### **Late Start**

As if standing in the rain was not penance enough for the spectators, the game was 28 minutes late starting, with both teams having to wait for the Tullamore and Ballinagar players to vacate the dressing rooms after the opening game, which itself was late getting underway.

Prior to the throw-in, a minutes silence was observed as a mark of respect to 21 years old Michael Bracken, a former underage player with Clara, whose untimely death occurred earlier on Saturday.

Clara jumped into an instant lead when a good passing movement was rounded off by David Reynolds pointing after only 30 seconds. Paul Jordan equalised for Daingean from a free a minute later, and after two successive wides the Maroons went in front in the 5<sup>th</sup> minute through Tony Kenny. David Reynolds landed a long-range free to level matters again, but then the Clara goal seemed to bear a charmed life in an all-out Daingean offensive which saw three shots blocked in the goalmouth before the siege was lifted with Sean Farrell's final shot brilliantly saved by Darragh Scully.

Having somehow survived that blitz, Clara took up the running with points by Alan Cronin, Robert Dunne and Pdraig Moran, in all of which full-forward David Reynolds had a hand. The miss of the match came at the other end when a great ball from Sean Farrell placed Mark Whittle in possession behind the defence, but the gift-horse was looked in the mouth as the full-forward shot across the goal and wide.

### **Cheers Stifled**

Daingean fans were shouting their heads off in glee two minutes later when John Kenny and Paul Jordan combined to set John Greene up for a shot that had the Clara net shaking, but the cheers were quickly stifled when the umpire signalled a wide, the ball having hit the side-netting.

Daingean finished the first-half strongly with points by John Greene, Mark Whittle, Martin Daly (free) and Paul Jordan (free) to which Clara's only reply was a pointed free by Reynolds, leaving an interval stalemate of 0-6 each.

Daingean shuffled their attack during the break and resumed with a lightning point from a free by Paul Jordan. However, it was Clara who dominated the third quarter. They bombarded their opponents goal, but their finishing was deplorably erratic and four wides in succession preceded a 35<sup>th</sup> minute point from a free by David Reynolds. Further scoring chances were squandered, leaving them vulnerable to a Daingean revival which yielded a point from play by Martin Daly and two from frees by Paul Jordan.

That left Jody Gunning's charges three points clear with seven minutes remaining, an although Clara tried might and main to pull the game out of the fire they were foiled by the do-or-die measures of the Daingean defence. The gap was narrowed to the minimum by points from Reynolds (free) and Mark Scanlon, but a match-saving point eluded them during the final minute of normal time and 90 seconds of injury time.

**Scorers:**

Clara – D. Reynolds 0-5 (4 frees), M. Scanlon, P. Moran, R. Dunne & A. Cronin 0-1 each.

Daingean – P. Jordan 0-5 (4 frees), M. Daly 0-2 (1 free), T. Kenny, J. Greene & M. Whittle 0-1 each

**Clara:** Daragh Scully, Pat Flanagan, Larry Carroll, Paddy Maher, Derek Coyne, Tony Dalton, Colm Kane, Mark Meehan, Mark Daly, Alan Cronin, Pauric Moran, Robert Dunne, Ronan Scully, David Reynolds, Mark Scanlon. Sub – Willie Reynolds for R. Scully.

**Daingean:** Mick Wright, Mark Smyth, J.J. Stapleton, Joe Gallagher, Seamus McEvoy, Brendan Donagher, J.J. Hanlon, Tony Kenny, Martin Daly, John Greene, John F. Kennedy, John Kenny, Sean T. Farrell, Mark Whittle, Paul Jordan.

Referee: Vincent Gillespie (Ballinamere)

<b>1<sup>st</sup> Half</b>	<b>Goals</b>	<b>Points</b>	<b>Wides</b>	<b>Frees</b>	<b>45's</b>
Daingean	0	6	9	16	0
Clara	0	6	4	16	0
<b>2<sup>nd</sup> Half</b>					
Daingean	0	4	1	10	1
Clara	0	3	8	17	1
<b>Total</b>					
Daingean	0	10	10	26	1
Clara	0	9	12	33	1