

Sunday August 20th 1995

Gracefield 2-10

Daingean 1-7

Six Booked As 14-Man Gracefield Reach Last Four

Gracefield became the first claimants of a semi-final place in this year's Offaly Senior Football Championship when they readily overcame the disappointingly limited challenge of Daingean in Walsh Island last Sunday. The Laois border club finished with six points to spare (2-10 to 1-7) in a game in which the standard of football must have disappointed the large attendance.

With a place in the semi-final awaiting the winners the stakes were high, and this was reflected in a game in which six names went into referee Mick Mahon's notebook – five players and an over-enthusiastic mentor who encroached onto the playing area within a minute or two of the final whistle. The added fact that the game yielded an aggregate of 34 frees, including a Daingean penalty, makes more remarkable the fact that the winners got all their scores from play.

Long Term Prospects

One is tempted to delay assessing Gracefield's long-term prospects following this performance, for whereas they strolled through the first half as they established a comprehensive interval lead of 2-6 to 0-1, their progress through the second half was much more of a stagger.

Nor can one claim the elements as an explanation for such an uneven performance. True, Gracefield played with wind advantage at the outset, but this was no more than a gentle breeze that mercifully tempered the blazing sunshine which raised the temperature to 28°C.

Gracefield won because of the simple fact that their forwards made better use of their scoring opportunities, particularly in the first half. Having got off to an inspirational start which saw them score 1-1 in the opening 90 seconds, they completely dominated affairs up to the break. During this period the Daingean forwards scarcely got a look in, and the few attacks which they succeeded in mounting came to nothing and were quickly snuffed out by Gracefield defenders who tackled well and covered each other most effectively.

No. Most of the first-half action was at the other end, and although they kicked an unhealthy nine wides the Gracefield forwards matched these with an equal number of scores, so that they apparently had the game wrapped up by half-time.

Dramatic Change

Few were prepared for the second half transformation. A goal from the penalty spot after only 17 seconds prompted a Daingean revival which continued with a string of points, so that by the end of the third quarter they had cut their deficit to a more respectable five points, 2-7 to 1-5 – and when Gracefield were reduced to 14 men at that stage through the dismissal of corner back John Murray the game was thrown wide open.

Had they retained their composure Daingean might well have completed the greatest recovery of the '95 championship, but hasty shooting by their forwards saw their number of wides soar into double digits as they kicked away their chance of a semi-final place. To be fair, some of those misses were forced on them by the quick tackling Gracefield backs. Some, but not all.

Sound Defence

The soundness of the Gracefield defence centred on the sterling performances of goalie Aidan Hanlon, James Brady, Pauric Maher, Dermot Hayes, and, up to his premature exit, skipper Conor Bryan.

At midfield Adrian Dunne and Joe Byrne had matters sewn up until Daingean's Martin Daly began to exert some influence in the second half. Corner forward Pauric Keegan was by far the pick of an eager forward division, his pace enabling him to cut a runway through the opposing defence. With 1-3 to his credit he was easily the game's top scorer. Declan McEvoy impressed greatly both on and off the ball, and if Liam Dunne was the only Gracefield forward not to score he played a crucial role in creating opportunities for those around him.

Daingean had a very sound goalkeeper in Mick Wright, who performed well behind a defence in which Sean McEvoy, J.J. Hanlon and Brendan Donagher most frequently caught the eye. Martin Daly was the better of their midfielders, but there were real problems up front, where Paul Jordan, John F. Kennedy and John Kenny were the ones to cause most discomfort to the opposition.

One-Way Traffic

It was practically all one-way traffic as far as first-half scoring was concerned. Gracefield could not have hoped for a better start, for within 35 seconds of the throw-in they had the ball in the Daingean net, Pauric Keegan racing through a porous defence to apply the finish to a long free by Timmy Dunne. A minute later Liam Dunne placed Kieran McEvoy for a good point, and Gracefield were on their way.

Keegan added another point before Daingean opened their account in the 8th minute when Martin Daly pointed. This, however, was to be the only interruption to a litany of Gracefield scores, the most crucial of which was a second goal in the 19th minute when Timmy Dunne flighted a line ball on the right into the goalmouth, where Dermot Dunne was well positioned to flick it past Mick Wright. Declan McEvoy and Pauric Keegan each added a brace of points to supplement this goal, leaving clear daylight of 2-6 to 0-1 between the sides at the interval.

Daingean Revival

Whatever manager Jody Gunning said in the Daingean dressing-room during the break certainly proved effective, for the Maroons resumed with all guns blazing.

Only 17 seconds had elapsed when Aidan Hanlon saved well from Paul Jordan, and in the melee which ensued Tony Kenny was hauled down in the square. County man John Kenny tucked the penalty neatly into the corner of the net, and further chances were missed through over-eagerness, including a clear goal-scoring opportunity when Paul Jordan rattled the side netting.

Controversy entered the game in the 35th minute when the referee overruled an umpire who had adjudged Timmy Dunne's shot to have gone wide and instead awarded a point. Daingean took this setback in their stride as they nibbled at the Gracefield lead with points by Paul Jordan (free), John Greene, Martin Daly and another Jordan free awarded for a foul on himself, and as a result of which Gracefield found themselves compulsory reduced to 14 men.

14 Men

Oddly, it was only when they were reduced to 14 men that Gracefield recaptured their earlier sparkle. Darren Hennessey came on as a replacement for Conor Bryan and played his part in bringing his side back into the game.

Two points by Joe Byrne ended a 16 minutes scoring moratorium for the Portarlinton side, and even though Mark Whittle hit back with a Daingean point in the 55th minute, Gracefield had a quick response when substitute Enda McDermott

pointed with his first touch of the ball. It was well into injury time when Paul Jordan closed the scoring with a late Daingean point that was of statistical interest only.

Scorers:

Gracefield – P. Keegan 1-3 , D. Dunne 1-0, D. McEvoy & J. Byrne 0-2 each, K. McEvoy, T. Dunne & E. McDermott 0-1 each.

Daingean – P. Jordan 0-3 (2 frees), J. Kenny 1-0, M. Daly 0-2, J. Greene & M. Whittle 0-1 each

Gracefield: Aidan Hanlon, Pauric Maher, Edward Moore, John Murray, Dermot Hynes, Conor Bryan, James Brady, Adrian Dunne, Joe Byrne, Timmy Dunne, Dermot Dunne, Kieran McEvoy, Pauric Keegan, Declan McEvoy, Liam Dunne. Subs – Darren Hennessey for C. Bryan, Enda McDermott for P. Keegan.

Daingean: Mick Wright, Stuart Behan, Sean McEvoy, Joe Gallagher, Seamus McEvoy, Brendan Donagher, J.J. Hanlon, Tony Kenny, Martin Daly, John Greene, John F. Kennedy, John Kenny, Mark Smyth, Mark Whittle, Paul Jordan. Subs – Mattie Corcoran for J. Gallagher, Richie Galvin for S. Behan, J.J. Stapleton for J. Greene.

Referee: Mick Mahon (Shannonbridge)

1st Half	Goals	Points	Wides	Frees	45's
Gracefield	2	6	9	10	0
Daingean	0	1	5	8	0
2nd Half					
Gracefield	0	4	3	3	0
Daingean	1	6	10	13	0
Total					
Gracefield	2	10	12	13	0
Daingean	1	7	15	21	0