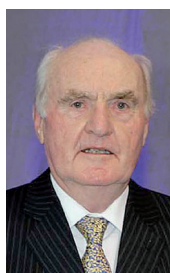


County Senior Hurling Championship 2023



By: Seamus J. King

Kiladangan are county senior hurling champions for 2023. It may have taken them two attempts to win the Dan Breen Cup, but they will forever be listed as the 2023 winners, following their victory over Thurles Sarsfields in the replayed final at FBD Semple Stadium on October 29. The

margin of victory was the narrowest, on a scoreline of 1-21 to 1-20, but the general consensus was that the winners were deserving champions, in spite of finishing the game with the huge total of seventeen wides.

It was Thurles who had the better start with a goal from Paddy Creedon, three points from Aidan McCormack and a further one from Creedon to put them in an outstanding position after ten minutes. In contrast Kiladangan were slow to start but eventually came alive between the tenth and the seventeenth minutes to leave them only a point behind. They were now very much in the game but poor shooting was their downfall and it was Sarsfields who held the lead, 1-8 to 0-10, at half-time.

Kiladangan dominated the opening ten minutes of the second half, with Willie Connors policing the centreback line, and they went two points in front. Thurles came back to level it with two brilliant points from Aidan McCormack. Billy Seymour put the north men back in front with a point, but a great burst from Sarsfields, which produced five points, gave them a four-point advantage and a look of victory.

However, Kiladangan were not out. In a brilliant counter burst they hit five points in succession to put them ahead again by the minimum on a scoreline of 0-20 to 1-16. Once again Aidan McCormack brought Thurles level but the decisive moment came in the 57th minute when Sean Hayes became the hero of the hour with a brilliant goal, following a movement involving Conor Byrne and Declan McGrath. The pressure was now on Sarsfields to respond and they brought the margin back to a point following points from Darragh Stakelum and David Corbett. Ronan Maher had a final effort in added time but the long-range shot drifted wide, and Kiladangan were crowned county senior hurling champions for the second time.

Kiladangan: Barry Hogan, David Sweeney, James Quigley, Willie Connors (0-3), Fergal Hayes, Alan Flynn (captain), Joe Gallagher (0-1), Decky McGrath (0-3), Tadhg Gallagher (0-3), Paul Flynn, Andy Loughnane, Billy Seymour (0-9), Sean Hayes (1-1), Dan O'Meara (0-1), Bryan McLoughney. Subs used: Eoghan Sharkey for Bryan McLoughney, Conor Byrne for Dan O'Meara, Darren Moran for Andy Loughnane.

Thurles Sarsfields: Paddy McCormack, Paul Maher, Denis Maher, Stephen Maher, James Armstrong, Ronan Maher (captain), (0-2) Michael Purcell, Stephen Cahill, Cathal Moloney, Billy McCarthy, Conor Stakelum, Paddy Creedon (1-3), Darragh Stakelum (0-2), Aidan McCormack (0-13), Eoin Purcell. Subs used: Seanie Butler for Billy McCarthy, David Corbett for Stephen Cahill, Cian Stakelum for Eoin Purcell, Conor Lanigan for Cathal Moloney.

Referee: John McCormack (Kickhams)

Successful Format

The same format, which was introduced in 2018 to organise

teams into their correct grades in the Tipperary county championships, was used in the running of the 2023 Dan Breen Cup senior hurling championship and was generally regarded as very successful, producing really exciting games, in equally exciting groups.

The sixteen teams involved were as follows: CJ Kickhams Mullinahone, Kilruane MacDonaghs, Holycross Ballycahill, Borris-Ileigh, Drom & Inch, Moycarkey-Borris, Loughmore-Castleiney, Clonoulty-Rpssmore, J. K. Brackens, Roscrea, Templederry-Kenyons, Kiladangan, Nenagh Eire Óg, Toomevara, Upperchurch-Drombane, Thurles Sarsfields. The only change in the teams from 2022 was the promotion of Roscrea from Premier Intermediate, and the relegation of Eire Óg Annacarty.

The teams were divided into four groups as follows:

Group 1 – CJ Kickhams Mullinahone, Drom & Inch, J. K. Brackens, Nenagh Eire Óg.

Group 2 – Kilruane MacDonaghs, Moycarkey Borris, Roscrea, Toomevara.

Group 3 – Holycross Ballycahill, Loughmore-Castleiney, Templederry Kenyons, Upperchurch Drombane.

Group 4 – Borris-Ileigh, Clonoulty-Rossmore, Kiladangan, Thurles Sarsfields.

Preliminary Rounds

All the Round 1 games were played on the weekend of July 28-30. Two games were played on Friday, 28th, with Toomevara defeating Kilruane MacDonaghs by 3-16 to 0-15 at Nenagh, and Moycarkey-Borris and Roscrea playing a draw, 0-21 to 1-18 at Templemore.

On July 29, Drom Inch defeated Nenagh Eire Óg by 2-19 to 1-20 at Templemore, while Loughmore Castleiney defeated Templederry Kenyons by 4-16 to 4-18.

The remaining four games in Round 1 were played on the 30th. At Cashel, Mullinahone defeated J. K. Brackens by 2-16 to 0-15, Holycross Ballycahill defeated Upperchurch Drombane by 2-16 to 1-13 at Littleton, Borris-Ileigh drew with Clonoulty Rossmore 1-13 to 0-16 at Semple Stadium, and Kiladangan defeated Thurles Sarsfields by 2-23 to 1-17 at the same venue.

Round 2 games were played on the weekend of August 11-13. Toomevara defeated Moycarkey-Borris by 1-22 to 0-24 at The Ragg on August 11. Three games were played on the 12th. Nenagh Eire Óg defeated J. K. Brackens by 5-15 to 1-15 at Dolla. Drom Inch defeated Mullinahone by 3-20 to 2-29 at Littleton. Loughmore-Castleiney got the better of Holycross-Ballycahill by 1-27 to 3-20 at Boherlahan. The remaining games were played on the 13th. Roscrea defeated Kilruane MacDonaghs by 4-21 to 3-19 at Nenagh, Upperchurch Drombane defeated Templederry Kenyons by 1-23 to 1-18 at Semple Stadium. Borris-Ileigh defeated Kiladangan by 2-23 to 1-25 at Nenagh, and Thurles Sarsfields defeated Clonoulty Rossmore by 1-20 to 1-17 at Templemore.

Round 3 games were played on the weekend on August 26/27. On the 26th, Moycarkey-Borris defeated Kilruane MacDonaghs by 1-23 to 1-21 at Templederry, and Toomevara defeated Roscrea by 1-20 to 1-18 at Borrisileigh. The remaining games were played on August 27. Mullinahone defeated Nenagh Eire Óg by 2-21 to 1-16 at Templetuohy, J. K. Brackens defeated Drom Inch by 3-24 to 2-16 at the same venue, Templederry Kenyons defeated Holycross-Ballycahill by 1-17 to 1-23 at Borrisileigh, Loughmore-Castleiney defeated

Upperchurch-Drombane by 2-15 to 0-17 at Semple Stadium, Kiladangan defeated Clonoulty-Rossmore by 0-25 to 0-17 at The Ragg, and Thurles Sarsfields defeated Borris-Ileigh by 2-20 to 1-11 at Semple Stadium.

Preliminary Quarter-Finals

The top two teams in each group qualified for the quarter-finals. They were Loughmore-Castleiney, Roscrea, Kiladangan, Holycross-Ballycahill, Toomevara, Mullinahone, Thurles Sarsfields and Drom & Inch. Because of the stipulation that divisional winners, who failed to qualify for the playoffs in the league proper, Clonoulty Rossmore and Nenagh Eire Óg got a second chance in preliminary quarter-finals. Nenagh Eire Óg were drawn against Thurles Sarsfields and lost by 1-27 to 1-23 at Borrisileigh on September 9. Clonoulty-Rossmore were drawn against Mullinahone and defeated them by 1-23 to 1-20 at Templetuohy on September 10.

Quarter-Finals

The quarter-finals were played at Semple Stadium on the weekend of September 16/17.

In two close encounters on Saturday, Loughmore-Castleiney got the better of Roscrea by the minimum of margins, on a scoreline of 2-22 to 1-24. In the second game Kiladangan had two points to spare over Holycross-Ballycahill on a scoreline of 2-22 to 3-17. On Sunday the game between Toomevara and Clonoulty-Rossmore was also close, with the former coming through by 3-20 to 1-24. In the second game Thurles Sarsfields showed themselves potential champions with a comprehensive defeat of Drom Inch on a scoreline of 0-24 to 1-12.

Semi-Finals

The semi-finals were played at Semple Stadium on the weekend of 30 Oct/Nov 1. Thurles Sarsfields and Loughmore-Castleiney provided the fare on Saturday in a game that Sarsfields eased to victory with a seven-point margin on a scoreline of 1-22 to 2-12. Loughmore kept in touch in the first half and actually led by the minimum, 1-6 to 0-8, at the interval, thanks to a goal by Ciaran McCormack five minutes before half-time. Sarsfields made a fine burst after the interval and within five minutes were ahead by 0-11 to 1-6. They continued to ease ahead during the remainder of the half as Loughmore found it difficult to keep in touch with them. The only bright spark for them was a goal from a penalty by John McGrath in the 63rd minute.

Kiladangan were well fancied to be better than Toomevara in the second semi-final on Sunday, and they exerted their superiority early on when a third-minute goal by Paul Flynn had them 1-3 to 0-2 ahead. Darragh McCarthy kept Toomevara in the game during the first half but Kiladangan led by 1-15 to 0-12 at the interval. It looked curtains for Toomevara when Bryan McLoughney netted for Kiladangan two minutes after the restart, but Toomevara bounced back with a goal from Mark McCarthy, followed by two points, to leave them only five behind, 1-14 to 2-16, after six minutes. That was as good as it got for Toomevara and Kiladangan led by 2-20 to 1-16 after three-quarters of an hour. Kiladangan's progress was halted when Barry Hogan was sidelined for a second yellow card and replaced by Darragh Egan. A goal by Mark McCarthy reduced Toomevara's deficit to six points, 2-23 to 2-17, but Kiladangan finished strongly to win by 2-30 to 2-21.

County Final

The pairing for the final at FBD Semple Stadium on October 15 was an interesting one. Kiladangan had lost the 2022 final to Kilruane MacDonaghs in a replay, while Thurles Sarsfields had lost the 2021 final to Loughmore Castleiney in a replay.

Kildangan won the 2020 final against Loughmore Castleiney, after losing the 2019 final to Borrisileigh. Sarsfields won the 2017 final when they defeated Borris-Ileigh.

The only indication of current form we had was when the sides met in the first round of Group 4 of the qualifiers. On that day Kiladangan got the better of their opponents by 2-23 to 1-17 at Nenagh on July 30, but the Thurles side missed their main player, Ronan Maher, on the day. Since then both teams had been impressive and it was an extremely difficult game to call.

How evenly matched the teams were was reflected in the fact that they were level thirteen times in the course of the game. Thurles had the better of the early exchanges, helped in no small way by inaccuracy on the part of Kiladangan, and led by 0-6 to 0-4 at the end of the first quarter. The north side improved in the second quarter and got some impressive scores from Joe Gallagher, Paul Flynn and Decky McGrath, but Thurles finished the stronger to lead by just one point, 0-11 to 0-10 at the interval.

Points were exchanged during the first ten minutes after the re-start and the sides were level at 0-13 apiece. Sarsfields made a spurt after that and points by Darragh Stakelum, Stephen Cahill and an Aidan McCormack free gave them a three-point cushion. It looked as if the game was slipping from Kiladangan, but a powerful run by Sean Hayes and a handpass to Paul Flynn produced a goal to level the scores. Kiladangan pushed on with a Flynn point, but Sarsfields got the next three points from Aidan McCormack and Seanie Butker to give them a two-point lead. Kildangan came back with two points from Paul Flynn and Billy Seymour. Conor Stakelum had Sarsfields ahead again but Billy Seymour responded to bring the sides level once again. An Aidan McCormack free put Sarsfields in sight of victory but a massive equalising score from ninety yards by Willie Connors sent the fixture to a reply.

Kiladangan: Barry Hogan, David Sweeney, James Quigley, John O'Meara, Fergal Hayes, Alan Flynn (0-1), Joe Gallagher (0-1), Decky McGrath (0-1), Tadhg Gallagher, Paul Flynn (1-3), Andy Loughnane (0-1), Billy Seymour (0-7), Sean Hayes (0-3), Dan O'Meara (0-1), Bryan McLoughney. Subs used: Willi Connors (0-1) for John O'Meara, Conor Byrne for Andy Loughnane, Eoghan Sharkey for Fergal Hayes. Also: Liam Hayes Darren Moran,, Johnny Moran, Neil Cahalan, Shane Gleeson, Ronan Ducie, Martin Minihin, D. J. McGrath, Darragh Ryan, Jack McGrath, Darragh Butler, Matthew Cleary.

Manager: John O'Meara, selectors: Sean O'Meara, Darragh Egan; coach: George Hannigan, Medic Roisin Hackett-Ryan, kit men, Michael Carmody, Jim Ryan, hurleys, James O'Meara, Eoin Meagher.

Thurles Sarsfields: Paddy McCormack, Paul Maher, Denis Maher, Stephen Maher, James Armstrong, Ronan Maher, Michael Purcell, Stephen Cahill (0-3), Cathal Moloney, Billy McCarthy (0-1) Conor Stakelum (0-2), Paddy Creedon, Darragh Stakelum (03), Aidan McCormack (0-11), Eoin Purcell (0-1). Subs used: Seanie Butler (0-1) for Billy McCarthy, David Corbett for Paddy Creedon. Also: Kevin Bracken, Jack Derby, Cian Stakelum, Seosamh Ryan, Tommy Doyle, Conor Lanigan, Michael Cahill, Henry Fogerty Kieran Moloney, Jack Lanigan, Liam McCormack, Robbie Stapleton, Tommy Maher.

Manager, Padraic Maher, selectors, Paddy McCormack, Michael Gleeson, Brian Stakelum, liaison, Ger Corbett, physios, Mick Clohessy, Aoife Lonergan, S & C, Paudie Carey, kit men, Paul Lanigan, Jim Woodlock, Michael & Robbie Hanrahan, Pepi Joe Clare, doctor, Dr. Paul Ryan, stats, Kevin Smith, video, Peter Donnelly.

Referee: Michael Kennedy (Newcastle)