

County Senior Hurling Championship 2021

By Seamus J. King

The county senior hurling final was in its dying minutes. The sides were locked at 2-13 each and another draw appeared imminent. Then Loughmore-Castleiney's John McGrath was fouled near the corner flag at the Town End of Semple Stadium, a most difficult angle for a free: 'It's something you practise a long, long time, since I was young – you just take your time over it and go through the process. When you see the ball sail through the posts it's just absolute relief and joy. A sweet one.'

And it was one of the sweetest shots that McGrath ever struck as it sailed between the posts for the lead as the clock ticked away to the final whistle. There was still time for Thurles Sarsfields to get the equaliser but the ball got bogged down in a schemozzle about thirty yards from the Loughmore goals and then a throw in as the seconds died away to the end of the game with Loughmore ahead by that solitary point by 2-14 to 1-13 and their fourth senior hurling title, to make it a wonderful double following victory in the senior football decider the previous weekend.

It was a great ending to the game and the championship.

The only change in the running of the competition was the admission of the divisional winners at a preliminary stage. In the event the only team that qualified in this manner was Killenaule, the South champions, who failed to qualify in the league stage of the competition. They played Loughmore-Castleiney, who were drawn from the four Group runners-up, in the preliminary and lost.

The sixteen teams that took part in the Dan Breen Cup were as follows: Thurles Sarsfields, Drom Inch, Eire Óg, Upperchurch Drombanne, Toomevara, Holycross Ballycahill, Clonoulty Rossmore, Mullinahone, Kildangan, Loughmore Castleiney, J. K. Brackens, Moycarkey Borris, Borrisileigh, Roscrea, Kilruane MacDonaghs, Nenagh Eire Óg. There was one change from the previous year with Mullinahone promoted as the O'Riain Cup winner and Burgess going down to the O'Riain through relegation.

The teams were divided into groups of four with the top two teams progressing to the knockout stage, and the last team

qualifying for relegation. The games took place on the weekend of August 28/29 and. Like all other games in the championships, were played under Covid 19 crowd restrictions.

The Groups

In Group 1 Thurles Sarsfields and Upperchurch Drombane qualified to the exclusion of Eire Óg and Drom Inch. Clonoulty Rossmore and Mullinahone came through in Group 2 against Toomevara and Holycross Ballycahill. In Group 3 Kildangan and Loughmore Castleiney were successful against J. K. Brackens and Moycarkey Borris. Borrisileigh and Kilruane MacDonaghs qualified in Group 4 with Nenagh Eire Óg and Roscrea losing out.

The Quarter-Finals

The quarter-finals took place on the weekend of 15/16 October. The week before saw Loughmore-Castleiney gaining a facile victory over Killenaule by 2-21 to 0-12 at Semple Stadium.

The first of the quarter-finals was played at Semple Stadium on October 15. Borris-Ileigh came through by 1-24 to 2-19 to Mullinahone in a great game after extra time. Two of the quarter-finals were played at Semple Stadium on October 16. Thurles Sarsfields defeated Clonoulty-Rossmore by 2-19 to 1-14 in a game that was determined by two goals in a five-minute spell before half-time by the winners. In the second game Loughmore Castleiney came through by 4-15 to 0-21 to Kilruane MacDonaghs, their victory greatly helped by 4-6 from John McGrath. The fourth game was played at Semple Stadium on October 17 with the champions, Kildangan, easily overcoming the opposition of Kilruane MacDonaghs by 1-21 to 0-13.

The Semi-Finals

The semi-finals were played at Semple Stadium on the weekend of 30/31 October with the champions, Kildangan, defending their title against Thurles Sarsfields on Saturday. They had a great start with three unanswered points but Sarsfields then settled and led by 0-7 to 0-3 at the first water-break. The second quarter saw Kildangan at their best with a quick goal by Bryan McLoughney and a second by Billy Seymour sending them clear by 2-8 to 0-10



Referee John McCormack blows the long whistle which is music in the ears of Loughmore/Castleiney players.



Brian McGrath on his way to score a great goal despite a broken thumb while Darragh Stakelum gives chase.

at half-time. Thurles were back with a bang soon on the resumption with a goal by Conor Stakelum after a minute. They then went ahead but Kildangan kept in touch with points and the sides were deadlocked, 1-14 to 2-11, at the second water-break. The final quarter was nail-biting stuff during which Thurles went ahead but were dragged back and Kildangan went two in front but Sarsfields levelled and had the edge in added time for a two-point victory on a scoreline of 1-19 to 2-14.

In the second game on Sunday Loughmore-Castleiney came through by 1-18 to 1-15 as a result of a late rally. Borrisileigh looked the likely winners early on with an early goal by James Devaney and led at the first water-break by 1-4 to 0-2. John McGrath's free-taking kept Loughmore in touch but they were still five points behind, 1-9 to 0-7, at half-time. Loughmore reduced the deficit by a point but still trailed by 1-13 to 0-12 at the second water-break. The third quarter belonged to Loughmore and the sides were level, 0-16 to 1-13, after fifty-three minutes. They then went ahead and Borriileigh's cause wasn't helped when Kieran Maher was sidelined following a second yellow card. The killer blow for Borrisileigh was a penalty against them in the 58th minutes, which John McGrath converted for a 1-18 to 1-13 lead. Borrisileigh got two later points, their only scores in the half, but it was too late and Loughmore went forward on a scoreline of 1-18 to 1-15.

The Final

Thurles Sarsfields were unbackable favourites going into the final, quoted by Paddy Power at 5-2 on, while Loughmore Castleiney were 9-4 and, when the outsiders were hit by a swift one-two goals from Thurles captain, Denis Maher, in the space of about sixty seconds in the tenth minute, the bookie's prediction appeared to be accurate. But the game didn't quite turn out like that. While Loughmore were behind by six or seven points for most of the half, and added to their plight with eight wides, Thurles didn't increase their lead as might have been expected, and Loughmore trailed by only four points, 2-9 to 0-11, at the interval.

A battling second-half performance, with Brian McGrath in particular giving a storming display, helped Loughmore reduce the margin to two. The final period was nail-biting as Loughmore levelled and went ahead by two points. However, Thurles responded through the excellent Pa Bourke, and Aidan McCormack brought them level. John McGrath restored Loughmore's advantage only for Conor Stakelum to level again. Then Ronan Maher hit a mighty point, which seemed like the

winner but Loughmore said no as Liam McGrath sent over the equaliser in the 62nd minute for a final score of 2-17 to 0-23.

The Replay

The replay had to wait two weeks, as Loughmore had also qualified for the football decider, which they duly won against hot favourites, Clonmel Commercial. The bookies still believed in Thurles Sarsfields and installed them as favourites and they were the sharper outfit in the opening quarter, running up a lead of 0-5 to 0-2 at the first water break Though dogged with poor shooting Loughmore held their own in the second quarter and were behind by 0-9 to 0-6 at the midway stage. The eventual winners made a great burst in the third quarter, as Sarsfields had a spate of wides, and they led by 1-11 to 1-10 entering the final quarter, the goals coming from Brian McGrath and Denis Maher respectively. Liam McGrath found the net on fifty minutes and four points seemed a decisive lead in such a close game. But then Seanie Butler pointed for Sarsfields and when a Loughmore free went awry, Darragh Stakelum crashed home an equalising goal. In the final minutes it was well nigh impossible to pick a result until John McGrath stepped into the breach and nailed the winner.

Loughmore-Castleiney: Aidan McGrath, Willie Eviston, Lorcan Egan, Joey Hennessy, Tommy Maher, John Meagher (0-1), Brian McGrath (1-0), Ciaran Connolly (0-1), Tomás McGrath (0-1), Liam Treacy, Noel McGrath (Capt.), (0-2), Liam McGrath (1-0), Ed Connolly, Conor McGrath, John McGrath (0-7). Subs: Eamonn Sweeney (0-1), for Ed. Connolly, Ciaran McCormack (0-1) for Liam Treacy, John Ryan for Tommy Maher, Ciaran McGrath for Tomas McGrath. Also: Michael McGrath, Antony Ryan, Cian Hennessy, Shane Hennessy, Ed Meagher, Henry Maher, Dinny Brereton Eamon Connolly Daragh McCahey, Niall Molony, David Kennedy.

Manager: Frankie McGrath, Coach, Eamon Sweeney. Selectors, Maureen Connolly, Eugene Stapleton, Taffy McGrath, Michael Dempsey,

Thurles Sarsfields: Paddy McCormack, Paul Maher, Padraic Maher, Seosamh Ryan, David Corbett (0-1), Ronan Maher (0-2), Jack Derby, Stephen Cahill, Michael Cahill, Aidan McCormack (0-3), Billy McCarthy, Darragh Stakelum (1-0), Pa Bourke (0-4), Denis Maher (capt.), (1-2), Paddy Creedon. Subs: Kieran Molony for Michael Cahill, Cian Stakelum for Paddy Creedon, Seanie Butler (0-1) for Aidan McCormack, Eoin Purcell for Darragh Stakelum. Also: Kevin Bracken, Pa Dunne, Cathal Molony, Kieran Costello, Stephen Maher, Conor Lanigan, Harry Fitzgibbon, James

Armstrong.

Manager, Mark Dowling, selectors, Brendan Carroll, Eamon Walsh, Liam Egan, coach, Luke Jordan.

County Senior Hurling Relegation 2021

The four teams that came last in their groups were as follows: Eire Óg, Holycross-Ballcahill, Moycarkey-Borris and Roscrea. They played off to decide which team would play in the O Riain Cup in 2022.

The semi-finals were played on the weekend of 9/10 October. Eire Óg defeated Holycross-Ballycahinn by 2-26 to 2-22 at Clonoulty on October 9. Moycarkey Borris defeated Roscrea by 2-20 to 1-19 at Templemore on October 10.

In the final, which was played at Templetuohy on October 23, Holycross Ballycahill defeated Roscrea by 1-15 to 1-12. Roscrea were relegated.

The O Riain Cup

The sixteen teams that played in the O'Riain Cup were as follows: Thurles Sarsfields, Carrick Swan, Kildangan, Burgess, Clonakenny, Silvermines, Templederry Kenyons, Newport, Sean Treacys, Killenaule, Gortnahoe Glengoole, Ballina, St. Marys, Lorrha-Dorrha, Cashel King Cormacs, Portroe. The changes from the previous year were as follows: Mullinahone were promoted and Burgess came down from the Dan Breen. Ballingarry was relegated to intermediate and Gortnahoe Glengoole were promoted.

The teams were divided into four groups of four, with the top two going forward for the play-offs and the last team qualifying for relegation. In Group 1 Thurles Sarsfields and Kildangan qualified to the exclusion of Carrick Swans and Burgess. Clonakenny and Templederry Kenyons came through Group 2 against Silvermines and Newport. In Group 3 Gortnahoe Glengoole and Killenaule were successful over Sean Treacys and Ballina. In Group 4 Cashel King Cormacs and St. Marys qualified with Portroe and Lorrha Dorrha losing out.

Quarter-Finals

The quarter-finals were played on the weekend of 16/17 October. At Nenagh, Cashel King Cormacs came from behind in the final quarter to beat Clonakenny by 1-17 to 1-16. At Templederry, Killenaule defeated Kildangan by 1-21 to 0-18, having the edge on their opponents for most of the hour. There was a great battle at Leahy Park on the Sunday before St. Marys saw off the challenge of Thurles sarsfields in extra time by 1-21 to 1-19. In the final game Templederry Kenyons made light work of Gortnahoe Glengoole by 3-28 to 2-15 at Templetuohy.

Semi-Finals

The semi-finals were played on the weekend of 30/31 October. At Golden Killenaule defeated St. Marys by 2-18 to 1-16. The winners led by 1-9 to 0-9 at the midway stage and extended their lead after the resumption. However, St. Mary's kept plugging away but couldn't make it count enough on the scoreboard.

In the second semi-final a very impressive Templederry swept past a very disappointing Cashel. The winners led by 2-7 to 0-4 at the first water-break and the match was virtually over at half-time, when Cashel trailed by 3-13 to 1-5 and were down to fourteen men, The final score was 4-23 to 1-11.

Final

The final was played at Semple Stadium on November 14 as a curtain-raiser to the Dan Breen final. After a closely contested first half with the sides level at 0-6 each at the first water-break and 0-10 each at the midway stage, it was mostly one-way traffic in the second half, with Templederry cutting loose as the Killenaule challenge crumbled. They managed only two points in the third quarter and Templederry were ahead by 1-17 to 0-12 at the second water-break. At the beginning of the final quarter, Templederry strengthened their grip on the game with four unanswered points and at the final whistle they were in front by 1-25 to 1-15. The

collapse of Killenaule in the second half was in sharp contrast to their spirited performance in the first half. Also, their shooting deteriorated as the game wore on and they were guilty of fifteen wides, in contrast to Templederry's eight.

Templederry Kenyon's captain, Gearóid Ryan, was presented with the Seamus Ó Riain cup by county board vice-chairman, Jimmy Minogue, after the match.

Templederry Kenyons: Tom McCutcheon, Daragh Carey, Christy Coughlan, Dale Donnelly, Tom Stapleton, Liam McCutcheon, Mikey Ryan, Odhran Murphy (0-3), Gearóid Ryan (capt.) (0-4), Adrian Ryan (0-4), Padraig O'Leary (0-1), Matthew Hogan (0-1), Eanna Murray (0-7) Sean Ryan (1-2), Subs: Brian Stapleton (0-3) for Michael Ryan, Colm Murray for Padraig O'Leary, Tom Ryan for Matthew Hogan.

Killenaule: Jonathan Gleeson, Killian O'Dwyer (capt.), Paddy Codd, Jack Hassett, Jimmy Feehan, Joe O'Dwyer (0-1), Liam Meagher (0-1), Tom Stakelum, Eoin O'Connell, Dean O'Connor (0-2), Ciaran O'Dwyer (0-9), Mark Stakelum, Michael Doyle, Eoin Shaw. Subs: Kieran Bergin for Mark Stakelum, Paudie Feehan for Dean O'Connor, Eoin Barry (1-0) for Eoin Shaw.

Referee: John Dooley (Thurles Sarsfields).

Seamus Ó Riain Cup Relegation.

The four teams that came last in their groups, Burgess, Newport, Sean Treacys and Lorrha, qualified for the relegation play-offs. The semi-finals were played on October 9. Newport defeated Lorrha by 0-25 to 0-14. Sean Treacys defeated Burgess by 2-20 to 1-16.

The final, between Burgess and Lorrha, was played at Nenagh on November 13. The result was decided in the second quarter, when Burgess scored three goals to lead by 3-6 to 0-8 at the interval. Lorrha never recovered and the final score was 3-15 to 0-16 in favour of Burgess.

The result means that Lorrha are relegated to the intermediate grade for the first time in fourteen years.



John Meagher holds possession with Billy McCarthy advancing in the county final.