

Leinster rugby

Inspired efforts by Bective and St. Mary's

FOR THE FIRST time in the 92 years history of the competition, Bective Rangers and St. Mary's College will meet in the final of the Leinster Senior Cup. Saturday's semi-finals at Lansdowne Road ended contrary to expectations, with Bective beating Wanderers 23-9 and St. Mary's removing Lansdowne, the holders, 19-9 and on the splendid form shown by the winners, an exciting final is in prospect next Saturday. Bective, whose last success was in 1962, have won the trophy 12 times and St. Mary's have come through three times—in 1958, 1969 and 1971.

Bective Rangers 23;

St. Mary's College 19

Wanderers 9.

Lansdowne 9

The improvement shown by Bective in recent weeks has been astonishing for they have produced the most constructive attacking football any team in the cup and each display has been better than the previous one. Admittedly, they were favoured by the bounce of the ball on the dry, hard pitch, but they opened the scoring with a handling movement of superb quality and the razor-sharpness of their reactions enabled them to snap up three further opportunities of tries.

By

PAUL MacWEENEY

There should be no argument about the superiority of the side which crosses the line four times while keeping their own intact, yet strange as it may seem, Wanderers put up sufficient try-scoring openings to have emerged with the odds only to see the vital pass go astray every time. All this made for a match of high quality and continual excitement and the wholehearted applause of the spectators at the end was a tribute to one of the finest cup ties seen for a long time past.

The first score, in the 12th minute, confirmed the skill and confidence acquired by Bective with their second round victory over C.D. From a scrum on the right-hand side near the Wanderers 25, the ball was passed smoothly to the left wing where O'Driscoll took the pass cutting inside on the burst, strong-footing the cover, he linked up with Anderson and from O'Carroll and Murphy the scoring pass was expertly taken by Byrne on the right wing for a gem of a try at the corner flag, the movement covering the width of the field in each direction.

When Steen added a penalty goal in the 22nd minute, Bective were leading high, but in the ensuing 18 minutes, Wanderers could well have changed a deficit of 7 points into an interval lead — instead they found themselves further behind — 3-13, by half time.

ON TARGET

In the 25th minute Ensor was on target with a sweetly-struck penalty shot from 45 yards and three minutes later Brady, coming in from the right wing, took an in-pass from Kevin Flynn to burst with menacing speed and power for the line. When challenged, he kicked ahead and had the ball run over the line he must have scored, but it stopped just short and he could not control it before a defender got the touch-down. Then Ensor missed from much the same place as he had landed his goal, and for a second time Brady could not turn an awkward bounce for the defence into the essential points.

Two incidents followed which really decided the issue. First of all Ensor, in marking a high kick, suffered a painfully bruised muscle from O'Driscoll's tackle, and when, in the second minute of injury time, Steen blocked down a kick by Freer and ran 40 yards for the snap try, the Wanderers full-back was unable to give chase.

Ensor had to depart at the interval and did not resume for 13 minutes, yet in his absence, Tommy Doyle took over the goal-kicking duty and reduced the gap to 7 points a minute after the resumption, but in spite of several thrilling handling movements in which some of the forwards handled and ran as dangerously as the backs, the finishing touches simply could not be applied and the Bective scrum-half, Anderson, sealed it up to all intents and purposes in the 9th minute when he nipped around a scrum on the line, heeled by Wanderers, to dive underneath McGrath for a try.

Doyle got another penalty goal for Wanderers four minutes later, but while Bective's cover was stretched to the limit on several occasions subsequently, it never capitulated and with typical opportunism, they had the last word, Byrne fastening on to a short kick headed by Anderson to sprint 35 yards for the last score. Steen, who had converted his own first-half try, added the points.

NOW FAVOURITES

On this evidence, Bective, who may even have surprised themselves so far, will certainly start at even money next Saturday. The return of that shrewd captain and tactician, Moroney, who had been absent against U.C.D., lent both strength and purpose to a pack in which Steen was dominant at the line-outs and the red-haired O'Carroll a positive ball of fire in the loose. If those two were outstanding the other six recalled all previous form this season, and the backs responded avidly. Anderson was the busiest of rum-halves and out-shone McGrath; Steen was the ideal link-out-half; the centres, Murphy and Fitzgerald, moved into the pass aggressively and the wings, O'Driscoll and Byrne were alert for any visible scoring chance. With a reliable full-back in Toner, this all added up to a most efficient team.

Vastly to their credit, Wanderers fought tigerishly right to the end and it was their day. There was a lot of hard, intelligent play, the forwards, with Bourke, Doyle and Jim Flynn posing frequent threats, but while McGrath put out a long service, Kevin Flynn denied any gaps as a ball-carrier, while the Bective defence was alert to the menace of his short passes ahead. Keen tackling kept Conive and Freer on a tight rein, and while Brady has fine physical assets on the right wing, he lacks resource on the ball is on the ground and was, perhaps, fortunate for Bective that the more elusive McLennan had more limited opportunities. The try to Ensor certainly was a blow, but there can be no denying the virtue of Bective's mph.

Bective Rangers—K. Toner, K. Byrne, Murphy, A. Fitzgerald, J. O'Driscoll, Steen, A. A. Anderson, T. A. Conive (capt.), J. McGrath, J. Lawlor, Freer, B. Lifford, E. O'Boyle, D. A. C. O'Carroll.

Wanderers—A. Freer, J. Brady, V. Doyle, B. Freer, F. McLennan, K. A. (capt.), B. McGrath, G. Collins, J. H. Dale, D. Rowell, E. O'Boyle, T. Doyle, A. Bourke, J. Flynn, Freer—K. D. Kellister.

If the rapidity of Bective's rise was unexpected, the demise of Lansdowne's power-house pack was even more surprising, writes PAUL McWEENEY. Eleven points behind after 32 minutes they came back into contention with a penalty goal on the stroke of half-time but not until half-an-hour of the second period had elapsed did they succeed in crossing the half-way line. Then when all virtually was lost they put in a storming finish, but the day was to end on an even sadder note for them for in the second minute of injury time, Gleeson, their right centre, suffered a fractured left leg.

Like Bective, St. Mary's have been climbing steadily up the ladder since emerging from the brink of defeat in their first outing against Old Wesley. The forwards rose majestically to the challenge of what was rated to be almost the best club pack in the country and with Denis Hickie showing a return to the dash and fire which had brought him international honours in 1971 and 1972, they outplayed the opposition comprehensively.

Hickie made the first try and scored the second himself and the other seven responded splendidly to his example—not least the hooker, Alberto Andreucetti, who has scored a try in each of the cup ties so far and very nearly added a second in the second half.

This, in fact, was a memorable day for the Hickie family. The return of Tony to full-back after an injury nine weeks ago which had seemed likely to put him out of action for the remainder of the campaign was triumphantly successful for at his best, as on Saturday, there is no more reliable fielder under pressure and he was as quick as ever in timing his advances into the attack.

The confidence he inspired in the other backs was abundantly clear, and especially so in the case of Murphy who came right out of his shell to handle, run and kick with the skill he has long been known to possess but too often has been hidden. His form was such that Moloney, with the Lions tour so soon in prospect, was able to confine himself to sending out a consistent service without needing to take any risks with his famous individual breaks. The centres Paul Andreucetti and the promising newcomer, Kennedy, seldom attempted more than they felt they could accomplish and if Grace was not as spectacular as in the previous round, he scored a delightful try and certainly won the keen duel against his international rival, Becker.

If this was St. Mary's most striking display of the season, with just one more hurdle ahead, it was Lansdowne's most ineffective. The forwards found themselves enmeshed in a net from which they could not escape until the opposition, a forward short after Murphy had had to retire in the 20th minute of the second half with a damaged knee, began to wilt in the closing minutes.

The trials and tribulations in front placed a heavy burden on those behind and not until he was afforded a measure of freedom near the end, could Quinn make any impact as a runner. This reacted on the centres, for Kerin and Gleeson sought far too frequently to blast a passage by cutting inside and such tactics foundered on the rock of solid tackling.

As has been seen on many an occasion this season, they failed to bring their wings sufficiently into the picture and this was particularly frustrating for Becker when, after Murphy's departure, Grace had to shift to full-back with Tony Hickie at out-half and Wigglesworth on the right wing. It would have seemed logical, then, to have moved the ball continually towards the sprinter on the left, but poor Becker only received it by chance, and seldom at that.

DANGEROUS WORK

Dangerous work in a ruck proved costly for Lansdowne in the 7th minute, Grace converting the point-blank offering and eight minutes later Denis Hickie made his first hole in the opposing defence when he burst away from loose play, found Wigglesworth up for the pass and Alberto Andreucetti completed the job with a dynamic dash over the last ten yards. In the 32nd minute Hickie charged down a clearance by Lynam and whipped up the bouncing ball to cover 20 yards to the line, but Quinn raised Lansdowne's drooping spirits with a 20 yards penalty goal just before the interval.

Such was the intensity of St. Mary's pressure on the resumption that their third try came as no surprise, and it was beautifully contrived by Murphy, serving Kennedy and coming outside the centre to take the next pass. A long pass to Grace gave the wing all the space he needed to surge past Becker and Meredith in a diagonal sprint for the corner flag, for a try of the highest quality.

St. Mary's moved out any fear of being caught when Murphy picked up a pass off his toes in the 20th minute and in a curving run to the left spotted a gap near the line through which he cut like a knife. As he grounded the ball he collided heavily with the corner flag and had to retire, after which Lansdowne made their last fling for survival, which, however, yielded no more than a try by Inglis, who forced a passage from a ruck on the line 8 minutes from the end, Quinn converting.

St. Mary's College—A. Hickie, T. Grace, J. Kennedy, P. Andreucetti, A. Young, H. Murphy, J. Moloney, A. Egan, A. Andreucetti, J. Feighery, M. Gleeson, P. O'Reilly, J. Wigglesworth, D. Hickie, P. Doyle.

Lansdowne—J. Meredith, A. McMahon, G. Gleeson, J. Kerin, A. Becker, M. Quinn, B. Lynam, D. Power, B. Troy, M. Dwyer, C. Feighery, M. Keane, J. Gray, P. Inglis, J. Feighery.

Referee—J. R. West (Leinster).

RUGBY IN BRIEF

International—England 7, France 26.

Leinster Senior Cup (semi-final)—

Bective Rangers 23, Wanderers 9.

St. Mary's 19, Lansdowne 9. Provincial Towns Cup (final)—Swords 6, Arklow 0.

Monster Senior Cup (final)—Garry-

moren 29, Shannon 6. Junior Cup (final)—

Waterpark 16, Dolphin 11.

Connacht Senior Cup (final)—U.C.G.

16, Ashmont 9.

Ulster Senior Cup (final)—C.I.Y.M.S.

16, Renshaw 6.

ANDERSON CUP (North Kildare 8

(R. McLennan, T. Stafford train), Drogh-

eda 4 (N. Gordon try).

IRISH TIMES, MONDAY, APRIL 22, 1974



The St. Mary's scrum-half, John Moloney, finds himself caught in the Lansdowne cover, in the second Leinster Senior Cup semi-final at Lansdowne Road on Saturday.

—(Photo: Dermot O'Shea.)