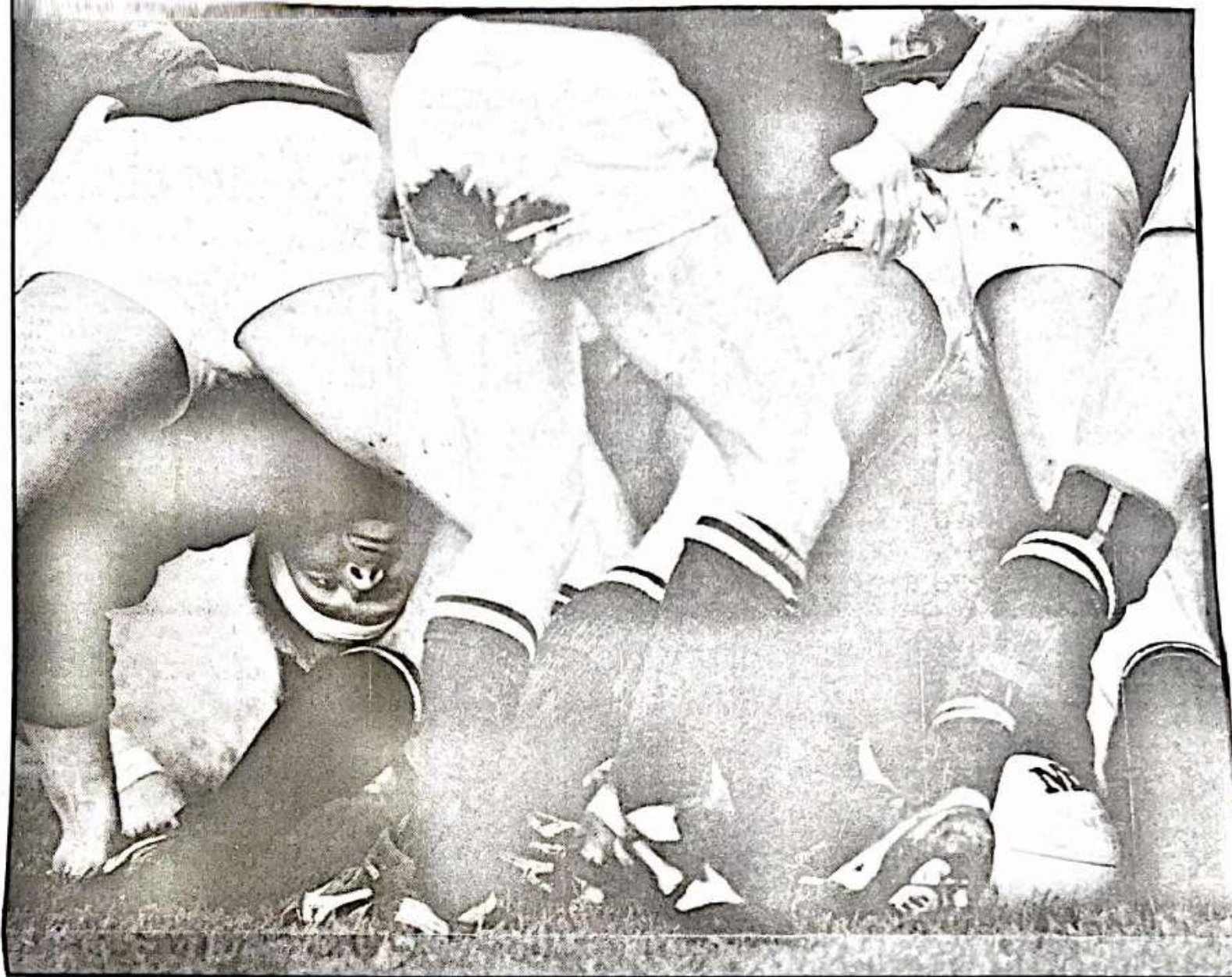




Ballymena's Dean McCartney keeps an eye on the ball at Templeville Road yesterday

INPHO/BILLY STICKLAND

Mary's escape after second half flourish

ST MARY'S COLLEGE 12

BALLYMENA 7

From Brendan Fanning at Templeville Road

ST MARY'S: S Hennessy; T Gillen, V Cunningham, R Hernan (capt), A White; P MacGiolla Ríogh, S O'Beirne; B Keane, D Whitty, C O'Brien; K Potts, S Jameson; B Gavin, P Kenny, N McCarthy.

BALLYMENA: P Rainey capt; P Davidson, M Rainey, O Smith, D Smyth; D MacAleese, R Brady; S Booth, S Smith, B McKenzie; T Lowry, D Tweed; D McCartney, B Robinson, W Pollock. Sub: J McCartney for D McCartney.

Referee: R McDowell (Munster)

IN every one of their league games so far this season St Mary's had waited until the second half to start playing. It cost them dearly against Constitution and Garryowen, they survived against Wanderers and remarkably they did it again against Ballymena.

The northern side opened the match with the wind at their backs and revenge on their minds. Last week it was the light blue of Garryowen, who had inflicted on Bally-

mena their first league defeat. This week it was a blue of a darker colour but the crest on the jersey was the same and the northern boys went about their business impressively.

They simply owned the lineouts where 'flu victim Declan Fanning was badly missed by Mary's. Davy Tweed, Tim Lowry and Brian Robinson had a field day. And after a promising start at the scrummage, Mary's began back-peddalling

on their own ball. They competed manfully in the loose, and none moreso than flanker Noel McCarthy, but were doing so against a pack who always held the initiative. And inevitably it forced them into conceding penalties.

Ballymena outhalf, Derek McAleese punished the first after four minutes with a good 35 metre penalty for Mary's going over the top at a ruck. But McAleese and Philip Rainey missed subsequent kickable awards, and if they didn't seem all that important at the time, they certainly did around 4pm.

After half an hour the game had its first try when scrumhalf Rab Brady fed his back row from a scrum. Pol-

lock, Robinson and McCartney all handled before winger Davy Smyth, who later found himself fielding more garryowens than he would have wanted, was held up on the line. The resultant scrum was collapsed and Tweed smuggled his way over from the tapped penalty. Seven points up, no conversion and still Mary's struggled to get involved.

Just before half time, Kevin Potts led the shake-up when his charge for the line was held up and followed by flanker Barry Gavin who was stopped at the price of a penalty and three vital points for the returned Steve Hennessy.

They opened the second half as they should have the game, and within five min-

utes they were ahead. A reasonably steady Mary's scrum on the right saw the ball move left, Cunningham was missed out and looped Hernan in midfield, Hennessy came into the line and Cunningham popped up again to support winger Aiden White and score an excellent try. Hennessy's conversion went in off the post and thereafter everything went their way.

The scrum improved, the lineout was shared rather than conceded, and as Ballymena tried to run everything, the previously absent tackles materialised. Scrumhalf, Seanie O'Beirne, added a penalty in the closing minutes to complete the revival. And what a revival it was.

Brave Mary's halt Ballymena

ST. MARY'S COL.....	12 pts
BALLYMENA.....	7 pts

By Kieran Rooney

ST. MARY'S COLLEGE severely dented Ballymena's All Ireland League Division One title ambitions by coming from behind to defeat the Ulster side in an exciting contest at Templeville Road yesterday.

And St. Mary's have every right to take a good deal of satisfaction from the win. When they were forced to field without number eight Declan Fanning, out-half Garoid Doyle and wing Ben Kealy the situation looked far from promising.

It appeared even worse after Ballymena established a 7-0 advantage in the first half. Ballymena were at this stage much the more effective side, dominating the line-outs through second-row Davy Tweed and generally dictating the pattern of the game.

But a vital penalty from full-back Stephen Hennesy just before the interval gave St. Mary's the encouragement they needed. Helped by the breeze in the second half, they showed considerable character to overhaul their rivals.

With wing-forward Noel McCarthy proving an inspirational figure, their forwards lifted their game and the backs repounded by scoring a beautifully worked try through impressive international centre Vincent Cunningham five minutes after the break.

Hennesy, a late call-up in the St. Mary's reshuffle, put over the conversion from near the touchline to leave St. Mary's 9-7 ahead and in a tense finish scrum-half Sean O'Beirne added a penalty three minutes from time.

St. Mary's College — S. Hennesy; A. Gillen, V. Cunningham, R. Hernan (Capt), A. White; P. MacGiolla Riogh, S. O'Beirne; B. Keane, D. Whitty, C. O'Brien, K. Potts, S. Jameson, B. Gavin, P. Kenny, N. McCarthy.

Ballymena — P. Rainey (Capt); P. Davidson, M. Rainey, O. Smith, D. Smyth; D. McAleese, R. Brady; S. Booth, S. Smith, B. McKenzie, T. Lowry, D. Tweed, D. McCarthy, B. Robinson, W. Pollock. Replacement: J. McCarthy for D. McCarthy.

Referee — R. McDowell (Munster).



ON THE BREAK: St Mary's centre Vincent Cunningham has team-mates Brian Keane (left) and Stephen Hennessy in support as he races for the Ballymena line at Templeville Road on Saturday. — (Photograph: Peter Thursfield)

Another surprise as St Mary's triumph

ST MARY'S.....12
BALLYMENA..... 7

Gerry Thornley

AT the beginning of the season it would hardly have seemed credible that Ballymena would effectively be out of contention at the half-way point of the inaugural league. Approaching half-time at Templeville Road on Saturday it seemed equally incredible to think that St Mary's would emerge deserving winners. But there you have it, this All-Ireland League has many good traits and uppermost amongst them is its wonderful unpredictability.

On the day when the Limerick clubs' 100 per cent records were left in shreds by crushing defeats for both Shannon and Young Munster, this St Mary's victory did not qualify as the shock of the day by any means, yet it was a huge surprise in its own right. Furthermore, the result has immense repercussions for both teams.

Not unreasonably, given their sharp decline last season compared to the previous two, St Mary's were regarded as the weakest of the three Leinster representatives in Division One. However, thanks to home victories over the respective league and cup holders in Leinster and Ulster, St Mary's

approach next week's away fixture to pointless Malone secure in the knowledge that victory at Gibson Park will give them a six point cushion for their three games in January. It is now not unreasonable to predict that they will finish the best of the Leinster trio and certainly relegation now appears distinctly remote.

Whereas St Mary's may thus be able to relax and enjoy their run-in, Ballymena will need their extended Christmas break (they are idle next week) to recover from the shock to their system.

Ballymena produced the best passages of running, handling and support play, even if St Mary's did produce the move of the match for the try of the match. The best means of overcoming Ballymena is to "get in among them" and prevent them from establishing any sort of handling rhythm — in short be destructive. By all accounts this is what Garryowen did last week and, drawing inspiration from that, St Mary's set out to do the same.

For much of the first-half they singularly failed; the late withdrawal of left winger Ben Kealy, out-half Gearoid Doyle and, most significantly, inspirational number eight Declan Fanning not helping their cause. Ballymena hooker Steve Smith, showing the better side of his character after last week's unsavoury publicity, handled the

ball more than anyone on the pitch. Timmy Lowry and Davey Tweed had the measure of Kevin Potts and Steve Jameson at the front and middle of the line outs, while flanker John McCartney and Brian Robinson reigned supreme at the tail. Only in the loose, where flanker Noel McCarthy performed with typical gusto, could St Mary's compete adequately up front.

A fifth minute penalty by Derek McAleese and a 32nd minute short-range try from a tap penalty by Tweed were the least Ballymena deserved, though Philip Rainey missed a 23rd minute penalty and, when you would have safely bet a week's groceries on him, McAleese pulled a 25th minute penalty wide from no more than 27 metres to the left of the posts.

The ensuing turnaround was remarkable and can be attributed to three key factors. Having spent much of the first-half clutching forlornly in the air, St Mary's transformed a first-half deficit of 4-13 in the line-outs to a second-half count of 10-8, thanks to Jameson and, in the main, an inspired Potts. Secondly, the porous nature of the St Mary's midfield, which enabled the Ballymena centres Oliver Smith and Michael Rainey to make lengthy breaks in the first-half, was tightened up considerably and the abiding memories of an exciting final quarter were two crunching tackles by

Ray Hernan on Oliver Smith and Philip Rainey. Thirdly, St Mary's bombarded the Ballymena left-winger Davey Smyth, cruelly exposing his buttery hands and defensive frailties.

Steve Hennessy, recalled late in the week, struck an important penalty into the wind in first-half injury time, and then added a touchline conversion via the upright to Vincent Cunningham's 45th minute try after the classy Irish centre had looped around Hernan and then Hennessy to score in the corner. St Mary's lost a five yard strike against the head and Hennessy saw a 61st minute penalty rebound from the post before Sean O'Beirne landed a 78th minute short-range penalty harshly awarded against the unfortunate Smyth for not releasing the ball.

The turnaround had been entirely in keeping with the fitful trend of St Mary's matches thus far. In all four games they have handed the initial running to the opposition. Should they ever begin a first-half as they begin the second they will be one helluva side.

ST MARY'S: S. Hennessy, T. Gilen, V. Cunningham, R. Hernan (capt), A. White, P. MacGillivray, S. O'Beirne, B. Keane, D. Whitty, C. O'Brien, K. Potts, S. Jameson, B. Gavan, N. McCarthy, P. Rainey.
BALLYMENA: P. Rainey (capt), P. Davidson, M. Rainey, O. Smith, D. Smyth, D. McAleese, R. Brady, S. Booth, S. Smith, B. McKenzie, T. Lowry, D. Tweed, D. McCartney, W. Pollack, B. Robinson. Replacement — J. McCartney for D. McCartney (half-time).
Referee: R. McDowell (Munster)

biggest league defeat

Magnificent Munster!

THAT the long-awaited breath of fresh air, the All-Ireland League, is now highly successfully permeating Irish rugby is dramatically illustrated by the newspaper reports of Saturday's games.



BY SEAN DIFLEY

filling a train, several coaches, not to mention the array of private cars.

And that sort of "away" support has been a feature of the ALL, particularly in the enthusiasm of the Munster clubs.

And why should this competition be turning out to be such a triumph for Munster, with their three first division sides, Garryowen, Constitution and Shannon filling the top three places in the League at the halfway stage?

The answer I received in the happy aftermath of the match at Temple Hill on Saturday was: "This is just an extension of a typical Munster Cup campaign and all which that entails. Now the whole country is learning what it means."

And the whole country certainly is. gone are the days when club matches of importance were observed by a man and a dog. The lively impact of competition is

making all the difference and the impact is now, for the first time in Irish rugby history, a national one not just a provincial affair.

PROFESSIONAL

It is significant too, that Constitution and Garryowen, in particular, have mounted a highly professional approach to the organisation of their home ties. Their attention to media requirements is an indication of their respect for the interests of the general rugby public.

The position now in division one is (number of matches played in brackets): 8 pts., Garryowen (4); Constitution (5). 6 pts., Shannon (4). 5 pt., Ballymena (5). 4 pt., St. Mary's (4); Lansdowne (4). 3 pts., Instonians (3). 2 pt., Wanderers (5). Zero pts., Malone (5).

Each side will play eight matches in the ALL. In division two, the Munster onslaught is much more muted with Old Wesley leading the way for Leinster with a full 10 points from their five matches.

Bangor are next, a point behind with Young Munster, following that hiccup

against Greystones now three points off the lead.

Next Saturday the first division leaders, Garryowen are at Lansdowne Road to meet Lansdowne, Constitution go north to take on Instonians and Shannon are at home against visiting Wanderers.

St. Mary's, having beaten off the considerable challenge of Ballymena are well fancied to gain further points at the expense of the luckless Malone in Gibson Park.

After Saturday's ties the Interprovincial Championship takes over and the ALL will not be resumed until January 5, 12 and 26 when the last three series take place.

One interesting development, halfway through this inaugural ALL, is that the clubs are beginning to realise that the IRFU were probably right after all: that the demand for the five division competition may not be a good idea and that the IRFU may be given the green light to persist with the present formula for a while longer.

HALCYON

And the League leaders, Garryowen, we read, "ran in four superb ties" at Dooradoyle against Malone.

For the first time since the halcyon days of the forties and fifties the crowds are returning to watch club fare. The full-house of over 4,000 at Temple Hill was a ground record. Shannon came from Limerick,

Acrossi ravelis in