

Malone's first victory

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FIVE SUCCESSIVE defeats since the start of their campaign in Division One of the All-Ireland League had projected Malone into the unwanted role as favourites for relegation. That was all, however, in advance of Saturday's spirited victory over St. Mary's at Gibson Park — a victory that not only provided Malone with their first brace of league points but, perhaps more importantly, provided the basis for real hope that they can now scramble a mid-table position.

With a pack that worked ceaselessly in both tight and loose and an enterprising half back partnership in Michael Niblock and Stephen Cowan, Malone revealed the kind of form that St Mary's found difficult to contain especially in the earlier stages of the match.

Malone's ability to secure comfortable possession in the line out through Ulster player Colin Morrison proved a decided asset and their rucking skills often enabled

them to launch incisive attacks which invariably stretched the St Mary's cover. Yet it was St Mary's who looked the more purposeful side in the initial stages and they deservedly took the lead with an Aidan White penalty.

Malone, with Cowan particularly active at scrum half, drove forward and when St Mary's were penalised Niblock brought the sides level from the resultant penalty. The St Mary's pack revealed their pace and workrate in the loose and White kicked his second penalty to put his team 6-3 in front.

However, in the 18th minute Malone achieved a significant breakthrough. The forwards created a useful platform of possession and when the ball was eventually whisked to Noel Thompson the winger sped in for a fine try which Niblock failed to convert.

This was just the boost Malone needed and for the next ten minutes they looked anything but a side still searching for their first league win. A sustained bout of pressure culminated in Maurice

Field spearing his way in for the home team's second try and although Niblock failed to convert Malone looked comfortable with their 11-6 advantage.

MALONE — C Wilkinson; S Hookes, N Holmes, M Field, N Thompson; M Niblock, S Cowan; R Mackie, M Graham, M Smyth, C Morrisson, G Ellis; W Duncan, S Kirkpatrick, D McBride.

ST MARY'S — A White; A Gillen, R Heman, v Cunningham, A McAvoy; P Rough, S Tracey, C O'Brien, R Whitley, B Keane, K Potts, S Jameson, P Kenny, B Gavin, N McCarthy.

Referee: B Smyth (Munster).

Munster schoolboys clinch title

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Munster's long run of success in the schools interprovincial championship against Leinster continued at Thomond Park on Saturday. By winning 10-6 Munster clinched the title for the first time since 1985 and they did so in front of a surprisingly big crowd of almost 1,000.