



Derek Dowling makes a break for St Mary's during the All-Ireland League Division One match against Ballymena at Templeville Road on Saturday - (Photograph: Paddy Whelan)

St Mary's easily brush aside Ballymena's listless challenge

AH! Remember the days when we were on the verge of the Brave New World of the All Ireland Rugby League and we rubbed our chins and wondered how the Munster primitives would cope with the disheartening humiliations about to be dispensed by the sophisticates of Ulster and Leinster, of which Ballymena were the pick of the bunch. It seems a long, long time ago doesn't it.

On Saturday, at Templeville Road, one had to wonder about the innocence of it all. Ballymena threw in the towel long before the end of a listless game and handed the points to a home side still in the process of coalescing into a team.

Two defeats in their opening three games effectively ends the northern side's interest in the

title. Unless their injury crisis is solved pretty snappily, they will lose more heavily to better teams than St Mary's before the season is out.

Without Derek McAleese applying his wise but well worn boot to the ball from the outhalf cockpit, Ballymena look like a rudderless side. Territory was claimed slowly and uncertainly, forward play was tentative and back play was predictable. When St Mary's enlivened the afternoon with their splendid opening try, Ballymena collapsed like hypochondriacs who had just been pronounced terminally ill.

What the first win of the campaign means to the hospitable home side remains to be seen. Their forwards performed admirably against Ballymena and the rugged and inspirational play of Brent Pope and Steve Jameson seems to show to better effect now that Tim Coughlan has ar-

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Tom Humphries

rived from Old Belvedere. On Saturday, however, the newly imported half back pair of Mark Thorne and Nicky Barry looked as if they had just been introduced, to each other and the game of rugby.

Nicky Barry started breezily enough, nonchalantly popping over a drop goal in the first minute with a confidence that augured well. For the remainder of the game, however, he was nervous and out of sorts and his apparent loss of concentration did little to compensate for Thorne's erratic service. Both players can perform infinitely better and St Mary's will be looking forward to

reaping the fruits when they do.

Until then, it would appear to be Aidan White's duty to provide the inspiration. The sides were divided by Barry's drop goal when the half time whistle put an end to a dreary opening period. White had traded two penalties with Stuart Laing and a try seemed like a rather remote prospect.

Then in the 52nd minute, White gathered a drop-out inside his own half and made off on a lateral run, selling a couple of outrageous dummies before releasing to Vinnie Cunningham whose quick transfer to David Wall let the latter in at the corner.

White converted the try that he had created and St Mary's subsequently established residence in Ballymena territory. Yet, while they settled in well, they showed no great desire to extend their lead and the game was in the

dying minutes when an ill-judged sortie by Stuart Laing ended badly.

Kevin Devlin committed aggravated burglary and released the loot for laundering. The process ended with White bursting over for a well deserved try which he converted and supplemented with a penalty just before the final whistle.

St Mary's took an undisguised delight in the acquisition of their first points but with the more familiar and probably more daunting foe of Old Wesley looming next week, they can't yet count themselves among the frontrunners.

ST MARY'S: - A White, A Gillen, G Levin, V Cunningham, D Wall, N Barry, M Thorne, B Keane, M Corcoran, D Dowling, T Coughlan, S Jameson (capt); K Polla, K Devlin, B Pope.
BALLYMENA: - D Nicholl, P Davidson, M Rainey, O Smith, D Smith, S Laing, M Robson, S Booth, S Smith, N McKiernan, S Lusk, D Allen, B Logan, K Andrew (capt); C Wallace.
Referee - R McDowell (Munster)

White only bright spark in a bore

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By Mick Doyle

APPROXIMATELY 60 minutes into this boring game a script for Scrap Saturday was beginning to take form.

On a sunny Saturday afternoon in front of an expectant throng of about 500 believing souls a severely depleted Ballymena side, which in no way represented their club's playing strength, and the selected St. Marys team put on a most underwhelming display of ineptitude.

It was as if both sides wanted to teach their coaches a lesson, make every possible mistake in the book and show one and all how the game should not be played at this level.

Only the news that South Africa were giving England a run their money kept the spirits alive. The tangible efforts St. Marys have made in beautifying their grounds and improving facilities surely deserved better than this charade.

The odd flurry of activity by both packs was followed invariably by the backlines giving possession away. It was lethargic and pointless. Both sides were intent on suicidally bringing the threequarter in possession back into the forwards (with the expected consequences) as their only attempt at back play.

The only name for it was Thick Rugby and that was being kind.

Not once in the first half hour was there any attempt at an intelligent back movement. Individually, of course, some players tried to establish a pattern to the play, notably Pope, Dowling, Corcoran and Devlin in the Marys pack with White and Lavin using their heads in their back line.

Laing, normally a full back, was at fly-half for Ballymena and tried to open up play but his efforts were falling on stony ground. Robson at scrum-half, wing forwards Andrews, Smith, Booth and Lusk tried hard but nothing seemed to click.

By half-time Aidan White had kicked two penalties for Marys and Nicky Barry had dropped an excellent goal; two penalties by Laing was Ballymena's lot.

Marys seemed to have brought themselves to wakefulness during the half-time interval and with new impetus from Pope, Mick Corcoran, Jameson and Dowling and plenty of line-out possession from the agile Coughlan, they were able to mount more concentrated attacks.

However it was Aidan White, a very aristocratic full back, who came to the rescue of this game and with his expert fielding, kicking and counter attacking; he sold some outrageous dummies, too, and kept his team regularly on the offensive.

Centres Lavin and Cunningham and Wall on the wing all had moments but it was often frantic and haphazard. The half back pairing of Thorne and Barry did not work as it should, although both are good players.

This potentially good St. Marys back line will not progress until Barry stands deeper and gives his outsides more space and less pressure. Only then can they create the try scoring situations that they obviously crave.

The line-out all too often is the predictable tap without variation. They are a team who appear to have the air of the tune but need to write a couple of basic scripts.

Ballymena were difficult to assess, being denuded by many defections.

For the record, in the second half the scorers were White and Wall with two good tries converted by White and the game finished on an expertly struck penalty goal from White.

St. Marys: White; Gillen, Lavin, Cunningham, Wall; Barry, Thorne; Keane, Corcoran, Dowling, Coughlan, Jameson, Potts, Devlin, Pope.

Ballymena: Nichol; Davidson, Rainey, Smith, Smyth; Laing, Robson; Booth, S Smith, McKernan, Lusk, Allen, Logan, Andrew, Wallace. Subs: Simpson for Logan (14 mins), Chambers for Davidson (56 mins).

