



■ **ON HIS WAY . . .** St. Mary's College No. 8 **Brent Pope**, with **Kevin Potts** in support, slips the tackle of Blackrock College's **John McGovern** and (inset) powers his way over for a try during the Leinster Senior Cup match at Stradbroke Road yesterday.

Picture by Austin Finn

Pope leads the way

John Redmond

Blackrock College 10

A. McGowan, try, con, pen gl.

St. Mary's College 23

A. White 2 pen gls, 2 cons, N. Barry dr, gl, B. Pope try.

S. Jamieson try.

Mean Of The Month

Brent Pope

Attendance: 1,500

YOU could readily appreciate how New Zealander Brent Pope did not want to depart St. Mary's College leaving behind the stigma of being sent off in the All Ireland League decider against Young Munster.

So, you could therefore understand why he punched the air in celebration of the try he scored against Blackrock College at Stradbrook yesterday. It effectively defeated the holders in the very opening round of the Leinster Senior Cup.

Pope heads home today after a distinguished season's contribution to St.

Mary's, although since he was at the very heart of yesterday's victory, his absence will surely be felt.

The belief that the provincial cup competitions have lost their value in the shadow of the All Ireland league was contradicted by the vexed undercurrent to a game that, however, failed to match in quality the spirited effort up front.

Referee Gordon Black was so busy trying to ensure that a melee did not materialise that he did not see the blatant knock-on by Blackrock Alan McGowan late in the game as the out-half scored a try which he also converted.

It was very much of the consolation category, as by then St. Mary's were riding it out, victory assured on the back of the class back row performance by Pope, Devlin and Potts, with no little help by the equally industrious Michael Corcoran.

The St. Mary's winning margin would have been appreciably greater but for a poor performance by their backs, who toiled at centre in the absence of Vincent Cunningham.

As well as Pope's solo run from the back of a scrum for his try, prominent St. Mary's added a second try when captain Steve Jameson got over as they ran a close penalty.

Fullback White landed both conversions from under the post. He also kicked two penalties, while Nicky Barry, not having his best ever game, landed a try goal.

Blackrock had started encouragingly with an early penalty from McGowan but it is an apt reflection on the game that they did not score again until three minutes from time and then courtesy of the referee failing to see the knock on that every else in the ground seemed to detect.

ST. MARY'S COLLEGE: A. White, A. Gullen, R. Horan, G. Lawin, D. Wall, N. Barry, M. Thorne, B. Keane, M. Corcoran, D. Dowling, T. Connelley, S. Jameson, K. Potts, B. Pope, K. Devlin. **Referee:** G. Halpin (for Barr).

BLACKROCK COLLEGE: D. Beery, P. O'Brien, B. Mullin, M. Ridge, A. Sharkey, A. McGowan, N. Assel, D. Kavanagh, S. Byrne, B. Byrne, M. O'Neill, N. Francis, F. O'Brien, V. Costello, J. McGovern. **Referee:** G. Black.

Schools places filled

IRISH SCHOOLS B 32

IRISH YOUTHS 7

THE Irish Schools selectors met yesterday to fill the vacant places in the Irish Schools team to meet Wales in the forthcoming Four Nations championship at Ebbw Vale next Saturday.

Joeey Power (Kings Hospital) and **John Ryan** (Blackrock College) will play in the second row and Kieran Dawson from Bangor Grammar School will be the open side wing forward.

In a one-sided match at Templeville, the Schools B side won by 32 points to seven running in six tries, two of them coming from Richard McCloskey (Methodist College, Belfast).

Subs for Irish School Team: Aleric Turtle (Campbell College) full back, Joeey Muldowney (Terenure College) out-half, Brian O'Mara (PBC) scrum half, Andrew Bermingham (St Munchans) back row, Raymond Crosbie (Omagh Academical) prop, Alan Linnane (Belvedere College) hooker.

Pope guides St Mary's to victory

IT was not so much a case of who wanted to win most, as who wanted to lose least. In this respect Saturday's Smithwicks Leinster Cup first-round tie was no different from many others since the advent of the All-Ireland League.

In the end, the need to avoid defeat burned greater in the St Mary's ranks, following their anti-climactic AIL campaign against Blackrock. By contrast, Blackrock had no sense of failure, having achieved their primary aim this season, namely promotion.

Little about this tie was surprising. As has been the case for the last three years the value of this competition was left in question, its stature diminished since the advent of the national league. The end-of-season cup campaigns, it would seem, can only be resuscitated by the advent of a national cup as well.

The list of distinguished absentees strengthened this feeling. Blackrock's Otago prop Steve Cumberland had returned home to England, as had Barry O'Mahoney, while Alain Rolland, like the St Mary's centre Vincent Cunningham, were playing in the Hong Kong Sevens. (Blackrock's flying winger Niall Woods would also have been in Hong Kong but for a torn hamstring).

All, of course, were perfectly entitled to do as they wished, but the clubs and the players might have had a different attitude had this been an AIL tie.

Clearly Blackrock's losses were the greater, the net result of these and other upheavals being that only six of last year's cup final winners were back in harness for the defence of their crown. By contrast, St Mary's retained all but Cunningham of the team that lost to Young Munster and they also retained enough good habits to win through without undue bother.

Central to their supremacy up front was their rolling maul, which trundled forward repeatedly and was invariably applied at key moments. The much coveted Brent Pope was the driving force, leading by example.

While, ironically, Blackrock have been among his most ardent suitors, the Otago number eight, who is expected to become a naturalised Irishman in time for next season and has already been earmarked for Leinster's squad, has pledged his continuing allegiance to St Mary's. This will be a major morale boost to all his teammates, one of whom describes him as "simply the best forward I have ever played with."

Pope is the pivot in a very well-balanced back-row, where Kevin Potts has now emerged as a num-

BLACKROCK	10
ST MARY'S	23

Gerry Thornley

ber six of such strength that an Irish cap is now surely probable rather than possible. Operating beside them is the waspish Kevin Devlin, who buzzed all over the pitch on Saturday.

With Tim Coughlan and captain Steve Jameson (captains remain supremely motivated for these Cup campaigns even if all their team-mates don't) winning the bulk of the line-out ball, Blackrock had no real platform with which to launch their backs. Consequently their lively back-line only managed to make any inroads by the time they had fallen 23-3 behind.

No doubt Neil Francis was cited by the alikadoos as a cause of Blackrock's difficulties, but the unlucky, injury-prone second-row at least lifted himself to win all Blackrock's throw-ins on their own line — as is his wont. Alas, Francis looked for all the world like a player who had just missed out on some rare Irish wins and a Lions place, and hence found not just his season but his career at something of a cul de sac.

The net result was that St Mary's led all the way, a penalty by Aiden White and a drop goal by Nicky Barry on either side of an Alan McGowan penalty earning them a less than flattering 6-3 interval lead. The absence of Cunningham showed in some ill-conceived and congested midfield moves.

It was left to Pope to pick up from a scrum on the 22 three minutes into the second half and crash through Johnny McGovern's tackle for a try which White goaled. Still keeping it amongst themselves, the St Mary's pack engineered another maul from a close-range penalty for Jameson to plunge over the line, White converting before adding a penalty.

McGowan sparked a fruitless late rally when following up his own Garryowen to score after a spot of basketball, unseen by Gordon Black, for a slightly unreal try which he also converted.

McGowan's dogged fervour can be explained. Up until this game he had never lost a cup tie, from under-13s at Williamstown through Junior Cup, two Schools Senior Cups, McCorry Cup and then last year's Senior Cup. Though he must have doubted it, you can't, after all, win them all.

BLACKROCK COLLEGE: D Baggly, P O'Brien, B Mullin (capt), M Ridge, A Sharkey, A McGowan, N Asaif, D Kavanagh, B Byrne, B Byrne, M O'Neill, N Francis, F O'Beirne, V Coello, J McGovern.

ST MARY'S COLLEGE: A White, A Gillen, R Hernan, G Larvin, D Wall, N Barry, M Thorne, B Keane, M Corcoran, O Dowling, T Coughlan, B Jameson (capt), K Potts, B Pope, K Devlin. Replacement — G Heipon for Barry (64 mins). Referee: G Black (ARLB).

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TEXTBOOK STYLE... St Mary's full-back Aidan White scores one of his two penalties during Saturday's Leinster Senior, Cup first-round tie against Blackrock at Stradbroke. — (Photograph: Eric Luke).

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