

St Mary's scupper hopes of league champions for double

Leinster title for Juniors

ST MARY'S 15
DUNDALK 9

DUNDALK'S brave bid to become only the second junior club to win the Junior One League foundered at Donnybrook yesterday as St Mary's retained the title with a victory which was by no means as comprehensive as the scoreline would suggest.

A resilient St Mary's were never more than six points behind and, crucially, they took almost every chance which came their way.

Leading 6-3 at the interval, Dundalk increased that advantage with a penalty by out-half Gerry O'Hara early in the second-half.

However, St Mary's kept plugging away, and the excellent Steve Hennessy landed three penalties in the space of five minutes to give his side a 12-9 cushion. The experienced full-back then put the game out of Dundalk's reach with his fifth penalty, in injury time.

O'Hara, who didn't have the best of days with his place kicking, dropped a goal and landed a penalty during a first-half

ST MARY'S: S Hennessy, S Butler, P Conlon, R Hernan, T Moran, G Halpin, J Muldoon, G Kelly, J Carvill (capt), C Shanley, F Dolan, C Potts, M McLoughlin, F Fitzgerald, D Fanning.

DUNDALK: D Croucher, D McCabe, C Poole, J Visage, R Rooney, G O'Hara, B Woods, J McKeivitt, C Herr, P Finnegan, R Shaktleton, P Hughes, M Halperny (capt), C Meegan, R Vorster.

ST MARY'S 17
LANDSDOWNE 6

Dermot Gilleece

good performances to our credit this season, and it would be nice to have something to show for those efforts."

They certainly didn't play like nearly-men. Indeed, there was a sparkling authority, particularly in a forward effort which eventually snuffed out some determined Lansdowne resistance. Despite fine jumping by Lansdowne's Paul O'Connor, Mary's dominated the line-out through Jameson and Tim Coughlan, while in the loose their forwards were irreplaceable.

That, added to the fine, penetrative running of their backs, particularly Aidan White, Cunningham and out-half Nicky Barry, made it somewhat surprising that they were limited to only one try. In truth, they were extremely hard done by not to have had another in the 51st minute when a brilliant move, initiated by Cunningham deep inside his own half, involved nine players, backs and forwards, before scrum-half Mark Thorne was held

up within a few feet of the Lansdowne line.

In view of their limited possession, Lansdowne desperately needed something special from Eric Elwood. For the international out-half, however, it was one of those forgettable days when his normal, delightful coordination seemed to desert him, even in the execution of dead-ball kicks.

Meanwhile, Mary's laid the necessary groundwork in the opening half. Solid in the tight, their forwards were particularly effective in pursuit of the loose ball, and the absence of Brent Pope, who has returned to New Zealand, was hardly noticeable, such was the back-row commitment of Kevin Potts, Philip Kennedy and Kevin Devlin. Indeed, Devlin was outstanding.

Lansdowne's best effort at a try came as early as the fourth minute when open-side flanker Andy Doyle gained possession after a quick line-out. In a surge down the left touchline, however, he took the surprising option of passing inside when one felt he might have made better progress on his own.

The St Mary's try came 10 minutes later. Cunningham made the initial break before passing to Gary Lavin who, in turn, sent

Michael Corcoran clear. The supporting position of the hooker was perhaps typical of his pack's mobility, and he did particularly well in breaking through an attempted tackle by Elwood before scoring at the corner.

A splendid, all-round performance by White was enhanced by four penalty goals; he was unlucky not to have had another when, just before half-time, an effort from a difficult angle on the right hit the near upright. By that stage the score was 14-6 in Mary's favour and Lansdowne had already completed their tally — two penalty goals from Elwood.

Mary's could afford to relax somewhat during the second-half without even marginally jeopardising their final place. And so, they created a little bit of history by becoming the first club to win a Leinster Senior Cup semi-final at Donnybrook since the competition was inaugurated 111 years ago.

ST MARY'S: A White, A Gillan, V Cunningham, G Lavin, D Wall, N Barry, M Thorne, B Keane, M Corcoran, D Dowling, T Coughlan, S Jameson, K Potts, P Kenny, K Devlin. **Replacements** — G Halpin for Wall (16 mins), J Muldoon for Cunningham (65 mins).

LANDSDOWNE: C Wheahan, M Dillon, G Ahern, B Glennon, B Casey, E Elwood, F Ahern, T Clancy, M Brady, A McKeen, P O'Connor, J Heanion, C Quinn, P Ward, C Quinn. **Referee:** S Buggy (ARLB).

IT MAY not have been the pinnacle of their aspirations for the season, but a place for St Mary's in next Saturday's Leinster Senior Cup final against Old Wesley has become eminently acceptable. They will probably need to find a replacement, however, for left-wing David Wall, who damaged knee ligaments in this semi-final victory at Donnybrook on Saturday.

But concern about Wall was more than offset by the anticipated well-being of international centre Vincent Cunningham, who was also replaced because of injury. "It's no more than a slight thigh strain — I should be fine," he said.

This was a splendid performance by Mary's who decisively scuppered Lansdowne hopes of adding the cup to their All-Ireland League second division title. And it made the Templeville side clear favourites to regain a trophy which they last won in 1987.

"It would be unrealistic to talk about the cup as compensation for our failure to win the league, which is obviously the ultimate target," said Mary's skipper Steve Jameson. "But we are a good, competitive side with a lot of