

Shannon reveal strength in depth

AGAINST the background of his break with the game at international level, Ciaran Fitzgerald must have had inescapable feelings of *déjà vu* after this Insurance Corporation League match at Thomond Park on Saturday.

As coach to St Mary's, he was telling the media that: "We were well in the match until the second half when the physical demands took their toll. There's no substitute for experience."

Interestingly, it was one of the less experienced of the Shannon players who dominated a sparkling performance by the home pack. Anthony Foley, a member of Shannon's all-conquering under-20 side of last season, displayed enormous potential as a driving, number eight forward, particularly when breaking two tackles for their third try.

Fitzgerald was suitably im-

pressed but with a slight qualification. "His football instincts are excellent," said the former Ireland coach and Lions captain. "He is a tremendous, hard-driving forward." Had he international potential? "Certainly. He may be a little small (6ft 2½ ins) as a number eight but there is always the option of playing him at number six."

In their four seasons as a first division league club, Shannon have finished fourth, second, seventh and eighth. Their meeting with champions Garryowen next Sunday should indicate whether they are now ready to challenge for the top.

"We're learning but we've got to learn fast," cautioned skipper Pat Murray, with the Garryowen match in mind. The most heartening aspect of this tie from a Shannon stand-

SHANNON.....20
ST MARY'S6

Dermot Gilleece

point was a free-scoring second-half performance in which they added 12 points to a half-time lead of 8-6. Indeed all of their points came from the 23rd minute on, by which stage Foley had given the lead to his colleagues with some devastating surges.

There was also evidence of formidable strength in depth. In the 19th minute of the second-half, international second-row Michael Galwey departed the scene with a twisted left ankle. While no reflection is intended on Galwey's contribution — he expects to be fit for next weekend — the fact remains that the pack seemed to perform with equal efficiency after the in-

roduction of substitute Kieran Maher.

St Mary's, with four forwards new to this level of competition, started competently but were gradually worn down by an extremely solid Shannon pack in which the back row of Eddie Halvey, Foley and Mick Fitzgibbon became an irresistible unit. In the first quarter, Steve Jameson gained some useful line-out possession for St Mary's. It was highly significant, however, that when Shannon came under real pressure for the first time, facing a line-out close to their own corner flag in the 33rd minute, Galwey won the ball.

Meanwhile, the arrival of former Greystones international second-row Brian Rigney added a further dimension to Shannon's skills in this area, quite apart from his scrummaging power. And be-

hind the scrum, halfbacks Jim Galvin and Gavin Russell were ready to bring their three-quarters into action at any appropriate opportunity.

As Fitzgerald incited, it is going to take some time for a reshaped Mary's side to reach full potential and there can be no greater learning process than a visit to Limerick.

SCORING SEQUENCE: — 6 mins, F Campbell (St Mary's) penalty goal, 23 mins, P Murray (Shannon) try, 35 mins, Campbell (St Mary's) penalty goal, 40 mins, B O'Shea (Shannon) penalty goal, 50 mins, P Murray (Shannon) try, 67 mins, A Foley (Shannon) try, converted by O'Shea.

SHANNON: P Murray, B O'Shea, A Thompson, C McCormack, D Gallagher, J Galvin, G Russell, J Healey, P Kerry, T Walsh, B Rigney, M Galwey, E Halvey, A Foley, M Fitzgibbon.

Replacement: — K Maher for Galwey (58 mins).

ST MARY'S: G Halpern, T Gillan, G Lavin, T Meagher, D Wall, F Campbell, N O'Brien, B Kearns, B Browne, W Bowden, S Jameson, M O'Kelly, K Devlin, K Pollis, N Campion.

Replacement: — A McEvoy for Meagher (25 mins).

Referee: B Starling (UAR)

Foley's kudros for rampant Shannon

MICK Galwey captured the essence of Shannon's victory at Thomond Park yesterday. "Our trump card was our backrow."

The Irish International, who was forced to retire after 57 minutes, paid tribute to the outstanding work of the Shannon triumvirate - Eddie Halvey, Mick Fitzgibbon and Anthony Foley.

It was their performance that was largely the difference between the sides. They tackled, supported and drove with a compelling ferocity that often overwhelmed the opposition. Amid the general splendour of such a fine effort stood Foley, whose display earned him the plaudits of not only his own side but former Irish and St Marys coach, Ciaran Fitzgerald.

"He was the games outstanding player, head and shoulders above the rest." It is mildly ironic that Fitzgerald used the term head and shoulders as common perception would maintain that Foley lacks the necessary inches for international rugby.

Yesterday the 20 year old belied that myth with a powerful performance: he frequently drove Marys backwards and was the fulcrum from which Shannon's best attacking moments were launched.

Marys began reasonably well, applying themselves in the line out where Steve Jameson and Malcolm O'Kelly enjoyed an early domi-

SHANNON.... 20 ST. MARY'S COLLEGE.... 6

From John O'Sullivan in Limerick

nance but despite their possession, the team never managed to threaten Shannon's defence. Too often ball was spilled in contact situations and they lacked direction in the backline.

Former Irish schools outhalf Fergal Campion gave them an early lead with a 30 yard penalty. He was unsuccessful with a more difficult effort seven minutes later and this seemed to galvanise Shannon. On 22 minutes they took the lead with a well worked try from a scrum inside the Marys 22.

Scrumhalf Gavin Russell broke on the blind side, Pat Murray and Billy O'Shea handled with Murray, coming round on the loop, crossing for a fine try in the corner. O'Shea missed the conversion.

Marys hopes were further dashed after 23 minutes when they lost centre Turlough Meagher with a leg injury. This caused a reshuffle with Arthur McEvoy coming on at left wing, Tony Gillen moving to the centre and David Wall switching across to the right.

Campion and O'Shea exchanged penalties to leave Shannon with a narrow advantage at the interval.

Buoyed by the advantage of a strong

breeze after the interval the home side totally dominated the second 40 minutes, registering two tries through hooker Paddy Kenny, after a fine burst by Foley and the latter, 16 minutes later from a Marys scrum close to their own line.

Billy O'Shea converted the second try to leave Shannon with plenty of daylight for a late Marys surge.

Afterwards Fitzgerald was brutally honest about the task that lay ahead. "The young guys that we introduced were exposed in the second half. They had no conception of what this level of rugby is like; it was a real eye opener.

"The Shannon backrow was rampant and they snuffed out anything that we tried in an attacking capacity. We will have learned from this experience, particularly the younger players."

And what was it like being involved for the first time since resigning as Irish coach? "I really enjoyed it. There is plenty of work to be done but I must say that I'm glad to be back."

Shannon - P Murray, B O'Shea, A Thompson, C McDermott, D Gallagher, J Galvin, G Russell, J Hickey, P Kenny, T Wainne, B Rigney, M Galwey, E Halvey, M Fitzgibbon, A Foley. Rep: K Maher for Galwey 57 mins.

St Marys College - G Halpin, T Gillen, G Larvin, T Meagher, D Wall, F Campion, N O'Brien, B Keane, B Browne, W Bowden, S Jameson, M O'Kelly, N Campion, K Devlin, K Potts. Rep: A McEvoy for Meagher 23 mins.

Referee: B Stirling (Ulster).