

Old Crescent pressure final

AFTER half an hour at Rosbrien on Saturday it seemed that Old Crescent would finally come unstuck. Malone had got off to a perfect start with Colin Wilkin-son cancelling out a Brian Begley penalty, and then crossing for a try himself after Denis McBride had got the first touchdown of the game. A dropped goal from Wilkin-son then put Crescent in serious trouble at 20-3 down, but Paul McDonagh's try just before the break gave the home side

heart for the second half.

They got better as the match went on and, even though it took them until five minutes from the finish before Begley's fourth penalty finally gave them the lead, they were worth it. Not much consolation for Malone however, who more than played their part in an excellent encounter.

The entertainment level may not have been as high at Musgrave Park, but there was no shortage of tension. Certainly

DIVISION TWO

Brendan Fanning

Dungannon were staring at what would have been a disastrous result when they nearly surrendered a 10-7 lead midway through the second half only for Dolphin's Brendan Keary to lose possession just short of the line. The visitors breathed a major

sigh of relief, an play the game off riotry, which it cessfully.

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RUGBY ROUND-UP

ALL-IRELAND LEAGUE

DIVISION ONE

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Garryowen.....	6	5	0	1	105	93	10
St Mary's.....	5	4	0	1	91	56	8
Cork Con.....	5	4	0	1	91	69	8
Shannon.....	6	4	0	2	66	51	8
Lansdowne.....	6	3	0	3	126	107	6
Y Munster.....	5	3	0	2	64	66	6
Blackrock.....	5	2	0	3	85	79	4
Old Wesley.....	5	1	1	3	72	85	3
Ballymena.....	5	1	1	3	60	97	3
Old Belvedere.....	6	1	0	5	76	98	2
Instonians.....	6	1	0	5	94	129	2

At Shane Park, **Instonians 12** (S Laing 4 penalties), **Young Munster 19** (A O'Halloran 3 penalties, dropped goal, conversion, N McNa-mara try)

At Lansdowne Road, **Lansdowne 22** (E Elwood try, conversion, 5 penalties), **Old Bel-vedere 14** (K Spicer try, B Murphy 3 penalties).

At Donnybrook, **Old Wesley 13** (S Wilson try, dropped goal, penalty, conversion), **Garryowen 16** (K Smith try, 3 penalties, conversion).

At Thomond Park, **Shannon 19** (P Murray dropped goal, penalty, conversion, A Thomp-

son 2 penalties, K Maher try), **Cork Constitu-tion 10** (V Donnelly try, P Burke penalty, conversion)

At Eaton Park, **Ballymena 13** (J Topping try, D McAleese conversion, 2 penalties), **St Mary's 12** (F Campion dropped goal, N Barry 3 pen-alties).

DIVISION TWO

At Ormeau, **NIFC 25** (N Lamont 6 penalties, conversion, A Park try), **Sunday's Well 39** (E Hogan-O'Connell 3 conversions, penalty, J O'Neill 2 tries, S McCahill, C Burke, J Lacey, J O'Connell try each).

At Castle Avenue, **Clontarf 9** (M Woods 3 penalties), **Wanderers 25** (M Mason, N Culliton, S McEntee try each, M Wyse 2 penalties, 2 conversions).

At Rosbrien, **Old Crescent 25** (P McDonagh try, B Begley 4 penalties, conversion, S Tuohy 2 dropped goals), **Malone 20** (C Wilkin-son try, 2 penalties, 2 conversions; D McBride try).

At Lakerlands Park, **Terenure 16** (A O'Farrell 3 penalties, conversion, N Hogan try), **Bective Rangers 9** (K Barrett 3 penalties).

At Musgrave Park, **Dolphin 7** (H Farrelly try, B Keary conversion), **Dungannon 10** (H

McCaughy try, K McGarry penalty, con-version).

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Old Crescent.....	6	6	0	0	131	70	12
Dungannon.....	6	5	0	1	150	91	10
Sunday's Well.....	6	3	1	2	154	115	7
Terenure.....	6	3	1	2	75	58	7
Wanderers.....	5	3	0	2	91	73	6
Graystones.....	5	3	0	2	92	94	6
Bective.....	5	3	0	2	79	92	6
Malone.....	5	2	0	3	91	97	4
Clontarf.....	5	1	0	4	50	97	2
NIFC.....	5	0	0	5	89	142	0
Dolphin.....	5	0	0	5	47	120	0

At Ballinakil, **Waterpark 12** (B Moran 4 pen-alties), **Monkstown 16** (A McMaster 2 pen-alties, conversions, dropped goal; C Heaney try).

At Kiltiernan, **DLSP 19** (N O'Riordan 3 pen-alties; J Corr, K Wheelock try each), **Skerries 19** (J Dempsey 2 penalties, dropped goal, conver-sion; P Beggs try).

At Uprichard Park, **Bangor 17** (M McCall 4 penalties; S Wallon try), **Bohemians 26** (J Cuhane, M Cahill, G Flanagan try each; O Moran 3 penalties, conversion).

At Model Farm Road, **Hightfield 21** (B

O'Herly, S O'Meara 1 penalties, conversion) Smith, N Stewart try €

At Mocher, **Buccaneer UCC 9** (J Kiernan p O'Mahony dropped go, At Crowley Park, G penalty, conversion, K each), **UCD 23** (B Ca conversion).

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Monkstown.....	6	5	0	1	150	91	10
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UCC.....	6	2	0	4	50	97	2
DLSP.....	6	2	0	4	89	142	0
Bangor.....	6	2	0	4	47	120	0
Waterpark.....	6	2	0	4	47	120	0
Galwegians.....	6	2	0	4	47	120	0

At Upper Malone, **Quirinhians 6** (A White pe

1995/6
HAE
WAE
STAGE

(Oct-20, 1995)

Final flurry fails to save St Mary's

IN any other league in the world bottom beating top would probably constitute a shock, but not the AIL. Pretty much 90 per cent of games are toss of the coin affairs, and Eaton Park on Saturday was just a bit finer than most. Four minutes into injury time Nicky Barry's well struck, prospective match-winning penalty from 35 metres veered off course and struck the upright. Hard cheese. And so the verdict went to Ballymena.

This time the rub of the green favoured the previously winless Ulstermen and, for a change, went against the hitherto unbeaten Mary's. Ballymena have played better and lost; Mary's have played worse and won. C'est la vie in the AIL.

Apart from a rousing finale, this was a chronically bad game.

Typical of so much club fare on this island, the exchanges were practically devoid of continuity, moving on, staccato-like from one stoppage and one set-piece to the next. Mary's endeavoured to play a far more expansive brand of rugby, but their hugely-influential back row was often stopped at source by a back-peddalling scrum. When the big runners, Victor Costello or Kevin Potts or Malcom O'Kelly did get rumbling (usually off their dominant line-out) the pack's recycling of the ball in the face of a spoiling Ballymena was frequently too slow, obliging Paddy Lynch to excavate unduly.

While the Use-It-Or-Lose-It credo was occasionally forgotten, and Gordon Black attracted much unfairly myopic criticism from both camps, the referee's concerto didn't help matters. This is also merely typical of the often inconsistent yet rigidly fastidious refereeing throughout the land.

Not that Ballymena had any great designs on a running game. The extent of their expansiveness extended to a couple of blind-side breaks by their impressive scrum-half Andy Matchett, one of which yielded the crucial 21st minute try from their first foray forward. Matchett made the incision and James Topping intelligently came in off his wing to score.

Derek McAleese's trusty boot took them to 13-9 at the break, shortly after which they had the winning of the match when encamped on the Mary's line. With clean ruck ball a couple of yards out, it said everything about Ballymena's rugby that they sought to maul it over the line. Mary's survived, and amid many longeurs the 700 or so crowd waited for the inevitable final flurry and typically belated sense of urgency.

Costello and O'Kelly began breaking tackles, Barry kicked a penalty and deep into injury time Arthur McEvoy counter-attacked from behind his own line. Kevin Devlin mopped up a sloppy pass as the move was still in its infancy and the pack recycled still inside their 22; Barry cut up the blind side, linked brilliantly with Halpin, then came O'Kelly (of course) and Potts. A tackle off the

BALLYMENA 13
ST MARY'S COLLEGE.. 12

Gerry Thornley

ball, well spotted by Black, helped stop a thrilling move and St Mary's deserved the last-gasp penalty, with which Barry unluckily struck the post.

That was somewhat typical of St Mary's luck on the day. They were down to 14 men when Topping scored, as David Wall, the winger who faced him, was temporarily off the pitch; and had Fergal Campion not also sustained an ankle injury which curtailed his involvement by about 75 minutes, in this observer's view St Mary's would probably have won. The gifted young out-half was due a big one and his hot performance against Cambridge last week, a serenely-taken drop goal and scything inside break within five minutes of the kick-off, suggested this would have been it.

Nicky Barry reverted to out-half, and Gary Lavin accommodated McEvoy by moving from the wing to midfield alongside Vinny Cunningham. As remodelled back units go, it was still one of the better ones, but only occasionally threatened to click. Gary Halpin, as ever, made some well-timed arrivals into the line, one of which would have yielded a try had Cunningham's poor pass not forfeited a three-to-one overlap.

Cunningham once again failed to deliver anything substantial and remains the most frustratingly talented under-achiever about. At the other end of the scale is a supremely talented 21-year-old who is already demonstrating truly awesome ability. Malcolm O'Kelly was brilliant in this game, beating Davey Tweed in the middle of the line handsomely and galloping freely into open spaces with his octopus arms and magnetic hands. He has the skills of a Fijian forward; an astonishing one-handed catch at full tilt and another shovel-like pass in the tackle springing to mind. Some of the cognoscenti and fellow lock forwards claim the St Mary's second-row is a bit too loose. Maybe so, but talent such as O'Kelly's is worth getting excited about.

With two trips to Limerick (where they have never won) highlighting a tough run-in for St Mary's, not many will be backing them to stave off the three-pronged Munster assault on the title. But Ciarán Fitzgerald is already smiling. "Personally I'm looking forward to going down to Limerick, because I've always found it a great place to play rugby. I think this is a bit of a kick in the ass for us. It means we can't sit back over the winter."

Scoring sequence: 3 mins, Campion drop goal 0-3; 19 mins, Barry pen 0-6; 21 mins, J Topping try, McAleese con 7-6; 31 mins, McAleese pen 10-6; 33 mins, Barry pen 10-9; 34 mins, McAleese drop goal 13-9; 77 mins, Barry pen 13-12.

BALLYMENA: J Peak; J Topping, M Rainey, A Simpson, D Smyth; D McAleese, A Matchett, S Booth, R Kernaghan, P Millar (capt), G Longwell, D Tweed, D Macartney, C Wallace, D Topping.

ST MARY'S: G Halpin; G Lavin, N Barry, V Cunningham, D Wall, F Campion, P Lynch, R Lynch, B Browne (capt), B Keane, M O'Kelly, S Jameson, K Potts, V Costello, K Devlin.
Referee: G Black (Leinster)

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At Lansdowne Road: **Lansdowne 22** (E Elwood try, conversion, 5 penalties), **Old Belvedere 14** (K Spicer try, B Murphy 3 penalties).
At Donnybrook: **Old Wesley 13** (S Wilson try, dropped goal, penalty, conversion), **Garryowen 16** (K Smith try, 3 penalties, conversion).

At Thomond Park: **Shannon 19** (P Murray dropped goal, penalty, conversion; A Thomp-

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DIVISION TWO

At Ormeau: **NIFC 25** (N Lamont 6 penalties, conversion, A Park try), **Sunday's Well 39** (E Hogan-O'Connell 3 conversions, penalty; J O'Neill 2 tries; S McCall, C Burke, J Lacey, J O'Connell try each).

At Castle Avenue: **Clontarf 9** (M Woods 3 penalties), **Wanderers 25** (M Mason, N Culliton, S McEntee try each; M Wyse 2 penalties, 2 conversions).

At Rosbrien: **Old Crescent 25** (P McDonagh try; B Begley 4 penalties, conversion; S Tuohy 2 dropped goals), **Malina 20** (C Wilkinson try, 2 penalties, 2 conversions; D McBride try).

At Lakelands Park: **Tenure 16** (A O'Farrell 3 penalties, conversion; N Hogan try), **Bective Rangers 9** (K Barrett penalties).

At Musgrave Park: **Dolphin 7** (H Farrelly try; B Keary conversion), **Dungannon 10** (H

McCaughy try; K McGarry penalty, conversion).

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Malone.....	5	2	0	3	91	97	4
Clontarf.....	5	1	0	4	50	97	2
NIFC.....	5	0	0	5	89	142	0
Dolphin.....	5	0	0	5	47	120	0

DIVISION THREE

At Ballinakill: **Waterpark 12** (B Moran 4 penalties), **Monkstown 16** (A McMaster 2 penalties, conversions, dropped goal; C Heaney try).

At Kilternan: **DLSP 19** (N O'Riordan 3 penalties; J Corr, K Wheelock try each), **Skenries 19** (J Dempsey 2 penalties, dropped goal, conversion; P Beggs try).

At Upprichard Park: **Bangor 17** (M McCall 4 penalties; S Walton try), **Bohemians 26** (J Culhane, M Cahill, G Flanagan try each; O Moran 3 penalties, conversion).

At Model Farm Road: **Hightfield 21** (B

O'Herly, S O'Meara try penalties, conversion), **C Smith, N Stewart** try each allies).

At Mohr: **Buccaneers UCC 9** (J Kiernan penalty, O'Mahony dropped goal).

At Crowley Park: **Galvy penalty, conversion; K D each), UCD 23** (B Care conversion).

	P	W
Monkstown.....	6	5
Hightfield.....	6	4
City of Derry.....	6	4
Bohemians.....	6	4
Skenries.....	6	2
UCD.....	6	3
Buccaneers.....	6	2
UCC.....	6	2
DLSP.....	6	2
Bangor.....	6	2
Waterpark.....	6	2
Galwegians.....	6	0

DIVISION
At Upper Malone: **Queenthians 6** (A White pe

St. Mary's fail to sparkle

BALLYMENA.....13
ST. MARY'S COLLEGE.....12

By Mick Doyle

APART from a final, flying flurry from St. Mary's and heroic defence from Ballymena, this game was, in all honesty, very disappointing with perspiration dominating inspiration by about 99 per cent to one.

It was a game that St. Mary's began with much apparent intent, with their pack dominating set pieces and ruck and maul and their backs looking continuously for the break. Fly-half Fergal Campion was propelling his team forward with his educated feet and put them ahead with a well-taken drop goal after three minutes. However, in the process of completing a superb inside break from a set scrum, he had to retire with an injured left ankle, which necessitated a whole re-arrangement of the St. Mary's backline; Nick Barry moved to fly-half, Gary Lavin to centre with McEvoy, a fine player, coming on at right wing.

Despite this unwanted mishap, Mary's kept plugging away but Ballymena were resolute. Barry kicked a neat drop goal after 25 minutes but Ballymena's right-wing Topping, later named "Dream Topping", finished off a clever blindside move by Matchett to score a fine try converted by McAleese. McAleese and Barry exchanged further penalties 2-1 in favour of McAleese, thereby putting Ballymena ahead 13-9 at halftime.

The second half yielded only one score, a penalty goal from Barry to put Mary's hunting Ballymena feverishly at 12-13. Despite good individual and collective work by Costello, Brown, O'Kelly, Jameson and Potts, and excellent loose play by wing-forward Devlin, the Mary's backline never got crisp enough ball until probably the last five minutes. With centre Cunningham merely posing with the ball and scrum half Lynch trying to scramble ball away from static possession, Barry and the excellent Lavin, McEvoy and Halpin had little chance of breaching a well-organised Ballymena defence.

Davy Tweed, Ballymena's powerful lock, though blinded by an ill-judged finger in the eye, played his heart out in the second half, as did wing-forward and No. 8 Topping and Wallace. Clever kicking by Matchett into the Mary's "box" kept Ballymena temporarily in the hunt. They messed up about four or five good scrummaging positions on the Mary's line and never threatened again. McAleese's relieving kicks kept Ballymena in survival mode for most of the game and very clever and classy play by scrum-half Matchett was the highlight of a drab, uninspiring team performance.

Gordon Black, Dublin's own pirouetting prima donna of a referee, broke up any pattern of play that was inclined to emerge by his pious whistling. At least some of his decisions were good and that's not saying much. Overall, it wasn't a game worthy of the All Ireland League Division One. St. Mary's could have kept their winning streak had Cunningham moved the ball on from ten metres out with a 3-1 overlap towards the end of the second half. Coach Claran Fitzgerald won't be too happy and will need to put in a lot of work to produce crisper, more predictable and protected possession.

The rousing finale and Gordon Black's solo performance kept the crowd on their toes.

BALLYMENA — J Peake, J Topping, M Rainey, A Simpson, D Smyth, D McAleese, A Matchett, S Booth, R Ker-poghan, P Miller (Capt.), G Longwell, D Tweed, D Macartney, D Topping, C Wallace.

ST. MARY'S — G Halpin, G Lavin, N Barry, V Cunningham, D Wall, F Campion (A McEvoy 10 mins.), P Lynch, R Lynch, B Brown (Capt.) B Keane, M O'Kelly, S Jamison, K Potts, K Devlin, V Costello.

Referee — G Black.