

St Mary's are let off the hook

ST MARY'S COLLEGE.. 12

OLD WESLEY 9

Gerry Thornley

IT is a well-worn analogy but it accurately tells the tale of Templeville Road on Saturday. Like the boxer who has his man on the ropes, Old Wesley had St Mary's where they wanted them, chin exposed and the referee on the verge of stepping in. They could have propped Mary's up and won on points but, fatally, Wesley lunged over-excitedly and St Mary's were let off the hook.

Leading 9-6, awarded a penalty close in and 15 yards to the left of the posts nearing the 50 minute mark, buoyed by their front-row's supremacy all afternoon, Wesley captain Greg Duffy opted for a put-in. Five more put-ins later — a further three of them could have been kicked — Wesley were adjudged to have shoved before the feed and the majority of the 1,500 crowd heaved a collective sigh of relief.

Thereafter, by hook or by crook, you somehow knew that St Mary's would maintain their 100% record. As off colour as their blue rinsed jerseys, in the final 10 minutes it was they who played the winning rugby by concentrating on playing it in Wesley's half.

In an awful game that was always going to be decided by kicks, bizarrely Wesley facilitated them by attempting to run the ball from inside their 22, and two Fergal Campion penalties steered St Mary's to their fifth league win out of five over Wesley.

It was difficult to know which angered Wesley's Kiwi coach Mark Anscombe more, the penalty chance that went abegging or the late ill-discipline. While hindsight constitutes 20-20 vision, there was an argument supporting Duffy's case, for 16-6 would have been game, set and match. But Anscombe didn't go along with that.

"Going for the pushover instead of the penalty was crucial," said Anscombe, who "totally" disapproved of the decision. "But what really disappointed me was discipline and not having the hunger to win. I've heard of how unlucky we've been but I told them 'you weren't unlucky, you beat yourselves. So don't feel sorry for yourselves. Get in the real world. If you want to beat these guys get disciplined and play in the right end of the field'.

"Having said all of that the quality of refereeing was appalling," added Anscombe, who pinpointed a knock-on and use of the outside arm at a line-out in the build-up to Nicky Barry's timely penalty before the interval.

But it is the general inconsistency of referee's interpretation of the laws at rucks and mauls which so appals Anscombe, and the lack of communication in a "them and us" Irish game devoid of "second phase ball which just goes from set piece to set piece."

Both sides felt bugged by the chronic lack of continuity in a game punctuated by 34 penalties. That, and a possible reaction to last week's win over Shannon, made Mary's look stale. The tone was set in the third minute with Paul Allen's big hit on Victor Costello, and Robbie Love swallowed up the loose ball. Thereafter, Wesley were queuing up for Costello, thereby stopping an over-reliant St Mary's at source.

Costello gamely kept plugging away and made some vital incisions late on, but for the most part it was Kevin Potts who took up the mantle. Dominant in the line-out, St Mary's had little else to offer.

Campion is an out-half with all the talents but this was one of his poorer games. Often stepping inside on his favoured left foot, he never effectively launched a poorly aligned back-line in which Vinny Cunningham has yet to rediscover his best form.

It's ironic to think that Mary's could win the league playing a far less fluent, running game than the nearly men of three years ago. Counter-attacking daringly through Conor Hoey, Wesley played the better rugby, a point Ciaran Fitzgerald readily conceded. "Old Wesley look a more complete side than they have been for a few years."

"I thought we were poor. We didn't have the spirit, particularly up front, which we had against Shannon. Very few of our forwards played up to par and our play, particularly in the first-half wasn't as focussed as it was last week. We couldn't get Victor away and unless we improve we are not going to win enough ball to release our backs."

That said, Fitzgerald commended the "tremendous belief in themselves" which enabled them to eke out this win. When push came to shove Mary's played the winning rugby. On the bad days, all title-winning sides need that to fall back on.

Scoring sequence: 12 mins. Howe pen 0-3, 14 mins. Barry pen 3-3, 24 mins. Howe pen 3-6, 37 mins. Howe pen 3-9, 40 mins. Barry pen 6-9, 71 mins. Campion pen 9-9, 78 mins. Campion pen 12-9.

ST MARY'S COLLEGE: G Halpin, G Lavin, N Barry, V Cunningham, D Wall, F Campion, P Lynch, R Lynch, D Breslin, B Kearne, M O'Kelly, S Jameson, K Potts, V Costello, K Devlin (capt).

OLD WESLEY: C Hoey, R Wolfe, P Allen, C Younger, A Johnston, A Howe, J O'Sullivan, H Hurley, M King, J Feehan, D Bursey, G Duffy (capt), C Pim, S Gill, R Love.

Referee: B Buggy (AFLB).



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St. Mary's stay on top — just

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By Sean Diffley

ST. Mary's — just like Jim Jeffries long ago, primed to take the crown away from the black usurper, Jack Johnson — have been hailed as the great white hope of knocking Limerick and Cork off their perch in the Insurance Corporation All Ireland League.

At Templeville Road yesterday, in a palpitating if low-grade tussle, they looked much more like Jem Roche.

It was four penalty goals to three and Wesley, who dominated for long periods, will rue their decision to ignore penalty awards in favour of scrums in a concentrated period on the Mary's line just after half time. Instead of a pushover try, their efforts yielded nothing.

It was 9-6 in Wesley's favour at that stage and after the Great Escape, one felt that St. Mary's, on whom the gods smiled yesterday, would save their situation.

And indeed they did, with about 12 minutes to go, when Fergal Campion, taking over from Nicky Barry, kicked the equalising penalty goal and then, in the closing stages, scored the winning penalty.

Wesley got one more chance, with the last move of the game, but Adrian Hawe failed to kick a diffi-

cult penalty. Had he succeeded, it would have been just deserts. Wesley didn't really deserve to lose.

As in all the All Ireland matches I have watched this season, the element of fear of losing dominated. This applied in particular to the St. Mary's back division, which was never a force in attack, despite plenty of opportunities.

Wesley were better behind the scrum, more willing to take their chances, and produced the only running move that looked like yielding a try, when full-back Conor Hoey and left wing Andy Johnston almost got through just after half time.

To the credit of both teams, the standard of tackling and cover defence was excellent. While Malcolm O'Kelly and Steve Jameson did well enough in the line-outs, they got nothing easy against Greg Duffy and David Bursey and Shane Gill at No. 8 had a fine all round game for Wesley.

St. Mary's will hold a long inquest after this. Their pack was humiliated in three set scrums, pushed off the ball on their own put-in. But Kevin Potts had a fine game and was adjudged Man-of-the-Match.

All Hawe's three penalties for Wesley were kicked in the first half, when they led 9-6 to two Nicky Barry penalties. Then came Fergal Campion's two.

Can Mary's break the Munster monopoly? After this, my verdict would be a very confident "maybe"!

ST. MARY'S COLLEGE — G Halpin; G Lavin, N Barry, V Cunningham, D Wall; F Campion, P Lynch; R Lynch, D Breslin, B Keane, M O'Kelly, S Jameson, K Potts, K Devlin, v Costello.

OLD WESLEY — C Hoey; R Wolfe, P Allen, C. Younger, A Johnston; A Hawe, J O'Sullivan; H Hurley, M King, J Feehan, D Bursey, G Duffy, C Pim, R Love, S Gill.

Referee — S Buggy (Leinster).