

St Mary's make it unlucky 13 for Shannon

THE stakes were high, the respect mutual and caution was the by-product of those elements as St Mary's College ended Shannon's 12-match winning run in the Insurance Corporation All-Ireland League at Templeville Road on Saturday.

So it was unlucky 13 for defending champions Shannon, whose last defeat in the league was also inflicted by St Mary's back in April 1994. That match was of no real relevance as all the issues in the top division had been decided. The encounter last Saturday was, however, of the utmost importance and the St Mary's victory leaves them two points clear at the top of the league.

As the scoreline indicates, the match was without a try and such was the pattern of a game contested with full hearted endeavour if not much adventure, that few try scoring chances were created. Twice the St Mary's line was in peril, but the defence was not breached.

The reward for this victory in tangible terms was considerable for St Mary's; the psychological benefits were also important. St Mary's coach Ciaran Fitzgerald was quick to stress that point after his team had triumphed. "It was not by any means a great match, but it was a good contest and psychologically of great benefit to us. We won a lot of possession and could have used it more effectively. But with that win behind us we should be able to expand and develop our game."

"There was a caution out there from both sides probably because of the respect they have for each other. With Shannon you can never relax, they keep coming at you. I was very pleased with our defence and we stopped them going forward a lot."

That is a fairly succinct assessment of a match that was disappointing, but as Fitzgerald added: "It was a vital step for us and now it is step by step." He then handed out a warning. "I would not write off Shannon's chances in the league."

That theme was taken up by Shannon coach Niall O'Donovan. "On balance, St Mary's deserved to win. They won the line out and that was important and they stopped us effectively. They had obviously worked hard on that. But we are still very much in this league with a chance of retaining the title. The league is still wide open."

Shannon included their flankers Kieran Maher and Eddie Halvey both of whom passed fitness tests before the match. But that potent Shannon back row, whose play was so crucial a factor in their great run of success, was not influential in this match. St Mary's defended well when Shannon tried to drive forward and the fact that the home side won the line out at a ratio of two to one obviously limited Shannon's opportunities to use the power of their pack in making ground.

Second row Malcolm O'Kelly had a splendid match for St Mary's and he had a very able ally in the line out in Victor Costello,

ST MARY'S COLL 9
SHANNON 6

Edmund Van Esbeck

"The line out was a problem for us," said O'Donovan, "yet we had chances we did not take and made too many errors."

Outside the scrum, there was little creative play with both outside halves Fergal Campion and Jim Galvin opting for the kick. Nor was the kicking always well directed, but Campion was in fact the match winner for St Mary's with two dropped goals, one a superb effort from 50 yards at a crucial time in the 73rd minute. It stretched their tenuous 6-3 advantage to 9-3.

Twice in the first half Shannon almost got in for tries, first when Niall O'Shea blocked down full-back Gareth Halpin's attempted relieving kick and the ball went into touch on the line. The St Mary's scrum was then under pressure and conceded a penalty. Shannon opted for a scrum but then they gave away a penalty to enable St Mary's to clear the immediate danger.

Subsequently another fine attacking position was lost by another transgression after the St Mary's defence was under great pressure as Shannon drove forward. Nor was Andrew Thompson in the best of place kicking form. He had missed a very good opportunity after 25 minutes by which stage St Mary's led after Campion's first dropped goal. When Nicky Barry kicked a penalty in the 36th minute, St Mary's faced the second half with 6-0 lead.

Thompson reduced the arrears when he kicked a penalty after two minutes of the second period from the "25", but he missed from the same spot nine minutes later and Barry was short with two long range efforts for St Mary's. So St Mary's led by three points as the match entered its final phase. Then came Campion's second dropped goal. The prelude to that had seen St Mary's penalised but Halvey in attempting to take a quick penalty transgressed by doing so well ahead of the point of the indiscretion. St Mary's won the ensuing scrum and the ruck that followed it and Campion did the rest.

A penalty in the 79th minute from Thompson was not enough to save Shannon's record. The best run of the afternoon came from Costello just before the end as he made a tremendous surge down the right touchline but he was stopped by a superb tackle from Pat Murray.

SCORING SEQUENCE: 17 mins, Campion dropped goal, 3-0; 36 mins, Barry penalty, 6-0; 42 mins, Thompson penalty, 6-3; 73 mins, Campion dropped goal, 9-3; 79 mins, Thompson penalty, 9-6

ST MARY'S — G Halpin, G Levin, N Barry, V Cunningham, D Wall, F Campion, P Lynch, R Lynch, B Browne, capt., B Keane, M O'Kelly, S Jameson, K Polts, V Costello, K Davlin

Replacement: D Breslin for Browne (77 minutes)
SHANNON: P Murray, capt., W O'Shea, A Thompson, A McGrath, N O'Shea, J Galvin, I Sherwin, J Hickey, J Deegan, T Walsh, B Rigney, M Galwey, K Maher, A Foley, E Halvey

Replacement: G Russell for Sherwin (14 minutes)

Referee: R McDowell (MAR)

Win lifts gloom



Victor Costello of St Mary's makes a typical charge through the Shannon defence during Saturday's All-Ireland League match at Templeville Road. — (Photograph: Joe St Leger)

RUGBY ROUND-UP

ALL IRELAND LEAGUE DIVISION ONE

At Lansdowne Road: **Lansdowne 13** (E Elwood 2 penalties, conversion; R Hennessy try), **Cork Constitution 20** (P Burke 5 penalties; R Casey try).

At Eaton Park: **Ballymena 8** (D Tweed try; D McAleese penalty), **Instonians 30** (S Robson, J Collins try each, G McCloskey 2 tries; S Laing 2 penalties, 2 conversions).

At Donnybrook: **Old Wesley 19** (N Farren 4 penalties, conversion; D Bursay try), **Old Belvedere 11** (B Murphy penalty; J Philpott dropped goal; KM McCarthy try).

At Templeville Road: **St Mary's 9** (F Campion 2 dropped goals; N Barry penalty), **Shannon 6** (A Thompson 2 penalties).

At Dooradoyle: **Garryowen 23** (K Smioth try, 4 penalties; K Keane dropped goal), **Blackrock 22** (A Guinan try; A McGowan 5 penalties, conversion).

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
St Mary's	3	3	0	0	67	34	6
Blackrock	3	2	0	1	66	49	4
Cork Con	2	2	0	0	37	27	4
Shannon	3	2	0	1	32	23	4
Garryowen	3	2	0	1	49	48	4
Old Wesley	2	1	1	0	32	24	3
Instonians	3	1	0	2	63	65	2
Old Belvedere	3	1	0	2	37	48	2
Ballymena	3	0	1	2	26	57	1
Y Munster	2	0	0	2	17	32	0
Lansdowne	3	0	0	3	47	66	0

DIVISION TWO

At Stevenson Park: **Dungannon 23** (J Davidson, J Patterson try each; K McGarry 3 penalties, 2 conversions), **Bective Rangers 8** (P McNamara try; K Barrett penalty).

At Rosbrien: **Old Crescent 18** (B Begley 6 penalties), **Wanderers 15** (M Wyse 5 penalties).

At Musgrave Park: **Dolphin 12** (B Kearney 4 penalties), **Greystones 25** (R Murphy 6 penalties, conversion; D Dowling try).

At Lakelands Park: **Terenure 0**, **Clontarf 3** (M Woods penalty).

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Dungannon	3	3	0	0	95	30	6
Old Crescent	3	3	0	0	56	21	6
Malone	3	2	0	1	47	47	4
Bective	3	2	0	1	45	48	4
Sunday's Well	3	1	0	2	52	51	2
Terenure	3	1	0	2	23	22	2
Wanderers	2	1	0	1	32	34	2
Greystones	3	1	0	2	48	56	2
Clontarf	3	1	0	2	22	51	2
NIFC	2	0	0	2	32	54	0
Dolphin	2	0	0	2	12	50	0

DIVISION THREE

At Ballinakill: **Waterpark 22** (S Killigrew try; B Daly dropped goal, conversion; B Moran 4 penalties), **Highfield 27** (B Quinlan, F Cooper try each; T Dillon 2 penalties; G O'Sullivan 3 penalties, conversion).

In the fourth division Trinity's

At Sydney Parade: **Monkstown 12** (A McMaster 2 penalties, 2 dropped goals), **Buccaneers 6** (M Devine 2 penalties).

At Thomond Park: **Bohemians 17** (K Hanley try; G Everett 2 dropped goals; O Moran 2 penalties), **DLSP 11** (N O'Riordan try; O'Riordan 2 dropped goals).

At Holmpatrick: **Skerries 23** (T Giles 2 tries; J Dempsey 2 conversions, 3 penalties), **Galwegians 15** (F Filan, N Beatty try each; E Molloy penalty, conversion).

At Belfield: **UCD 9** (B Carey 3 penalties), **City of Derry 12** (I McGregor 2 dropped goals, penalties).

At The Mardyke: **UCC 12** (J Kiernan 2 penalties; A O'Shea dropped goal; J O'Mahon dropped goal), **Bangor 21** (M McCall conversion, 2 penalties; R Scott dropped goal; McKinty, M Wade try each).

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
City of Derry	3	3	0	0	48	12	
Monkstown	3	3	0	0	48	34	
Bohemians	3	3	0	0	39	27	
Highfield	3	2	1	0	53	47	
Skerries	3	1	1	1	47	41	
Bangor	3	1	0	2	38	38	
UCD	3	1	0	2	29	29	
DLSP	3	1	0	2	32	37	
Buccaneers	3	1	0	2	23	32	
Waterpark	3	1	0	2	40	68	
Galwegians	3	0	0	3	38	52	
UCC	3	0	0	3	36	54	

Mary's topple holders

ST. MARY'S COLLEGE
SHANNON

David Walsh at Templeville Road

WHATS in a number? Thirteen is supposed to be unlucky. It was for Shannon, who turned up at Templeville Road with 12 straight League wins. But their run ended at the thirteenth and now you could stick a pin in the Division One table and have a reasonable chance of picking the winner.

This is not to downplay the merit of Mary's achievement or to ignore their position at the top but they have a long way to travel. Here, we speak of two journeys: to the end of the season and to the summit of the team's development.

The second may take longer than the first and hence one's reluctance to get overly excited about Mary's chances. This was nothing more than one small step and things will get tougher for Mary's.

What they showed here was an ability to battle. They concentrated on their defence, stayed disciplined and did just enough to squeeze through. Shannon were not at their best and yet they could easily have swung the game their way.

For those beyond the touchlines, it was a smashing contest but a disappointing football match. That has become the norm for many games in the top division as, fearful of losing, teams put their best efforts into negating their opponents' strengths.

Mary's had done their homework. They concentrated on Shannon's line out, contesting fiercely every time John Deegan threw and winning a good share of their rivals' ball. With out the ball, Shannon didn't have a

platform and their hard runners got too few chances.

For Shannon, too many things were just not right. Andrew Thompson's goalkicking was poor, Kieran Maher and Eddie Halvey passed late fitness tests but neither was one hundred per cent. Halvey pressurised Fergal Campion, made a lot of big tackles but he can be even better.

There was also the limitation of Shannon's ten-man game. Unable to wear their rivals down, Shannon did not attempt any other route to the try-line.

That tells a part of the Shannon story. The other part is that the team is not playing with the buzz which fuelled last season's campaign. Then they were hungry, fresh and bloody strong. This season, they have just been bloody strong.

That left them vulnerable yesterday as Mary's were not prepared to be pushed to one side. Steve Jameson, Malcolm O'Kelly, Kevin Potts and Victor Costello are all good at the line out and they do much more than jump.

Costello is the ace in Mary's pack and he did okay yesterday in his mano-a-mano with Anthony Foley. One second half run showed what Victor can do and, in full flight, he is worth watching.

But the line out was still the key to what Mary's achieved and if Barry Browne's throwing improved, the return would be even better. But the hooker is a fierce competitor in the loose, invariably found at the bottom



CRUNCH! . . . Shannon's Brian Rigney gets in a hefty challenge on Kevin Devlin of St. Mary's at Templeville Road.

of the rucks and not always on his own side.

Shannon often reminded him of the laws but, until he retired injured on 78 minutes, Browne was unrelenting.

That defiance epitomised Mary's spirit and it cheered Claran Fitzgerald's post-match mood. The Mary's coach had been unimpressed by the two winning performances of the last fortnight but he appreciated the resilience which chiselled out this victory.

It was as well for Mary's that they defended well because they attacked badly. Campion punted often but Pat Murray saw the kick coming before the fly-half's left foot began its backswing. Even on a day when the stakes were high, one expected Mary's backs to be a little more adventurous.

On the few occasions they ran the ball, only Vinny Cunningham was seriously interested in having a cut.

Full-back Gary Halpin and the wings, David Wall and Gary Lavin can all attack but they never saw the ball. What a waste!

Halpin's day was spent defending and he made more mistakes than he would allow himself for a season. This is as much a testimony to his marvellous consistency through the last 14 months as it is to his troubles yesterday.

But Mary's will easily forgive him because winning was the most important thing. That was clear from their delight at the end of a punishing but unproductive battle.

The trail of scores is easily recorded: a Campion drop goal and a Nicky Barry penalty left Mary's 6-0 in front at the interval, a Thompson penalty halved the deficit early in the second half and then Campion's second drop goal decided it.

That second effort from Campion

is worthy of recall. It began when Halvey lost his concentration and tapped at Shannon penalty five yards in front of the mark. From the scrum Mary's went forward and Campion shot from all of 48 yards. Not a hope, we thought, but it flew and flew and the game was suddenly beyond Shannon. A late Thompson penalty cut the lead to three points but the game was played out in Shannon's half. They couldn't and weren't complaining about the result.

ST. MARY'S — G Halpin, G Lavin, N Barry, V Cunningham, D Wall, F Campion, P Lynch, R Rigney, B Browne (capt), B Keane, M O'Kelly, S Jameson, K Potts, V Costello, K Devlin. Replacement: P Brellin for Browne (78mins).

SHANNON — P Murray (capt), B O'Shea, A Thompson, A McGrath, N O'Shea, J Galvin, J Sherwin, J Hickey, J Deegan, T Walsh, B Rigney, M Gahvey, K Maher, A Foley, E Halvey. Replacement: G Russell for Sherwin (14mins).

Referee: R McDowell (Monster).