

St Mary's dealt crushing blow to title hopes

THE VITAL requirement of Shannon having been defeated gaining two points allied to the ongoing burden of failure to win on Limerick soil in the Insurance Corporation All-Ireland League, weighed heavily yet again on St Mary's College at Tom Cliford Park on Saturday when Young Munster won by 12 points to five.

The defeat represents a major setback to St Mary's ambitions to become the first Leinster club to win the first division title, as once more they left Limerick empty handed from a match they badly needed to win. They went into the game having dropped two points in the league as have Garryowen, with the holders

Shannon having been defeated twice.

So high stakes involved, especially as a visit to Garryowen lies ahead. Nor was there anything in the way of consolation for St Mary's after they left the field heads bowed. Garryowen had won and so indeed had Shannon. So now there is a twin assault on the title from a familiar area — no variation on a familiar theme. St Mary's needed to deliver.

Limerick. Young Munster imposed those demands last Saturday in what was an absorbing contest and one which the home side deserved to win.

Young Munster went into the match knowing that the title was beyond their reach, however it did not diminish their desire, appetite or commitment in any way. Nothing summed up their attitude in more fitting manner than the magnificent defence they offered in the closing minutes as St Mary's sought to erase the seven points lead they carried at that stage and get at least a share of the points.

"They find it hard to win in Limerick," said Young Munster's admirable captain John Fitzgerald with a broad grin, after leading his pack by example to 80

YOUNG MUNSTER 12 ST MARY'S COLLEGE 5

Edmund Van Esbeck

too much of our play. But all is not lost we are still in with a chance."

That chance now looks tenuous, a point taken up by Young Munster coach Tony Grant. "It looks like Garryowen or Shannon now and I hope the title stays in Limerick. As well as the loss of the points, that defeat was a huge blow to St Mary's psychologically. We went out to disrupt their halfbacks and to stop them creating space for the support players. Our defence did that. They also relied too much on Victor Costello to break us down. Our back row was superb, indeed so was the whole pack. It was a great team effort. We went out there focused to do a job and did it."

It is hard to offer an argument against that assessment. Young Munster took the lead with a penalty from O'Halloran after one minute and St Mary's never got on terms. They were as their coach said too conservative, one might say tentative, for much of the first half. O'Halloran added a second penalty after 27 minutes and a six points lead did not flatter Young Munster, who played with the desire of a team in pursuit of the title. Fergal Campion missed two penalty chances for St Mary's who scored a very good try in the 35th minute. That came when scrumhalf Conor McGuinness made a fine break and found Malcolm O'Kelly in support and he scored on the left. Campion missed the conversion. St Mary's, through O'Kelly and Steve Jameson, had done espe-

cially well in the line-out in the initial period, but failed to make it pay and there was a frenetic aspect to much of what they did.

Young Munster started the second half as they had the first, full of fire, commitment and industry and when O'Halloran kicked his third penalty in the 60th minute, St Mary's trailed by four points. A great break by O'Halloran carried on by the excellent Ger Earls, was stopped just on the line in the 65th minute and then St Mary's launched a series of assaults but were repulsed, notably by one great tackle by Niall McNamara. When Mick Lynch kicked a superb penalty from over 50 yards in the 76th minute, St Mary's trailed by seven points. Saving the game was now all that was open to

them. They attacked vigorously if not with maximum awareness and scored four penalty attempts in pursuit of the try. They twice opted for scrums and after losing a ball against the head, they then went for the tapped ball. They met an unbreachable barrier as Young Munster stood firm.

Scoring sequence: 1 minute, O'Halloran penalty, 3-0; 27 mins, O'Halloran penalty, 6-0; 35 mins, O'Kelly try, 8-5; 60 mins, O'Halloran penalty, 9-5; 76 mins, Lynch penalty, 12-5.

YOUNG MUNSTER: P. Boland, N. McNamara, N. O'Mara, M. Lynch, D. Walsh, A. O'Halloran, D. Tobin, J. Fitzgerald, capt., Mark Fitzgerald, Mick Fitzgerald, M. O'Halloran, D. O'Meara, D. Conneely, D. Edwards, G. Earls.

ST MARY'S COLLEGE: G. Heppin, D. Hickey, N. Barry, V. Cunningham, A. McEvoy, P. Campion, C. McGuinness, B. Keene, B. Browne, capt., S. Cawley, M. O'Kelly, S. Jameson, K. Potts, V. Costello, K. Davlin.

Referee: B. Stirling (USRI)

Bewildered Mary's hit brick wall

REGARDLESS of any future tampering with the structure of the All Ireland League — whether it is upgraded, downgraded, or whatever — this fixture will always be worth watching. Young Munster fans will travel to Tom Clifford Park knowing that their opponents will be weighed down by psychological baggage. By now, the Young Munster monkey is well glued to the St Mary's backs.

Yet again, the Dublin side headed for home with their egos bruised and title chances battered. It seems that until they are capable of getting a result at this most hostile of venues they will never be champions.

Right up until the seventh minute of injury time this game was theirs for the saving. Referee Brian Stirling was penalising a back-peddalling home side at a rate of knots, but by then Mary's were so dazed and confused by the welter of excitement that they were clueless as to what to do with all this possession.

One moment of clarity — a good 10 minutes before the end of normal time — saw Mary's opt for the scrum in the Munsters' 22 when awarded a penalty. But for a super tackle by Niall McNamara on Victor Costello, the score would have come.

When the penalty count started to soar in that dramatic finale, you expected Mary's to go for the same option. One series of drives ended with yet another Mary's penalty, this time five metres out and straight in front of the posts. But when a calm head was needed to settle things down, look at the acres of attacking space afforded by the position and take another scrum, there was none to be found. Instead, Mary's ploughed on, Munsters continued to defend like demons, and the line was held intact.

When the final whistle eventually sounded you would have thought that Munsters had either won the title, or avoided relegation. Rather, they had

Brendan Fanning at Tom Clifford Park

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P Boland, N McNamara, N O'Meara, M Lynch, D Walsh, A O'Halloran, D Tabor, J Fitzgerald (capt), Mark Fitzgerald, Mick Fitzgerald, M O'Halloran, D O'Meara, D Clohesy, D Edwards, G Earls.

G Halpin, D Hickey, N Barry, V Connolly, A McEvoy, F Camplon, C McGuinness, B Keane, B Browne (capt), S Cawley, M O'Kelly, S Jameson, K Potts, V Costello, K Devlin.

Scorers: O'Halloran (P 2min) 3-0; O'Halloran (P 28min) 6-0; O'Kelly (T 34min) 6-5; O'Halloran (P 60min) 9-5; Lynch (P 75min) 12-5.

Weather: perfect. Ground: firm. Referee: S Stirling (Ulster).

merely triumphed in a contest they consider crucial. Yet again.

On the balance of play the result was entirely appropriate, for until the last 15 minutes the second half had belonged to Munsters, and this despite they having a mediocre lineout on a day when most of the restarts were being made on the touch-line.

But when you would have expected Steve Jamieson and Malcolm O'Kelly to dominate for the Dubliners, they didn't. How much was down to Barry Browne's dodgy lineout throwing, and how much was due to the usual level of jungle warfare, was hard to quantify; but the result was a stream of tapped ball which set up scrum-half Conor McGuinness for some painful hits.

This delighted the throng on the popular side of the ground. Neither were they displeased at the enthusiasm of Ger Earls to spend his afternoon in the face of Fergal Camplon, the Mary's fly-half. For a player whose fitness was in doubt until late in the week, Earls had a huge game. So, too, did his back-row colleagues: Declan Edwards consistently made good ground from Camplon's sloppy restart, and Des Clohesy was aggressive and direct in his running, and cunning in his acts of grand larceny.

All told, it made for a typically rugged performance from Munsters, all of them were totally committed to the cause. The same could not be said of their opponents. At least O'Kelly can reflect with some pride on his performance. Not only did he put in a terrific burst for his side's only try, but his

ability to pop up in support of stranded colleagues was uncanny. Gary Halpin at full-back — who did well under the high balls — will remember him for it.

Camplon will remember two missed kicks in the first half when his side were trailing to an early penalty from O'Halloran. So O'Kelly's try was all the more welcome when it came soon before the break, for after O'Halloran's second penalty it left just a point between the sides.

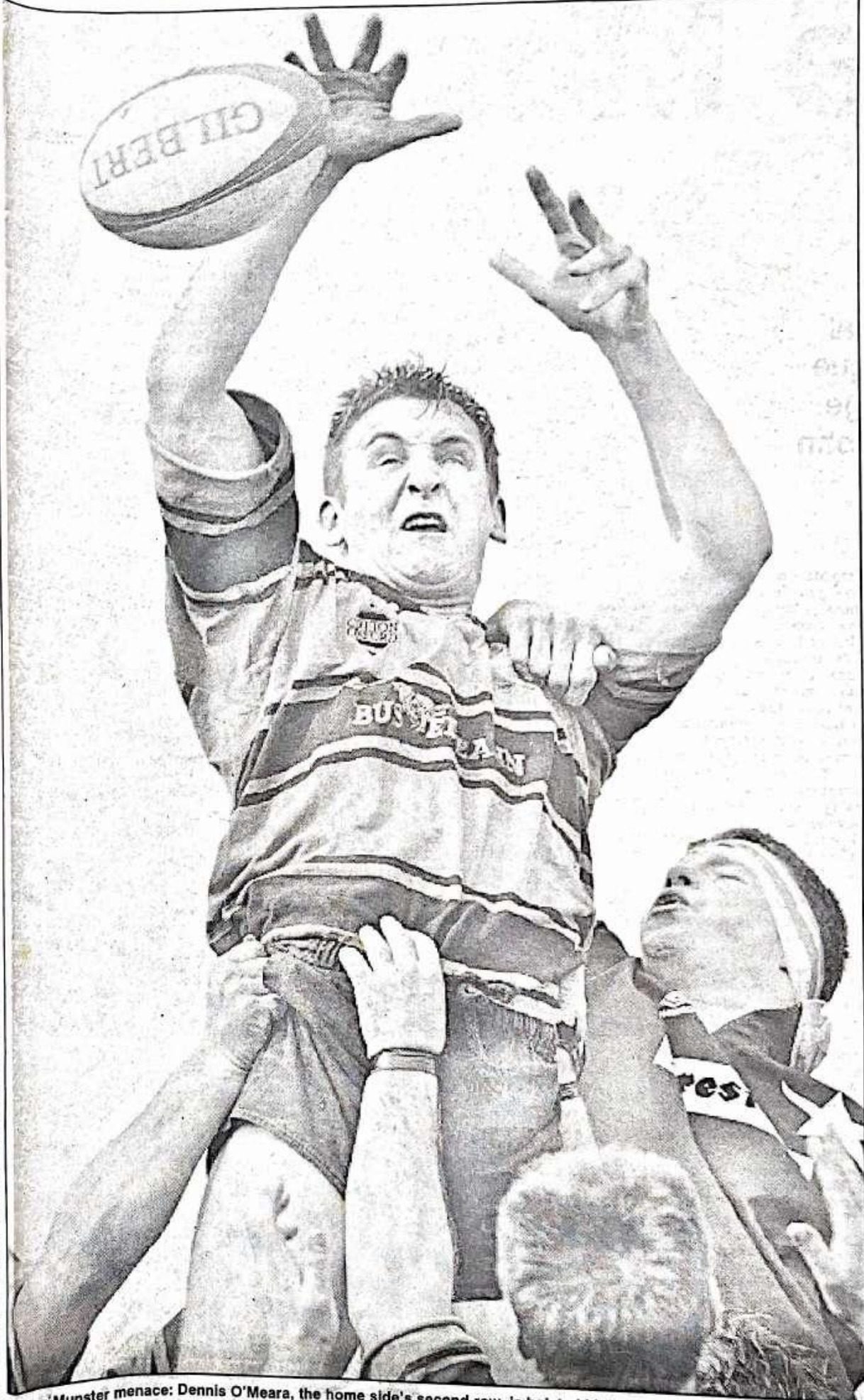
From a lineout around halfway, a gap opened up towards the tail of the line and McGuinness took off through it, more in hope than expectation. As he looked left and right for support runners, O'Kelly materialised from nowhere and did particularly well to make the line.

But by the time the second half started, Munsters had reasserted themselves up front, and their back row started doing serious damage with ball in hand. It should now be clear that when it comes to stopping Clohesy, you have to sit on him, for no sooner is he grounded than he is up again and off like a rocket.

In this fixture that sort of play does wonders for the crowd; and their involvement is everything. So it was no surprise that when the inevitable St Mary's fightback came, the home boys risked life and limb to keep them out.

True, they spent as much time on the wrong side of the offside line as on the right side, but almost all's fair in this encounter.

Munsters won it. They deserved it.



Young Munster menace: Dennis O'Meara, the home side's second-row, is hoisted high above Mary's Malcolm O'Kelly