

Clontarf let determined St Mary's grab a win

CLONTARF..... 23
ST MARY'S 27

Kieran Garry

THERE was never going to be much between the sides in this Leinster League semi-final, but St Mary's ability to make greater use of limited possession proved decisive and enabled them to see off Clontarf's spirited challenge at Castle Avenue on Saturday.

For long periods of the second half Clontarf, who led 23-20 with 10 minutes to go, looked likely winners. However coach and flanker Brent Pope felt they showed some inexperience in the closing stages.

"We made vital mistakes. We should have sewn it up in the final 10 minutes and played for a penalty to get away from them. Instead there was a bit of panic. St Mary's used the ball to much better effect. They took their chances. We knew if they got a chance they'd run us around in the backs and that's how they scored."

With Clontarf holding a deserved 9-6 lead, a fairly uneventful first half seemed to be winding down when St Mary's struck for the first try of the game. After good work by Kevin Potts up the left the ball was spun out along the line for full-back Kevin Nowlan to come in at pace and score under the posts. That converted try gave St Mary's, who were missing seven players, a 13-9 lead at half-time.

Clontarf upped the pace and, five minutes after the restart, the impressive Mick Fitzsimons gathered the ball from a ruck outside St Mary's 22 and ran wide of the cover to score in the left corner. Mattie Smith kicked an excellent conversion.

However Fitzsimons proved the villain of the piece five minutes later. His attempted clearance was blocked by Paddy Lane, and the right wing gathered the ball, shrugged off the outside-half's tackle and crossed for a try, which Craig Fitzpatrick converted.

Clontarf appeared to put that setback behind them and put the St Mary's line under sustained pressure. A fine angled kick from Mattie Smith allowed Tony Lawless in for a try. Smith again kicked the conversion from touch, and facing into the third quarter Clontarf looked on their way.

St Mary's, however, have shown tenacity in this competition and they refused to lie down. From a scrum inside the Clontarf 22 they moved the ball along the line to left wing Davy Lyons who scored in the corner. This time there was to be no way back for Clontarf.

St Mary's coach Ciaran Fitzgerald declared himself pleased with the result if not by the team's performance. "I don't think we played particularly well. We never got going at it. It was a slow, hard competitive fight. I was pleased with the heart we showed. We hung in there and scored when it mattered."

Scoring Sequence: 2 mins, Fitzpatrick penalty, 3-0; 14 mins, Fitzpatrick penalty, 6-0; 16 mins, Smith penalty, 6-3; 30 mins, Smith penalty, 6-6; 36 mins, Smith penalty, 6-9; 38 mins, Knowlan try, Fitzpatrick conversion, 13-9; 45 mins, Fitzsimons try, Smith conversion, 13-16; 51 mins, Lane try, Fitzpatrick conversion, 20-16; 59 mins, Lawless try, Smith conversion, 20-23; 73 mins, Lyons try, Fitzpatrick conversion, 27-23.

CLONTARF: C Sherwood; D O'Brien, M Smith, G Aherne, T Lawless; M Fitzsimons, K Lawless (capt); T Hannigan, B Jackman, A O'Donnell, P Mullaney, S Lusk, B Pope, S Guerin, D Moore.

ST MARY'S: K Nowlan; P Lane, G Gannon, E Gibney; D Lyons; C Fitzpatrick, F McCormack; B Keane (capt), D Breslin, E Byrne, S Jameson, K Potts, N Campion, M Cuddihy, F Fitzgerald. **Replacement:** K Jennings for N Campion (72 mins).

Referee: M Gillick (ARLB).

LANSDOWNE 16
TERENURE 14

Section winners Terenure were dumped out of the Leinster Championship in the second semi-final at headquarters on Saturday.

In a first half devoid of fluent movements, both sides were restricted to scrapping for possession and scores. A Willie Clancy dropped goal and Declan Fassbender penalty were nullified by two penalties from Terenure's reliable full-back, Peter Walsh.

On the turnover, a Walsh penalty had Terenure ahead. But then Lansdowne scrum-half Dave O'Mahony pounced for a try following a scrum near the Terenure line midway through the second half.

Fassbender converted and struck another penalty shortly after to put clear water between the sides.

A late David Coleman try gave Terenure the chance to rescue the game at the death, but Walsh was narrowly wide with the conversion.