

Setback for St Mary's as Ballymena fight back

BALLYMENA are something of a litmus test for title aspirations, especially at Eaton Park. What they lack in star individuals they make up for in spirit and a high fitness level borne out of a rigorous three nights per week training regime. Nothing less than a full 80 minute effort is required against them. St Mary's dictated the tune for much of the game, yet they still came up short here.

The only losers in the top six, St Mary's thus dropped three places to sixth and now need two favours apiece against both Lansdowne and Shannon to begin with, while winning their remaining six. In short, they need snookers.

Having probably kissed another league challenge goodbye, St Mary's will have kicked themselves all the way back to Dublin. They took the game to Ballymena from the off.

For half an hour there was really only one team in it. The pack laid on plenty of good ball, and their talented young backs attacked Ballymena in midfield or out wide. Craig Fitzpatrick moved his line well, their promising centre pairing of Gareth Gannon and Ray McIlreavy were on their game and Kevin Nowlan was hitting the line with unerring timing.

The full-back arrived on McIlreavy's shoulder to score their first try, and made the initial incursion to put the centre over for the second. At 17-3 only a commanding away win seemed feasible.

BALLYMENA 25
ST MARY'S 22

Gerry Thornley

Ballymena were pedestrian by comparison, forever attacking close in where the solid St Mary's fringe defence conceded little.

Passages of uninspired running into a brick wall ended with kicks to touch into the wind, routine applause and an even more routine Steve Jameson takes from Barry Browne's ensuing throw.

But you underestimate Ballymena at your peril. They had conceded three early tries to Terenure, trailed 32-9 to Shannon and 20-3 to Cork Constitution before launching comebacks, clawing to within a score of both Terenure and Shannon. St Mary's hadn't read the script and paid for it.

Mark Beattie measured one of the aforementioned kicks to perfection, forcing Nowlan to concede the throw-in and Paul McBride rolled over from a rolling maul. St Mary's went to sleep following the restart, permitting Derek McAleese to carve through and from the resultant five-metre scrum the veteran out-half put Beattie over on his inside.

Suddenly, St Mary's well-earned lead had vanished, and they had to do it all again into a second-half wind. In fairness, they made a fine fist of it and your heart went out to them at the end. They kept running, it and coming at Ballymena, coming within a tackle or a pass of

a try on countless occasions, but the home side's tackling was superb.

Despite a big game from the St Mary's open side Mark Cuddihy, Ballymena also limited the flow of second phase ball when moves broke down. Ciaran Fitzgerald singled out the superior mobility of the Ballymena tight five, which was epitomised by their super-charged hooker Stephen Ritchie, an additional back-row forward in stealing two key loose balls.

Any St Mary's turnover or fumble in the tackle was punished, McAleese repelling them with booming touchkicks off the ensuing scrums. One such box kick resulted in Jameson riskily tapping down Browne's throw beyond Owen McCormack for Ritchie to poach a crucial try.

Just two more sorties were enough for Ballymena, who in truth created little apart from rolling mauls and close-in driving. McAleese surprisingly missed an insurance drop goal before Ray McIlmoyle did so. Fitzpatrick and Nowlan did put David Lyons over in injury time, and St Mary's gamely sacrificed the conversion attempt, but the game was up.

"We can only blame ourselves for losing it," said a typically candid Ciaran Fitzgerald. "I think we lost it in the first-half when we had the lead. We took our eye off the ball and started to relax. It's a costly lesson. You can't afford any lapse in concentration at this level."

Ballymena were always capable of scalping a big name and should certainly be capable of acquiring

another couple of wins to ensure their survival without undue bother. It came at a huge personal cost for the concussed James Topping, though in the event his replacement McIlmoyle became something of a match-winner.

Similarly, Fitzgerald's counterpart Davey Smyth identified his pack's increasing ability to "drive them (Mary's) back so that the ball they were getting wasn't as good as it had been. We've been practising very hard on our forward play and technique and I think it showed."

As for the propensity to concede a big early lead, Smyth was at a total loss. "If I knew the secret of that I'd rectify it. I honestly don't know. We cannot settle down and play the rugby we're capable of until we're a few points down. But teams coming here can expect a match. There'll be no easy points got off us."

Lansdowne, hosts to Ballymena a fortnight hence, have been warned.

Scoring sequence: Five mins Fitzpatrick pen 0-3; Eight mins McAleese pen 3-3; 14 mins Nowlan try, Fitzpatrick con 3-10; 18 mins McIlreavy try, Fitzpatrick con 3-17; 23 mins McBride try, McIlmoyle con 10-17; 26 mins Beattie try, McIlmoyle con 17-17; 57 mins Ritchie try 22-17; 74 mins McIlmoyle drop goal 25-17; 80 mins Lyons try 25-22.

BALLYMENA: J Topping; P Rodgers, M Rainey, S Coulter, J Harley, D McAleese (capt), M Beattie, N McKernan, S Ritchie, R Irwin, G Longwell, P McBride, A Graham, D McCartney, A Simpson. **Replacements:** R McIlmoyle for Topping.

ST MARY'S: K Nowlan, D Hickie, R McIlreavy, G Gannon, D Lyons, C Fitzpatrick, O McCormack, E Byrne, B Browne, P Coyte, S Jameson (capt), D Burke, K Potts, V Costello, M Cuddihy. **Replacements:** M Riley for Burke (66 mins).

Referee: A Lewis (Leinster)

RUGBY ROUND-UP

ALL DIVISION ONE

At Donnybrook: **Old Wesley 12** (A Hawe 2 pens, drop goal), **Shannon 38** (A Thompson 2 tries, 5 cons, pen; P Murray, K Maher, R Sheriff try each).

At Tom Clifford Park: **Young Munster 15** (D Clohessy, M Lynch try each; A O'Halloran pen, con), **Lansdowne 42** (M Dillon 3 tries; A McKee try; penalty try; R Governey 3 pens, 4 cons).

At Dooradoyle: **Garryowen 28** (D Wallace 2 tries; J Clarke try; K Keane 3 pens, 2 cons), **Cork Constitution 16** (K Murphy try; R O'Gara 2 pens, drop goal, con).

At Stradbroke: **Blackrock 23** (D Lynagh try, 3 pens, 2 cons; M Roche try), **Old Crescent 9** (S Tuohy 3 pens).

At Lakelands Park: **Terenure College 45** (C Clarke and D Coleman 2 tries; M Smyth try; P Walsh 4 pens, 4 cons), **Dungannon 18** (C Simpson try; penalty try; K McGarry 2 pens, con).

At Anglesea Road: **Old Belvedere 36** (R Ward 2 tries; H McDonnell, F O'Beirne, C Jewley try each; W Treacy 4 cons, pen), **Instonians 26** (N Moffett 2 tries; I Gray try; S Bond 3 pens, con).

At Eaton Park: **Ballymena 25** (P McBride, S Ritchie, M Beattie try each; R McIlmoye drop goal, 2 cons; D McAleese pen), **St Mary's 22** (K Nowlan, D Lyons, R McIlreavey try each; C Fitzpatrick pen, 2 cons).

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Lansdowne	7	6	0	1	210	88	12
Shannon	7	6	0	1	175	108	12
Garryowen	7	5	0	2	196	154	10
Blackrock	7	5	0	2	142	101	10
Terenure	7	5	0	2	149	114	10
St Mary's	7	4	1	2	154	121	9
Cork Con	6	3	1	3	142	132	7
Old Belvedere	7	3	0	4	136	147	6
Ballymena	7	3	0	4	121	167	6
Dungannon	7	2	0	5	176	187	4
Old Crescent	7	2	0	5	119	157	4
Y Munster	7	2	0	5	123	171	4
Old Wesley	7	1	0	6	75	162	2
Instonians	7	1	0	6	94	203	2

DIVISION TWO

At Gibson Park: **Malone 3** (G Fry pen), **Bective 8** (S Montgomery try; S Buckley pen).

At Castle Avenue: **Clontarf 13** (D Moore try; M Woods 2 pens, con), **Skerries 9** (J Dempsey 3 pens).

At Dr Hickey Park: **Greystones 19** (M Dwyer

try, 2 cons; D Nolan, L Murphy try each), **UCC 17** (D Murphy try; J O'Mahony 4 pens).

At Lansdowne Road: **Wanderers 10** (C Leahy try; O Cobbe con, drop goal), **Sunday's Well 15** (C Burke 5 pens).

At Musgrave Park: **Dolphin 24** (C Mahony try, pen, 3 cons; T O'Connell, B Kearney try each), **Highfield 6** (J O'Neill 2 pens).

At Sydney Parade: **Monkstown 16** (A McMaster 3 pens, con; C Heaney try), **NIFC 16** (M Barnes 3 pens, con; J Park try).

DLSP v City of Derry — OFF.

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Bective	7	6	0	1	160	77	12
Dolphin	7	5	1	1	168	128	11
Clontarf	7	5	0	2	149	85	10
Sunday's Well	7	5	0	2	190	137	10
Wanderers	7	4	1	2	142	152	9
Greystones	7	4	0	3	131	109	8
Skerries	7	4	0	3	106	103	8
Monkstown	7	3	2	2	128	130	8
Malone	7	3	0	4	127	137	6
DLSP	6	2	1	3	113	130	5
UCC	7	2	0	5	130	168	4
NIFC	7	1	1	5	101	199	3
Highfield	7	1	0	6	85	137	2

RUGBY

Insurance Corporation All Ireland League Division One

Donnybrook: OLD WESLEY 12 (A Hawe 2 pen & 2 drgl) SHANNON 38 (A Thompson 2 tries & 5 cons, pen, P Murray, K Maher, R Sherriff tries)

Anglesea Road: OLD BELVEDERE 36 (R Ward 2, H McDonnell, F O'Beirne, C Bewley tries, W Treacy 4 cons, pen) INSTONIAN 26 (N Moffett 2, I Gray try, S Bond 3 pens, con) h/t: 13-18

Lakelands Park: TERENCE COLLEGE 45 DUNGANNON 18

Stradbroke: BLACKROCK 23 (D Lynagh 3 pens, 2 cons, try; M Roche try) OLD CRESCENT 9 (S Tuohy 3 pens)

Eaton Park: BALLYMENA 25 (P McBride, S Richie, M Beattie tries, R McIlmoyle 1 dr gl, 2 cons; D McAleese pen) ST MARY'S 22 (K Nowlan, D Lyons, R McCreavey tries, C Fitzpatrick 1 pen, 2 cons)

Dooradoyle: GARRYOWEN 28 (D Wallace 2 tries, J Clarke try, K Keane 3 pens & 2 cons) CORK CONSTITUTION 16 (Kenny Murphy try, R O'Gara 2 pens, dropgoal & con) h/t: 28-16

Tom Clifford Park: YOUNG MUNSTER 15 (D Clohessy, M Lynch tries; A O'Halloran pen & con) LANSDOWNE 42 (M Dillon (3), A McKeen tries, pen try, R Governey 3 pens & 4 cons)

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Lansdowne	7	6	0	1	210	108	12
Shannon	7	6	0	1	175	108	12
Garryowen	7	5	0	2	196	154	10
Blackrock Coll	7	5	0	2	142	101	10
Terenure Coll	7	5	0	2	149	114	10
St Mary's Coll	7	4	1	2	147	121	9
Cork Con	6	3	1	3	142	132	7
Old Belvedere	7	3	0	4	136	147	6
Ballymena	7	3	0	4	123	167	6
Dungannon	7	2	0	5	176	187	4
Young Munster	7	2	0	5	123	171	4
Old Crescent	7	2	0	5	119	157	4
Old Wesley	7	1	0	6	75	162	2
Instonians	7	1	0	6	94	205	2

Next fixtures: (8 Mar) Con v OW, Shannon v OB, OC v Terenure, St Mary's v Garryowen, Lansdowne v Ballymena, Inst v Blackrock, Dungannon v YM

STATISTICS

(before yesterday's games)

Division Three

Deramore: COLLEGIANS 15 (W Storey, S Kennedy tries, M Jackson pen, con) PORTADOWN 77 (A Matchett 2 tries, A Eagleson 2 tries, D Tweed, M McCluskey, M McAllister, K Gallagher, T McDowell, D McKay, J McAfee try each, S Laing try, pen, 7 con)

Thomond Park: BOHEMIANS 36 DUBLIN UNIVERSITY 5

Ballinakill: WATERPARK 16 (M Logue try; J Murphy 3 pens, 1 con) UCD 18 (D Finn 2 tries; R Ormond 1 con, 2 pens)

Corinthian Park: CORINTHIANS 3 (J Malone pen) QUEENS UNIVERSITY BELFAST 6 (B Hall 2 pen) h/t 3-3

Keane Park: BUCCANEERS 11 (R Lee 2 pen, M Whelan try) GALWEGIAN 11 (K Barrett dr gl, 1 pen, A Connolly try) h/t 8-5

Free: Bangor

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Galwegians	7	6	1	0	138	74	13
Buccaneers	6	5	1	0	130	63	11
Portadown	6	5	0	1	122	81	10
UCD	8	4	1	3	138	168	9
Bohemians	6	4	0	2	138	51	8
Queen's Univ	6	4	0	2	93	87	8
Corinthians	7	2	1	4	87	111	5
Collegians	7	2	0	5	96	164	4
Dublin Univ	7	1	0	6	115	197	2
Bangor	6	1	0	5	78	189	2
Waterpark	6	0	0	6	59	114	0

Next fixtures: (8 Mar) Portadown v Corinthians, QUB v Bohs, Galwegians v Waterpark, Bangor v Collegians, DU v Buccaneers, Free: UCD

STATISTICS

(before yesterday's games)

Try scorers:

5 D Reddan (Gal),
4 S McKinty (Bgr), D Finn, J Sharp (UCD)
3 J Culhane (Boh), B Rigney, J Screene (Buc),
J Cunningham (DU), M Ericson, G McCluskey (Por)
2 M Duignan, N Mannion (Buc), M Jackson, M Robinson (Col), D McElligott, B Quinn, P Mandel, A Turtle (DU), M Murphy, P Rowe, B Gavin, G Heaslip (Gal), M Begley, D McKay, T Octave (Por), P Spence, A Hood (QU), R Ormonde, R Staunton (UCD)
1 A Scott, D Rainey, D Dunlop, M Webb (Bgr), M Benson, G Koch, G Ross, A Reddan, K Hanly, L Walshe, C Murphy, D Culhane

Cinora Park — Young Munster 11 (C. Ryan try, A O'Halloran 2 pens), **St Mary's College 19** (E Lyons try, C Fitzpatrick 4 pens, 1 conv).

Lansdowne Road — Lansdowne 30 (Penalty try, M McDermott try, O' Mahony try, R Corrigan try, E Elwood 2 pens, 2 convs); **Cork Constitution 6** (R O'Gara 1 pen, 1 dr gl).

Anglesea Road — Old Belvedere 36 (S Tormey 2 tries, D Shanley try, C Bewley try, P McKenna try, B Treacy 1 pen, 4 cons); **Dungannon 23** (A Blair dr gl, 1 pen, 1 con, W Dunne try, S Bell try, G Leslie try)

St Mary's	5	4	1	0	119	77	9
Lansdowne	5	4	0	1	149	60	8
Shannon	5	4	0	1	120	80	8
Garryowen	5	4	0	1	152	121	8
Terenure	5	4	0	1	84	63	8
Blackrock	5	3	0	2	105	79	6
Cork Con	5	2	1	2	87	86	5
Dungannon	5	2	0	3	145	128	4
O Belvedere	5	2	0	3	83	84	4
Ballymena	5	2	0	3	80	112	6
Y Munster	5	1	0	4	75	109	2
O Crescent	5	1	0	4	73	117	2
O Wesley	5	1	0	4	48	95	2
Instonians	5	0	0	5	39	154	0