

Spectators the winners in a fine game of rugby

THIS was high-altitude rugby played with a Southern Hemisphere style. All credit to St Mary's College and Blackrock College for producing a feast of entertainment. It's a pity that Division One of the ALL has not always been up to this standard.

The Stradbroke crowd was treated to an expansive game as the tides of fortune flowed back and forth. The league's dark horses, St Mary's, showed in one 80 minutes why they have come so far this year.

Within six minutes, Denis Hickie and John McWeeney had broken through for tries; Craig Fitzpatrick converting the second for a 12-0 lead. Seven minutes later, it was 12-10, with Shane Byrne drawing a penalty try, David Lynagh kicking the conversion and a penalty.

St Mary's stretched their legs, Blackrock quickened their strides.

BLACKROCK COLL 40
ST MARY'S COLL 43

Des Berry

By the break, it was a case of 20-20 vision on the scoreboard. Hickie's second try on the stroke of half-time saw to that.

Although St Mary's almost contrived to throw away the game in the second half, it was all about their full back, Kevin Nowlan. His hat trick of tries in the 54th, 59th and 69th minutes had Blackrock all aquiver.

Still, St Mary's allowed Blackrock back in with a sniff. Two late tries from number eight Duncan Kennedy and a pumped-up Aidan Guinan hinted a near impossible comeback. However time had run out for Blackrock and they were left to rue missed chances. Then again, that is the

nature of the beast in a free-flowing spectacle like this where the accent was on creativity.

For St Mary's coach, Ciaran Fitzgerald, there was a lot to be positive about, not least the form of Victor Costello.

Scoring: 2 mins: D Hickie try 0-5; 6: J McWeeney try, C Fitzpatrick con 0-12; 12: D Lynagh pen 3-12; 17: pen try, Lynagh con 10-12; 27: Fitzpatrick pen 10-15; 31: D Johnson try, Lynagh con 17-15; 36: E Farrell drop goal 20-15; D Hickie try 20-20; 41: Fitzpatrick pen 20-23; 44: Fitzpatrick pen 20-26; 51: Lynagh pen 23-26; 54: K Nowlan try, Fitzpatrick con 23-33; 59: Nowlan try 23-38; 69: Nowlan try 23-43; 72: Lynagh pen 26-43; 76: D Kennedy try, Lynagh con 33-43; 80: A Guinan try, Lynagh con 40-43.

BLACKROCK COLLEGE: S Hunt; D Johnson, E Farrell, D Lynagh, A Guinan; A McGowan, N Assaf; D Kavanagh, S Byrne, P Jordan, P Holden, H Kos, D Hackett, R Rogers, D Kennedy. **Replacements:** G Cummins for Hunt 36 mins.

ST MARY'S COLLEGE: K Nowlan; D Hickie, D Lyons, E Gibney, J McWeeney; C Fitzpatrick, C McGuinness; B Keane, B Browne, E Byrne, S Jameson, K Potts, M Reilly, M Cuddihy, V Costello. **Replacements:** D Breslin for Browne 78 mins.

Referee: David McHugh, MRA.

Reward for the faithful few

■ AND THE hardy, too, shall have their reward. About 600 of them turned up at Stradbroke for a match that did not seem to matter much. They stumbled across a little gem; lively and vigorous, competitive and honest. Engaging in the very first minute, it remained so right to the end.

■ Mary's deserved their victory and so retain a mathematical chance of winning the League. But teams do not win titles from their position and Mary's will be happy to settle for the intrinsic satisfaction of a good match, well won. Six tries, all scored by the wings and full-back, testify to how Mary's went about their business.

■ Rock were not much behind them. They, too, played with verve and were also good behind the scrum. Nicky Assaf was quick and positive at scrum-half, Emmet Farrell constantly searched for gaps and the wingers, David Johnson and

David Walsh

Blackrock College	40
St Mary's College	43

Aidan Guinan were quick. Mary's were always winning the match but they could have lost it at the death.

Farrell, who has such an appetite for involvement, was making his umpteenth run out of defence. Maybe it is because he is stocky and would-be tacklers can not believe he is going to jink or side-step them but he often does. This time he did and his little inside-pass came within a fraction of connecting with Guinan. The final score might have been 47-43 to Rock.

Mary's would not have deserved to lose because they were a touch more polished. You could see that in the running of Denis Hickie in the first half and in the outstanding Kevin Nowlan through the second period. Hickie got two

marvellous tries, one in the second minute of the half and the second just before half-time.

Steve Jameson pinched a Rock line in the first minute, Victor Costello then made a lot of ground and you could sense the No 8's urgency to link with Hickie. Once he got the ball, Hickie was exceptional and swerved quite beautifully to accelerate wide of the Rock full-back Shane Hunt.

John McWeeney, the left wing, had Mary's second try on seven minutes and they looked set for a cruise. A penalty try, a nice David Johnson try allowed Rock to turn a 12-0 deficit into a 20-15 lead. Then Hickie struck again and the teams turned at 20-20.

Mary's improved in the second half and full-back Nowlan was majestic. He scored three tries but every time he ran he hurt Rock and created things for his team. His third try pushed Mary's into a 43-26 lead. That should have been

that. But Rock plugged on and that was the remarkable part.

Duncan Kennedy and Guinan got tries and the deficit was whittled down to three. Mary's were relieved when David McHugh eventually ended it. Nowlan had reason to be most pleased: it was his third hat-trick this season and he is making a name for himself.

"I am a bit of a late developer," he said afterwards. He was a Third A's player last season. The development has been spectacular.

Blackrock: S Hunt (Cummins); D Johnson, E Farrell, D Lynagh, A Guinan; A McGowan, N Assaf; D Kavanagh, S Byrne, P Jordan, P Holden, H Kos (capt), D Hackett, D Kennedy, R Rogers.
St Mary's: K Nowlan; D Hickie, D Lyons, E Gibney, J McWeeney; C Fitzpatrick, C McGuinness; B Keane (capt), B Browne (Breslin), E Byrne, S Jameson, K Potts, M Reilly, V Costello, M Cuddihy.
Scores: Blackrock, Tries: Penalty try, Johnson, Kennedy, Guinan; Cons: Lynagh (4); Dg: Farrell; Pens: Lynagh (3).
St Mary's: Tries: Nowlan (3), Hickie (2), McWeeney; Cons: Fitzpatrick (2); Pens: Fitzpatrick (3).
Referee: D McHugh (Munster).

Hickie and Nowlan sparkle for St Mary's

John O'Sullivan

Blackrock College 40
St Mary's College 43

THE option of keeping the ball in hand, adopted by both sides at Stradbroke yesterday, made for a hugely entertaining afternoon's rugby, embellished by several fine individual performances.

St Mary's pursuit of Shannon may be a forlorn quest but there is much to admire in coach Ciaran Fitzgerald's rugby philosophy. Six tries, all scored by a backline shorn of first choice centres Ray McIlreavy and Gareth Cannon, illustrated their quality.

None exemplified this ability more than rangy fullback Keith Nowlan and international wing Denis Hickie. Nowlan has been a revelation since breaking into the first team this season and yester-

day his superb running helped him to secure three tries.

Hickie was equally devastating, getting two tries from as many opportunities and confirming his status as the best wing in Irish rugby.

There was much to admire in the way Mary's conjured this victory from the industrious support play of Mark Cuddihy to the excellent line-out work of Steve Jameson. And then there was Victor Costello.

He set up the first two tries with trademark surges and good vision, was generally unstoppable in possession but, crucially, what is still apparent is a work-rate which will not suffice at the top level.

While doubts persist, Costello continues to tantalise with his power and speed, offering more and more evidence that he still boasts the pedigree for international rugby — when his concen-

tration and work-rate improve significantly.

Mary's penchant for assuming control of matches and then relinquishing that authority was once again in evidence. They were twice in command, only to allow the home side back in; it nearly cost them victory.

Four minutes into injury time at the end of the match, had David Lynagh's pass not been spilled by left wing Aidan Guinan, 'Rock' would have snatched victory.

'Rock, equally hamstrung by injury, survived the concession of two early tries to lead 20-15 but conceded a second try to Hickie in injury time at the end of the half to leave the side's tied 20-20 at the interval.

Their pack worked hard, with none more industrious than David Hackett, Duncan Kennedy and Shane Byrne.

Mary's raced into a 12-0 lead after six minutes with tries from Hickie and John McWeeney, the latter converted by Craig Fitzpatrick. Both were the product of initial surges by Costello.

A David Lynagh penalty and a penalty try awarded by referee David McHugh for deliberately killing the ball after Byrne had taken play to the Mary's line, allowed Blackrock to claw their way back into the match.

Fitzpatrick's penalty on 27 minutes was followed by a try from Blackrock left wing David Johnson, which Lynagh converted. Emmet Farrell dropped a goal before Hickie's unconverted try, a wonderful piece of finishing, ended the first half points fest.

Two Fitzpatrick penalties to one from Lynagh pre-empted a Mary's purple patch in which Nowlan scored three fine tries.



Fitzpatrick managed only one conversion.

Lynagh maintained his exemplary kicking form with a penalty before tries by Kennedy and Guinan, both converted by the centre, hinted at an unlikely escape for the home side.

Blackrock: S Hunt, D Johnson, E Farrell, D Lynagh, A Guinan, A McGowan, N Assaf, D Kavanagh, S Byrne, P Jordan, P Holden, H Kos (capt), D Hackett, D Kennedy, R Rogers. **Replacement:** G Cummins for Hunt 38 mins.

St Mary's: K Nowlan, D Hickie, E Gibney, D Lyons, J McWeeney, C Fitzpatrick, C McGuinness, B Keane (capt), B Browne, E Byrne, S Jameson, K Potts, M Reilly, V Costello, M Cuddihy. **Replacement:** D Breslin for Browne 80 mins. **Referee:** D McHugh (Munster).

RUGBY: Champions look set for hat-trick of titles

Shannon poised