

Clontarf confirm their arrival

ST MARY'S 12
CLONTARF 23

Des Berry

ST MARY'S COLLEGE, who must travel to play Shannon in their next game, did little to inspire confidence in their prospects in this match at Templeville Road on Saturday.

But the focus should not be on the fading title hopes of St Mary's but on Clontarf. They came into the highest league in the land with a disparate group of players who were unfamiliar with each other. Through the first five challenges they have acclimatised to the new altitude and forged a path into mid-table which many thought was impossible.

"The boys were tremendous today," Clontarf coach Brent Pope said. "This season, I have been dealing with a whole new set of forwards, but the team spirit has been fantastic and I felt our defence was very good in the first half into the strong wind."

This was when the game was won and lost. St Mary's began as if they believed it was only a matter of time before the breakthrough would come. It was. Clontarf full back Mark Woods tossed out a pass that had 'hospital' written all over it and St Mary's centre Ray McIlreavy strolled over beside the posts.

Richard Ormond landed the conversion, but wasn't so satisfied with his failure to repeat the dose when Denis Hickie took advantage of the quick thinking of Eoin McCormack and the quick feet of Kevin Nowlan to go over unopposed in the right corner after 37 minutes.

Both teams knew that 12-0 was not a sufficient lead to carry into the second period given the severe wind and Clontarf set about giving this theory credence as early as the 43rd minute. Replacement scrum-half Ronan O'Reilly persisted in following up his block down of Ormond's attempted clearance and threw himself on the ball behind the line. Richie Murphy converted and penalties in the 47th and 70th minutes confirmed for Mary's what they were learning all the while — Clontarf are relishing life with the big boys.

A second try from 'super sub' O'Reilly and Murphy's conversion and a late penalty crowned a jubilant afternoon for Clontarf.

Scoring Sequence — 16 mins: R McIlreavy try, R Ormond con, 7-0; **37:** D Hickie try, 12-0; **43:** R O'Reilly try, R Murphy con, 12-7; **47:** Murphy pen, 12-10; **70:** Murphy pen, 12-13; **74:** R O'Reilly try, Murphy con, 12-17; Murphy pen, 12-20.

ST MARY'S COLLEGE: K Nowlan; D Hickie, H McIlreavy, G Gannon, K McNamee; R Ormond, E McCormack; R Lynch, B Browne, D Coen, S Jameson, F Fitzgerald, K Jennings, M Cuddihy, V Costello. **Replacements:** E Byrne for Coen, 4 mins; M Reilly for Jennings, half-time; P Power for Browne, 73 mins.

CLONTARF: M Woods; R Noble, M Smith, N Barry, M Fitzsimons; R Murphy, S McCarthy, T Hannigan, B Jackman, P McQuillen, C Power, M Coughlan, A Dignam, P Ward, C Brownley. **Replacements:** R O'Reilly for McCarthy, 38 mins; S Guerin for Dignam, 64 mins. **Referee:** A Watson (Uist Branch).



Eoin McCormack of St Mary's veers away from Clontarf's Craig Browney during the sides' AIB League Division One match at Templeville Road on Saturday.
— (Photograph: Alan Betson).