

**SUDDENLY** it all makes sense. In Philip Danaher, the coach watching Warren Gattland watch a kindred spirit. If the Garryowen coach can instill half the defensive solidity which his team used to negate a free-running St Mary's into the Irish backs over the next few days, he'll be worth his place on the coaching ticket.

By no stretch of the imagination are Garryowen a team of all the talents. Accordingly, they don't attempt to play like one; instead they play to their strengths and hide their weaknesses. Their back play isn't noted for its innovative moves, more its percentage use of the ball and outstanding defence — one of the best in the league.

When one thinks back on this match, it's hard to recall much in the way of creative rugby from the home side. Their pack built up some phases of continuity, they attacked the narrow side well and half-backs Stephen Melvor and Barry Everett kicked for position cleverly so that Garryowen had much more of the game territorially than their possession would have dictated.

"I don't think we created, but I think we capitalized when we had to capitalize," said Danaher. "We supported an awful lot of energy out of them when they moved ball and coming didn't get far. It's always easier to go to defend and stopping them behind the gain line, so they have to regroup. Our folks broke their asses. Mary's might have thrown the ball in the hand a lot more than we did, but at the end of the day, it's all about points on the board."

Garryowen's sole try came from a very orthodox blindside move off a scrum, the St Mary's out-half, Fergal Campion, allowing Dominic Crotty to round him a little too easily. Ultimately, Killick's conversion of the try to a try-in-play was the difference in the result.

Garryowen should also have added another in the second period when Melvor again passed

to Croly on the narrow side, but this time Jack Clarke embarrassingly spilled the ball with the line at his mercy. But for a try-saving cover tackle on John McWenney late on in the in-goal area, and the result itself, Clarke would have had nightmares about that knock-on.

But those incidents apart, Garraween left little attacking imprint on the match. Ahead in a low-scoring game, they sought to play the second period in the visitors' half through their halves' kicking, and the troubled St Mary's scrum twice went down for Keane to tack on the decisive penalties. Otherwise, the game was mostly about how St Mary's attacked and how Garraween defended. In their two previous outings, St Mary's had run in 15 tries and over 100 points, when poring through porous Lansdowne and Ballymena midfield.

Garryowen presented a far more demanding, 'four-up' drift defence which rarely missed their first-up tacks. St Mary's had more than enough neck ball, Mark Cuddihy supporting his backs well and the prominent Mark Reilly, a converted lock, effectively getting them a fourth back-rower. But one after time, St Mary's drifted across the pitch and engaged Garryowen in midfield with needless over-elaborate moves.

"A lot of our movement was lateral rather than forward," agreed St. Mary's co-coach, Hugh McGuire, the really damning point being that a back-line with four internationals didn't have the wit to change tack.

Campion (who also missed three kicks at goal), Gareth Gannon and Victor Costello were the prime culprits, the latter spending too much time away from his pack and slowing things down in midfield. His yardage haul must rank as his lowest of the season.

The malaise went deeper still. The normally reliable Barry Browne had the throwing yips and Conor McGuinness took too long to make an imprint on the game. Kevin Nowlan made far too many bad errors, such as kicking ahead when he had fiddle in clear space to his left, bothing a try-scoring transfer to Peter Coyle and laying too flat and too close to Ray McElwray when a cut-out pass to a two-man overlap would have yielded a certain try.

Also declining to take a probable three points during a lengthy first-half spell of pressure, St Mary's played fitfully. At times, it seemed as if Trevor Brennan and McWeeney were playing Garraween on their own.

Brennan never lost the ball in contact, and forced countless turnovers. He still has to curb a tendency to give away penalties, though a tally of five was a little harsh on him, and needs to get to more rucks, but he's become vital to his team.

The in-form McWeeney, despite his late *jaux pas*, cluttered with gusto. One Lom-lu counter-attack, which ensnared a host of sky-blue shirts, should have led to a try on the left, given Hickie's pace, but off quickly, he received bail. Campeon and Gannon worked a totally unnecessary midfield loop which went

Their belated breakthrough try showed them the route to go. Twice the forwards took it straight up the middle, and then Campion used decoy runners to check the drift before his double slip-pass enabled Denis Hickey to put Nowlan into space. Nowlan timed his try-scoring pass perfectly for McWenney.

Nowlan, showing how dangerous he can always be, even when below his best, quickly atoned for McWentz's late error when dummifying inside for his sixth try two minutes from time. Even then, St. Mary's could have stolen it, but Gannon's looped pass eluded Hickie with what would have been a clear run for him if few others.



Shannon's Billy O'Shea is caught in possession by Old Belvedere at Anglessea Road on Saturday. — (Photograph: Joe St Ledger).

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**at Anglesea Road on Saturday.**

**SCORING SEQUENCE:** 18 mins — Croly  
7: Keane con 7-0; 47 mins — McWeesey try  
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5: 65 mins — Keane con 10-5; 75 mins —  
Keane con 13-5; 78 mins — Nowlan try  
Keane con 13-12  
Conced con 13-12

**ST. MARY'S COLLEGE:** K. Nowlan, J. (capt.), J. Brooks, C. Kirby, B. Everett, S. McKeown, P. Humphreys, G. Walsh, V. Humphreys, S. Quinn, P. Hogan, D. Wallace, A. Birmingham. Replacements — K. Harigan for Kirby (77 mins), C. Varley for Leahy (86 mins).

McIntirey, R. McIntirey, G. Garmon, D. Hickey, Campion, C. McGuinness, E. Byrne, B. Browne, Coyle, S. Jamieson, M. Reilly, T. Brennan, V. Costello, M. Coddery. **Replacements** — D. Dowling for Coyle (64 mins), R. Diamond for Campion (65 mins), P. Power for Browne (74 mins).

**Referee:** A. Lawlor (Limerick).