

Costello spur for St Mary's win

NOT so long ago Victor Costello was informed by the Irish management that international football required an 80-minutes player. The dynamic number eight was told to shape up with his attitude towards fitness or ship out.

At that stage Costello might have been criticised for being less mature than other players around him and no one really knew how he would react in the face of what was a public humiliation.

The Irish management made little effort to spin a yarn. Costello was out because he didn't train hard enough.

Now there is little doubt about the former Blackrock student's motivation. Two tries and a probable third before referee David McHugh awarded a first half penalty to St Mary's capped off

what coach Steve Hennessy described as an "awesome" performance from the Irish number eight.

Combining Costello's forceful input with the predatory instincts of flankers Trevor Brennan and Mark Cuddihy and an impressive tight five, St Mary's won this game at a canter against a lighter and relatively inexperienced Blackrock side.

"I think the first half, where we got three tries against the strong breeze and up the hill, was where the game was kinda won — provided we kept the ball ahead of the pack in the second half," said Hennessy.

"Once we allowed the pack to go forward after the break, we knew the scores would come. It was that platform we built in the first half off set pieces that won us the game."

It was Costello who emerged triumphantly after just five minutes when Ian Bloomer collected from a St Mary's lineout and the pack powered their way over the Blackrock line.

ST MARY'S 34
BLACKROCK 11

Johnny Watterson

From the same position in the right hand corner 19 minutes later it was Cuddihy who opportunistically pounced in a Blackrock lineout. The ball was tapped back into the Blackrock zone but it was the back row who rammed his way through to take the touch.

Two earlier penalties from Blackrock full-back Brian Carey left the score at 10-6 before Kevin Nowlan spilled the ball coming into the St Mary's line and the speedy Aidan Guinan kicked ahead to beat the covering Ray McLiravay to possession. That was in the 28th minute for 10-11 and was to be the visitors last score of the game.

The match by then had a certain inevitability as St Mary's set the tempo and shaped the flow. Superiority in the set pieces was particularly striking, culminating in the

penalty try from a set scrum which sent St Mary's into half-time 17-11 ahead.

"The pack played very well and obviously Victor was awesome today," said Hennessy.

"It took two or three guys to look after him. I think there was a big improvement from the back line today and to be honest we've been a bit disappointed in their play over the last few games but the last try today from Peter McKenna was a nice try. We've been working hard on that all season and it hasn't been coming off."

As the pitch cut up Blackrock floundered more and when Carey hobbled off on the hour adding to a lengthening injury list which included out-half Alan McGowan, St Mary's sensed their opponents' vulnerability.

Costello added his second try in the usual way, bursting from the fringe of a scrum. The pack pushed Blackrock towards their line before winger Paddy Lane fed off a Guinan fumble on the ground and kicked ahead to pick up at his leisure for 29-11.

McKenna's final score was a brash final flourish, typical of a side in full swing and playing with soaring confidence. Bursting through a Blackrock fracture, he galloped away untouched for his side's sixth try of the game.

The win puts St Mary's in fourth position with six games played; Blackrock, with the same number under their belt, sit third from the bottom; Terenure, with two games in hand, and Galwegians with one, occupy the two bottom slots.

Scoring Sequence: 1 mtr: B Carey penalty, 0-3, 5; V Costello try, 5-3; 16, Carey penalty, 5-6; 23, M Cuddihy try, 10-6; 28, A Guinan try, 10-11; 37, penalty try, F Campion conversion, 17-11; 64, V Costello try, 22-11; 66, P Lane try, F Campion conversion, 29-11; P McKenna try 34-11.

ST MARY'S: K Nowlan, J McWenney, P McKenna, R McLiravay, P Lane, F Campion, C McGurness (capt), J Maher, P Smyth, P Coyne, S Jernston, I Bloomer, T Brennan, M Cuddihy, V Costello. **Replacements:** E Byrne for Coyne (44 mins); D Bourke for Bloomer (60 mins); G Quinn for Brennan (60 mins).

BLACKROCK: B Carey, A Guinan, E Ryan, M Roche, T Keating, N O'Donovan, N Aislinn, M Cullen, S Byrne (capt), P Jordan, R Casey, H Koe, R Wheeler, R Lawlor, L Cullen. **Replacements:** D Johnston for Carey (60 mins); D Heavitt for Koe (60 mins); D McHugh (Munster).

Referee: D McHugh (Munster)

Costello drives St Mary's on to victory

Grant Robbins

St Mary's College.....34
Blackrock College.....11

IN a match both sides were desperate to win, something had to give. It was Blackrock College who cracked, comprehensively outplayed by St Mary's at Templeville Road yesterday, going down to their fourth consecutive AIB League defeat.

Six tries to one on a day of high winds and atrocious underfoot conditions tells its own story and St Mary's, having themselves suffered three defeats from the first five played to lie halfway down the table, will have regained much confidence.

Confidence was a word fixed on by St Mary's coach Steve Hennessy afterwards. "This was

win-or-bust for us," he pronounced. "We have been drifting this season. But our preparation was good in the run-up and Victor Costello and Peter Smyth, the former Blackrock hooker, reinforced our self-belief. Today, they were both exceptional and chiefly responsible for our forward ascendancy."

For Kevin West's Blackrock, a season which offered so much promise has suffered too many serious fissures lately. There was much honest endeavour and some slick handling but bad defence cost Rock this crucial game.

It was at the coalface that St Mary's turned the screw, particularly in the second half, and ultimately wrested the contest away from the lightweight Blackrock pack. In fairness, the heavy overnight rains had left the pitch

waterlogged and it was only after some excellent groundwork by the local staff that the match got underway at all.

Hennessy was quick to reflect on this: "Both 22s were glue-pots. It was extremely difficult to play any flowing rugby, hence our decision to revert to a ten-man game in the second period and it paid off."

Blackrock were given a poor platform and with Nicky Assaf providing a slow service from the scrum, it was small wonder that Niall O'Donovan found it difficult to give his line impetus.

From St Mary's, it was textbook stuff. They turned round 17-11 ahead, recovering from two early Brian Carey penalties to turn up the heat and roast the opposition. Costello and Mark Cuddihy benefited with a well-worked try apiece, while referee,

David McHugh also awarded them a penalty try.

St Mary's had so much of the play in the first half that they ought to have been away over the horizon. But they are prone to switch off mentally — and so it proved.

Kevin Nowlan, the international full-back, lost his bearings and his ham-fisted attempt to locate Paddy Lane was intercepted by Ray McIlreavy. The centre's hack ahead was retrieved by Aidan Guinan, who crashed over to claw back some of the advantage.

In contrast, the second period offered Blackrock scant consolation. St Mary's began to better utilise the dynamism of Costello off the base of the scrum and Blackrock needed three or four men to stop the punishing No 8, and the gaps opened up.

Finally, the St Mary's scrum had found itself. The back row started punching forward, the defence bared its teeth and turned the opposition over. Blackrock were left clinging on.

Midway through the second period, St Mary's cut loose. First Costello, with his second try from an eight-man shove, then Lane and finally Peter McKenna touched down, embellishing a margin of victory which could have been far greater.

St. Mary's College: K Nowlan; J McWeeney, P McKenna, R McIlreavy, P Lane; F Camplon, C McGuinness (capt); J Maher, P Smyth, P Coyle (E Byrne 44); S Jamieson, I Bloomer (D Burke 60); T Brennan (G Quinn 60); V Costello, M Cuddihy.

Blackrock College: B Carey (D Johnson 66); A Guinan, E Robinson, M Roche, T Keating; N O'Donovan, N Assaf; M Cuffe, S Byrne (capt), P Jordan, R Casey, H Koe (D Hackett 60); R Whaeeler, L Cullen, R Lawlor.
Referee: D McHugh (MfU).