

1997

Team Manager: P.J. McGowan

Dr. Mc Kenna Cup.

1 9th March MacCumhaill Park Donegal 1-09 Tyrone 1-13

Winners: Fermanagh

Ulster Senior Football Championship

2 24th May MacCumhaill Park Donegal 2-12 Antrim 1-13

3 22nd June Clones Cavan 2-16 Donegal 2-10

Ulster Senior Championship final: Cavan 1-14 Derry 0-16

All Ireland Senior Championship Semi-final: Cavan 1-10 Kerry 1-17

All Ireland Senior Championship Semi-final: Mayo 0-13 Offaly 0-06

All Ireland Senior Championship final: Kerry 0-13 Mayo 1-07

National Football League. – 1996/1997 Allianz NFL Division 1A

4 20th Oct 1996 MacCumhaill Park Donegal 2-06 Cork 0-12

5 27th Oct 1996 Omagh Tyrone 2-06 Donegal 2-06

6 17th Nov 1996 Fr. Tierney Park Donegal 0-10 Cavan 0-06

7 24th Nov 1996 Tralee Kerry 2-09 Donegal 2-07

8 2nd Feb 1997 MacCumhaill Park Donegal 0-08 Meath 0-13

9 26th Feb Celtic park Derry 1-13 Donegal 1-06

10 2nd March Newbridge Kildare 1-14 Donegal 1-07

20th April Semi-final Croke Park Kerry 2-13 Laois 1-10

20th April Semi-final Croke Park Cork 2-10 Kildare 1-09

4th May **Final** Páirc Uí Caoimh Kerry 3-07 Cork 1-08

DONEGAL 1-9

TYRONE 1-13

Donegal suffered their fifth competitive defeat in-a-row on Sunday last as they went down to Tyrone in the Dr. McKenna Cup before a small attendance at MacCumhaill Park.

Peter Campbell reports from MacCumhaill Park

Photo by Conor McGonagle

The poor form of the Donegal team continues with Tyrone being good value for their four point victory, and indeed if they had taken advantage of 50% of their openings in the first half, Donegal could have been well and truly hammered.

The Donegal defence were under severe pressure in the first half and at times was opened up with alarming ease.

The return of Peter Canavan to the Tyrone starting line-up after a lengthy absence through injury didn't help as the Errigal Ciaran man ran the game from centre-half forward. From a spectator point of view, he is a delight to watch, making time for himself on the ball, and at times pointing to colleagues where to make their run while he toe-tapped or hopped the ball.

Apart from defence Donegal had problems in other areas. Midfield was dominated by Enda Kilpatrick while Donegal's front players suffered because of this. Mark Boyle, making his debut, was the one bright spot in the Donegal display. The Killybegs lad showed an appetite for the ball and his return of four points from play was very impressive, while his general all-round game was superb, being involved in most of the Donegal scores.

OPENED SCORING

It was Mark Boyle who opened the scoring in the second minute after a quick free from James Ruane and after that it was point for point, Vinnie Owens equalising for Tyrone; Adrian Sweeney pointing a free; Peter Canavan replying for Tyrone. John Gildea and Tony Boyle edged Donegal 0-4 to 0-2 ahead, but Ciaran Corr pulled a point back and after another Donegal defensive lapse, Brian Gormely punished severely taking the ball on the ground and firing past Gary Walsh in the 18th minute to put Tyrone ahead by 1-3 to 0-4.

Eoin Gormely added to Tyrone's lead before Mark Boyle pulled a point back for Donegal but two minutes before the break, Peter Canavan pointed a free to leave Tyrone ahead by 1-5 to 0-5 at the break. Canavan's brilliance was underlined late in the first half when he was back on his own 13m line to cut out a certain goal opportunity when Adrian Sweeney's defence-splitting pass was bound for Tony Boyle in the clear.

Just before the break Donegal had a goal opportunity when a miskick from Ollie Reid found John Ban Gallagher in front of goal. His effort was blocked, as was follow-up efforts from Brian Roper and Adrian Sweeney.

Paul Donnelly replaced an out of sorts Fay Devlin on the Tyrone team at half-time but it was Donegal who were first on the scoreboard with Mark Boyle again on the mark. However, Tyrone hit back strongly with points from Brian Gormley, Ciaran McBride and Eoin Gormley to push Tyrone five points clear, while Donegal hit four bad wides in the same period.

Fifth defeat in-a-row

Dr. McKenna Cup

Noel Hegarty made his appearance as a substitute for Donegal after 10 minutes of the second half and almost immediately the Glen man made an impact after Peter McGinley had cut out a Tyrone attack. Hegarty and Tony Boyle made the opening for John Ban Gallagher who found himself clear in front of the Tyrone goal to fire to the net. A point from a Tony Boyle free after Mark Boyle was hauled down, a minute later, brought Donegal back within a point and there was hope.

SHUT DOOR

But Tyrone shut the door firmly on Donegal with Peter Canavan finding the range with two points, one from 40m out on the sideline to underline the class of the Tyrone centre-forward. Tony Boyle had a Donegal free, but Eoin Gormley with two points and Canavan again tagged on scores for Tyrone.

For Tyrone, Enda Kilpatrick was outstanding at midfield, while Noel Donnelly and Fergal Logan were excellent in defence. Up front, Canavan, Eoin Gormley and Brian Gormley tormented Donegal throughout.

For Donegal, Damien Diver in defence and Tony and Mark Boyle in attack were best.

Donegal: Gary Walsh; Peter McGinley, Sean McEwen, John Cunningham; Damien Diver, Mark Crossan, Ollie Reid; James Ruane, Martin Coll; John Ban Gallagher (1-0), John Gildea (0-1), Brian Roper; Adrian Sweeney (0-1, free), Tony Boyle (0-3, two frees), Mark Boyle (0-4). Subs., Seamus McGinty for Reid; Noel Hegarty for Coll (both 40 mins.); Ronan McLaughlin for Gildea (45 mins)

Tyrone: Joe Cassidy; Paul Devlin, Paul O'Neill, Fay Devlin; Noel Donnelly, Fergal Logan, Chris Lawn; Enda Kilpatrick, Ciaran Corr (0-1); Eoin Gormley (0-4, two frees), Peter Canavan (0-5, one free), Brian Gormley (1-1); Ciaran Loughran, Ciaran McBride (0-1), Vinnie Owens (0-1). Subs., Paul Donnelly for F. Devlin (half-time); Pascal Canavan for Corr (41 mins.), Stephen Lawn for Loughran (51 mins.)

Referee: Brendan Gorman (Armagh).

MATCH STATISTICS

		FIRST HALF				
	Goals	Points	Frees	Wides	45s	
Donegal	0	5	13	3	0	
Tyrone	1	5	10	5	1	
		SECOND HALF				
	Goals	Points	Frees	Wides	45s	
Donegal	1	4	13	3	1	
Tyrone	0	8	11	3	0	
		TOTALS				
	Goals	Points	Frees	Wides	45s	
Donegal	1	9	23	6	1	
Tyrone	1	13	21	8	1	

Dr. McKenna Cup Final

Fermanagh "erne" victory

FERMANAGH 2-11
TYRONE 3-4

Revenge is sweet and although this was a far cry from a Championship encounter, Fermanagh made up for last year's mauling to lift their first Dr. McKenna Cup in twenty years at a damp and drab Clones on Sunday. But while the conditions didn't lend themselves to good football, both sides must be commended for producing an enjoyable encounter.

Indeed the pitch was like a sponge after several days rain. The conditions didn't provide for fluent football, but it didn't prevent Fermanagh from opening in tremendous fashion and led throughout the game despite concerted attempts by Tyrone to muster a winning challenge.

The Ememen led by 1-6 to no score after only eighteen minutes, but at the break they had only one point to spare after a brace of Peter Canavan goals were added to two Adrian Cush frees.

The Fermanagh heads didn't drop though despite playing so well yet having so little to show for it.

Having played poorly for the opening period, Tyrone failed to raise their game much in the second half and

lost as a result.

COMMANDING

Fermanagh continued in the second half where they had left off with the Gallagher connection, Rory and Raymond, in commanding form.

Raymond, in particular, was outstanding, scoring from both play and frees before notching his second goal a few minutes from time.

As for Tyrone, they have problems at midfield which must be addressed immediately if they are to have any chance of making it three Anglo-Celt's in a row. Both Ciaran Corr and Jody Gormley struggled throughout the hour with Corr being replaced and Gormley

punching rather than fielding every ball which came his way.

Clean catches in the middle of the park were sadly lacking, and while the conditions may have had some part in that, it was Fermanagh who reaped the rewards by being quicker to the breaking ball.

And while the Tyrone forwards struggled through lack of service, the defence relied totally on a short passing game which brought little reward.

INJURY TIME

Another baffling aspect of the game was the length of injury time added at the end of each period. Donegal's Liam Browne added twelve minutes in total.

This didn't help Fermanagh as Cush scored a late, late goal, but in the end it was of little consequence.

The game opened in tremendous fashion for Fermanagh when Liam MacBarron and Raymond Johnston scored a brace of points apiece before, in the 16th minute, Raymond Gallagher scored the first of his two goals.

Collecting possession deep in Tyrone territory, the Belleek man dispensed of the attentions of Fay Devlin before blasting the ball past a stranded McConnell.

Tyrone fought their way back into the game however, with Peter Canavan scoring two goals in three minutes. His first came out of nothing when, after turning Michael Lilly, he outwitted McAdam in the Fermanagh goal.

PENALTY

Three minutes later he added another from a penalty after Ciaran Loughran had been upended in the square. Two Cush frees followed to give Tyrone a deficit of just one point at the break.

The second half opened in tremendous fashion with both teams trading points for the first ten minutes, but while Tyrone failed at any stage to level affairs, they certainly had their chances.

As the game entered its final quarter, Rory Gallagher put Fermanagh two points ahead before Raymond Gallagher scored his and Fermanagh's second goal to put them out of reach.

Despite a late Cush goal,

Fermanagh were deserving winners. Tyrone will have to up their performance significantly if they are to hope for Ulster success.

Fermanagh scorers - Raymond Gallagher 2-3; Liam MacBarron, Rory Gallagher and Raymond Johnston 0-2 each; B. King and P. Brewster 0-1 each.

Tyrone scorers - Peter Canavan 2-1; Adrian Cush 1-2; Mattie McGleenan 0-1.

FERMANAGH - C.

McAdam capt.; M. Lilly, S. Breen, P. McGuinness; T. Callaghan, B. King, J. Gilheaney; P. Brewster, C. Courtney; R. Johnston, C. Curran, L. MacBarron; Raymond Gallagher, Rory Gallagher and S. King. Subs. - K. Donnelly for Johnston; and S. Maguire for L. Barron.

TYRONE - F.

McConnell; P. Devlin, C. Lawn, F. Devlin; P. Donnelly, N. Donnelly, R. McGarrity; C. Corr, J. Gormley; A. Cush, E. Gormley, C. Loughran; M. McGleenan, S. Lawn and Peter Canavan. Subs. S. McCallan for Corr; E. McCaffrey for E. Gormley.

REFEREE - Liam Browne (Donegal).



On left Tyrone's Fay Devlin struggles in the difficult conditions while on right Fermanagh's Rory Gallagher gets the better of three Tyrone players.

ULSTER SENIOR FOOTBALL CHAMPIONSHIP

Donegal2-12
 Antrim1-13

"A win is all that matters" was our headline last week and a win is just about all they got as Donegal struggled to get by Antrim in the first round of the Ulster Senior Championship in Ballybofey on Sunday last.

Nine points ahead midway through the second half, Donegal only scored a single point in the final seventeen minutes and in the end they only just held on as Antrim forced the pace in the final quarter.

Indeed, Antrim could well have secured a draw in the final minutes as their full-back, Martin Mulholland broke forward to scrape the Donegal crossbar with a rasper almost on time.

It was embarrassing enough as it was - Donegal defeated Antrim by four points in 1993, three in 1994 and they had just two to spare this time.

*Peter Campbell reports from Ballybofey
 Photos by Conor McGonagle*

When the home side were nine points in front, it could be said that they were cruising, but the final quarter showed an alarming lack of fitness among many of the Donegal side and the break of one month until the Ulster semi-final against either Cavan or Fermanagh will be needed to put to use on the training fields if this Donegal side are to make any further headway in the Championship.

It should have been a stroll for Donegal after they went 1-4 to 0-1 ahead after 18 minutes, Tony Boyle breaking the heart of the Antrim defence to power home a goal, but they allowed Antrim back into the game before half-time and despite the Saffron side struggling in many areas, they were only three points adrift at the break, 1-6 to 0-6.

Again the second half started well for Donegal with Brian Murray flicking home a good goal to open up a six point gap, which they extended to nine, but the fade-out in the final quarter will be the main worry for the Donegal management as they prepare for the Ulster semi-final. Against an Antrim team that had a midfielder, Chris Murphy, who was at best 40% fit, Donegal lost the second half by 1-7 to 1-6.

Conditions were ideal for football and for spectating and the 10,000 plus crowd would have expected a much tougher encounter than that on show. At times it would have been difficult to discern that a championship encounter was taking place, such was the lethargic nature of the play.

What lies ahead for Donegal in the championship depends on whether the side can overcome a fitness problem which was in evidence on Sunday last. There is also a big question mark whether the best fifteen were on the field for this game. The playing of Noel Hegarty in the forward line when his biggest strength is carrying the ball from defence is also open to debate, while Adrian Sweeney, who many felt was the best choice for centre-half forward, was never given a chance there. The return to fitness of Damien Diver will also help.

Antrim had their first score after 20 seconds from Jimmy Wilson, but had to wait until the 19th minute before David Smyth

Antrim: Sean McGreevy; Gerard McCarren, Martin Mulholland (0-1), Locky McCurdy; Donal Armstrong, Aiden Shortt, John Kelly; Chris Murphy, Paul McErlean; Frank Wilson (0-2, one free), Jimmy Wilson (0-2), Colum McCabe; Paul Derby (0-3, one free), Frank Fitzsimmons, David Smyth (0-1). Subs., Peter McCann (0-2) for D. Armstrong (17 mins.), Kevin Madden (0-1, free) for C. McCabe (29 mins.), Mickey Boyle for C. Murphy (52 mins.)

Referee: Brendan Gorman (Armagh).

added to their tally. In between, Manus Boyle (free), Adrian Sweeney, and Manus Boyle again with two more points (one free) added to Donegal's tally before Noel Hegarty fisted a great pass for Tony Boyle to score Donegal's first goal.

Antrim pulled a point back with a Frank Wilson free, before Declan Bonner had a similar score for Donegal from a 13m free.

Antrim again hit back with two points in two minutes from Peter McCann and Frank Wilson before Barry McGowan came forward to fire a beauty for Donegal.

Antrim, however, had the final point of the half, substitute, Peter McCann, hitting his second point to leave the half-time score: Donegal 1-6, Antrim 0-6.

Peter McGinley replaced Matt Gallagher in the Donegal full-back line for the second half, and just over three minutes had elapsed when Donegal hit their second goal. James Ruane and Declan Bonner combined before Barry McGowan from the 45m line hit a delightful pass to the inrushing Brian Murray to flick past the Antrim 'keeper to the net.

Declan Bonner punched a point before second Antrim sub., Kevin Madden pointed a free. Then Jim McGuinness, who was excellent throughout, with a great catch and solo run, fired over the best point of the day for Donegal.

Manus Boyle added a point with his left foot while Paul Derby had a similar effort for Antrim. Two further points for Donegal by Brian Murray and Noel Hegarty opened the gap to nine points, 2-11 to 0-8 by the 53rd minute to leave Donegal in a very comfortable position.

But again Antrim finished the half well, Paul Derby pointed a free, Kevin Madden also from a free and Derby from play reduced the margin to six, and in the 64th minute, a great run by Aidan Shortt was finished by Kevin Madden to the Donegal net from 20m to leave the issue wide open, 2-11 to 1-11.

Donegal responded with Brian Murray and Noel Hegarty setting up substitute Brian McLaughlin for Donegal's last score. Antrim cam again with Jimmy Wilson pointing from long range and two minutes into injury time they almost snatched the equaliser. Shortt again powered forward to find full-back, Martin Mulholland, on his shoulder. Mulholland fired for goal but the ball went over the crossbar to the relief of the Donegal team.

Donegal: Paul Callaghan; Matt Gallagher, John Joe Doherty, John Cunningham; Barry McGowan (0-1), Mark Crossan, Sean McEwen; James Ruane, Brian Murray (1-1); Adrian Sweeney (0-1), Noel Hegarty (0-1), Jim McGuinness (0-1); Declan Bonner (0-2, one free), Tony Boyle (1-0), Manus Boyle (0-4, three frees). Subs., Peter McGinley for M. Gallagher (half-time); Brian McLaughlin (0-1) for A. Sweeney (61 mins.)

	FIRST HALF				SECOND HALF				TOTALS	
	Goals	Pts	Frees	Wides	Goals	Pts	Frees	Wides		
Donegal	1	6	21	4	1	6	12	8	2	12
Antrim	0	6	17	6	1	7	11	1	1	13
Donegal										
Antrim										
Donegal	2	12	33	12						
Antrim	1	13	28	7						

Bookings: Barry McGowan, John Joe Doherty, Declan Bonner (Donegal); Locky McCurdy (Antrim)

ULSTER CHAMPIONSHIP SEMI-FINAL

Donegal 2-10
 Cavan 2-16

Donegal's dream of an Ulster final place took a hammering as they were overrun by Cavan in Clones on Sunday last.

A difference of six points does not do justice to Cavan as they annihilated a Donegal team that failed miserably, especially in the second half, and the game was over as a contest when Cavan scored their second goal in the 58th minute.

That it took almost an hour to put Donegal away was the only weakness in a Cavan team that had outplayed their opponents throughout with a running game to which the losers had no answer.

Peter Campbell reports from Clones

Photos by Conor McGonagle

It was like waiting for a bomb to go off.. Throughout the first half the Cavan half-back line ran riot, while their midfield were also on top. In front of them the Donegal defence was holding on by a thread, mainly through the broad shoulders of Sean McEwen, who was the only Donegal player to show the necessary fitness and resolve to shout stop.

The question of the fitness level of the Donegal team must be raised. Arguments could be made that there were many old legs, but even some of the younger panel members were clearly struggling to keep pace. Are our methods of training falling behind, or was it just that Cavan wanted an Ulster final appearance much more than us?

The lack of pacy players was a major drawback, the introduction of Brian Roper underlined that fact, as from the moment of his introduction, he gave the Cavan half-back line much more to think about, in attack and defence.

What next for Donegal. After this defeat where does this team rank in the Ulster order of merit. Cavan were the only team, apart from Antrim, that they had a win against for a long time, and now the Breffni men have got ample revenge for the League defeat last year.

The youth policy in Cavan is showing big dividends. There must be an example to Donegal. Old heads and legs are important, but when young legs are pumping at a ratio of 5:1 higher than the old ones, then damage can be done.

On Sunday last Cavan could easily have won by much more than six points. It was humiliating as it was, but it could have been much worse.

GOOD START

The opening twenty minutes put the Donegal faithful in a good frame of mind as Tony Boyle with a goal and a point and a free from Declan Bonner left them four points in front, Cavan's only score coming from a Ronan Carolan free.

Boyle's goal was very well executed, receiving a great pass from Jim McGuinness. With a poor angle, he was about to go for his point, but when his marker, Damien O'Reilly, lost his footing, he cut inside to shoot low to the net.

When Cavan lost O'Reilly, injured in trying to stop Boyle, things looked even better for Donegal, but that was where things began to go wrong. Cavan hit back with points from Stephen King and Raymond Cunningham, while John Joe Doherty spectacularly fisted off the line from Larry Reilly. Reilly's fisted effort, presumably for a point, would not have counted.

Cavan had Terry Farrelly fouled for stopping Tony Boyle illegally, but this formula of stopping teams by fouling the best player was working for Cavan.

It took a brave interception from Sean McEwen to deprive Fintan Cahill but Ronan Carolan pointed the '45'. Declan Bonner replied for Donegal but Larry Reilly at last finished a point

after another run at the Donegal defence and from a sideline, Ronan Carolan hit the point of the match in the 33rd minute to level the scores.

Before the break, Manus Boyle gave Donegal hope with two good points to edge his side ahead.

Half-time: Donegal 1-5, Cavan 0-6.

When Brian Roper put Donegal three points ahead inside a minute of the restart, things looked even more promising, but then disaster struck. A foul on Jim McGuinness was not forthcoming and Cavan broke quickly downfield to find Ronan Carolan in acres of space and he powered the ball to the net over the head of Donegal 'keeper, Paul Callaghan.

Donegal hit back in the 48th minute when Noel Hegarty made a good run from defence to finish with a point, but a minute later Larry Reilly again had Cavan back on level terms.

Brian Roper wormed his way through to be fouled in the 53rd minute and Manus Boyle pointed as Damien O'Reilly rejoined the Cavan team in the forward line, replacing Mickey Graham.

Peter Reilly equalised for Cavan once more and in the 58th minute, a free from Carolan was dropped in the Donegal 'square' and a Cavan boot pounced to force the ball to the net.

WHERE TO NOW

The injury to Barry McGowan 'didn't help Donegal. The absence of Damien Diver was also felt. The introduction of Brian Roper did help. These three are players who do have that vital extra called pace. There are many players left in the Donegal panel who can still give a lot, many who when fully fit have oceans of ability to offer. There are others outside the panel who could well now get their chance.

Donegal won a U-21 Ulster title in 1995, defeating Cavan in the final. A year later Cavan were successful. Donegal won an Ulster minor Championship last year and only one of that side played in the U-21 Championship this year.

A case must be made to set aside four or five panel places for young players at senior level. Whether they play is not important; panel places, other than the normal numbers, should be made available. The Donegal Co. Board have been accused of being tight-fisted in the area of panel numbers, but after Sunday's display, the need to encourage our young players is all important. The Co. Board can give a lead by providing at least five extra places for young players.

In front for the first time, captain Stephen King 'lifted' his side for the kill by winning the knockout easily and setting up Carolan for a point, while the winners added three more points in the next six minutes from Peter Reilly (free) and Ronan Carolan twice (one free).

Brian Roper, the only Donegal forward at this stage still chasing the game, pointed in the 65th minute and two minutes later created a goal chance for James Ruane, but the Cavan 'keeper O'Dowd twice denied the Donegal man.

Three more points from Ronan Carolan (free), Damien O'Reilly with a fisted effort (a goal chance was on the cards) and Larry Reilly to put Cavan nine points in front (2-15 to 1-9).

In injury time Manus Boyle pointed a '45' before Larry Reilly had Cavan's last score, while at the other end, Donegal had a face-saving goal when Brian Roper's effort was pulled across the goal and Brian McLaughlin slid in to find the net.

Donegal: Paul Callaghan; Peter McGinley, John Joe Doherty, Sean McEwen; Mark Crossan, Noel Hegarty (0-1), Martin Shovlin; Brian Murray, James Ruane; Adrian Sweeney, John Ban Gallagher, Jim McGuinness; Declan Bonner (0-2, one free), Tony Boyle (1-1), Manus Boyle (0-4, one free, one '45'). Subs., Brian Roper (0-2) for Sweeney (25 mins.), Brian McLaughlin (1-0) for D. Bonner (inj. 55 mins.); Damien Diver for McGuinness (71 mins.)

Cavan: Paul O'Dowd; Ciaran Brady, Terry Farrelly, Damien O'Reilly (0-1); Gerry Sheridan, Bernard Morris, Patrick Shiels; Stephen King (0-1), Demot McCabe; Fintan Cahill, Larry Reilly (0-4), Raymond Cunningham (0-1); Peter Reilly (1-2, one free), Ronan Carolan (1-7, two frees, one '45', one sideline), Michael Graham. Subs., Philip Kermath for D. O'Reilly (inj., 17 mins.), Damien O'Reilly for Graham (53 mins.), Anthony Forde for P. Reilly (72 mins.)

Referee: Jim Curran (Tyrone).

MATCH STATISTICS					
FIRST HALF					
	Goals	Pts.	Wides	Frees	45s
Cavan	0	6	6	14	0
Donegal	1	5	5	5	1
SECOND HALF					
	Goals	Pts.	Wides	Frees	45s
Cavan	2	10	7	12	0
Donegal	1	5	2	10	1
TOTALS					
	Goals	Pts.	Wides	Frees	45s
Cavan	2	16	13	26	0
Donegal	2	10	7	15	2

Church & General National Football League:

DONEGAL2-6

CORK0-12

Although it was Cork who got the equalising score in injury time, Donegal can count themselves lucky to have got a point from their first game in the new National Football League at Ballybofey on Sunday.

It took fortunate goals, one in either half, to keep Donegal afloat on a day when playing football was almost impossible and a downpour just before half-time left the small attendance in miserable condition for the second half.

That Donegal survived was due in great measure to inaccuracy from the Cork forwards in the second half when they had the advantage of the elements.

Peter Campbell reports from MacCumhail Park, Ballybofey

Donegal can also thank goalkeeper, Gary Walsh in that second period when he brought off two wonderful saves, both at the expense of points, as the Donegal defence found the going difficult against a lively Cork attack.

It was not all doom and gloom from a Donegal point of view. Newcomer, Martin Coll, revelled in the conditions at midfield with a performance as assured as any of the more experienced players. The Gaoth Dobhair newcomer got through a lot of work, and capped his display with Donegal's final point, eleven minutes from the end.

That Coll score put Donegal three points in front and in a position from which they should have taken full points, but in the final ten minutes Cork hit back. In the final minutes Donegal played a possession game in an effort to hold onto a slender lead, but it was difficult to play the short-passing game in the prevailing conditions. In the end, Cork won possession back and drew a foul on Ciaran O'Sullivan to give Colin Corkery the opportunity to level the match.

It was no more than Cork deserved as they had dominated the game for long periods and their forward line, especially their half-forward and Colin Corkery looked very lively.

In comparison, Donegal's forwards disappointed apart from the inside duo of Brian Roper and Tony Boyle who battled bravely. The half-forward line, in particular, was disappointing from a Donegal point of view with only Ollie Reid showing up, and most of his good work was done much too deep.

Cork signalled their intentions with Corkery almost pointing from the throw-in, and the visitors dominated the opening ten minutes and were full value for their two point lead from Ciaran O'Sullivan and Pdraig O'Mahony.

The Cork manager, Larry Tompkins had made minor alterations to his side, Mark Farr switching with Mark O'Connor to mark Tony Boyle, while up front, Brian Corcoran started on the '40' while Mark O'Sullivan switched with Colin Corkery to start at full-forward.

Corkery missed a 21m free in the 10th minute and within two

minutes Donegal were in front, a free from Manus Boyle dropped short and goalkeeper, Kevin O'Dwyer dropped the slippery ball and Tony Boyle and Brian Roper were in quickly to bundle the ball over the line, Roper getting credited with the score.

Colin Corkery brought Cork back on level terms and Jonathan McCarthy almost connected with a Mark O'Sullivan cross. Sean McEwen failed to clear despite have plenty of time and Ciaran O'Sullivan was fouled for Corkery to point Cork back into the lead.

The last ten minutes of the first half was the best period of the match for the home side. Manus Boyle pointed a free to level the sides once more. Matt Gallagher, having a great tussle with O'Sullivan, made a great interception to give Brian Murray the opportunity to put Donegal back in front in the 24th minute and Brian Roper almost had a second goal within a minute, again in quickly after O'Dwyer dropped another high ball but his diving fisted effort went wide of the post.

Four minutes from time, to coincide with the torrential

downpour, Tony Boyle set up Manus Boyle for Donegal's third point.

Half-time: Donegal 1-3, Cork 0-4.

Cork started the second half again in whirlwind fashion and Colin Corkery pointed after 18 seconds. Donegal hit back after two minutes, Ollie Reid setting up Brian Murray to point with his left foot, but Cork hit back with Brian Corcoran pointing from long range to leave the minimum between the sides once more and only three minutes of the new half gone.

Between that and the 38th minute, Cork hit four wides in-a-row, before Tony Boyle won a free for Donegal, some 35m from goal. Manus Boyle's effort failed to gain the necessary elevation but a flick from Tony Boyle sent the ball flying to the corner of the net.

Cork should have had a goal at the other end within a minute when Brian Corcoran found himself in the clear and he opted to hit the ball first time off the ground but fired wide.

Manus Boyle combined with Martin Coll to put Donegal four points in front in the 44th minute. But within two minutes the lead was reduced to two, Colin Corkery bringing a great save from Gary Walsh at the expense of a point, and a Pdraig O'Mahony effort was allowed to bounce over the bar in the 46th minute.

Cork had brought in Fathna Collins at midfield with Liam Honohan moving to full-forward, while John Ban Gallagher came in for Donegal for an out-of-sorts Dessie McNamara.

Martin Coll had Donegal's last score and John Ban had a chance to increase the lead, but in the final minutes Cork began to push forward once more. Honohan set up O'Mahony to bring Gary Walsh into the action again to tip over, while confusion in the Donegal defence gifted Ciaran O'Sullivan a point in the 54th minute, although he seemed to pick the ball off the ground.

Donegal tried to close ranks and they were quite successful in keeping possession, despite the conditions in the final minutes before a foul on Ciaran O'Sullivan over a minute into injury time gave Corkery the opportunity to level matters for the last time.

Gary Walsh was outstanding for Donegal, while in defence Matt Gallagher, Damien Diver and Mark Crossan were best; Coll and Murray with half of the Donegal points tally, would be happy enough with performance at midfield, Coll gaining the accolade of man of the match. Brian Roper made himself available continuously, but a big improvement is needed in the half-forward line next time out.

Donegal: Gary Walsh; Mark Crossan, Matt Gallagher, Sean McEwen; Damien Diver, Noel Hegarty, Martin Shovlin; Brian Murray (0-2), Martin Coll (0-1); Dessie McNamara, Ollie Reid, James Ruane; Brian Roper (1-0), Tony Boyle (1-0), Manus Boyle (0-3, two frees). Subs., John Ban Gallagher for McNamara (48 mins.); Peter McGinley for McEwen (52 mins.); Adrian Sweeney for Ruane (60 mins.)

Cork: Kevin O'Dwyer; Mark O'Connor, Mark Farr, Ronan McCarthy; Martin Cronin, Niall Cahalane, Michael O'Donovan; Liam Honohan, Damien O'Neill; Ciaran O'Sullivan (0-2), Brian Corcoran (0-1), Pdraig O'Mahony (0-3); Jonathan McCarthy, Mark O'Sullivan, Colin Corkery (0-6, three frees).

Referee: Michael Curley (Galway).

Democrat

Church & General National Football League Division 1, Round 2:

much improved Donegal

TYRONE 2-6
DONEGAL 2-6

In extremely difficult and windy conditions, Donegal and Tyrone served up an entertaining game of football at Healy Park, Omagh, on Sunday and the final result was just about right.

Apart from the opening twenty minutes, when both sides found it difficult to get into their rhythm, the game was lively and the four goals added greatly to the see-saw nature of the play which kept the interest of the 5,000 supporters alive right to the very end.

*Peter Campbell reports from
Healy Park, Omagh
Photos by Conor McGonagle*

Indeed, Dublin referee, Adrian Walsh – who had an excellent game throughout – allowed two and a half minutes of added time in the second half which gave Donegal at least two good opportunities to get a winner and right at the end, it took a timely interception by substitute Dessie McNamara, to thwart Tyrone when they came with a late flurry right on the final whistle.

It was that sort of game all through the second half, and the mediocrity of the first twenty minutes were soon forgotten as both sides contributed greatly in a free-flowing manner. There were many mistakes, but given the strength of the wind and the underfoot conditions after heavy overnight rain, that was to be expected.

Donegal can be happy that they have made a vast improvement from their first outing two weeks ago. This time they were much keener in the one-to-one situations and their three debutants were a revelation.

Peter McGinley, in his first full game, took time to settle with the roving Brian Gormley giving him some problems, but once the game settled, McGinley began playing like he has done for Killybegs throughout the summer and his comfort on the ball, is ideal for the way Donegal play.

Up front, young Brian McLaughlin also took time to settle at full-forward, but when his first opportunity arose just before half time, he pounced on the half chance to lash to the net, and that obviously settled him as he added two second half points. He did have the best opportunity to win the game for Donegal in the added time, but his effort was a little hurried and drifted wide.

Beside him at corner-forward, Ronan McLaughlin had probably

the best game of all three newcomers. He was always available and was first to almost every ball. Given that Ronan hasn't played his football at a high level for quite some time, this was as good a debut as anybody could expect.

Elsewhere in the Donegal side, Brian Roper was again the most lively forward, and although he didn't score, he was instrumental in many fine moves, including Donegal's second goal which took them back into the lead at a vital stage in the second half.

Martin Coll had another fine game at midfield, while there were much improved performances from James Ruane and Martin Shovlin.

The opening twenty minutes were a drab affair with much of the play being directed by the wind to the sideline away from the clubhouse. Indeed, there must have been a record number of sideline balls from that side over the hour. Donegal took an early lead in the 3rd minute, Peter McGinley, Martin Coll and Brian Murray sending Ollie Reid through for a point.

Ronan McLaughlin found himself in a good position in the 8th minute after good work by Tony Boyle, Brian Murray and Brian McLaughlin, but with James Ruane free outside, McLaughlin opted to take his point, but it was blocked at the expense of a '45'.

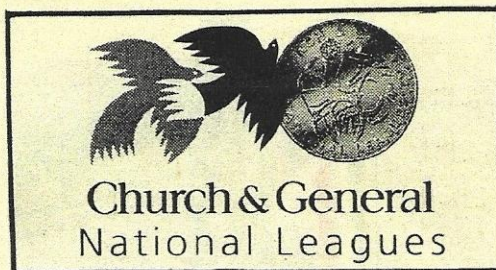
Good pressure from new boys, the McLaughlins, forced Tyrone full-back, O'Neill into a poor clearance and Martin Coll picked up to fire over Donegal's second point in the 14th minute.

Tyrone hit back with Sean McLaughlin finding Eamon McCaffrey in the 18th minute, and Donegal were fortunate two minutes later when Ciaran 'Dinky' McBride, who was causing most problems for Donegal, fisted a Noel Donnelly free to the net, but the score was ruled out because McBride was in the 'square'.

Tyrone were back on level terms in the 23rd minute, Eoin Gormley pointing after McBride drew a foul, and it could have been worse for Donegal three minutes later when a poor clearance by Martin Shovlin sent Tyrone back into attack and Ciaran McBride fielded well and turned to hit a rasper toward the corner of the net. But Gary Walsh dived to his right to make a great save at the expense of a '45'.

Two minutes from the break, Brian Roper was fouled for Tony Boyle to put Donegal back in front, but the Tyrone danger in front of the Donegal goal manifested itself again a minute later, a high ball from Pascal Canavan, broken by Fergal Logan to the inrushing Sean McLaughlin to fist to the Donegal net.

Donegal responded magnificently, James Ruane chasing down a



ball he had no right to win; putting Martin Coll through on a run. Coll threw a delightful dummy before passing across goal in Ronan McLaughlin's direction. The ball broke and Brian McLaughlin pounced to fire home and put Donegal back in front.

Half-time: Tyrone 1-2, Donegal 1-3.

The threat posed by Ciaran McBride in the air continued at the start of the

second half, the Omagh man getting his fist to a '45' which had to be cleared off the line. However, after that John Cunningham seemed to get to grips with McBride.

Eoin Gormley pointed from a free in the 34th minute to bring the sides level and four minutes later, Tyrone were in a commanding position after a speculative effort from Ciaran McBride saw Gary Walsh come off his line as Peter McGinley and Brian Gormley were vying for possession. The ball broke very kindly for Fergal Logan who had the simple task of tapping into an empty net.

Donegal hit back with a sustained period of pressure, firstly Damien Diver finding Brian McLaughlin to point, and then great work from Brian Roper which was also finished by McLaughlin to leave just a point between the sides, 2-3 to 1-5.

In the 47th minute, Brian Gormley had the point of the game from near the sideline, but a minute later Donegal were back in front. Ollie Reid with a lovely through ball over Chris Lawn's head, saw Brian Roper clash with the big Tyrone 'keeper, Plunkett McCallan. The 'wee man' came off best, and although he seemed to be fouled, the referee allowed the advantage as Roper passed from the ground back to the unmarked Tony Boyle to fire to the Tyrone net.

Tyrone came back with Ronan McGarrity levelling the game in the 50th minute, and within a minute Mark Crossan gave away a silly free with a foul on substitute, Stephen Conway, for Eoin Gormley to put Tyrone back into the lead.

The final ten minutes saw hectic pressure from Donegal, but they made hard work of getting the equaliser, until the 59th minute, a free from Brian Murray found Damien Diver near the sideline and the Ardara man found the direction to point from an acute angle and give Donegal a deserved draw.

In added time, Donegal had several opportunities, the best falling to Brian McLaughlin, but they will be happy enough with a point which leaves them on target for retaining their Division One status.

Overall, this was a big improvement from Donegal from their opening game against Cork. The strength of the opposition could be questioned with Ciaran McBride, Brian Gormley, Noel Donnelly

and Paul O'Neill the best of a mediocre Tyrone side. Still, Donegal showed a big improvement in most areas from their opening game, especially in the forward line, where the six selected players showed a greater hunger to win the 50/50 ball.

Tyrone: Plunkett McCallan; Damien O'Hagan, Paul O'Neill, Chris Lawn; Ronan McGarrity, Noel Donnelly, Barry McGinn; Fergal Logan (1-0), Pascal Canavan; Sean McLaughlin (1-0), Eamon McCaffrey (0-1), Stephen Lawn; Ciaran McBride, Eoin Gormley (0-4, all frees), Brian Gormley (0-1). Subs., Seamus McCallan for C. Lawn (40 mins.); Stephen Conway for E. McCaffrey (45 mins.)

Donegal: Gary Walsh; Peter McGinley, Matt Gallagher, John Cunningham; Damien Diver (0-1), Mark Crossan, Martin Shovlin; Martin Coll (0-1), Brian Murray; James Ruane, Tony Boyle (1-1; one free), Ollie Reid (0-1); Brian Roper, Brian McLaughlin (1-2), Ronan McLaughlin. Subs., John Ban Gallagher for Ruane (inj., 45 mins.); Dessie McNamara for Reid (51 mins.)

Referee: Adrian Walsh (Dublin).

MATCH STATISTICS

FIRST HALF

	Goals	Pts.	Frees	Wides	45s
Donegal	1	3	10	4	1
Tyrone	1	2	9	9	1

FIRST HALF

	Goals	Pts.	Frees	Wides	45s
Donegal	1	3	13	8	0
Tyrone	1	4	12	4	1

TOTAL

	Goals	Pts.	Frees	Wides	45s
Donegal	2	6	23	12	1
Tyrone	2	6	21	13	2

DIVISION ONE TABLE

Kildare	2	2	0	0	4
Cork	2	1	1	0	3
Kerry	2	1	0	1	2
Donegal	2	0	2	0	2
Derry	2	1	0	1	2
Cavan	2	0	1	1	1
Meath	2	0	1	1	1
Tyrone	2	0	1	1	1

Church & General N.F.L. - Round 3

First home win for Donegal in over a year

DONEGAL 0-10
CAVAN 0-6

Donegal remain unbeaten and on target to at least retain their Division 1 status after their first home win in over a year against Cavan in the Fr. Tierney Park, Ballyshannon on Sunday last.

Their last victory at home in the National League was against Tyrone in Ballybofey in October of last year, having drawn three and lost one of their last four home games.

Peter Campbell reports from Fr. Tierney Park, Ballyshannon
Photos by Conor McGonagle

There was a fitting tribute to the memory of the late Patrick Cunningham prior to the throw-in as the entire Donegal panel and management stood together for a minute's silence.

Thereafter Donegal were dominant throughout the first half, their defence equal to anything the Breffnimen had to offer, but the second half saw many frailties return to the Donegal side and their victory margin in the end was a little flattering.

The return of John Joe Doherty was significant for Donegal with the Naomh Columba man, captain for the day, impeccable in the first twenty minutes and it was no surprise when he was named man of the match at the end.

Not far behind him was Damien Diver, playing now like a veteran in the half-back line and his point in the first half was out of the top drawer, while his workrate throughout was noteworthy.

0-4 to 0-2 ahead after playing against the breeze, sleet and hail, Donegal had to call on all their fighting qualities to keep a resurgent Cavan at bay in the second half.

Indeed, but for some woeful shooting and some great last ditch defending by the full-back line and 'keeper, Gary Walsh, Cavan could have at least two goals to show for their efforts.

Their failure started in the first half with normal ace freetaker, Ronan Carolan really off colour and he was replaced after 27 minutes after missing four very kickable frees.

The early play was dominated by the Donegal full-back line. Matt Gallagher switched to look after the lively Jason Reilly along with John Joe Doherty and John Cunningham mopped up every Cavan move and in their first attack after five minutes Tony Boyle won a free and put Donegal on the scoreboard from 35m.

The play was scrappy with Cavan's plan of trying to hit their front line with the long ball proving fruitless with Doherty completely in control at full-back.

A second Donegal point arrived after fifteen minutes. James Ruane and Ronan McLaughlin combined to find Damien Diver in support in the full-forward line. Diver twisted and turned in the corner and hooked over a delightful point. Tony Boyle added a third point from a free after Brian Roper was fouled. Boyle judged the wind and angle to perfection from a difficulty position.

Cavan's shooting problems were exacerbated by an out of sorts Ronan Carolan and it took a mighty effort from a Dermot McCabe sideline to get them on the scoreboard in the 17th minute. Carolan found the target at last from a '45' in the 23rd minute and a minute

later the Breffnimen were almost through for a goal. Mickey Graham, McCabe and Stephen King were involved before Finbar Crowe was found in space but Gary Walsh was out quickly to deflect his effort out for a '45'

Donegal hit back with Brian Murray finding his midfield colleague, Martin Coll, on a forward run and he drew a foul for Tony Boyle to point from 21m.

Three minutes from the break a 60m high lob by Dermot McCabe gave Gary Walsh a difficult moment as he palmed it out but an alert Damien Diver was on hand to clean up a dangerous position.

Half-time: Donegal 0-4, Cavan 0-2.

John Gildea replaced Brian McLaughlin in the Donegal side for the second half but it was Cavan who had the better start, lively corner forward, Mickey Graham and Jason Reilly pointing within three minutes to bring Cavan back on level terms.

With Stephen King exerting a greater influence around midfield, Donegal found the going much tougher. Matt Gallagher dispossessed Jason Reilly to find John Gildea who in turn found Brian Roper. Roper was fouled and Tony Boyle pointed to edge Donegal back in to the lead. It was noticeable that Brian Roper found the passing of John Gildea much more to his liking in the second half.

Fintan Cahill and Manus Boyle both made their way into the action by the 42nd minute and both made an impact. Cahill pointed to level the scores once more in the 43rd minute but then Boyle pointed twice by the 53rd minute to give Donegal a two point cushion. The first score came after great work by Martin Shovlin, John Gildea and Brian Roper while Manus was fouled by at least five Cavan players for the second score. The Cavan players protested strongly and the free was moved to the 13m line, making it easy for Boyle. In between Tony Boyle, the subject of much close attention by Ciaran Brady throughout the hour, was blatantly fouled for which he did not receive a free, and after a Donegal wide, referee Jim Curran saw fit to book Brady for the incident. How he didn't penalise him with a free was mystifying.

Six minutes from time, John Gildea set up Martin Coll for a good point from an awkward angle, but the final minutes were dominated by Cavan pressure which could easily of secured a goal which would have levelled affairs once more.

Stephen King, now at full-forward, fielded in front of goal and turned to fire for the Donegal net but somehow, John Cunningham got a hand to the ball to block. After a deliberate trip by James Ruane on Jason Reilly, Dermot McCabe pointed the free to narrow the margin to just two points.

A minute from time, after a delightful pick-up by Damien Diver, Martin Coll set up Dessie McNamara for a good point, but almost immediately, Cavan had another good goal chance. King again fielded a free and laid off to substitute Larry Reilly who fired low at the Donegal goal. Fortunately, his effort came off the bottom of the upright and was scrambled clear. Donegal went upfield for Manus Boyle to set up Brian Murray for the final score. There was relief as the final whistle went, such was the topsy turvy nature of the final minutes in a game which could easily have gone either way.

The main talking point afterwards was that Donegal had defeated a poor Cavan team, and that, it itself is a warning for Donegal that they have some way to go yet. Cavan created at least four goal chances over the hour, while Donegal didn't create one.

With four points after three games, Donegal can afford to relax a little and the fact that they remain unbeaten is a bonus. They still have some problems in the half-forward line, an area which will need attention before the summer of '97. Both James Ruane and Dessie McNamara seem better suited to midfield and the half-back line, although McNamara's workrate on Sunday last was commendable.

Donegal can thank the stopping power of Gary Walsh for keeping Cavan at bay and the management must be very happy with the progress of Martin Coll at midfield, on the scoresheet for the third game in a row, and generally looking the part at midfield. His calmness in possession and the intelligence of his forward runs are very noteworthy.

Donegal: Gary Walsh; Matt Gallagher, John Joe Doherty, John Cunningham; Damien Diver (0-1), Mark Crossan, Martin Shovlin; Brian Murray (0-1), Martin Coll (0-1); Dessie McNamara (0-1), Brian McLaughlin, James Ruane; Brian Roper, Tony Boyle (0-4, all frees), Ronan McLaughlin. Subs., John Gildea for B. McLaughlin (half-time); Manus Boyle (0-2, one free) for R. McLaughlin (42 mins.)

Cavan: Paul O'Dowd; Philip Kermath, Ciaran Brady, Michael Reilly; Gerry Sheridan, Aidan Connolly, Bernard Morris; Stephen King (0-1), Philip Smith; Dermot McCabe (0-2, one free, one sideline), Peter Reilly, Ronan Carolan (0-1, '45); Jason Reilly (0-1), Finbar Crowe, Michael Graham (0-1). Subs., Anthony Forde for R. Carolan (27 mins.); Fintan Cahill (0-1) for F. Crowe (39 mins.); Larry Reilly for J. Reilly (59 mins.)

Referee: Jim Curran (Tyrone).

STATISTICS

FIRST HALF

	Gls	Pts.	Frees	Wides	45s
Donegal	0	4	13	2	1
Cavan	0	2	9	3	1

FIRST HALF

	Gls	Pts.	Frees	Wides	45s
Donegal	0	6	13	4	0
Cavan	0	4	11	7	1

No roses for Donegal

Cormac Mac a Ghoill at Austin Stack Park

KERRY 2-9
DONEGAL 2-7

Although Donegal recorded their highest Church and General score to date in Tralee on Sunday last, they also recorded their first defeat in the current series.

At the outset let me say that Kerry were deserving winners on the day, a day when for far too long Donegal were listless, careless at times and never seemed to have any match-winning cohesive plan.

Who would play and who would not play dominated the pre-match talk. Kerry were forced to field without their four players on Laune Rangers duty in the Munster club championship, and four more Dara O'Se, Dara O'Conneide, Sean Geaney and Fergal O'Se all who had played Stateside without the Liam O'Mhaoimhchill, green card, the blessing of the Association.

Donegal too had to make changes with safety in view. Manus Boyle and Damien Diver were omitted as was goalkeeper Paul Callaghan, his omission due to a hamstring problem.

KERRY GAME PLAN

Kerry had a game plan. It worked. If we had one and I could not determine one, it didn't work. It was as simple as that. You may care to call twenty five short passes and making no ground a game plan but I could not agree.

The Kerry ploy was to hit All-Star Fitzgerald high and often. It worked. True John Joe battled Maurice for every dropping ball and rarely gave the St. Mary's player a clean catch. On the other hand the tall Kerry classy full forward broke the world of ball around our 20m line. In James O'Shea and the mercurial Gene Farrell he had helpers who grabbed all the broken pieces and used them to advantage.

Donegal lacked this direct approach on the Kerry goals. From early on it was obvious that Brian Roper had the "skinning" of his opponent. So too had John Gildea had the right type of ball been served, served quickly and chest high.

The slow ball to Gildea gave his marker Liam O'Flaherty time to cover the Naomh Conaill man's move and the Kerry No. 6 had a fine game, a game made easier for him by the slow delivery from the Donegal defence.

BRIAN ROPER STARS

Had Donegal fifteen of the courage determination and willingness to work that Brian Roper showed on Sunday last they'd win a string of Sams. He was our outstanding player. John Gildea a close second. Brian Murray played an almost lone hand at midfield, his best display to date in an area where Martin Coll seemed off his game and retired in the second half.

That brought Dessie McNamara to the midfield area and here he too showed great improvement on his previous outings. Gary was blameless for the goals that beat him and the full back line though over-worked battled all through.

Early morning rain gave way to bright sunshine and showers, one of which fell just before the game got under way. Donegal faced a stiff breeze in the first half, a breeze that died somewhat in the second

Four minutes later Brian Roper again left his marker for dead and wriggled his way in for a shot that skimmed the bar. Immediately at the other end Maurice Fitzgerald broke the ball down to John Crowley who pointed number four for Kerry.

The broken ball around the Donegal goal area was to bring Kerry's first goal on the 15th minute. Willie Kirby lofted one with the assistance of the wind. Fitzgerald again got the break and Gene Farrell dashed in to hit the back of the net.

Into the second quarter and Donegal started to get a slight grip. I emphasise the word slight. Kerry still dominated the midfield area despite the best efforts of the tireless Brian Murray Donegal might have had a point from a free but Tony wided into the breeze.

PENALTY

Six minutes from the interval Donegal got the break they so badly needed. Martin Coll played Brian Roper who again wriggled and side-stepped his way in on goal. He parted to Sean McEwen. The St. Eunan's player was "grassed" in forbidden territory and Tony's stinging penalty carried too much power for the Kerry 'keeper who parred but could not hold.

Towards the end of the half Seamus Moynahan was booked, referee Joe Woods have earlier noted the name of Liam O'Flaherty for a foul on Mark Crossan. Indeed O'Flaherty would be lucky to finish the game as another high tackle, in the second half, this time on John Gildea, saw referee Woods take out the little book but issued a warning instead.

A Maurice Fitzgerald free that was safely collected by Gary ended the half with Kerry ahead 1-4 to 1-3. During the interval Donegal supporters felt that with the assistance of the breeze in the second half a deficit of 0-3 was well within the grasp.

SECOND HALF

On the resumption Kerry switched corner backs in a fruitless attempt to curb Brian Roper. James Ruane was stretched off in the opening play and a Maurice Fitzgerald wided free after two minutes seemed to herald a change in Donegal's fortunes.

This was when Donegal should have left their mark on the game. They failed and in so doing handed the game to Kerry, who goaled through substitute Brian Clarke after Gary had gone full length to save from John Crowley.

A scrimmage developed in the Donegal goal area and Matt must consider himself lucky not to have take a walk to the dug-out.



Kerry star, Maurice Fitzgerald and Donegal's John Joe Doherty challenge for the dropping ball during Sunday's League meeting in Tralee.

28/11/SM53

half. Donegal were first to break. Martin Coll, Brian Roper, John Gilea and Tony Boyle all involved but Tony wided the free.

Kerry then showed their hunger for the task in hand early on, a hunger they retained all through the game. They hit 0-3 without reply. John Crowley, Gene Farrell from a poor kick-out and Maurice Fitzgerald from a 45 were the marksmen.

We might have goaled in a rare attack in the 6th minute. Dessie McNamara lofted high into the Kerry goal area and Brian McLaughlin must have been just millimetres from the ball as it sped past Peter O'Leary's right hand post.

Tony Boyle pointed a free after Brian McLaughlin was fouled. John Cunningham burst upfield gave to Brian McLaughlin who sent to Brian Roper and once again his shot just skimmed over the bar. A minute later at the other end James O'Shea pointed for Kerry.

John Gildea hit a great Donegal point from all of 55 yards and when Brian Murray gave to Tony Boyle who found Brian Roper the Ballyshannon man's shot went over the bar 2-6 to 1-5 and Donegal looking good.

However they let Kerry back in to dictate matters and points for Kerry between the 17th and 27th minute from Maurice Fitzgerald, Gene Farrell, 0-2 and Denis Dwyer saw the Kerry lead extended to 2-9 to 1-5. In that period Donegal had a golden goal chance as Brian McLaughlin found himself in space with only the 'keeper to beat. O'Leary advanced smartly and blocked the Naomh Michil man's effort.

Two minutes from the end Brian Roper and Dessie McNamara now playing really well combined for the Bundoran player to point.

Donegal were now in total charge for the first time in the game. Dessie McNamara, Brian Murray, Sean McEwen and Tony Boyle combined and Brian McLaughlin made amends for the earlier miss with a goal.

Back came Donegal. Brian Murray got his fist to a cross on the edge of the square. From the pressbox it seemed that Kerry full back Barry O'Shea hauled the ball into play from behind the line but referee Joe Woods would not listen to the Donegal appeals.

Two minutes into injury time Brian McLaughlin pointed a late Donegal consolation score. Too little too late. A game was lost that should have been won. Donegal forgot to play their best football until the closing stages and paid the penalty for earlier listlessness.

KERRY: P. O'Leary; K. Byrne, B. O'Shea, M. O'Shea; S. Motinhan, L. O'Flaherty, C. Drummond; W. Daly, W. Kirby; D. O'Dwyer, J. Crowley (0-3), J. Cronin; J. O'Shea, M. Fitzgerald (0-2, one free, one 45), G. Farrell (1-2). Subs: B. Clarke (1-0) for J. Cronin 37 minutes and J. Daly for D. Daly 49 minutes.

DONEGAL: G. Walsh; M. Gallagher, J. J. Doherty, J. Cunningham; S. McEwen, M. Crossan, M. Shovlin; B. Murray, M. Coll; D. McNamara (0-1), J. Gildea, J. Ruane; B. Roper (0-3), T. Boyle (1-1, one free and a penalty goal), B. McLaughlin (1-1). Subs: A. Sweeney for J. Ruane (31 mins.), and R. McLaughlin for M. Coll (48 mins.).

Referee: J. Woods (Baile Atha Cliath).



How ya! Donegal fans who made the long trip to Tralee for Sunday's N.F.L. meeting between Kerry and Donegal.

28/11/SM55.

All-Ireland champions meet Donegal

Suspensions and injuries force changes

The Church & General National Football League resumes on Sunday next with the most vital game Donegal have had to date in the current competition - a home game against All-Ireland champions, Meath, in MacCumhaill Park, Ballybofey (2.30 throw-in) and the result could determine whether Donegal will play in Division One of the League next season.

By Peter Campbell

As it stands at the moment, Donegal need a win on Sunday next to give them a reasonable chance of survival, given that their remaining two games are away games against Derry and Kildare. With four points from their four games to date, and looking at the closeness of the Division 1 table, two more points would probably give Donegal the possibility of survival or, failing that, a play-off to stay in the top flight.

All of that must be viewed from a point of view in the county at the moment where six of the county panel stand suspended, while others like John Joe Doherty, Noel Hegarty, John Duffy, Declan Bonner and Brian McLaughlin are on the injured list and not available to manager, P. J. McGowan for selection.

It is from that standpoint which the preparations have been made and in their challenge games over the last two weekends, the teams fielded have fuelled a new confidence that there is enough strength in depth to get the county out of its present difficulties.

Last weekend, against an almost full-strength Leitrim side, a Donegal side minus the above, plus three others on Railway Cup duty, acquitted themselves well and many of that side can look forward to starting on Sunday next. A pointer to the strength of the panel is that there is unlikely to be any players making their debut against Meath.

Manager, P. J. McGowan, is the man

faced with the task of selecting a team in the difficult circumstances, but he was candid in his approach to the situation when speaking to the Democrat on Tuesday: "We have to plan without them," said P. J. when asked about the suspended players. "In all we are missing eleven of our panel at the moment", said the manager, with injuries rulling out John Joe Doherty (cartilage), Noel Hegarty (groin), Declan Bonner, John Duffy and Brian McLaughlin.

The manager is quite happy with the workouts the side have had in recent weeks:

"They would have been very useful. The game against Tyrone was the first in quite a while for most of the panel and they were rusty and the handling was poor. Last Sunday saw an improvement in those areas."

It has been difficult for the management to prepare the side with the missing players and then the Railway Cup semi-final meaning that three more senior players were missing for those games.

"Basically were were juggling around. I was happy enough with the way lads performed. We have a good enough squad and when some were out, others have had an opportunity to stake a claim."

For Sunday one of the successes in those games, Ollie Reid in the half-back line, looks likely to get a further opportunity to stake a claim, while the performances of young corner-backs, Peter McGinley and Sean McEwen also look like to put them in the starting line-up.

It is likely that Matt Gallagher will return to full-back, releasing the effervescent Martin Shovlin for a half-back slot. The midfield pairing prior to Christmas of Brian Murray and Martin Coll looks set to continue, while up front the return of James McHugh will be a big bonus to Tony Boyle and Brian Roper, while Paddy Hegarty and John Gildea also look set to start on Sunday next.

With the team not being picked in time

for this preview, the choice of goalkeeper will also be interesting to supporters, with Paul Callaghan performing so well in the challenge game on Sunday last. Callaghan was, in fact, selected to play against Kerry prior to Christmas but a hamstring injury ruled him out.

The All-Ireland champions, Meath, have been away for a two-week holiday in Lanzarote and only returned on Saturday last, but the Donegal manager is not too worried about that: "I'm not really considering that for the simple reason that teams can go away and come back well prepared. Galway were on holiday recently and came back and trounced Leitrim."

"What Meath are doing is not our concern. Basically we're playing the All-Ireland champions in the first game of a new year and that's the way we'll be looking at."

"Maybe since I took over this is the sternest challenge we have faced, in terms of the side we have to put out and the strength of the side we're playing against."

"Last year Laois were relegated with six points. It's an important game and while we're missing some players I have no doubt that the 15 going out will give it their all."

"We will need the help of our supporters and I'm sure we'll get 110% support and, I hope, patient support. We'll need that," said the Donegal manager.

Meath also have their problems in relation to team selection with Jim McGuinness still suspended for his part in the All-Ireland final brawl. Also missing through injury will be Brendan Reilly, Barry Callaghan and Ciaran Brady.

Whatever about the team selection it will be down to motivation as to who comes out on top on Sunday next. After suffering at the hands of officialdom in recent weeks, this is the perfect opportunity for the Donegal players to hit back and two points from Sunday's game is the best way to do that.

• Team news on Page 2a.

Match arrangements

Donegal v. Meath at 2.30 in MacCumhaill Park, Ballybofey.

Supporters are especially asked to travel at least a half an hour earlier than normal for Sunday's game due to extensive roadworks in Ballybofey and especially in the MacCumhaill Park area.

Patrons are asked to park outside the town if possible to avoid major congestion. Patrons are also asked to face cars in a homeward direction.

Throw in: 2.30 p.m.

Pay hatches open 1.15 p.m.

Admission £4.

Students and OAPs £2. Only students with proof of identification will be admitted.

No parking in front of main gate.

PLEASE COME EARLY

CHURCH & GENERAL NATIONAL FOOTBALL LEAGUE:

Division One status in serious doubt for Donegal after
Depressi-
ng defeat

DONEGAL 0-8
MEATH 0-13

The defeat was comprehensive. That must be the first comment as Donegal went down tamely in their vital Church & General National League game against Meath in MacCumhaill Park, Ballybofey on Sunday last.

By Peter Campbell

It was a depressing scene as Donegal struggled to come to terms with a mediocre Meath side and the absence of suspended players failed to inspire those selected to the required standard. On this display it is difficult to remain optimistic that Donegal can garner the required points from their remaining two away games against Derry and Kildare to retain their Division One status.

Prior to the match the Donegal side looked good enough on paper but the game wasn't long in progress before it became obvious that challenge games are no great guide to required fitness and a big number of the Donegal fifteen were struggling to be first to the ball. It was also obvious that the suspended players were missed and the after this defeat a huge question mark now hangs over the validity of these suspension, especially when one of the Meath players on the day was named by several sources as having played in New York this year, but escaped without suspension.

It must also be said that referee, Michael Curley, for the second time in this League gave a very mediocre performance in Ballybofey and whether he dislikes the way that Donegal play or whatever, it seemed that Donegal players found it much more difficult to win a free than their Meath counterparts. Indeed, one of his umpires seemed to be on the same wavelength, awarding Meath a '45' in the first half when it was clearly put over the line by a Meath hand.

FOOLISH

But it would be foolish to blame the referee and suspensions for all of Donegal failings. Only Tony Boyle and Martin Shovlin came out of the game with any real credit, while others, to a lesser degree, gave it everything they had. However, too many of the Donegal players were well beaten in their individual battles and the way the side lost their shape when Meath added four points in four minutes midway through the second half was a major factor. When the short passing game failed, mainly due to a lack of pace in the side (backpassing to the goalkeeper when you are four or five points down is not inspiring), the aimless kicking which followed was even more frustrating, and one could feel genuinely sorry for Tony Boyle as he made a plea to the sideline for some sort of order to put on the play.

At that stage it was too late as there weren't enough Donegal players on the park who were capable of changing the game, and

of the substitutes only Ronar McLaughlin made any impact.

The arrival of Martin Gavigan for his first game in eighteen months in a county jersey in the 42nd minute was an indication of how the county panel has been ravaged and it would be unfair to judge Gavigan on this showing.

The end result is that Donegal are facing into the barrel of a gun as regards relegation and at present they would need the return of at least some of the suspended players to give themselves a realistic chance of survival.

From the early stages on Sunday they were in difficulty in defence where a physically stronger Meath side were able to win one-to-one situations and by the 8th minute the Leinster men were 0-3 to the good, two points from Trevor Giles frees and a fisted point from Evan Kelly after a Tommy Dowd effort came back off an upright. Indeed, it could have been worse had Kelly opted to go for goal, but he decided to take the easy option and punched the ball over the bar.

Donegal did stage a comeback midway through the half with Adriar Sweeney pointing from a free after Paddy Hegarty was fouled, and a minute later Hegarty was again involved along with Martin Shovlin to set up John Gildea for a second point.

Martin Coll found an opening in the 18th minute and gave Tony Boyle the chance to level matters, but Meath came back with a Paddy Reynolds run which yielded a point for Oliver Murphy. Brian Roper almost had Donegal in front when a Brian Murray pass found Roper in space but Meath 'keeper Conor Martin showed just how sharp he was by being out very quickly to block Roper's effort. However, the pass from Murray was just not quick enough and a slight interception from Martin O'Connell helped the keeper make up the ground.

The visitors then had another good goal opportunity when the Donegal defence opened up but luckily Evan Kelly when clean through somehow managed to steer the ball wide of the gaping goal although the umpire was able to see things much different, awarding a '45' to the Meath men.

Donegal levelled again in the 24th minute when a quick free found Brian Roper who set up Ollie Reid for a long distance point, which was the final Donegal score of the half.

In the last three minutes Meath opened up a two point gap, both scored when the players concerned, Nigel Nestor and Oliver Murphy, were completely free from any tackle and scoring was an easy exercise.

Half-time: Donegal 0-4, Meath 0-6.

There was a delay before Donegal re-appeared for the second half and indeed captain, Tony Boyle, seemed to be giving his side an extra team talk in the tunnel before they took the field, but it was Meath who scored first, Tommy Dowd winning a free for Trevor Giles to point.

Referee Curley again adjudged that Dowd was fouled in the 40th minute and again Giles found the target to open up a four point gap Tony Boyle narrowed the gap to two points once more when Martin Shovlin and sub. Ronan McLaughlin won frees and in the 44th minute McLaughlin almost made a bigger impact when he combined with Shovlin to break the Meath defence but his final effort from close range blazed across goal and just wide of the mark.

That was to be the nearest Donegal got to the Meath men as the All-Ireland champions added four unanswered points from the 45th to 49th minutes to effectively end the game as a contest. Three of those scores from Graham Geraghty, Nigel Nestor and Evan Kelly were points which Donegal gave up easily.

Donegal had two more points, Tony Boyle twice pointing from frees, but in between Nigel Nestor added a point for Meath with much of the 5,000 crowd on their way to their cars at that stage.

The problems for the Donegal management are obvious and the supporters are not sympathetic when the side are playing badly. But while you could be critical of many of the players, it is always difficult when you are missing some of your top performers. Without the likes of Barry McGowan, John Joe Doherty and Damien Diver from defence, the Donegal running game was sorely lacking in the pace necessary to play that type of game, and the side just doesn't seem to have a Plan B.

DONEGAL: Paul Callaghan; Peter McGinley, Matt Gallagher, Sean McEwen; Ollie Reid 0-1, John Cunningham, Martin Shovlin; Martin Coll, Brian Murray; James McHugh, John Gildea 0-1, Adrian Sweeney 0-1, free; Brian Roper, Tony Boyle 0-5, four frees, Paddy Hegarty. Subs: Ronan McLaughlin (40 mins) for Sweeney; Martin Gavigan (43 mins) for McHugh; Dessie McNamara (54 mins) for Hegarty.

MEATH: Conor Martin; Mark O'Reilly, Darren Fay, Martin O'Connell; Donal Curtis, Enda McManus, Paddy Reynolds; Kevin Cahill, John McDermott; Trevor Giles 0-5 all frees, Tommy Dowd. Graham Geraghty 0-1; Evan Kelly 0-2, Nigel Nestor 0-3, Oliver Murphy 0-2. Subs: Jody Devine (56 mins) for Geraghty; P.J. Gillic (58 mins) for Dowd.

Referee: Michael Curley (Galway).



Martin Shovlin and Paddy Hegarty try to beat Meath's John McDermott to possession.

DIVISION 1 TABLE

	P	W	D	L	Pts.
Cork	5	3	2	0	8
Kerry	5	3	0	2	6
Kildare	5	3	0	2	6
Derry	5	2	1	2	5
Meath	5	2	1	2	5
Donegal	5	1	2	2	4
Tyrone	5	1	1	3	3
Cavan	5	1	1	3	3

NATIONAL FOOTBALL LEAGUE, DIVISION ONE

Donegal's downward spiral continues

Derry 1-13
 Donegal 1-6

Michael Daly reports from Celtic Park

Photos by Lorcan Doherty

Donegal's depressing downward spiral in Division One continued at Celtic Park last Sunday where Derry's deserved seven points winning margin was a reasonable reflection of the chasm between the sides. While relegation looms for Donegal, perhaps more worrying is the fact that Derry didn't have to be particularly good to win this game. They got the basics right, converted their frees (ten of them), closed down the Donegal short-passing game and marked Donegal's two most potent attackers out of the game.

Donegal's difficulties with suspensions and injuries are well documented by now, the problem is that those suspensions/injuries alone do not explain a loss of form which has prompted a run of three defeats in-a-row.

Indeed, such are the permutations now in the first division that a victory for Donegal against Kildare in Newbridge does not necessarily ensure retention of Division One status.

The principle concern from last Sunday's display in the city was the simple fact that at no stage did Donegal ever threaten Derry's supremacy. They drew level early in the game, more through good fortune than good football.

A poached goal by Tony Boyle from an horrendous error by Derry's debutant 'keeper, David Hasson, gave Donegal a somewhat superficial first half scoring proximity to the hosts, whose dominance in that first 30 minutes with the strong wind was scarcely reflected by a four points lead, 0-8 to 1-1.

However, Derry, immediately after the interval, soon put that right, scoring twice in as many minutes against the breeze, Henry Downey, Sean Martin Lockhart and Kieran McKeever continuing to provide a winning platform as attacking defenders.

Against the breeze Donegal's decision to play Dessie McNamara as a third midfielder gave his marker, Kieran McKeever, scope to set up attacks rather than create the desired space for Boyle and Roper.

With the exception of Adrian Sweeney the impression made by the remainder of the Donegal forwards, in either half, was negligible. While in general Donegal are playing poorly, it's unfortunate but perhaps no coincidence that Tony Boyle and Brian Roper have been quite ineffective since Christmas, both suffering a major loss of form. Add to that the fact that McBride and O'Neill in Derry's defence excelled against these two and one begins to appreciate the attacking difficulties experienced by Donegal.

In defence only Sean McEwen and Mark Crossan were consistently better than their immediate opponents but it was a defence under almost constant siege with the Derry half-backs and attacking midfielder Dermot Dougan presented with an embarrassment of options when going forward.

In the circumstances it's no surprise that Donegal were forced into fouling, too often too close to goal for Anthony Tohill who scored seven points from 'placed balls', two of those from wind-assisted 45s in the first half. Further evidence of Donegal's need to foul comes from the tallies of an otherwise subdued Joe Brolly who chipped over two frees from the hands and Joe Cassidy, brother of Damien, who also converted a free.

However, despite scoring ten points from frees, Derry played with greater industry than Donegal, their passing at speed to players on the move in stark contrast to Donegal's short ball to invariably well marked or static colleagues. On one occasion in the 30th minute this passing took a bizarre twist with the ball shuffled dangerously to and from the goal-line, Donegal literally saved by the half-time whistle.

Donegal, who didn't start Damien Diver and Manus Boyle, two of their players given a reprieve for their New York exploits, did make three changes from the match programme, Mark Crossan playing centre-half back, John Cunningham moving from there to replace Peter McGinley. Martin Gavigan came in for Martin Coll at midfield while McNamara came in for Paddy Hegarty.

Playing in very heavy rain and against a strong wind, Donegal failed to mount a serious attack in the first ten minutes, Derry leading three points to nil, their third point from Seamus Downey out on the wing the pick of those scores.

GOAL

Donegal half-forward Ronan McLaughlin won a free close to the 20 metre line to present Donegal with a first real scoring chance in the 14th minute. Adrian Sweeney, the first left footed player in the county side for quite some time, took the kick, but hit it poorly. However, Derry's debutant 'keeper failed to hold and Tony Boyle stretched around his marker to one hand the ball to the net.

Derry responded with four points, three from Tohill, one from Brolly, all of them from 'placed balls'.

Donegal's most promising break from defence ended prematurely when a clever switch in the play put Ollie Reid in acres of space but Reid failed to hold the pass.

A foul on Brian Roper yielded a scoring chance from a free duly pointed by Tony Boyle, Tohill replying with another Derry free to end the half with Derry 0-8 to 1-1 ahead.

The introduction before and after half-time of Manus Boyle and Damien Diver had little impact with Derry's two early second half points and a Seamus Downey goal in the 42nd minute sealing victory.

Although Derry added just two scores from there to the finish, both Tohill frees, there was never much sign of a sustained Donegal comeback with Derry's fullback Johnny McBride playing an almost flawless defensive/covering game on Tony Boyle.

Elsewhere Sean Lockhart, like McBride, involved in the 90 minute Sigerson Cup quarter final between Coleraine and Jordanstown 24 hours earlier, was superb. He and Henry Downey ran Donegal ragged, Downey having his best game for the Oak Leaf since the championship run of '93.

With five Derry players playing in that Sigerson game which went to extra-time (Hasson, McBride, O'Neill, Lockhart and Cassidy) Donegal might have expected Derry to run out of steam. However, if anything they improved against the wind and their students, in particular, were full of running.

From a Donegal perspective there is little of positive note to be gleaned from this latest setback. However, Martin Gavigan, in his second game for 18 months, was much better and his power/stopping ability is an undoubted asset for championship. Adrian Sweeney is beginning to translate his underage form onto an adult stage while Sean McEwen is rediscovering the form which gained him sensational reviews over a year ago in Ennis.

Still, there remains a now genuine fear of relegation. For whatever reason Donegal appear sluggish of mind and body; their short passing game is a liability when executed at half-pace; their normally reliable defence beginning to show worrying decline while an attack which tends to blow hot and cold is registering zero degrees at present.

Derry: David Hasson; Kieran McKeever, Johnny McBride, David O'Neill; Sean Lockhart, Henry Downey, Karl Diamond; Anthony Tohill 0-7, five frees, two 45s, Dermot Dougan; Ruari Boylan, Enda Muldoon, Dermot Heaney 0-1; Joe Broolly 0-2, frees, Seamus Downey 1-1, Joe Cassidy 0-2, one free.

Donegal: Paul Callaghan; John Cunningham, Matt Gallagher, Sean McEwen; Ollie Reid, Mark Crossan, Martin Shovlin; Martin Gavigan, Brian Murray; Ronan McLaughlin, John Gildea, Adrian Sweeney 0-2, one free; Brian Roper, Tony Boyle 1-2, one free, Dessie McNamara. Subs: Manus Boyle 0-2, frees (29 mins) for McLaughlin; Damien Diver (42 mins) for McNamara; Paddy Hegarty (48 mins) for Roper.

Referee: Pat McGann (Westmeath).

-6th NOVEMBER 1997-

Donegal 2-14
Derry 1- 9

Michael Daly reports from MacCumhaill Park

Photos by Thomas Gallagher

Donegal's new look senior side dispatched visitors Derry with some ease at Ballybofey on Sunday, two second-half goals from Jim McGuinness effectively killing off Derry hopes of victory.

A typically hard-hitting derby match, the sides showed changes from the original team selections, all of which ensured both teams fielded some new players.



The Donegal team which defeated Derry on Sunday last.

Donegal: Paul Callaghan; Noel McGinley, John Joe Doherty Cpt., Eamon Reddan; Mark Crossan, Martin Coll, Damien Diver; Noel Hegarty, Jim McGuinness 2-0; Shane Bradley 0-2, Adrian Sweeney, Brian Roper 0-2; John Duffy 0-2, Tony Boyle 0-6, five frees, Brendan Devenney 0-2. Subs: Brian McLaughlin (55 mins) for Sweeney; Brian Murray (58 mins) for Bradley.

Derry: David Hasson; Paul Diamond, Johnny McBride, Gary Coleman; Karl Diamond, Henry Downey, Adrian Heaney; Anthony Tohill, Gary Doyle; Gary McGill 0-3, Dermot Dougan 0-1, Benny Murray 0-1; Michael Gribben 0-1, Ronan Rocks 1-0, Joe Cassidy 0-1. Sub: Gavin Diamond(42 mins) for Rocks.

Referee: Pat M c E n e a n e y (Monaghan).

NATIONAL FOOTBALL LEAGUE, DIVISION 1, ROUND 7

relegated

Michael Daly reports from Newbridge
 Photos by Conor McGonagle

KILDARE 1-14
DONEGAL 1-7

Donegal's much shuffled side failed to secure the two league points necessary to ensure their survival as a Division One team on Sunday at Newbridge where they were defeated by a clinically accurate Kildare side for whom midfielder Niall Buckley had an outstanding match, scoring eight points.

To ensure survival in the top flight Donegal needed favours from either Cavan or Derry. Ironically both team obliged by beating Tyrone and Meath, but lately Donegal haven't been doing themselves too many favours and they never looked anything like winning this one.

Defeat ensures a return to Division 2 for the first time since 1988 and after the game the knives were already been sharpened for manager P. J. McGowan who has seen his side win only once this season and lose their last four games in-a-row.

While McGowan has distanced himself from those who would suggest Donegal's relegation is a "disaster" the fact remains that it has been a dreadful league campaign for Donegal and relegation, after successive defeats in two league finals is very disappointing.

Much may be made out of the injuries and suspensions that have deprived Donegal of many talented players but it might also be noted that teams like Kildare, for perhaps different reasons, have also come through major changes in personnel. For example, only five of the Kildare side which drew with Donegal in February 1996 were on duty last Sunday. Despite those changes they looked an excellent side and not surprisingly top the division, a feat achieved by Donegal last year.

Funny how things can change so much in 12 months. Wasn't it Kildare in desperate need of points a year ago who came away with a draw against Donegal? Donegal eventually topped the division. 12 months later there couldn't be a more striking reversal of fortune.

CONFIDENCE

Donegal will now turn their attention to the Dr. McKenna Cup where they will hope to rebuild team confidence, something which has been badly shattered by their downward spiral.

In Newbridge the greatest weakness was again in attack. There was very little invention on or off the ball. The ability to penetrate the opposition's defence, the ability to create an overlap, the ability to build a deliberate scoring chance seems to have deserted the various attacking combinations who have lined out for Donegal in this league.

Last Sunday yet again the forwards were rarely able to create a clearcut opening for a score and were confined to two scores from play, one of these, their goal, coming two minutes into injury time. The third score from play came from half-back Ollie Reid.

With an all new half-forward line of big men, Donegal did improve their share in the possession stakes but when it came to the crunch no one seemed very keen to take on the responsibility of attempting to score. With the occasional exception of Roper and Sweeny none of the forwards could really make that yard in front of their man and as a result the passing was too hurried, to high and too hopeful.

All too often the best work of Murray, Boyle and Gallagher in that half-forward line was in winning the ball; all too rarely did we see them trying to finish a move with a score. An attack which is unwilling to attempt to take a score or unable to enjoy some ratio of success when they do 'have a go' is, in every sense, a 'pointless' forward line and this is my lasting impression from Newbridge.

And yet for all that there were early chances, albeit mainly from frees which, had they been taken, might have altered the eventual outcome. Indeed those chances, three of them from frees, in the first 20 minutes, were so clearcut that Donegal should/could have finished ahead at half-time by at least a point.

Manus Boyle and Adrian Sweeny both missed close range frees. Boyle also hit an upright with another free and Tony Boyle blazed inexplicably wide from play, having succeeded, for once to make a penetrating run.

PENETRATION

However, that kind of penetration was all too rare, as it has been all season, and instead Donegal have been forced down blind alleys, hustled into hit and hopee football, unable to string together a cohesive spell of attacking football.

Equally worrying (is it a lack of fitness?) is the fact that Donegal have shown a worrying penchant for '50 minute football', i.e., total collapse in the final ten minutes of their last two games.

Last Sunday that collapse was all too apparent when Kildare raced from a three to ten point lead in the space of eleven minutes, scoring a goal in the 48th minute followed by six points, Donegal responding with just two points.

By that stage even the Kildare supporters were drifting away and at least a third of the 5,000 spectators would have missed a superbly finished if irrelevant late goal from Brian Roper.

Coming into the game with five changes, the most pronounced at fullback where Sean McEwen took over from Matt Gallagher, Donegal, playing against the wind, were unfortunate not to score until the 26th minute. They matched Kildare for effort and while McEwen kept Martin Lynch subdued, there was also success in the midfield where Donegal's

huge half forward line and the power house Martin Gavigan were coming out on top.

Sadly, this possession couldn't be turned into scores and while one could not fault them for commitment in the opening half, Donegal were inaccurate in a game which at that stage was very tight and likely to remain low scoring.

After 30 minutes Kildare's clinical approach was reflected in their three point lead, 0-5 to 0-2, both Donegal scores and three of Kildare's five coming from frees in an essentially pedestrian first half.

From three frees and once from play Donegal missed relatively simple chances. Manus Boyle kicked his first free of the afternoon wide from 20 metres and his second from 35 metres hit the upright. A third chance in the 11th minute was kicked wide from a free from the hands by Adrian Sweeny while a great run by James Ruane after 20 minutes should have ended in a Tony Boyle point but Boyle's drive was a spectacular miss, the ball going well wide.

Add to this a dubious umpire's signal for a wide from a fine wing effort from Sweeny from play and one began to suspect, yet again, that it was one of those days.... one of those years.

SYSTEM

By contrast Kildare midfielder Nail Buckley seemed to have a NATO missile guidance system attached to his boots, scoring a spectacular free from the side-line after three minutes, pointing on 14 minutes from a wind-assisted 45 and again on 21 minutes from a free after McEwen and Crossan had fouled Lynch.

Buckley turned up one minute later to fist over his side's first from play and his fourth in-a-row with Donegal's Adrian Sweeny having his task of scoring from a 20 metre free made all the easier when Glen Ryan refused to concede the necessary 13 metres to the kicker.

A fine piece of Ruane fielding led to Donegal's second score, Roper fouled and Sweeny converting from 20 metres. Donegal put on massive pressure for the next three minutes but it was revealing to see Paul Callaghan's reaction of utter frustration when this spell of pressure ended with a 30th minute Martin Lynch point for Kildare. Having tried desperately hard to create a real scoring chance, Donegal's inadequacies were underlined by Lynch's confident strike from 40 metres. With the exception of one Ollie Reid point from 40 to 45 metres in the second-half, Donegal seemed incapable of hitting these type of scores from distance.

By the finish Kildare were dropping the ball over from long and short range but by the 38th minute they held a still tentative two point lead, 0-6 to 0-4. With the game in the balance Donegal kicked two costly wides from play. Kildare added Buckley and McCormack points and led by double scores with 16 minutes to play.

A pointed free from Manus Boyle on 45 minutes suggested that Donegal although not playing well, might finish with a flourish. But Kildare were having none of it and effectively finished the game with a 48th minute goal.

Not surprisingly Buckley had a part to play in it, his free from 70 metres breaking kindly for Declan Kerrigan to drag the ball soccer style onto his right foot with which he unleashed a stinging shot which the advancing Paul Callaghan could do nothing to stop.

TRIGGER

Mentally and physically that score was the trigger to signal a Donegal collapse. Kildare piled on the agony, Callaghan brilliantly pushing a Buckley goal effort over for a point and then making a superb point blank save from sub Michael Ryan. Five more Kildare points, four of them from play had the Kildare supporters in footballing heaven, Donegal fans and footballers in a quite opposite abode.

Callaghan, McEwen (until injured), Cunningham and Sweeny were Donegal's better performers, Buckley, Doyle, Ryan and the sub Michael Ryan did well in a super confident Kildare side.

For Donegal a season in Division two may be a blessing in disguise, however, in the shorter term with championship in mind Manus Boyle's after match comment that Donegal need "to have a serious look at ourselves" is an understatement.

KILDARE: Christy Byrne; Martin Ryan, John Finn, Ken Doyle; Anthony Rainbow, Glen Ryan, Brian Fahy; Dale Hynan, Niall Buckley (0-8, 4 free, one '45); Pdraig Garvin, Declan Kerrigan (1-0), Tom Harris; Eddie McCormack (0-2), Martin Lynch (0-2), Eric Dockery (0-1). Subs: Michael Ryan (0-1) for Gravin (52 mins.).

DONEGAL: Paul Callaghan; Peter McGinley, Sean McEwen, John Cunningham; Damien Diver, Mark Crossan, Ollie Reid (0-1); James Ruane, Martin Gavigan; John Ban Gallagher, Tony Boyle (0-1, free), Brian Murray; Adrian Sweeny (0-2, frees), Manus Boyle (0-3, two frees), Brian Roper (1-0). Subs: Dessie McNamara (43 mins.) for Gallagher; Matt Gallagher (49 mins.) for McEwen (injd.); John Gildea (52 mins.) for Boyle.

Referee: Joe Woods (Dublin).

DIVISION 1 TABLE					
	P	W	D	L	Pts.
Kildare	7	5	0	2	10
Kerry	7	5	0	2	10
Derry	7	4	1	2	9
Cork	7	3	2	2	8
Meath	7	2	1	4	5
Tyrone	7	2	1	4	5
Cavan	7	2	1	4	5
Donegal	7	1	2	4	4