

2004

Team Manager: Brian McEniff

Dr. Mc Kenna Cup.

1	28 th Dec 2003	MacCumhaill Park	Donegal	1-11	Queen's	1-09
2	4 th Jan 2004	Brewester Park	Donegal	1-16	Fermanagh	0-10
3	18 th Jan	Fr. Tierney Park	Donegal	0-14	Cavan	1-07
4	25 th Jan	Clones	Donegal	3-08	Down	1-11
5	22 nd Feb Final	MacCumhaill Park	Donegal	0-07	Tyrone	1-22

Ulster Senior Football Championship

6	29 th May	MacCumhaill Park	Donegal	1-15	Antrim	1-09
7	20 th June	Clones	Donegal	1-11	Tyrone	0-09
8	11 th July	Ulster final Croke Park	Donegal	0-11	Armagh	3-15

All Ireland Qualifiers 2004

9	25 th July	Clones	Donegal	0-12	Fermanagh	1-10	
	22 nd Aug	Semi final	Croke Park	Mayo	0-09	Fermanagh	0-09
	28 th Aug	Semi final	Croke Park	Mayo	0-13	Fermanagh	1-08
	29 th Aug	Semi final	Croke Park	Kerry	1-17	Derry	1-11
	26 th Sept.	Final	Croke Park	Kerry	1-20	Mayo	2-09

National Football League. - 2004 Allianz NFL Division 2A

10	1 st Feb	MacCumhaill Park	Donegal	2-07	Offaly	1-07
11	8 th Feb		Leitrim	1-05	Donegal	2-10
12	15 th Feb	Fr. Tierney Park	Donegal	3-06	Monaghan	0-11
13	7 th March	Dr. Hyde Park	Roscommon	0-11	Donegal	0-12
14	13 th March	Ruislip	London	1-06	Donegal	1-14
15	20 th March	MacCumhaill Park	Donegal	0-12	Clare	2-04
16	4 th April	Carlow	Carlow	0-05	Donegal	3-15
17	18 th April	Semi-final	Donegal	0-10	Down	2-05

Div 2 Final

Div 1 Final

Kerry **3-11** **Galway** **1-16**

Sweeney swings it for Donegal

Dr. McKenna Cup

DONEGAL1-11
QUEENS1-9

When the crunch time comes then you look for leadership. And when Donegal were facing the embarrassment of a home defeat against Queens on Sunday, Adrian Sweeney showed why he has an All-Star.

Peter Campbell reports from MacCumhail Park
Photos by Michael O'Donnell

Behind by three points with just thirteen minutes left, Sweeney lifted Donegal from their lethargy with three of the final five scores.

It has been a topsy turvy game with Donegal mixing the good and the bad, but throughout most of the game Sweeney had been starved inside, the ball being short-passed out-field.

The signs were good in the second quarter with Donegal taking over and leading at one stage by eight points, but they went to sleep and allowed Queens wipe out that lead and eventually take a three point lead.

The opening quarter was a really dull affair with the only real talking point being the number of injuries being picked up. Stephen Cassidy lasted only ten minutes before Queens were struck a significant blow with the loss of their keeper Martin Dunne with a suspected broken arm. He had been challenged for a high ball by Brian Roper but seemed to fall awkwardly.

Not long after the visitors also lost half-back Paul O Hea. There was a four and a half minute stoppage while Dunne was stretchered off and Donegal seemed to come alive immediately afterwards.

Before that Rory Kavanagh and Brian Roper had notched points but by the 30th minute they had

added 1-4 without reply. The goal from Stephen Cassidy was a beauty. Adrian Sweeney and Johnny McCafferty set him up and he let fly with his left on the run and found the corner of the net.

He almost repeated the act a little later but this time his right foot screamer rose a little too high and went over the crossbar. The other points came from Brian McLaughlin with two (one free) and Rory Kavanagh. In between Brian Roper found Johnny McCafferty free in front of goal but his effort had the 'keeper beaten but the crossbar came to the aid of Queens.

With 29 minutes gone the No. 3 was raised on the sideline to indicate three extra minutes (a conservative estimate of the time lost for three or four injuries) but what materialised was that there was still eight minutes to play (the game being 35 minutes each way).

Whether Donegal went to sleep or was it Queens who suddenly awoke from their slumber, the game changed again.

By the 37th minute Queens had added five points without reply. Dick Clerkin added a second to his and Queen's solitary

score for more than twenty minutes, while Aidan Fagan with three and Karl Oakes were the other scores.

Half-time: Donegal 1-6, Queens 0-6.

Driving seat

Donegal brought in Brendan Boyle at midfield for Neil Gallagher at the break, but it was Queens who were still in the driving seat. They were within a point of the Donegal side by the 49th minute with Conal Dunne at the centre of both scores, winning a free from which Fagan pointed and he then broke through from the endline to fist one for himself.

Two minutes later and Queens were in front but in somewhat controversial circumstances. In their initial attack Barry Monaghan was deliberately taken out of the action off the ball but the misdemeanour was not punished. Then the ball was floated in high and Aidan Fagan seemed to be in the 'small square' as he broke the ball and Conal Dunne was following up to lash to the net.

A few minutes later Fagan opened up the margin to three points with the score

of the game, finding the range from the sideline in front of the stand.

But that was as good as it got for the visitors. Donegal and Adrian Sweeney awoke. Four Masters' Barry Dunion, on as a sub for his intercounty debut, found Sweeney and he was fouled and pointed the free himself.

Noel McGinley then showed his front men how to do it, bursting through to reduce the margin to the minimum and when Barry Monaghan drew a foul just inside the 45m line, Sweeney levelled matters with six minutes still left on the clock.

Queens were left with an uphill task when their full-forward, Kevin McGourty, was reported for an indiscretion by the linesman and he was red carded, but Donegal found it difficult to get in front, missing three opportunities before another substitute, Michael Hegarty, found the range with a left footed effort.

It was fitting that All-Star Sweeney had the final say, pointing two minutes into added time to seal a shaky victory.

A very small crowd of not more than 200 was there to witness the game, played on a reasonably good surface, although the heavy

sanding left little bounce in the ground.

Donegal were good at times with Rory Kavanagh, Stephen McDermott, Barry Monaghan and Brian McLaughlin really anxious

for work.

Kavanagh faded somewhat in the second period but he should be able to put pressure for a starting position in the 2004 half-forward line.

Overall Donegal seem to be getting a stronger panel together and that augurs well for the New Year. They just about did enough in this game to get the result.

Donegal: Tony Blake; Eamonn Doherty, Raymond Sweeney, Damien Diver; Noel McGinley (0-1), Barry Monaghan, Dessie McNamara; Neil Gallagher, Brian McLaughlin (0-2,1f); Rory Kavanagh (0-2), Stephen McDermott (1-1), Paul McGonigle; Brian Roper (0-1), Adrian Sweeney (0-3, 2f), Stephen Cassidy. Subs., Johnny McCafferty for Cassidy (10 mins.); Sean Sweeney for Blake (15 mins.); Brendan Boyle for Gallagher (h.t.); Michael Hegarty (0-1) for McGonigle (45 mins.); Barry Dunion for McNamara (55 mins.)

Queens: Martin Dunne; Niall Boge, Enda Casey, Ryan O'Neill; Paul O Hea, Owen Devine, Mel Courtney; Dick Clerkin (0-2), Martin McGrath; Conal Dunne (1-1), John Clarke, Billy Joe Padden; Karl Oakes (0-1), Kevin McGourty, Aidan Fagan (0-5, 3f). Subs., David Padden for Dunne (15 mins.); Aidan Carr for O Hea (22 mins.); Gavin Donaghy for Casey (h.t.); John McGill for B. J. Padden (59 mins.)

Referee: M. Sludden (Tyrone).

Man of the match

At different times there were good performances on both sides. Dick Clerkin and Aidan Fagan were excellent for Queens, while Barry Monaghan, Stephen McDermott, Rory Kavanagh (first half) and Adrian Sweeney (final quarter) were good for Donegal. But for his workrate and special finish, the award goes to McDermott.

Dr. McKenna Cup, Brewster Park, Enniskillen -

An Adrian Sweeney goal midway through the first half was the spark that cranked Donegal into gear and set the Tirconail men on the road to victory in this Dr. McKenna joust with neighbours Fermanagh at Brewster Park on Sunday.

Tom Comack reports from Brewster Park
Photos: Michael O' Donnell

All Star Sweeney made no mistake, finishing to the net from ten metres after good work from Brian McLaughlin and Johnny McCafferty.

Up until then, Donegal had played second fiddle to an understrength Fermanagh team who fielded just four of their championship team. However, Sweeney's strike put Donegal in front for the first time in the game, 1-1 to 0-3. Fermanagh did gain parity shortly after through midfielder James Sherry and were level once more before half-time, but Donegal still went in at the break two points up 1-6 to 0-7.

And while Fermanagh were not without hope at the break, it was all one way traffic in the second period as Donegal upped the pace and the home team seemed to run out of steam and ideas.

In truth this game was over as a contest from very early in the second half. Donegal were five points up before Fermanagh raised their first white flag of the second 35 minutes and eight points ead by the time Kieran Donnelly struck the Ernesider's second five minutes from time.

This may have been a far from vintage Donegal performance but it was an improvement on the previous week's display against Queens especially in the second half.

Speaking afterwards, Donegal manager, Brian McEniff was certainly not getting carried away with the result.

"We are very happy to get the win, but we must put the result in the context that we were playing a very weak Fermanagh side," he argued.

"They are without a manager, and had only four of the their championship winning team. They just had cobbled a side together for the day. Many of those young Fermanagh

players were having their first senior outing and this was something that worried me in the dressing room before the game."

"I think when our lads saw the team programme they got a bit complacent and I suppose it showed in the first ten minutes or so. But once Adrian got the goal and we settled down, I think there was never any doubt about the outcome," he added.

Delightful scores

Colm McFadden with two delightful points, one from the right wing and the other from the left, Sweeney two and Brian McLaughlin with a free were the first half Donegal point scorers.

Kieran Donnelly who was his team's scorer in chief with a personal tally of 0-7, converted three frees in the first half. James Sherry, who was the best midfielder on show in the first period, knocked over two good points and the lively Ryan Keenan (0-1) were the other Erne county marksmen in the opening half.

While Fermanagh were still in the tie at half-time, Donegal emerged a new side after the break and with Brendan Boyle now partnering Brian McLaughlin in the middle of the park, for the first time in the contest they began to get a grip in that area.

The Ardara man, playing in his third game in as many days, made an instant impact and all of a sudden the Donegal attack were beginning to enjoy a reasonable supply.

Brian McLaughlin converted two frees within three minutes and Michael Hegarty polished off the move of the match with a fine point to propel Donegal into a five point lead.

And while Kieran Donnelly got one back for the home team, Brian McEniff's men were nine

Donegal.....1-16

Fermanagh.....0-10

Score of the Match

Colm McFadden's second point 18 minutes into the game. The St. Michael's man moved over from the right corner to the left to take a pass from Michael Hegarty and from an almost impossible angle, he disected the posts for a super point.

Five of their starting front six got on the scoresheet and the management team must have been happy with substitute Conal McGonigle who notched three frees for his 25 minutes on the park.

Apart from Dunne, the McClafferty brothers were rock solid for St. Eunan's in defence. Captain Rory Kavanagh had a quiet game by his standards at midfield, but up front Peter O'Doherty was excellent.

For Glenfin the midfield pairing of Mark McGinty and Ciaran Moy shaded their battle but Paddy O'Connor apart, they struggled to find real penetration. They can also thank goalkeeper, Michael Moy, who kept them in the game at vital stages.

Teams & scorers

St. Eunan's: Sean McNulty; Michael O'Malley, Niall McClafferty, Kevin McHugh; Ronan Lennon, Damien McClafferty, Paul Crossan; Rory Kavanagh, Aidan Blake (0-1); Ciaran Sharkey (0-1), Michael Martin, Paddy Rafferty (0-1, f); Mark McCloskey (1-0), Conal Dunne (0-2), Peter O'Doherty (0-1). Subs., Conal McGonigle (0-3, 3f) for Rafferty (35 mins.); Donal Gallagher for K. McHugh (40 mins.)

Glenfin: Michael Moy; Jason McGinty, Christopher Morrow, Paul McCrudden; Gavin McDermott, Paddy O'Connor (0-1), Shaun McGlynn; Mark McGinty (0-2), Ciaran Moy (0-5, 3f); Damien Houston, Leigh Herron (0-1,f), Stephen McGlynn; Barry McDermott, Seamus McGlynn, Frank McGlynn. Subs., Kieran Foy for McDermott (16 mins.);

Referee: Paddy McBride (Downings).

Man of the match

For his workrate throughout the 75 minutes of action Brian Roper gets the award this week. The Aodh Ruadh man covered literally every blade of grass in Brewster Park, bobbing and weaving all over the half forward line and even dropping back helping out in defence when Fermanagh threatened.

A typical example of his workrate came with under five minutes remaining when he was back on his own end line to take the ball away from the danger area. He also struck two points, one in each half.

And this on a day when Colm McFadden hinted of greatness, Brendan Boyle showed that he might be an answer to our problems at midfield and Adrian Sweeney, in snatches showed just why he is an All Star.

Turning Point

Fifteen minutes into the game Brian McLaughlin finds Johnny McCafferty with a quick free about 50 metres from the Fermanagh posts. McCafferty tears down the middle, splitting open the Erne defence, drawing a defender before off-loading to Adrian Sweeney who hammers home the game's only goal from ten yards. Sweeney's strike propelled his team into a 1-1 to 0-3 lead, a lead they were never to surrender.

Move of the match

Damian Diver intercepts a Fermanagh attack close to his own posts, side-steps his marker before passing to Brian McLaughlin. McLaughlin carries the ball into midfield before finding Colm McFadden 40 metres from the Fermanagh posts. He lays it off to Brian Roper on the run who then sets up Hegarty for a great score.

Dr. McKenna Cup

Tuesday, 20th January, 2004

SPORT 3

DONEGAL 0-14
CAVAN 1-7

Donegal kept their Dr. McKenna Cup ambitions on track on Sunday when they proved too strong for Cavan in a tough encounter at Fr. Tierney Park, Ballyshannon.

Peter Campbell reports from Fr. Tierney Park
Photos by Thomas Gallagher

The win means that Donegal are winners of their group and will most likely play Down in the semi-final on Sunday next in Clones. That is based on the premise that Tyrone will defeat UUJ in the final game of their group, which was due to be played last night (Wednesday). With a win Tyrone would go through to the final automatically as they have the superior scoring average.

The Donegal squad, less than 24 hours back in Ireland after their holiday in the Canaries, had to be alert for this encounter as Cavan were certainly 'up' for it.

Both sides were short many of what is likely to be their championship sides. The conditions for the time of year were reasonably good and the fare produced also reflected the time of year.

The goalposts may have changed at the Fr. Tierney as it has been widened and lengthened but Brendan Devenney was not put off by that, landing his first of seven points after 44 seconds.

The first half was a tough affair with plenty of physical challenges and a few little flare ups. Cavan were tackling with some venom and new manager Eamon Coleman's influence was such that their defence started at No.15. On at least two occasions in the opening half, Damien Diver, was upended coming out of defence and that was

when he didn't have the ball.

It was a pretty easy prediction to make that the game would finish without 30 players on the field. The two red cards didn't arrive until the second period, but they could have been avoided if Monaghan referee, Darren Ward, had exerted more control early on. The referee seemed to lose control at vital stages and his decision making was questionable on many occasions.

Donegal were in control of affairs for most of the game and they were in a strong position at the break, leading by 0-6 to 0-4. The only time they were headed was very early in the second half when Cavan goaled after Nicholas Walsh found himself in acres of space to lob a goal over Donegal's Sean Sweeney.

Devenney in form

It was good to see Brendan Devenney back in a Donegal shirt and he worked hard for the team throughout. After his opening point, Donegal doubled their lead with Adrian Sweeney finding Paul McGonigle from a free to point.

Sean Brady had a Cavan point from an awkward angle on four more Donegal opened a three point gap, Johnny McCafferty and Michael Hegarty finishing good moves. Hegarty's point could have been a goal as he got possession with Brendan Devenney breaking inside, but the Kilcar

man took the minor score.

Sean Brady from a free reduced the margin for Cavan and they almost had a goal on fourteen minutes, Mark McKeever firing from 30 yards with Sean Sweeney thinking it was going over the bar, but it came back off the crossbar.

By the 28th minute Cavan were back on level terms, Anthony Forde lofting a 50m free with the wind advantage and Jason Reilly with a spectacular point, which had shades of a similar score by his namesake Damien O'Reilly in the 1992 encounter in Breffni Park. The ball was going over the endline but somehow Reilly first timed it from an angle and between the posts.

Donegal lost Rory Kavanagh to a ankle injury as he was warming to the contest but they finished the half well with Brendan Devenney pointing two frees to leave the half-time score: Donegal 0-6, Cavan 0-4.

Cavan started the second half against the breeze in spectacular fashion with the Donegal defence being badly caught out of position and Sean Brady pushed the ball through to Nicholas Walsh who had a 25-yards defender free zone between himself and goals. Sean Sweeney came off his line but Walsh lobbed him for a good goal.

Cavan were two points to the good after 44 minutes, Thomas Farrelly fisting a point after good work by Forde and Brady.

Donegal hit back with Brian Roper following up on his good recent form, finding the range with two quick-fire scores. First he picked up a break and hooked a good point while surrounded by Cavan players and then availed of a stray pass from Pearse McKenna to put Donegal level.

By the 49th minute Donegal were back in front, Brendan Devenney pointing after a fortunate free was awarded, but Cavan hit back immediately with Nicholas Walsh equalising at the other end.

Then the first sending off occurred, Eamon Doherty reacting after being tackled after releasing the ball. The offence occurred under the linesman's nose and there was little argument. The same official and umpires could well have reported other incidents in the first half.

The Donegal response was encouraging because they opened up a three point gap with Brian Roper winning a free and Devenney pointing from 50m. Devenney added another free on 60 minutes and Adrian Sweeney almost had a

goal on 63 minutes. He won a high ball and was fouled as he tried to break free. He took the free quickly but it went just over the bar.

Sweeney caused Cavan full-back, Darren Rabbit, more problems a few minutes later and Rabbit hauled him to the ground in a tackle that would have been at home in a wrestling ring. Technically he probably should have received a yellow card but referee, Ward, flashed the red.

A few minutes from the end Adrian Sweeney fired over another free before Sean Brady had Cavan's final point, also from a free. However, it was fittingly Brendan Devenney who completed the scoring three minutes into added time with the final point from a free.

The game was good preparation for Donegal for the forthcoming National League. They were given a searching time by a Cavan team who were very defensive. Damien Diver and Barry Monaghan were outstanding in a very tight defence; Gaoth Dobhair's Sean Sweeney had a shaky time in goal, being caught on a number of occasions with the crossbar saving him twice. Paul McGonigle worked hard at midfield and Brian McLaughlin helped when introduced at midfield, while up front Brendan Devenney was hungry and Brian Roper and Adrian Sweeney raised their game when needed.

Donegal: Sean Sweeney; Noel McGinley, Raymond Sweeney, Damien Diver; Shane Carr, Barry Monaghan, Eamon Doherty; Paul McGonigle (0-1), Stephen McDermott; Rory Kavanagh, Michael Hegarty (0-1), Brian Roper (0-2); Johnny McCafferty (0-1), Adrian Sweeney (0-2, 2f); Brendan Devenney (0-7, 6f). Subs., Brian McLaughlin for Kavanagh (inj. 32 mins.); Dessie McNamara for McDermott (48 mins.); Mark McGinty for McCafferty (57 mins.); Paddy Campbell for McLaughlin (72 mins.).

Cavan: Eoghan Elliott; Sean Smith, Darren Rabbit, Rory Donoghue; Karl Crotty, Trevor Crowe, Michael Brides; Cathal Collins, Pearse McKenna; Anthony Forde (0-1,f), Thomas Farrelly (0-1), Sean Brady (0-3, 2f); Jason Reilly (0-1), Nicholas Walsh (1-1), Mark McKeever. Subs., Ray Galligan for Brides (45 mins.); Sean Maguire for Farrelly (55 mins.); Andrew Coleman for J. Reilly; Paul O'Dowd for Elliott (64 mins.).

Referee: Darren Ward (Monaghan).

Turning Point

There were a couple of key moments in this game, not least the Cavan goal and the sending off of Eamon Doherty. On both occasions Donegal responded in fine style, hitting three unanswered points on both occasions. That response was the key to the victory on the day.

Ref Watch

Monaghan official Darren Ward had a difficult afternoon. He found it hard to keep control in the first half and many of his decisions were questionable with Donegal benefitting from some of his whistling, while they were baffled by others.

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Man of match

There were a number of solid performers in Donegal shirts - most notably Barry Monaghan, Brendan Devenney, Brian Roper, Noel McGinley and Damien Diver, who was eager for work in defence. Diver showed remarkable restraint at times because of the treatment which was dished out to him and he gets the award because of that.

Dr. McKenna Cup Semi-Final,

Donegal failed to score for the last 30 minutes of this encounter yet held on for a win and qualify to meet Tyrone in the Dr. McKenna Cup final.

Peter Campbell reports from Clones
Photos by Conor McGonagle

It certainly was a game of two halves with Donegal running riot in the first half - leading by thirteen points at one stage - and then being close to being over-run in the final quarter.

It is difficult to explain how a team could perform so well in one half and then seem to switch off. When that happened the cracks of the past began to appear - losing control at mid-field and only Brian Roper in the half-forward line seemed to have the competitive interest.

It was all so different in the opening half as Donegal looked sharp, especially Brendan Devenney, who terrorised the Down defence, scoring one goal and setting up two more for Johnny McCafferty.

The first half was a very open affair with Devenney being denied another clear goal chance when pulled back by the referee for a foul when he had broken the tackle and was some five yards clear. At the other end Down, too, had goal chances with Brendan Coulter fluffing their best opportunity while Tony Blake was in very good form, denying them on a few occasions.

Everything was going Donegal's way and they led by 3-6 to 0-2 after 26 minutes. From there to the finish the referee played 50 minutes in total and Donegal just added two more points in those 50 minutes - those coming in the opening nine minutes of the second half.

It was at that stage that Donegal lost Brendan Devenney with an ankle injury. Moments before he had fired wide with probably his best goal chance. In the next eight minutes of the game Down became more physical and a number of players received yellow cards and then the Mourne men took over with Donegal surrendering the middle third of the field.

There will be lessons for Donegal and on the positive side it is good to be able to learn a lesson and still win the game. By the time the final whistle was sounded, Donegal were showing signs of relief with Down having notched seven points with reply.

The first half was a very open game, both sides driving forward. Johnny McCafferty was particularly lively fielding a high ball and winning a free for Brendan Devenney to point in the opening minute.

Down hit back with Brendan Coulter hitting two points inside a minute, the first of which could have been a goal as Donegal failed to deal with a high ball and he fired first time when it dropped but it went just over the bar from ten yards.

A foul on Adrian Sweeney off the ball saw Devenney level matters on nine minutes but Donegal needed Tony Blake to be at his best a minute later as Coulter had a free run through the middle but at the last minute fumbled. The ball fell to Daniel Hughes, but Blake smothered his shot with a great stop.

Great point

Brian McLaughlin put Donegal ahead with a great point from distance and Donegal went further ahead from an Adrian Sweeney free. It could have been better but after Paul McGonagle had found Devenney, he had beaten his man and was bearing down on goal, but the referee awarded him a free when he was clear.

Blake saved again from Hughes at the expense of a '45' before the first goal arrived at the other end in the 21st minute. Michael Hegarty found Devenney and he cut through to fire to the corner of the net. Indeed, the ball went through under the net and for a minute some supporters thought he had missed. The goal was the cue for six scores in six minutes in a period when Donegal were on fire.

A minute later Adrian Sweeney and Hegarty were involved before Brian Roper's effort for a point came back of the crossbar and Johnny McCafferty just failed to make contact.

Adrian Sweeney added another point after three delightful six inch dummy solos. The second goal followed with Brian Roper keeping possession before Devenney broke through and found Johnny McCafferty at the far post to slide home.

Devenney added a free from 40m and then good work by Brian Roper and Barry Monaghan saw Devenney beat the Down defence on the ground before crossing soccer-style for McCafferty to slide home a second goal that would have had the faithful in Finn Park in raptures.

Tony Blake denied Daniel Hughes a third time before the Down goal arrived on 35 minutes. Eoin McCartan found himself in

space but his effort was a poor one, pulling it across the goal but it fell for Colin McCrickard to finish to the net. A minute into added time McCrickard added a point from a free to leave the half-time score: Donegal 3-6, Down 1-3.

Down determined

Down came out very determined in the second half and Liam Doyle pointed a free in the first minute but Donegal responded with Brian Roper finding Kevin Cassidy on the overlap to point with his left.

Donegal should have had a fourth goal on 42 minutes when Michael Hegarty found Adrian Sweeney, who quickly put Brendan Devenney through. However, Devenney took his effort early and with his left boot and it went a yard wide of the post. Devenney injured himself in executing the shot. Before he left the field, however, he was on hand to pick a rebound and point after Roper hit the crossbar for a second time.

That was to be Donegal's last score as they switched off and then found it impossible to get their engine in gear again.

From the 52nd minute to the finish Down swarmed forward with points from Brendan Coulter, Aidan O'Prey with three; Colin McCrickard (2), Daniel Hughes and Eoin McCartan. O'Prey had come on as a half-time substitute and caused Donegal problems and he brought the best out of Tony Blake on 62 minutes, who saved at the expense of a '45'.

In the end Donegal hung on but their heads were down as they trooped off the field. From a position of great advantage, they almost let it slip.

Donegal: Tony Blake; Noel McGinley, Raymond Sweeney, Damien Diver; Shane Carr, Barry Monaghan, Kevin Cassidy (0-1); Paul McGonagle, Stephen McDermott; Brian McLaughlin (0-1), Michael Hegarty, Brian Roper; Johnny McCafferty (2-0), Adrian Sweeney (0-2, one free); Brendan Devenney (1-4, three frees). Subs., Christy Toye for McLaughlin (41 mins.); Colm McFadden for Devenney (45 mins.); Brendan Boyle for McGonagle (53 mins.); John Gildea for McDermott (63 mins.)

Down: Brendan McVeigh; Michael Higgins, Alan Moiloy, Joe Doran; Ronan Sexton, Sean Farrell, Ciaran Byrne; Brendan Coulter (0-3, one free), Sean Ward; Barry Doran, Liam Doyle (0-1, free), Ronan Murtagh; Eoin McCartan (0-1), Colin McCrickard (1-2, one free), Daniel Hughes (0-1). Subs., Aidan O'Prey (0-3) for B. Doran (h.t.); Stephen Kearney for Murtagh (41 mins.)

Referee: Paul Mullan (Antrim).

Donegal 3-8, Down 1-11

Man of the match

Even though he was only on the field for about 45 minutes, Brendan Devenney was the difference between the teams. He was unstoppable in the first half and hopefully the ankle injury he picked up will not curtail him for Sunday next against Offaly.

Key moment

There wasn't any particular moment in the game which you could point to. The half-time break probably gave Down the chance to re-focus as things were going against them in the opening half. However, the scoreline in the first thirty five minutes didn't reflect the game as Down had some very good goal chances as well.

Ref watch

The Antrim official had a good game, keeping on top of things, although he was a little fussy at times and held up play for too long to admonish small misdemeanours.

After match Reaction

Donegal captain, Adrian Sweeney, admitted that it was 'pretty awful stuff' in the second half. "I suppose all you can do is take the positives out of it. For a ten or fifteen minute spell in the first half I thought we were motoring fairly well, but the second half was a different story. "It is pretty hard to keep up that sort of momentum.

Dr. McKenna Cup Final

DONEGAL	0-7
TYRONE	1-22

DONEGAL'S nine-match unbeaten record came to an abrupt end at MacCumhaill Park, Ballybofey on Sunday when they were taken apart by a rampant Tyrone.

In front of a record 12,000 attendance Donegal showed symptoms of needing medical attention with just ten minutes gone. Gerard Cavan had split the posts twice from distance and he then set up Brian McGuigan for a superbly taken goal.

Donegal were 1-3 to 0-1 in arrears and looking like they needed smelling salts but it was to get worse as Tyrone added four points in an many minutes, taking Donegal apart like a doctor performing open heart surgery.

There was to be no let-up by the All-Ireland champions as they kept opening wounds in the Donegal set-up and by the final whistle the Donegal team looked battered and bruised and in bad need of a period of rehabilitation.

If the good Dr. McKenna were around Ballybofey at 4.30 on Sunday last he would have been the busiest man on the field, coping with bruised egos and seriously punctured reputations. It is learned that Dr. McKenna was a former Bishop of Clogher but even divine intervention would hardly have been helpful to the Donegal cause on Sunday.

Tyrone were simply mesmerising. Their team and support play was a joy to watch and once they found the range, they were awesome. They missed the target six times over the 73 minutes, but some of their point taking was breathtaking - the Brian Dooher point from the outside of the right boot one of the highlights.

Captain Cormac McAnallen, in accepting the Cup, felt that "Donegal had an off-day." He was being generous!

Donegal were about as good (or as bad) as they were the previous Sunday against Monaghan. They only had a handful of players who were up to speed with the game and against a team like Tyrone that was never going to be good enough.

Brendan Devenney had give Donegal room for optimism when he won and pointed a free after two minutes but by the time he won and pointed a second free on 21 minutes Armagh had 1-8 on the scoreboard.

Holes

Kevin Hughes and Gerard Cavan were finding holes at will in the Donegal defence, accounting for four of the eight points. Cavan also availed of a poor Tony Blake kick-out to send Brian McGuigan through for the only goal of the game, McGuigan firing home from well outside the 20m line.

One of the few Donegal successes on the day, Christy Toye, put Stephen McDermott through with a great pass in the 20th minute, but he was denied by Tyrone 'keeper, John Devine.

A great score from Brendan Devenney, under pressure from three Tyrone players, and a Colm McFadden free were the only other Donegal scorers as Tyrone led by 1-11 to 0-4 at the break.

Within two and a half minutes of the re-start Tyrone had added three points, one from Philip Jordan and two more from Gerard Cavan.

Christy Toye produced another good run to set up Michael Hegarty for Donegal's fifth point, but Tyrone 'took over' again hitting five points without reply to lead by 1-19 to 0-5 after 58 minutes.

Donegal had improved a little with Michael Hegarty making a poor decision to go for goal from 30 metres with men to his left and right and Toye found Devenney with a great ball only for the St. Eunan's man to be denied by a super save from Devine in the Tyrone goal.

Exhibition stuff

By that stage Tyrone were playing exhibition stuff and they sent on four substitutes at the one time with eleven minutes left. Two of those were to get on the scoreline as Donegal could only manage two points in the final minutes from Brian McLaughlin and Michael Hegarty.

Where to from here for Donegal? The warning signs were there from Ballyshannon the previous Sunday. This time there was no last minute revival. Indeed, the game was over as a contest after the first quarter.

What is even more worrying is the fact that Donegal (apart from captain, Adrian Sweeney) had close to their best selection on the field.

Are Tyrone players naturally fitter? Or did it just look that way?

Whatever is the answer to that question, Donegal have plenty of problems to ponder. The panel have been given this week off training and to report on Saturday next before they travel to Roscommon for the vital National League game on 7th March.

On Sunday they looked like a team who were turning up for a challenge game, while Tyrone

looked like a team wanting to win. It is said that Mickey Harte asked his panel on Friday night: "How many of you have McKenna Cup medals?" The answer after Sunday is 20.

Peter Campbell reports from
MacCumhaill Park

Photos by Thomas Gallagher

The last time Tyrone won the competition was back in 1984. On that day they also annihilated Donegal in Irvinestown and then went on to win the Anglo Celt with Frank McGuigan scoring 11 points. Few would bet that Cormac McAnallen will not lift more silverware in 2004.

Donegal: Tony Blake; Niall McCready, Raymond Sweeney, Noel McGinley; Shane Carr, Barry Monaghan, Kevin Cassidy; John Gildea, Stephen McDermott; Christy Toye, Michael Hegarty (0-2), Paul McGonigle; Brian Roper, Colm McFadden (0-1,f), Brendan Devenney (0-3, 2f). Subs., John Haran for McDermott; Damien Diver for Carr (both 45 mins.); Brian McLaughlin (0-1) for Roper (56 mins.); Eamon McGee for McGonigle (61 mins.)

Tyrone: John Devine; Ryan McMenamin, Cormac McAnallen, Ciaran Gourley; Conor Gormley, Gavin Devlin, Philip Jordan (0-1); Kevin Hughes (0-3), Sean Cavanagh (0-2); Brian Dooher (0-1), Brian McGuigan (1-0), Gerard Cavan (0-5, 2f); Mark Harte (0-6, 5f), Leo Meenan, Enda McGinley (0-1). Subs., Joe McMahon for Jordan (50 mins.); Barry Collins (0-1) for Dooher; Brendan Donnelly for Gormley; Shane Sweeney for McMenamin; Michael Coleman (0-1) for McGinley (all 59 mins.)

Referee: Joe McQuillan (Cavan).

Democrat Sport

Lacklustre Donegal do just enough

DONEGAL1-15
ANTRIM1-9

Enough done, but much more to do, best describes Donegal's first round Bank of Ireland Ulster championship win over Antrim on Sunday afternoon, in Ballybofey.

Tom Comack reports from Sean MacCumhaill Park
Photos: Thomas Gallagher & Conor McGonagle

While they never rose above the ordinary Brian McEniff's men had six points to spare at the finish. And if anything, their six point winning margin, did not fully reflect their superiority against what was a very poor Antrim outfit.

This was best illustrated by the fact that the Saffrons had just 0-7 to Donegal's 1-14 on the scoreboard, with a little over five minutes remaining. A late Darren O' Hare goal and two points from James Martin and Kevin Madden with Donegal literally already going down the tunnel served only to put a slightly less embarrassing look on the final scoreline.

On the evidence of this showing Brian McEniff's charges will have to up their performance considerably in three weeks time if they are to dethrone reigning Ulster and All Ireland champions Tyrone. While the O'Neill county are not in the semi final, just yet, barring an upset of gigantic proportions by Charlie Mulgrew's, Fermanagh this Sunday, the double champions will be Donegal's semi-final opponents on

Sunday, June 20.

While this was far from vintage Donegal, followers will be heartened somewhat with the second half display after a desperately poor opening forty three minutes.

Lucky to be level 0-4 each, at the break Donegal were a transformed team after the break and racked up an impressive 1-11 in the closing 37 minutes.

With Brian McLaughlin and Brendan Boyle getting a grip at midfield Michael Hegarty, Adrian Sweeney, Colm McFadden, Brendan Devenney, and Brendan Boyle inflicted most of the damage on the score board. Boyle's goal with ten minutes remaining putting the final seal, on a game that as already in the bag.

The Ardara man polished a sweeping five man move involving Christy Toye, Adrian Sweeney, Stephen McDermott and McFadden with great coolness to finally end any lingering doubt that Donegal fans might still have had.

Hard to believe then that the sides

were level on 0-4 each at the end of the first half with the visitors unlucky not to be in front. And for their first half territorial and possession advantage they should have been in front, but lack of ideas and fire power in the final third of the park cost them dearly.

The first half was very poor fare and the 15,200 fans that flocked into Sean MacCumhaill Park, had little to cheer about. Four times in all the sides were level in that period Brendan Devenney with two and one each from Adrian Sweeney and Michael Hegarty the Donegal scorers. Kevin Madden with one from play and two from a frees and Darren O' Hare were the Antrim marksmen.

Teams and scorers

Donegal scorers: Adrian Sweeney (0-5, 4F), Brendan Devenney (0-3, 1F), Michael Hegarty (0-3), Colm McFadden (0-3), Brendan Boyle (1-0), Christy Toye (0-1):

Antrim: Kevin Madden (0-6, 5F), Darren O' Hare (1-1), Kevin McGourty (0-1), James Marron (0-1):

Antrim: Sean McCreevy; Niall Ward, Colin Brady, Tony Convery; Gearoid Adams, Sean Kelly, Anto Finnegan; Joseph Quinn, Mark McGrory; Martin McCarry, Kevin Brady, Kevin McGourty; Paul Doherty, Darren O' Hare; Kevin Madden: Subs: Mark Dougan for M. McCrory, 1st min.; John McKeever for N.Ward, 55 min.; Kevin Murray for G. Adams, 61 min.

Referee: Pat Fox (Westmeath)

The Marksman

Paul Durcan: Quiet afternoon, did not have to make a save of note, got good length into his kick-outs. 7

Niall McCreevy: A good solid play from first whistle until substituted in the closing minutes. 8

Raymond Sweeney: He did well throughout and more than held his own against the aerial threat of Darren O' Hare. 7

Damian Diver: Back to his brilliant best he had his opposite number Paul Doherty wrapped up from very early. 8

Eamonn McGee: Struggled for a while in the first half on Kevin McGourty, but steadied up in the second and emerged with flying colours. 7

Barry Monaghan: He took a while to settle but once he got to grips with Kevin Brady, he restricted the centre forward to a bit part in the second half. 7

Kevin Cassidy: He was by far and away Donegal's best player in the first half and produced an equally impressive second half of power play. 9

Brendan Boyle: He capped a top class display with a great second half goal. 8

Brian McLaughlin: After a quiet first half, Brian did well in the second, and got in a number of heavy hits and drove the ball forward quickly. 7

Christy Toye: He was in the wars in the first minute and was off the field for close on eighteen minutes with a head injury, showed no ill effects on his return and made a number of penetrating runs; kicked a fine point. 8

Michael Hegarty: After a quiet first half, really came into his own in the second and kicked two great points at the start of second half to kill off Antrim challenge. 9

Stephen McDermott: He came into it well in the second half, made a number of good runs was involved in move for goal. 7

Colm McFadden: Once he got going in the second half he made a handsome contribution with three good points and gave the final pass for the goal. 7

Adrian Sweeney: He was his team's top scorer with five points and revelled in his second half role of playing in front of Devenney and McFadden. 8

Brendan Devenney: While a little off his best he kicked two fine points from play and added another from a free. 7

Paul McGonigle: Replaced Brian McLaughlin with twelve minutes remaining and won a fair share of possession in that time. Not on long enough for assessment.

Karl Lacey: He came on for Niall McCreevy with under five minutes remaining, and a couple of balls, but not long enough in the action for a rating.

Brian Roper: Blood sub for Toye at the start and came on again the closing minute or so when again replaced Toye. 5

Shane Carr: He was introduced in the closing seconds coming on for Eamonn McGee, not long enough for a mark.

Man of the Match

Kevin Cassidy, for an inspiring display of power play right through the game the Gweedore man gets the verdict ahead of Michael Hegarty. While Hegarty had a very productive second period Cassidy was on top of his game from the off.

Turning Point

Michael Hegarty's two points within four minutes of the start of the second half turned the tie in Donegal's favour and definitely set down a marker that the home team meant business.

Ref Watch

While Brian McEniff was not happy with the Westmeath man's performance, claiming that Donegal did not get their share of close in frees. I must confess I had no great problem with the referee. And by and large I thought he had a good game, but I would have preferred if he would apply a little more common sense in relation to the advantage rule.

Tyrone wait on Dooher while

17th June, 2004

Donegal wait on Hegarty

By Peter Campbell

Neither Donegal or Tyrone were revealing their starting line-ups for Sunday's Bank of Ireland Ulster semi-final in Clones (2.15).

While Tyrone are waiting on captain Brian Dooher to recover from ligament damage, Donegal are waiting on the influential Michael Hegarty who has been struggling to shape off a leg injury.

Donegal trained on Tuesday night in Ballybofey but declined to name a starting fifteen.

Apart from Hegarty - who is being given time to prove his fitness - Donegal are also hoping that Paul McGonigle will recover from a hamstring injury.

It is unlikely that the Buncrana man will be named in the starting line-up but the management would be boosted if he was able to take his place on the bench to give cover for midfield.

Otherwise, it is expected that Donegal will field as expected with Shane Carr coming in to replace the injured Kevin Cassidy, while Brian Roper will return in the half-forward line.

If Hegarty doesn't recover then it is likely that Stephen McDermott will move to the No. 11 shirt, as he has been performing in that role in recent challenge matches.

News from Tyrone would suggest that Peter Canavan will be kept in reserve on the bench and there is increasing speculation that captain, Dooher, will be fit to take his place.

The other news from the Red Hand men is that man of the match in the All-Ireland final, Kevin Hughes, has been unable to train in recent weeks due to a hamstring injury. The speculation is that Hughes could well start in midfield after doing well there against Tyrone, but we will probably have to wait until throw-in on Sunday. Team selections can be misleading and it is only when the ball is thrown in that players find their true positions.

Donegal manager, Brian McEniff, was keeping his fingers crossed this week for playmaker, Michael Hegarty, but he had a warning for his team on Tuesday night. "Nobody will be taking the field on Sunday unless they are 100% fit."

The team expected to start for Donegal is: Paul Durcan; Niall McCready, Raymond Sweeney, Damien Diver; Eamon McGee, Barry Monaghan, Shane Carr; Brendan Boyle, Brian McLaughlin; Christy Toye, Michael Hegarty, Brian Roper; Colm McFadden, Adrian Sweeney, Brendan Devenney.

• One man who will be missing for Donegal on Sunday is mentor, Michael Oliver McIntyre who is hospitalised. All Gaels in Donegal will wish him a speedy recovery to full health and a return to the sidelines with county and club.



Michael Hegarty receives treatment from Dr. Austin Hegarty and physio Charlie Gillespie after breaking down in training. Photo Michael O'Donnell

Bank of Ireland Ulster
SFC semi-final
Donegal... 1-11
Tyrone 0-9



■ Brian Roper and Kevin Hughes get up close and personal during Sunday's Ulster semi-final clash. (2206TG33)

A second half performance to match anything from the past saw Donegal dethrone Ulster and All-Ireland champions, Tyrone in St. Tiernach's Park, Clones on Sunday.

Peter Campbell reports from Clones
Photos by Thomas Gallagher

It didn't look good for Donegal at half-time as they trundled into the dressing room a point in arrears and a man down. They had played poorly and negatively in the first half and lost corner-back, Niall McCreehy, lured by Owen Mulligan into a challenge immediately after he had been booked.

However, according to Barry Monaghan, the side made a pact in the dressing room to emulate the Donegal side of 1992, who went out to play the game of their lives against Derry in the Ulster final, despite being without John Cunningham.

They won every break and put Tyrone on the back foot and in corner forward, Colm Anthony McFadden, they had the executioner. McFadden finished with a tally of 1-7, his goal on 52 minutes putting Donegal 1-9 to 0-5 in front and while they lost the final quarter by 0-4 to 0-2, the game was effectively clinched with McFadden's strike.

The expected Tyrone comeback never arrived. Peter

Canavan remained on the bench and by the final whistle Donegal were coasting, limiting Tyrone to the odd long-range point.

Apart from the excellent McFadden, Donegal got superb second half performances from nearly every man on the park. Right from the back where Paul Durcan was supreme in the limited action he was involved in, they had leaders in Damien Diver, Michael Hegarty, Brian Roper, Barry Monaghan, Adrian Sweeney and Shane Carr.

It was different in the first half as their play was laced with nerves, off the mark with their first three opportunities from frees and Brian Roper's point two minutes into added time was their only score from play.

The All-Ireland champions looked the more likely in that opening half as they created a couple of goal chances with Donegal hanging on thanks to good defensive work.

Then on 34 minutes came the McCreehy dismissal with Tyrone's Eoin Mulligan luring him into a rash challenge. You could make an argument that

the red card was harsh and you could also argue that McCreehy was foolish, but the incident had a big bearing on the game.

Behind by 0-4 to 0-3, Donegal were a different team for the second half and it seemed to this observer that referee, Gerry Kinneavy, was more favourable to Donegal in the second half.

Played Tyrone off the field

The Donegal lads, however, didn't need any help. They played Tyrone off the field in the third quarter and had six points on the trot to turn a one point deficit into a four point lead by the 50th minute. Colm McFadden accounted for three of those while Christy Toye, Adrian Sweeney and Barry Monaghan added the others.

Adrian Sweeney became increasingly more effective in his withdrawn role, especially in getting quality fast ball to the front men.

Tyrone pulled a point back from wing-back, Joe McMahan before McFadden struck for the killer goal. Michael Hegarty put Christy Toye away up the sideline and when he cut in he found Colm McFadden, who rounded Ciaran Gourley before firing low past John Devine in the Tyrone goal.

When Tyrone responded with a point from Stephen O'Neill, McFadden countered with a '45' and even when the Red

Hand men had a mini-comeback with three points to reduce the margin to four, McFadden had the final say, pointing a free after substitute Stephen Cassidy had won his first tussle for possession.

The final point gave Donegal the breathing space for the comeback that never came. The life had been squeezed out of the All-Ireland champions with Donegal looking like the team that had the extra man.

Donegal: Paul Durcan; Niall McCreehy, Raymond Sweeney, Damien Diver; Eamon McGee, Barry Monaghan (0-1), Shane Carr; Brendan Boyle, Brian McLaughlin; Christy Toye (0-1), Michael Hegarty, Brian Roper (0-1); Colm McFadden (1-7, 5 frees, 45), Adrian Sweeney (0-1, free), Brendan Devenney. Subs., Stephen McDermott for McLaughlin (27 mins.); Stephen Cassidy for Devenney (60 mins.); John Gildea for Toye (72 mins.)

Tyrone: John Devine; Ryan McMenamin, Conor Gormley, Ciaran Gourley; Joe McMahan (0-1), Shane Sweeney (0-1), Philip Jordan; Gerard Cavan, Sean Cavanagh; Brian Dooher, Brian McGuigan (0-1), Stephen O'Neill (0-2, one free); Mark Harte (0-1), Kevin Hughes, Eoin Mulligan (0-3, 2 frees). Subs., Enda McGinley for Harte (51 mins.); Michael McGee for Gourley (53 mins.); Colin Holmes for Hughes (60 mins.)

Referee: Gerry Kinneavy (Roscommon).



Donegal 1-11, Tyrone 0-9 - After-match reaction from Clones



■ The Marksman

Paul Durcan: A competent performance by Durcan, who performed his duties in the manner of a veteran. Has given the defence a sound backbone, especially under the high ball. 7.5

Niall McCready: Was having a reasonably good game in the last line until a rash moment. Always playing on the edges, McCready has to learn to deal with moments like this. 6

Raymond Sweeney: Not much in the game but saw off a succession of full-forwards without any fuss. 7.5

Damien Diver: Has become one of the real leaders of this team. Inspirational throughout, hitting the line at the right time. 8.5

Eamon McGee: Another game played like a veteran, McGee's aerial ability and strength has been a real find for Donegal. 8

Barry Monaghan: Another of the leaders, Monaghan kept McGuigan very quiet and also popped up for a great point. 7.5

Shane Carr: Shane's first two clearances went astray, but after that he never put a foot wrong and was an inspiration. 8

Brendan Boyle: A difficult first half when Donegal were struggling to find their feet, Boyle came good in the second half. 7.5

Brian McLaughlin: Was a victim of Kinneavy's fussy overcarrying rule. McLaughlin found himself in a defensive role and consequently found it hard to impose himself. 6

Christy Toyne: Struggled to get into the game in the first half, but came good when the game opened up. A very good point and laid on the goal with a great pass. 7.5

Michael Hegarty: Worked hard throughout and was just off the mark with three efforts. His ability to break tackles was vital to the win. 7.5

Brian Roper: A real workhorse, his point just before the break was the launching pad for Donegal's win. Was involved in everything in the second half. 8

Colm McFadden: A fairly quiet first half with one pointed free, McFadden came alive in the second, involved in everything that was good for Donegal. 9

Adrian Sweeney: Struggled to get on the ball in his new role in the first half. However, in the second Sweeney's strength in possession and his quick, accurate ball was one of the decisive factors in the Donegal win. 7.5

Brendan Devenney: After missing his first free, Brendan found it very difficult to make an impact. A great pass for Barry Monaghan's point, but overall he found the going tough. 6

Stephen McDermott: Into midfield before the break, McDermott rose highest to win the ball right away and gave Donegal a new impetus. 7.5

Stephen Cassidy: While only on for ten minutes, it was probably his best ten minutes in a Donegal jersey. Won a free with his first touch and looked lively. 7.5

John Gildea: You could say he didn't put a foot wrong. He got all of ten seconds!

■ Man of the match

Donegal had plenty of candidates with Damien Diver a real leader in defence. There were a host of others who ensured that Donegal were always on the front foot, but the display of Colm McFadden with 1-7 was the outstanding performance and he gets the award.

■ Talking Point

The main talking point was the red carding of Niall McCready with mixed views. It is learned that McCready was fouled off the ball before the first incident and that explains his rash challenge, while the second yellow card must have a question mark over it. However, McCready is an experienced defender at this stage and with the advantage of hindsight, he will feel that he reacted in haste.

■ Ref watch

Neither county will be happy with referee, Gerry Kinneavy. He was fussy in the first half, especially on overcarrying. In the second half it seemed as if he was informed of Mulligan's part in McCready's sending off and Donegal benefited.

■ Michael Hegarty

"This win will be no good unless we go on and win an Ulster title. When we were a man down, I had to go back deep but it worked well and we deserved the win on the day," said Hegarty.

Asked about the display of Colm McFadden, Hegarty said that "McFadden is liable to do that any day. Thank God he did it today."

As for an Ulster final which is not the dream final of Tyrone against Armagh, Hegarty said: "We filled Croke Park last year and we will fill it again this year," said Michael.

■ Brendan Devenney

Donegal corner-forward, Brendan Devenney, was probably disappointed with his own personal performance, but he accepted his substitution in a positive manner and was delighted when the final whistle went.

"It didn't matter that we had fourteen players on the field. We have great spirit in the team.

"We were written off before the game in the media but the lads showed that there is more to Ulster than Tyrone and Arma

"We will be happy to go to Park and take on Armagh," said Brendan.

■ Barry Monaghan

"We were up against it when we were down to fourteen men. It came at a bad time and after a poor first half.

"However, we had to throw cau-

tion to the wind. Our backs were to the wall against the All-Ireland champions and we had to go out and attack," said Barry Monaghan.

"We made a pact in the dressing-room at half-time and the ball seemed to bounce for us in the second half. The spirit was always there and the 1992 Ulster final when John Cunningham was sent off was mentioned. We made a promise to emulate that team, that we would do the same in the second half," said Barry.

"We were probably lucky that we caught Tyrone at the end of a hard season but we were far too cautious in the first half and Niall (McCready) was unlucky to be sent off."

Asked about Colm McFadden's performance, Barry said his final tally "was a fabulous total".

■ Mickey Harte

The Tyrone manager, Mickey Harte, was gracious in defeat, offering no excuses.

"I have no arguments, the better team won on the day. They're hungrier than we are, they did the business and I have absolutely no argument with that," said Harte.

The Red Hand man felt that they were doing reasonably well in the first half but Donegal were superior in the second period.

"In the second half Donegal started the brighter and they had the quality players who were capable of finishing. As long as a goal wasn't scored I thought that we could still win the game, but once the goal went in it was really a tall order. Then we had to get a lot of scores to stay in the game we we didn't look like getting that amount of scores today," said Harte.

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2004 Ulster Final - Donegal.....0-11, Armagh.....3-15



Donegal's bid for their first Ulster title in 12 years floundered on the wide open spaces of Croke Park as powerful Armagh collected their fourth Ulster title in six years.

Tom Comack reports from Croke Park
Photos: Thomas Gallagher & Conor McGonagle

And they should have no complaints about it. Armagh were much the slicker outfit on the day and were deserving 13 points winners.

Except for a brief period in the middle of the first half, and again early in the second, Donegal, did not measure up. And Brian McEniff's men looked but a pale shadow of the team that had lowered Tyrone's colours in such impressive fashion in the semi-final.

Only fullback Raymond Sweeney, and corner backs Niall McCreeady - after a sticky start - and Damian Diver left Croke Park with reputations any way intact. In fairness to Michael Hegarty, he worked hard throughout, while Brendan Devenney looked the only real threat up front.

However, Armagh were most impressive and in that type of form they will be difficult to beat. Strong in the tackle and looking much more at home on the wide open spaces of Croke Park, they produced as good a performance as possibly this team has ever produced, with 3-12 of their 3-15 total coming from play:

Late goals

Donegal hit four points in the first half to Armagh's 1-9, and while they did much better in the second period with 0-7, so too did Armagh. The Orchard county hit 2-6, with the goals from Paddy McKeever and Oisín McConville in the closing ten minutes putting the icing on the cake.

Diarmuid Marsden's opening goal on twenty nine minutes was a hammer blow to Donegal, who after a sticky opening quarter had come back into it, and were just two points adrift 0-4 to 0-6 at that stage. The corner forward got a flick to an Oisín McConville '45', with keeper Paul Durcan in no man's land.

Durcan, seconds earlier, had done well to deny Kieran Hughes from close range after the defence was found napping.

And with three more points before the break, Armagh took a seven point advantage to the dressing rooms with them. And in truth, they were well on their way to a quarter final spot.

Colm McFadden with two pointed frees and one each from Brendan Devenney (free) and Michael Hegarty were the Donegal first half scorers.

Donegal did up the tempo on the resumption, and had hit four points to Armagh's two by the 55 minute mark - Brian Roper, Rory Kavanagh, Brendan Devenney and Colm McFadden raising the white flags. And McFadden was desperately unlucky not to have the umpire waving green, within two minutes of the restart. His fierce drive, after a great run, crashing back of the crossbar with Paul Hearty well beaten.

Game set and match

It was game set and match for Armagh when Paddy McKeever got on the end of a great move to crack home his side's second three pointer, ten minutes from the end.

And Oisín McConville's third goal on the seventy minutes was only academic as Armagh coasted to an easier than anticipated victory.

Donegal: Paul Durcan; Niall McCreeady, Raymond Sweeney, Damian Diver; Eamon McGee, Barry Monaghan, Shane Carr; Brendan Boyle, Stephen McDermott; Christy Toye, Michael Hegarty (0-2), Brian Roper (0-1); Colm McFadden (0-3,2F) Adrian Sweeney (0-1), Brendan Devenney (0-2 F). Subs: John Gildea (0-1) for S. McDermott; Rory Kavanagh (0-1) for C. Toye, inj., both at half-time; Paul McGonagle for B. Roper, 52 min.; John Haran for A. Sweeney, 63 min.; Karl Lacey for E. McGee, 65 min.; Brian McLaughlin used as a blood substitute for John Gildea.

Armagh: Paul Hearty; Enda McNulty, Francie Bellew, Andy Mallon; Kieran Hughes, Kieran McGeeney, Aidan O'Rourke; Philip Loughran (0-1), Paul McGrane; Paddy McKeever (1-3), Tony McEntee (0-2), Oisín McConville (1-3,2F); Steven McDonnell (0-2), Ronan Clarke (0-1), Diarmuid Marsden (1-2). Subs: Brian Mallon (0-1) for R. Clarke, 62 min.; Andrew McCann for K. McGeeney, 68 min.; Justin McNulty for F. Bellew; John McEntee for D. Marsden.

Referee: Michael Collins (Cork)

Match Statistics

First Half					
	Gls	Pts	Frees	Wides	45s
Donegal	0	5	13	5	0
Armagh	1	9	10	3	1
Second Half					
Donegal	0	6	13	5	1
Armagh	2	6	6	4	1
Totals					
Donegal	0	11	26	10	1
Armagh	3	15	16	7	2

Yellow Cards - Raymond Sweeney, Brian Roper, Eamon McGee (Donegal); Francie Bellew, Enda McNulty (Armagh).

Man of match

Kieran McGeeney stood head and shoulders above all others and is the player that made Armagh tick on Sunday. He totally controlled the opening twenty minutes of the game, and while he seemed to tire near the finish he had a huge influence on the game.

Turning Point

While Armagh were looking much the sharper from very early and were in control for most of the game, Diarmuid Marsden's goal on twenty seven minutes was possibly the nail in the Donegal coffin. Donegal had come back from four points to two down when Marsden struck, and all of a sudden Armagh were five up.

Ref Watch

Kevin McStay raised the issue of the legality of Armagh's first goal on the Sunday game. McStay argued that Kieran Hughes should have been pulled back for not being the required fourteen metres from the kicker Philip Loughran.

I must confess I did not spot it, nor did I hear anyone complain about it at the time. The one big gripe that Donegal had was that Michael Collins was a little too lenient on the Armagh defence and in particular Enda McNulty who was stuck to Brendan Devenney like a leech.



Fragile Donegal lose the plot

All-Ireland Football
Qualifier Round Four
Donegal.....0-12
Fermanagh..1-10



DONEGAL0-12
FERMANAGH1-10

The fragile nature of Donegal football was in the spotlight after Saturday's disastrous elimination from the Bank of Ireland Championship, going down to neighbours, Fermanagh, in extra time.

Peter Campbell reports from Clones
Photos by Thomas Gallagher

Indiscipline and inaccuracy were the result of the fractious preparation with nineteen wides and two players dismissed over the 90+ minutes.

With a Manus Boyle on board Donegal would have won this game pulling up, but players and management have to take responsibility for the shambles in the closing minutes when nobody seemed to know who was doing what regarding frees.

The main theme from the Donegal support afterwards was relief - relief that they don't have to go back to Croke Park because they feel that the present team don't possess the togetherness necessary for another assault on the Armagh's, Tyrone's or Kerry's of the game.

Any team that records just one point in the final 44 minutes of play is hardly likely to be in the shake-up for major honours. Donegal went two points clear in the 50th minute through Brian Roper but seven minutes later they lost Brendan Devenney to a red card and scored their final point with seconds to go at the end of the first period of extra time.

Devenney's reaction to his red card by prodding the referee three times is likely to see him in very hot water. He was obviously frustrated at the lack of protection but will pay a price for the reaction.

It was all so different at the start of the game as Donegal seemed up for the contest and raced three points clear by the 9th minute with Devenney, Sweeney and Michael Hegarty pointing.

They were hit with a well crafted goal by Eamon Maguire on 13 minutes but were just a point adrift at the break (0-6 to 1-4) thanks to a wonderful point from John Gildea on the stroke of half-time.

After twice going two behind early in the second half Donegal hit the front with four points in seven minutes through Roper, Christy Toye, Adrian Sweeney and Roper again.

They should have closed the game in the 51st minute when Brendan Boyle and Roper put Stephen McDermott through but his effort for goal was well saved by Niall Tinney.

Then came the Devenney red card and Fermanagh responded with Martin McGrath levelling the game with three minutes of normal time left.

Donegal had the better chances to win it in normal time with Adrian Sweeney continually finding himself shooting from impossible angles while Brian Roper worked a great opportunity but missed from 20m.

Extra time Fermanagh were again given numerical advantage when Stephen McDermott, unlucky in my view, was given a second yellow. The Erne men took advantage with Stephen Maguire and Tom Brewster pointing frees, while Donegal's only response was a Colm McFadden free.

Litany of chances

The second period of extra time saw a litany of chances for Donegal but Adrian Sweeney and Michael Hegarty missed very kickable frees, while at the other end Paul Durcan made a great save from Mark Little, who should have opted for the point and put Donegal out of their misery.

While it was an exciting contest one felt that we were watching two mediocre teams and Fermanagh manager, Charlie Mulgrew, acknowledged that his side were lucky that Donegal had left their shooting boots at home.

One Donegal player who must have wondered what was happening on the line was Stephen Cassidy, who was given a couple of minutes as a sub at the end of the second half, but was replaced for extra time.

Despite that there were a

number of top class Donegal performers, mostly in defence - Paul Durcan (who even saved a 'point'), Raymond Sweeney, Karl Lacey, Barry Dunning and the excellent Shane Carr. Barry Dunning also made an impression, while John Gildea put in a strong performance at midfield.

At times Fermanagh looked naive with numerous passes going over the sideline. But they had two fretakers who were capable of finding the range and in the end that was the difference between the sides.

Donegal: Paul Durcan; Niall McCready, Raymond Sweeney, Noel McGinley; Karl Lacey, Barry Monaghan, Shane Carr; John Gildea (0-1), Brendan Boyle; Paul McGonigle, Michael Hegarty (0-2), Brian Roper (0-2); Colm McFadden (0-1,f), Adrian Sweeney (0-2), Brendan Devenney (0-3, 2f). Subs., Christy Toye for McFadden (34 mins.); Stephen McDermott for McGonigle (ht); Barry Dunning for McGinley (41 mins.); Stephen Cassidy for Toye (67 mins.); Rory Kavanagh (for Devenney, 70 mins.); Colm McFadden for Cassidy (70 mins.); Kevin Cassidy for Gildea (78 mins.); John Haran for Roper (84 mins.); Stephen Cassidy for A. Sweeney (79 mins.)

Fermanagh: Niall Tinney; Niall Bogue, Barry Owens, Ryan McCluskey; Raymond Johnston, Shane McDermott (0-1), Declan O'Reilly; Martin McGrath (0-2), Liam McBarron; Eamon Maguire (1-0), Stephen Maguire (0-4, all frees), Mark Little; Claran O'Reilly; James Sherry, Colm Bradley (0-2). Subs., Damien Kelly for D. O'Reilly (28); Peter Sherry for N. Bogue (45); Tom Brewster (0-1f) for C. O'Reilly (47); Hugh Brady for McBarron (54); Shane Goan for McCluskey (69); Mark Murphy for J. Sherry (76); Dara McGrath for Maguire (90).

Referee: Joe McQuillan (Cavan).

Man of the match

There were a good number of solid Donegal performers, not least Shane Carr, Paul Durcan and John Gildea. For Fermanagh Barry Owens, Raymond Johnston and Martin McGrath were excellent but for leadership the award goes to Shane McDermott who was a rallying force when it mattered most.

Turning point

The missed goal from Stephen McDermott which was followed minutes later by the dismissal of Devenney. These events came midway through the second half and changed the game back in Fermanagh's direction.

Ref watch

Donegal could feel aggrieved that they did not get many calls from the Cavan official. There were a number of occasions when Devenney and Sweeney were manhandled with no whistle.

Allianz National Football League Div. 2 A

Donegal.....	2-7
Offaly.....	1-7

On a day for getting down and dirty and rolling up the sleeves, Donegal and Offaly did just that in this Div. 2A Allianz League opener at Ballybofey.

Donegal's greater potency up front was just about enough to see them claim the two precious league points. But only just, as Offaly, gave as much as they got. The Midlander's inadequacies in front of the posts, especially in the second half, leading to their downfall.

The Faithful county, who were the better team in the first half, paid the price for a lack of scoring ideas in the second period. One point was their only return in 39 minutes of second half action and that came two minutes into injury time. Donegal were only marginally better as they posted four second half points.

In fairness to both teams the heavy first half rain took its toll and underfoot conditions deteriorated drastically in the second.

Still smiling

Despite being on the back foot for much of the first half, Donegal, were still smiling at the break and still very much in the game on level terms, 2-3 to Offaly's 1-6.

Brian McLaughlin's goal, just before half-time, was a real boost and a great lift. It brought Donegal kicking and screaming back into the contest that was definitely slipping away.

Offaly may have been a little disappointed as they trundled off at half time, because they had done more than enough to be in front. Though there was a hint of good fortune about their goal, a massive long range free - from about 45 metres - sailed into the

Donegal goals to end up going in off the post and a number of hands into Tony Blake's net. Centre forward Pascal Kellaghan was credited with the crucial touch.

The goal put the Midlander's five points up, and in the driving seat by the half hour mark. Not bad for a team that found themselves three points down, inside five minutes.

Brendan Devenney opening with a goal and point got Donegal off to a perfect start. Michael Hegarty and Adrian Sweeney combining to set up the Eunan's man in front of the posts, and from ten metres he made no mistake to burst the net on five minutes, even if there was a hint of a step or two too many.

That was under five minutes. But worryingly Donegal did not score again until Adrian Sweeney and his lethal left point landed a great long range effort seventeen minutes later. In between, Offaly powered, by Ciaran McManus - who was striking oil in the middle of the field - knocked over five points. McManus himself, with a great strike off the outside of his right boot from thirty five metres; Neville Coughlan, Barry Mooney, Niall McNamee and McManus again with a free off the ground from all of fifty metres.

Narrowed the gap

While Devenney narrowed the gap before the Offaly goal, it was only after Kellaghan got his finger tips to McManus' free that Donegal awakened

to the challenge once more. However, in truth McLaughlin's life line was very much against the run of play.

Donegal must have got a real roasting at half-time. Not only did they return with a change of strip, but they also had more fire in their bellies. And the umpire had his coat scarcely buttoned up when Brendan Boyle raced through for the lead point, and one minute later they were two up thanks this time to Brendan Devenney.

However, this was to be their last score until ten minutes from time when Adrian Sweeney once more split the posts from a 20 metre free. Thankfully, Offaly left their shooting boots in the dressing room and while they had a number of chances all were squandered as Donegal set up a blanket defence. It was very much a case of what we have we hold for Tírchonail.

Donegal scored once more before the close, Christy Toye, from an acute angle knocking over the insurance point nine minutes from time. Coughlan ended the Midlander's embarrassing prospect of a scoreless second half when he found the target on seventy two minutes. And Offaly almost pulled off an amazing draw in

the closing seconds, Brendan Boyle getting back to block a Coughlan close range strike on goals.

DONEGAL : Tony Blake; Shane Carr Raymond Sweeney, Eamonn McGee Dessie McNamara, Barry Monaghan Kevin Cassidy; Paul McGonigle, John Haran; Brian McLaughlin (1-0), Michael Hegarty, Brian Roper; Johnny McCafferty, Adrian Sweeney (0-2,1F), Brendan Devenney (1-3,1F). Subs: Brendan Boyle (0-1) for Johnny McCafferty, 22 mins.; John Gildea for J. Haran, 48 min.; Christy Toye (0-1), for B. McLaughlin, 60 min.; Colm McFadden for P. McGonagle, 70 min.:

OFFALY: Kevin Meehan; Barry Mooney (0-1), Cathal Daly, Michael Flynn; Shane Sullivan, Scott Brady, Matthew Mitchell; Mark Daly (0-1), Ciaran McManus (0-2,1F); Cillian Farrell, Pascal Kellaghan (1-0), Joe Quinn; Tomas Deehan, Neville Coughlan (0-2), Niall McNamee. Subs: Colm Quinn for T. Deehan, 21 min.; James Coughlan for Cillian Farrell, 49 min.; Alan McNamee for P. Kellaghan, 60 min.; Conor Evans for S. Sullivan, 62 min.; John Reynolds for J. O Neill.

REFEREE: Michael Daly (Mayo):

Score of the Match

Its a toss up between Ciaran McManus' 50 metre free from the ground and Adrian Sweeney's point from play. Both were in the first half, and were brilliant scores in difficult conditions. Sweeney's effort was from a good forty metres out and on the stand side of MacCumhaill Park, and with Cathal Daly breathing down his neck, Sweeney won possession used that Sweeney hand off special before turning and splitting the posts. A great score! McManus, who also kicked a fine point from play, drove straight between the posts from 50 metres with plenty to spare. A great score in driving rain and on a greasy surface.

Move of the Match

It had to be the one that lead to Donegal's goal. Barry Monaghan is fouled on his forty five he takes a quick free to Michael Hegarty who in turn spots Adrian Sweeney in space to the right of the posts. Hegarty finds Sweeney with a forty metre pass (and they say Donegal cannot play the long ball) who in turn off loads to Devenney on the run in front of the posts. And breaking the tackle Devenney finds the corner of the net.

Turning Point

Without question Brian McLaughlin's goal on the stroke of half-time. Donegal who were under the cosh for much of the first half were trailing 1-3 to 1-6 and within second of the half-time whistle when McLaughlin rose majestically to punch Adrian Sweeney's cross to the net to tie up the game. And instead of going in three down at the break Donegal were back on level terms and back in the game.

Ref Watch

Michael Daly had good control throughout though by and large the players made it easy for him. That said, he may have shied away from giving Ciaran McManus a straight red for a slap on John Gildea, instead he opted to give the International Rules Star a yellow. I also thought, given the conditions, he was a little harsh on the pick up and in fact got a few calls wrong on this one.

MICHAEL HEGARTY: Michael had a great start and had a hand in the opening two scores, but faded a little in the middle of the first half. Likewise in the second was in and out of the game, but still one of his best displays for some-time. 7

Man of Match

On a day it was more a team effort Barry Monaghan gets the vote and only just from Brendan Boyle, Adrian Sweeney and Brendan Devenney. It was another typical solid performance from the Four Masters man who shades on his first half display when Donegal were under the cosh.

Donegal.....	2-10
Leitrim.....	1-5

Two goals in the space of two minutes in the middle of the second half from Adrian Sweeney and Brendan Devenney, finally saw Donegal pull away from a determined Leitrim in this Allianz National League Div. 2 A clash.

Full-forward Sweeney rattled the Leitrim net on fifty three minutes for the first of the three pointers, after good work from Christy Toye, Brendan Devenney, and John Haran - to open up a four point lead for the second time in the contest.

Two minutes later, it was game set and match for the visitors, when Devenney took a long delivery from Paul McGonagle on the run to add goal number two.

This score finally silenced the home support in the 2,500 approximate Cloone crowd who were still clutching on to hopes of an upset. Wing forward Michael Foley had raised those hopes with a goal five minutes into the second half to bring his side back into the game, and to within a point of the Tirchonail men.

Cheeky goal

Foley's goal was of the opportunist variety, as he cheekily lobbed Tony Blake, after Blake had been dispossessed by Colin Regan just outside his area.

But that's as good as it got for the home team, and while it took Donegal some time to pull away again the goals sealed the victory.

While this was far from a vintage Donegal there was a sense of inevitability about the outcome from way out.

True Leitrim were full of bluster and heart early on, but the harsh reality is that when it came to translating possession into scores they were not in the same orbit as Donegal.

Half forwards Michael Foley and Pat Farrell were the only Leitrim men to

raise a flag, and what's more were the only men that looked like doing so. Wing man Foley posting 1-4, the 0-4 from frees, while Farrell knocked over their only point from play.

In fairness to the Leitrim attack, the Donegal rearguard with Niall McCready back on board looked razor sharp and in no mood for giving away handy scores.

All guns blazing

The game went very much according to the script in the first half with Leitrim coming out with all guns blazing. And they had three shots on the Donegal posts, one of them a decent chance of a goal, before the visitors had got their first breath.

Despite the home team's early bluster, it was Donegal who were first to score, Brendan Devenney splitting the posts with a thirty five metre free.

With their midfield and defence on top, Leitrim continued to set the pace and they were in front by the fifteen minute mark with two pointed Foley frees. Adrian Sweeney brought Donegal level with a point from play in the middle of the half.

And it was still level, 0-3 each, well into the second quarter. Devenney and Foley trading scores.

But in the closing ten minutes we got the first hint that Donegal had that little extra in their locker, and without much fuss they were two up, 0-5 to 0-3, thanks to late points from Michael Hegarty and Christy Toye.

And like last week against Offaly, Donegal began the second half in whirlwind fashion, and had two points on the board inside three minutes.

Brendan Devenney from a free and Adrian Sweeney from play the scorers. All of a sudden they were in the driving seat and four up, 0-7 to -3, but they were rocked when Foley chipped Blake for the Leitrim goal to reduce the margin to a single point once more.

While it took Donegal some time to recover from the setback, Leitrim were not able to build on their good fortune and in fact it was Donegal who were next to score, Paul McGonagle popping up in front of the posts to punish a poor clearance with a

point. And minutes later it was lights out for Leitrim, with that two goal barrage from Sweeney and Devenney. Game over!

John Haran and Brendan Devenney put the icing on the win with two late points. With two wins under their belts Donegal are now joint top with Roscommon who also remain unbeaten after two rounds.

Donegal: Tony Blake; Niall McCready, Raymond Sweeney, Eamonn McGee; Shane Carr, Barry Monaghan, Kevin Cassidy; Paul McGonagle (0-1), Brendan Boyle; Brian McLaughlin, Michael Hegarty (0-1), Brian Roper; Johnny McCafferty, Adrian Sweeney (1-1), Brendan Devenney (1-4,3f); Subs: Christy Toye (0-1) for B. McLaughlin, 25 min.; Colm McFadden for J. McCafferty, half-time; John Gildea for Brendan Boyle, 47 min.; John Haran for B. Roper, 52 min.; Barry Dunion for N. McCready, 67 min.

Leitrim: Gareth Phelan; Michael McGuinness, John McKeon, Dermot Reynolds; Niall Gilbane, Seamus Quinn, Barry Prior; Shane Canning, Chris Carroll; Colin Regan, Pat Farrell (0-1), Michael Foley (1-4,4f);

John McGuinness, Fintan McBrien, Jimmy Guckian. Subs: John McGoldrick for Fintan McBrien, 48 min.; John Mooney for J. McGuinness, 55 min.; Michael Greene for Niall Gilbane, 60 min.; Dermot Kennedy for P. Farrell, 66 min.

Referee: P. Daly (Westmeath):

Tom Comack reports from Cloone
Photos: Michael O'Donnell

Man of the Match

Michael Hegarty gets the vote this week in what must rank as one of his best displays for some time. He covered back to ease our midfield problems in the first half and by my reckoning had possession fifteen times in the first half. While this dropped to ten touches in the second period it was still a significant contribution and was without question the man of the match. He also managed to get his name on the score sheet with a sweetly struck point.

Move of the Match

Christy Toye picks up possession out wide; he carries forward before releasing to Devenney, who in turn finds John Haran running through the middle. Haran takes the ball on the run and is charging down on the posts when he spots Sweeney in space on his right. Sweeney takes the pass before giving Gareth Phelan no chance from the edge of the area for goal number one.

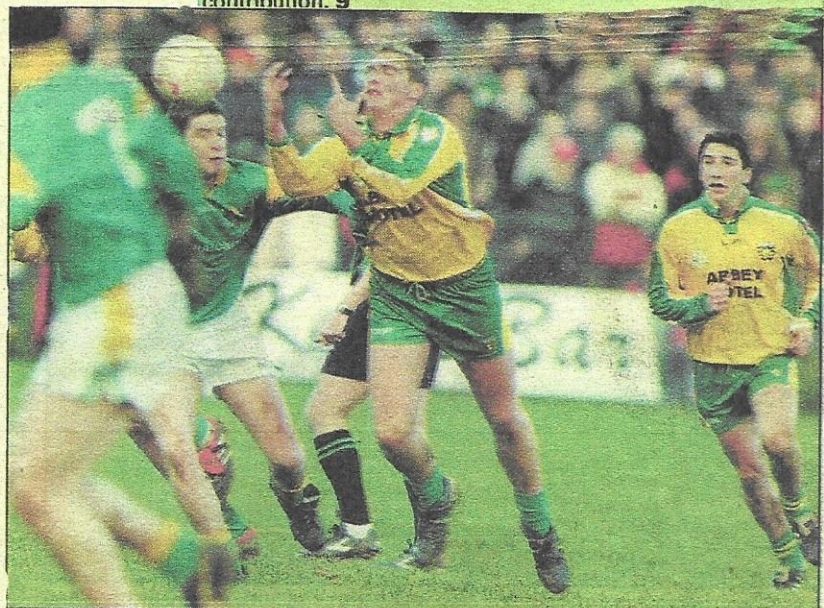
Turning Point

This game turned on a number of occasions with both Donegal goals key moments but for me the real turning point came in the closing minutes of the first half. Despite not playing up to scratch Donegal were still in front thanks to points from Michael Hegarty and Christy Toye.

Ref. Watch

Westmeath official Pat Daly dished out a total of six yellow cards, five of them to Donegal players, in what was not a dirty game. All of which suggests he may have been a little liberal in his application of discipline. He was a little lenient on over carrying, but Donegal supporters should have no complaints on this front as both Adrian Sweeney and Brendan Devenney may have taken more than four steps for both Donegal goals.

MICHAEL HEGARTY: At long last we are beginning to see some of that old Hegarty flare and work rate return. Easily his best game for some time and was without question my man of the match. He covered back to ease our midfield problems in the first half and while my method of keeping stats is not the most scientific, but by my reckoning Michael had possession fifteen times in the first half. And while this dropped to just ten touches in the second period it was still a significant contribution. 9



■ Brian McLaughlin lays the ball off as defenders close in on him.

Allianz National Football League, Division 2A

DONEGAL.....3-6
MONAGHAN.....1-11

Peter Campbell reports from Fr. Tierney Park, Ballyshannon
Photos by Thomas Gallagher

Donegal - and Brendan Devenney - fashioned a piece of larceny on Sunday last against Monaghan that will live long in the memory.

Donegal were taken apart from the beginning until the 71st minute of this contest by a Monaghan side who were convincing and rugged.

But then in a three minute period Donegal turned a four point deficit into a win that put them right up there with all the great robbers of the past.

And they can thank their ace corner-forward, Brendan Devenney for the two points collected. Devenney, with a hat-trick of goals, kept Donegal in a game with goals that were delicately finished in the 2nd, 54th and 71st minutes. All three strikes were of the highest order, all from close range with up to four Monaghan men around him. On each occasion he made the opposition decide first before finishing with panache on each occasion.

But apart from Devenney's ability to get the upper hand on his opponent, no other Donegal player was able to do so.

The Farney men had the upper hand all over the pitch, with few bright spots for Donegal. Indeed, the writing on the wall was heeded by many Donegal supporters who were heading for the exits from midway through the second half.

Donegal were behind by four points at the break and by six points in the 46th minute. A Devenney goal stopped the exodus of supporters with sixteen minutes left, but they failed to score again until the St. Eunan's man bulged the net with a one of the three allotted minutes of added time gone.

At that stage Donegal were down to thirteen men, losing Niall McCreeady for persistent fouling of the excellent

Thomas Freeman, while an out of sorts Adrian Sweeney took out his frustration on James Coyle and saw a straight red.

Even then Donegal would have gratefully accepted the draw and a point they would not have deserved, but they were to get more than that, thanks to the industry of Glenfin man, Stephen McDermott.

Firstly, McDermott was on hand to win back possession after a Devenney free fell short. Stephen hooked a point under pressure to draw the sides level. The action on and off the ball was boiling for some time and at that stage Paul Finlay also made the walk to the line for a second yellow, joining Jason Hughes, who had triumphantly made the march minutes earlier, thinking that his side had the points in the bag.

Now with the sides level, Monaghan's nerve was under the microscope and they elected to try and keep possession with a short kick-out. However, Stephen McDermott had other ideas and he again won the ball back and set John Gildea through to fire over the winner.

It was drama of the highest order and it reminded me of when Donegal were struck with two sucker goals in the League quarter-final in 1992 by Dublin in Breefni Park.

This, however, was grand larceny. To score three times in three minutes, one of them a goal, and squeeze home by a point was just incredible.

agement for a performance that was probably the worst seen in a long time, even worse than the championship in Enniskillen on June 1 of last year.

Second fiddle

It was that sort of game. Before the final minutes of added time Donegal's obituary could have been written. They had used five different players to shore up midfield, sacrificing two forwards. Even then they were playing a very poor second fiddle.

The result was that Monaghan had at least 70% of the possession and the Freeman brothers were reveling in it.

A Christy Toye individual 40m run at the start of the second half gave some hope. Shane Carr was battling to keep the defence intact, but the Donegal ship looked like it had been transported from Pearl Harbour with holes everywhere.

Then there was Brendan Devenney. He had a goal after 68 seconds, outstripping the defence and then allowing a few defenders back before fooling them with a tap in. He was hauled back five minutes later for a blatant penalty but the whistle never came.

When Donegal were seven points down early in the second half, they availed of three frees to reduce the margin. Then Devenney struck again, this time put through by Brendan Boyle.

But it was the third goal which gave Donegal the impetus for victory. Barry Dunnion, on as a late sub, drove forward twice and won frees on each occasion. One of them led to Michael Hegarty putting Devenney in once more to leave just a point in it. With Devenney's work done, Stephen McDermott then made his mark and Donegal had the points.

Few others will be happy with their performance. Paul Durcan conceded one goal, that coming after he had stopped the initial effort from Raymond Ronaghan with a superb block. His dominance in the air in front of goal will have impressed but his kick-outs, albeit to a midfield under pressure, were of the mixed variety.

Donegal: P. Durcan; E. McGee, R. Sweeney, N. McCreeady; S. Carr, B. Monaghan, K. Cassidy; J. Gildea (0-1), P. McGonigle; C. Toye (0-1), M. Hegarty, B. Roper; C. McFadden, A. Sweeney (0-2,2f), B. Devenney (3-1, 1f). Subs., N. McGinley for McGee; J. Haran for Roper; B. Boyle for C. McFadden; S. McDermott (0-1) for P. McGonigle; B. Dunnion for Haran.

Monaghan: P. McElroy; J. P. Mone, J. Coyle, E. Lennon; D. Duffy (0-1), J. Conlon, V. Corey; E. Lennon, J. Hughes; D. Clerkin, P. Finlay (0-3,2f), D. Freeman (1-4); T. Freeman (0-1). R. Ronaghan, G. McQuaid. Subs., D. Mone (0-2) for McQuaid.

Referee: M. Kolbohm (Tyrone)

Turning Point

It could be argued that the sending off of Jason Hughes helped Donegal. Goalscorer, Brendan Devenney, alluded to this afterwards, saying it gave Donegal the chance to win some mid-field possession. Most of the turning points involved Devenney, with the vital one being his third goal a minute into added time. From there Donegal fashioned a victory that was hardly deserved.

Ref. Watch

Tyrone referee, Martin Kolbohm, set his stall by yellow carding Thomas Freeman after six minutes. By the end he had handed out 14 yellows and four reds. He missed the Devenney penalty foul and was in danger of losing control midway through the second half when tempers were frayed.

BRENDAN DEVENNEY: Donegal's saviour. There is nothing more to say. 9

MICHAEL HEGARTY: Found it hard to make any headway in the first, getting on the ball only a couple of times. Improved a little in the second and had a hand in the third goal. 5

Man of the Match

Given that we are a Donegal based newspaper, this is an easy task. **Brendan Devenney** was Donegal's saviour and even though he was superb, he had little opposition for the award in gold jerseys. On the Monaghan side Thomas Freeman was a real threat, while Dermot Duffy was very impressive in the half-back line.

A good number of the Donegal fans missed it. They were on their way out of town, cursing the players and man-

Donegal 0-12
Roscommon 0-11

Winning can become a habit, and for Donegal that is very much the case as they bagged another two precious league points in their top of the table clash with Roscommon in Dr. Hyde Park, Roscommon.

Tom Comack reports from Hyde Park, Roscommon
Photos: Michael O' Donnell

Famous escapologist Harry Houdini clearly is a Donegal fan and on Sunday he turned up again in the guise of Brian McLaughlin to help Donegal to yet another unlikely late victory.

For the second league Sunday in-a-row, Donegal defied Newton's Law on gravity to come back from being dead and buried, to win an amazing game and now sit proudly on top of division 2A.

While it may not be larceny on the scale of last time out against Monaghan, it does come close. Though this time around it was more a case of Roscommon throwing away the two points rather than Donegal moving heaven and earth to win them.

If it was a horse race, Tommy Carr and his players would have been hauled before the stewards at the finish.

From a position where they were in total control in the first half, it was very much a no show by the Shannonsiders in the second period.

However, Donegal must take some credit for their second half display. When presented with the opportunity, they slowly clawed their way back into the tie. And, when the winning post came into sight, they always looked the more likely to win - substitute Brian McLaughlin pulling the game out of the fire with a late late point.

Trailing 0-9 to 0-5 at the break, and counting his lucky stars that his side were not 4-9 to 0-4 down, McEniff rejigged things in the second half, brining in Paul McGonigle and Brian McLaughlin and moving Brian Roper to centre half forward. These and other switches proved vital to Donegal's revival.

Big Influence

This trio, along with Barry Dunnion, who came on for an out of sorts Niall McCready just before half-time, had a big influence on this victory. McGonigle, in a free role around midfield and at the back, had an excellent 35 minutes to stifle the effect of Roscommon's Seamus O' Neill who was lord and master of this sector in the first half.

Dunnion played at wing back, with Shane Carr dropping back into the corner and this steadied the right side of the defence while McLaughlin picked up a lot of possession and used it well. His quick ball and long delivery unsettled the home defence and set up a number of crucial scores and he did his prospects of a permanent recall no harm long before he kicked the winner.

Roper not only curbed the threat of Roscommon play maker Francie Grehan, but he also kicked two very important

points and got in a number of big hits.

Not only did Karol Mannion and Frankie Dolan miss a host of goal chances but they also posted nine wides in that first period and sixteen in all. Donegal hit a total of three wides for the entire game.

Donegal more than held their own on the scoreboard in the opening ten minutes, and were 0-3 to 0-2 ahead inside thirteen minutes thanks to points from Brendan Devenney, Michael Hegarty and Colm McFadden. Karol Mannion and Frankie Dolan were the Roscommon scorers.

The Shannonsiders then reeled off five points on the trot to race four clear, 0-7 to 0-3. And they were 0-9 to 0-5 up at the break, Devenney and Colm McFadden scoring for Donegal.

Roscommon began the second half as if they meant business, Karol Mannion pointing inside five minutes. And they should have been on their way one minute later, but a brave save from Paul Durcan denied Seamus O'Neill from ten metres.

This save was very much the turning point in the game, and the ball was cleared all the way down the field for Roper to hit the first of his two second half points.

While Roscommon continued to press and create chances it was Donegal who hit the next five scores from McFadden (2), Roper, Toye and Devenney. Devenney's strike, six minutes from time gave his team the lead for only the second time in the game, 0-11 to 0-10.

The draw looked on when Frankie Dolan tied it up again two minutes later, but Donegal had other ideas and McLaughlin split the post from forty metres for a brilliant winning score one minute into injury time to snatch the two points.

Donegal: Paul Durcan; Niall McCready, Eamonn McGee, Damian Diver; Shane Carr, Barry Monaghan, Raymond Sweeney; John Haran, Stephen McDermott; Christy Toye (0-1), Michael Hegarty (0-1), Brian Roper (0-2); Colm McFadden (0-4, 2F), Brendan Devenney (0-3, 2F), Stephen Cassidy; Subs: Barry Dunnion for Niall McCready, 32 mins.; Paul McGonigle for S. Cassidy, half-time, Brian McLaughlin (0-1) for J. Haran 45 min.

Roscommon: Shane Curran; Ray Cox, Michael Ryan, Paul Noone; Eamon Towey, Francie Grehan, John Rogers (0-1); Seamus O' Neill, Brian Higgins; Gary Cox (0-1), John Hanley, Derek Connellan; Nigel Dineen (0-1); Karol Mannion (0-4), Frankie Dolan (0-3); Subs: Jonathan Dunning for D. Connellan and David Casey for B. O. Higgins and John Tiernan for J. Hanley.

Referee: Michael Monaghan (Kildare)

Man of Match

After a number of below par performances Brian Roper was the pick of the Donegal players throughout the game. And he had a particularly good second half when moved to centre forward. He kicked two precious points in that second period and curbed the threat of Roscommon play-maker Francie Grehan which had a major bearing on the outcome. Roscommon's Karol Mannion, Seamus O' Neill, Michael Ryan and Paul McGonigle were also in the hunt but the vote at the finish went to Roper.

Turning Point

The introduction of Paul McGonigle at half-time and Brian McLaughlin ten minutes into the second half along with the moving of Brian Roper to number 11 was for me the turning point in this game.

Key Moment

Paul Durcan's save at the boot of Seamus O' Neill six minutes into the second half was the key-moment. From Durcan's save the ball was swept down field and Roper pointed to begin the long race to recovery. If O'Neill had netted it would be hard to see Donegal come back from nine points down.

Ref Watch

Kildare official Michael Monaghan, like all refs, got the usual share of wrong calls, dished out seven yellow cards five to Roscommon and two to Donegal but he was in control throughout. He certainly wasn't a 'hometeam' ref. Roscommon supporters were a little peeved that he did not award at least one penalty in the first half, while there may have been grounds for another in the second half. He may have suffered the wrath of Donegal supporters after last September's All Ireland semi final, but there should be no complaints this time around.

Michael Hegarty: Worked hard throughout and won a good deal of possession, but spoiled much of his good work by being guilty of poor distribution. He scored a good point in the early minutes of the game. 6

Allianz National Football League, Division 2A

LONDON1-6
DONEGAL1-14

Donegal emerged as very easy winners against London in Ruislip on Sunday.

Peter Campbell reports from London
 Photos by Thomas Gallagher

Conditions were far from ideal but for the first time in four matches, the Donegal side were focused from the start and after surviving an initial London onslaught, there was only going to be one result.

The only real excitement the 1,500 crowd had was in the opening minutes when London hit the Donegal net after two minutes through Patrick Quinn.

That, however, was as good as it got for the Londoners as Donegal hit back within 30 seconds. Brian Roper found the net at the other end and although London were up for it in the opening quarter, Donegal began to get on top and the game was really over as a contest by half-time when the visitors led by 1-10 to 1-1.

It really was the Devenney and Sweeney show in the opening half, both revelling in the supply from further out the field and they ended the half level on five points each.

London had a couple of goal chances apart from the one they finished. Corner back Sean Murphy brought a great save from Paul Durcan and the Four Masters man was a little unlucky to concede the Quinn goal, as he denied the half-forward with his first effort but the ball fell kindly for the London man and he was able to side foot home.

The game could have turned on a tough refereeing decision on 30 minutes when Brian McLaughlin caught Carl Scanlon high in a tackle and after a little bit of handbags the Roscommon referee produced a straight red card which was probably harsh, especially

given the conditions.

The card was also out of character for the referee as he only produced one yellow card during a game in which there was over sixty frees during the 70 plus minutes.

The sending off only lifted Donegal because they came back out for the second half and had three points on the board before five minutes had elapsed.

From there to the finish they eased off and the final score was made look better for the London side as they added on four points in the final twelve minutes.

Not a real test

However, it must be said this was not a real test for Donegal. They certainly improved on recent outings and their preparation for the game was serious. They were on top in most departments without anyone really setting the world on fire. Brian Roper was again a bundle of energy and apart from his goal igniting Donegal, he was also the main link between defence and attack, aided and abetted by Barry Monaghan and Paul McGonigle.

The front two of Adrian Sweeney and Brendan Devenney were in super form, winning frees and taking on their opponents at every opportunity. They will, however, have tougher outings than this one.

It was an energy-sapping game for both sets of players as the early morning rain left the Ruislip pitch very difficult. Donegal took full advantage of the elements in the first half with some very good long range points

The threat from London was non-existent after those opening minutes with full forward Paul Hehir accounting for five of their six points from frees and their only point from play came with just a minute of normal time left from centre-forward Colm Foody.

The win leaves Donegal in an almost unassailable spot at the top of Division 2A with full points from five games. On present form they would seem to be assured of a Division 2 semi-final spot, even with games against Clare (Sunday next) and Carlow (April 5th).

The return of Adrian Sweeney certainly gave them a boost and the continued good form of Brian Roper is also reason to be hopeful.

For London Donegal's Patrick McConigley was captain for the day but after starting well he found Roper a real handful, while St. Naul's Gary Kane made little headway in the middle of the field. John Paul Breslin of Na Rossa made an entry in the second half, but by that stage the game was over as a contest.

LONDON: James Kinahan, Carl Scanlon, Nathan Kane, Sean Murphy; Patrick McConigley, John Niblock, Morgan Drea; Gary Kane, James Carmody; Brendan Egan, Colm Foody (0-1), Patrick Quinn; Paddy Conneely, Paul Hehir (0-5, all frees), Barry McDonagh. Subs., Charlie Harrison for Drea; John Paul Breslin for Kane; Patrick Lynott for McDonagh.

DONEGAL: Paul Durcan; Niall McCready, Raymond Sweeney, Damien Diver; Shane Carr, Barry Monaghan, Eamon McGee; Brian McLaughlin, Stephen McDermott; Christy Toye, Michael Hegarty, Brian Roper (1-1); Paul McGonigle, Adrian Sweeney (0-7, 4 frees), Brendan Devenney (0-6, two frees). Subs., Eamon Reddan for McCready, inj.; John Gildea for McDermott; John Haran for Hegarty; Karl Lacey for McGee; Colm McFadden for Toye.

REFEREE: H. Beirne (Roscommon).

The Marksman

Paul Durcan: Another good showing by the big Four Masters man. He made a couple of good stops and his kick outs were better, possibly because the London midfield was not strong. 7

Niall McCready: Strong in the opening quarter when London had their best period. He picked up an ankle injury which left him limping but he will be happy with the outing. 7

Raymond Sweeney: Back in the No. 3 position, Sweeney was up against one of the best London players and handled him very well. A competent display. 7

Damien Diver: Like the other two in the full-back line, was in control and also gave options to set up attacks. 7

Shane Carr: This was Shane's last game before the Nuptials and he came through with flying colours. Took he game to London in the second half. 7.5

Barry Monaghan: Very strong on the ball, Monaghan was back to his controlling best. This game was good for many of the side in this respect. 7

Eamon McGee: A good game from the Gaoth Dobhair man, his display reflected the control which the defence exerted. 7

Brian McLaughlin: Was contributing much to the display before his harsh dismissal. One quick free yielded a great first half point. 7

Stephen McDermott: Was very strong in the opening quarter and his runs caused a lot of trouble, making the goal for Brian Roper's goal. 7

Christy Toye: A quiet game for the St. Michael's man who was again playing for the second day in a row. Will be wanted more in future games. 6

Michael Hegarty: The *Kilcar* man had an easy game, was not required to do much against this opposition but has much more to offer. 6

Brian Roper: Must be taking some new brand of soup. He was he, there and everywhere and is now scoring regularly as well. 8

Paul McGonigle: Back in his role as a third midfielder, the Buncrana man is good at creating space and providing an outlet for defence and keeper. 7.5

Adrian Sweeney: Back after suspension, Sweeney had an appetite for work and his accuracy was first class. 7.5

Brendan Devenney: Worked his socks off and scored six points. He also was involved in the Donegal goal. 7.5

Eamon Reddin: Came in when Donegal were on top and won his first ball very well. 6

John Gildea: Could have caused a riot near the end with an unnecessary hand trip. Should know better. 6

John Haran, Karl Lacey and Colm McFadden: Not on long enough to be rated.

Man of the Match

Most of the contenders were in Donegal jerseys with Colm Foody, Paul Hehir and Sean Murphy best for London. For Donegal Raymond Sweeney, Barry Monaghan, Paul McGonigle and the inside duo of Devenney and Sweeney were in top form. But it was the link work of Brian Roper as well as a very good goal which gets him the nod for the second week in a row.

Turning Point

The main turning point came when Brian Roper responded to the great London start by firing a goal at the other end. Even at that early stage London were causing problems but Roper's goal put Donegal on the road to victory.

Ref Watch

It was an easy game to referee but because of the conditions there were many fouls, some 61 in all. Referee Beirne was lenient in not even ticking and issued just one yellow card, which did not reflect what referees were doing on Irish soil in the past weeks. He then issued one red

McFadden on form as

DONEGAL 0-12
CLARE 2-4

Donegal extracted another victory from the jaws of defeat by coming from seven points down to defeat Clare in MacCumhaill Park, Ballybofey on Sunday.

Peter Campbell reports from MacCumhaill Park

Photos by Thomas Gallagher

This time they had to rely on a wonderful second half display from St. Michaels' corner-forward, Colm McFadden, who hit four of the best scores seen at the venue for some time.

Two of the four came from sideline kicks, one from a '45' and one from a 35m free. Without them it is difficult to see how Donegal would have escaped as they struggled to make headway against a big physical Clare side.

For the third time in four games Donegal had to perform an Houdini act, coming from well behind to snatch two points that.

Indeed, one well-known supporter felt that Donegal should make a late bid to get another motion on the Clár for Congress to read: "that the playing time for football matches be reduced to one half - the second half".

Apart from the win in London when Donegal held a very good half-time lead, the county has struggled in the first half of games. On Sunday they had a good share of possession in the opening half but just couldn't make any impression.

There were a number of reasons for that - not least a very stubborn Clare defence and some very erratic refereeing by Paddy Mullen of Antrim, who could measure the distance the ball travelled from a free much better than being almost assaulted when in possession of the ball.

It is to the credit of the players that they did not get totally frustrated, such was the standard of officialdom.

The win elevates Donegal back to

Division One after just one year in Division 2. The positives of the campaign are mostly limited to that. In former days Donegal would probably have lost the three games against Monaghan, Roscommon and Clare.

On Sunday manager, Brian McEniff, was a notable absentee, in bed with a heavy 'flu and he was listening on local radio and also in 'phone contact with P. J. McGowan on the sideline. It must have been a difficult position, especially in the first half.

Great start

With the strong wind at their backs, Clare got off to a great start with a goal on five minutes. A high ball into the Donegal danger area saw Denis Russell all alone in front of the goal and he elected to deflect the ball with his fist, giving Paul Durcan no chance.

Donegal had the ball over the bar in the 11th minute but the referee penalised Brendan Devenney from kicking from the wrong spot. They did get on the scoreboard two minutes later when Adrian Sweeney took a short free from Devenney to turn and point from an awkward angle.

They should have been ahead on the 15th minute when in a great move started by Brian Roper, Paul McGonigle was involved along with Brendan Devenney and Adrian Sweeney, who gave the ball back to McGonigle but his effort was badly off target.

The referee continued to be the centre of attraction,

penalising Donegal for a '45' not travelling 13m and Colm McFadden being fouled but got no reward, while at the other end David Russell broke through to fire to the Donegal net, but was whistled back for a free which Denis Russell pointed.

However, the second Clare goal came on 20 minutes with David Russell involved before Michael O'Dwyer put Odhran O'Dwyer through to give Durcan no chance with a low shot to the corner of the net.

Donegal got their only other score of the half on 25 minutes thanks to good battling by Adrian Sweeney which allowed Brian Roper to set up Paul McGonigle to point.

Threatened

In the final five minutes of the half Clare threatened again with Denis Russell almost getting a third goal, his angled drive going just over the crossbar, while Odhran O'Dwyer added another point to leave Clare ahead by 2-3 to 0-2 at the break.

It was going to take something special to ignite Donegal and that spark arrived 35 seconds into the second half. From a sideline Colm McFadden landed the ball on top of the net over the crossbar and inside two minutes Brendan Devenney set up Michael Hegarty to add another point.

However, Clare hit back with impressive centre-half back, Brian Considine breaking forward to set up Michael O'Dwyer to point, but it proved to be their only score of the half.

Donegal reduced the margin gradually with Paul McGonigle giving them further inspiration with a great score from 45m. Brendan Devenney (free), Colm McFadden (free), Devenney again and Brian Roper had points to

reduce the margin to one point with nine minutes of normal time left. Donegal, for the first time in a long time, reverted to the route-one method and the high ball reaped reward, not least due to the fact that Colm McFadden was winning a good amount of possession.

The equaliser arrived on 65 minutes, Adrian Sweeney winning a free for Devenney to point.

Then Colm McFadden put the icing on the Donegal cake. With Clare reduced to fourteen men after corner-back Kevin Dilleen was shown a second yellow card, McFadden pointed a '45' with a half minute of normal time left. That score put Donegal in front for the first time and then almost three minutes into added time the St. Michaels man hit a second wonder sideline to seal victory.

DONEGAL: Paul Durcan; Eamon Reddin, Raymond Sweeney, Damien Diver; Eamon McGee, Barry Monaghan, Kevin Cassidy; Stephen McDermott, Paul McGonigle (0-2); Christy Toye, Brian Roper (0-1), Stephen Cassidy; Colm McFadden (0-4, 1f, 1'45', 2 sidelines), Adrian Sweeney (0-1), Brendan Devenney (0-3, 2f). Subs., Michael Hegarty (0-1) for S. Cassidy (31); John Gildea for McDermott (51); John Haran for Toye (58).

CLARE: David McInerney; Kevin Dilleen, Conor Whelan, Christy Kirwan; Philip Smith, Brian Considine, Ronan Slattery; John Moody, Ger Quinlivan; David Russell, Enda Coughlan, Michael O'Shea; Denis Russell (1-2, 1f), Odhran O'Dwyer (1-1), Michael O'Dwyer (0-1). Subs., Sean O'Mara for Moody; David Russell (Clarecastle) for Coughlan, both 63 mins.

REFEREE: Paddy Mullen (Antrim).

Allianz National Football League

MICHAEL HEGARTY: Was hungry when introduced after losing his No. 11 shirt. Was a factor in Donegal's comeback. **6**

JOHN GILDEA: Added something to Donegal in the middle, even if some of his frees didn't find their target. **6**

JOHN HARAN: Made a great pass for Roper's point but afterwards didn't take responsibility when in a good position. **5**

Reaction

On Sunday manager, Brian McEniff, was absent through a heavy 'flu and mentor, P. J. McGowan, was happy with the battling qualities.

"We are not playing well but we battled well in the second half," said P. J., who praised Colm McFadden for his work.

"Colm has been playing well recently and was very good in Roscommon. However, he has been deprived of a starting place at times due to our deficiencies at midfield," said P. J.

Man of the match

There could only be one winner - Colm McFadden. He was a real Donegal hero, even though he was pushed hard for the award by Paul McGonigle, who worked harder than anybody for the Donegal cause.

Turning Point

The Donegal comeback began with McFadden's first inspirational sideline kick seconds into the second half. It was also helped by a mighty point by Paul McGonigle on 46 minutes and this point put Donegal on a run of points which eventually led to success.

Ref watch

It was a bad day at the office for Antrim official Paddy Mullen. He was picky on small things while blatant fouls went unpunished. By the end both sets of players were as confused as the spectators.

Allianz NFL Division 2A

Donegal3-15
 Carlow0-5

Donegal and Carlow may have been operating in the same division, but on Sunday they were poles apart as the Tirconail men completely out-gunned the Leinster minnows.

Tom Comack reports
 Photos: Thomas Gallagher

Donegal's 19 point winning margin on Sunday in Fr. Tierney Park in no way flattered the Donegal men who toyed with their opponents in the second half.

The writing was on the wall from very early on as Donegal, despite playing into a very strong wind, tore into the visitors who were making their very first appearance on Donegal soil.

Goals

First half goals from Brendan Devenney and Michael Hegarty set Donegal on their merry way. And when they led by seven points at half-time, 2-5 to 0-4, Brian McEniff's charges had the points all but wrapped up.

Devenney's searing pace and acceleration saw him outstrip his marker Paul Cashin, to rattle the Carlow rigging from close range. That was on eight minutes.

Ten minutes later Hegarty, who had skimmed the crossbar for the game's opening score, combined with Brian Roper to carve open the Carlow defence, before drilling low and hard past the Carlow keeper to give his team a 2-3 to 0-0 lead.

With Donegal taking a breather Carlow mounted something of a mini revival to hit four points in a seven minute purple patch. Fullforward Joe Byrne opened the Carlow account on 21 minutes with a well struck sideline. And this was followed by strikes by Mark Carpenter and Ray Walker. Wing forward Carpenter who looked useful throughout posted two of the four points. And but for a brave save by Paul Durcan during this period too, he could have also bagged a goal.

Two injury strikes from a red hot Devenney meant that Donegal were back in the driving seat as the trooped off at half-time with a seven point cushion, 2-5 to 0-4.

Game over

And if there were any doubters in the Fr. Tierney crowd, the second half was a matter of only minutes old when Brendan Devenney once more showed his marker a clean pair of heels to pounce for goal number three. Donegal's lead was now out to 11 points, 3-6 to 0-4.

With the exception of a Brian

Kelly point it was all Donegal from there to the finish, as second half substitutes Johnny McCafferty and Stephen Cassidy got in on the scoring act along with Kevin Cassidy, Michael Hegarty, Adrian Sweeney, Brendan Devenney and Paul McGonigle adding to the Carlow misery.

The victory was so comfortable that it afforded Brian McEniff the chance to give his full complement of subs a run out with Johnny McCafferty, Stephen Cassidy, Rory Kavanagh, Karl Lacey and Neil Gallagher all seeing action.

While this was a comfortable win it must be put in the context of the level of opposition. Carlow were very poor and with the exception of Mark Carpenter, John Hayden, Thomas Walsh and Joe Byrne, the rest looked out of their depth.

Donegal now advance to a semi-final meeting with Down in two weeks time with the prize for the winners a division 2 league final showdown with Kildare or Offaly.

Donegal: Paul Durcan; Eamon Reddin, Raymond Sweeney, Damian Diver; Dessie McNamara, Eamonn McGee, Kevin Cassidy (0-1); Brendan Boyle, Paul McGonigle (0-1); Stephen McDermott (0-1), Michael Hegarty (1-3), Brian Roper; Colm McFadden, Adrian Sweeney (0-2), Brendan Devenney (2-4, 1F). Subs: Johnny McCafferty (0-1) for C. McFadden, half-time; Stephen Cassidy (0-1) for S. McDermott, 58 min.; Karl Lacey for D. McNamara, 60 min.; Rory Kavanagh for A. Sweeney, 69 min.; and Neil Gallagher for B. Boyle, 70 min.

Carlow: John Brennan; Paul Cashin, John Doyle, Barry English; John Kavanagh, John Hayden, Ken Walker; Ray Walker (0-1), David Byrne; Brian Carberry. Mark Brennan, Mark Carpenter (0-2); Patrick Hickey, Joe Byrne (0-1), John Nevin: Subs: Thomas Walsh for J. Nevin, 12 min.; Philip Nolan for P. Hickey, half-time; Brian Kelly (0-1) for K. Walker, 43 min.; Willie Ryan for J. Kavanagh, 54 min.; Cormac McCarty for B. Carberry, 63 min.

Referee: Joe McQuillian (Cavan).

Man of the match

Goals win games and for his two goal salvo Brendan Devenney gets the vote this week. The St. Eunan's ace struck for his first on eight minutes his searing pace taking past his marker to really knock the stuffing out of Carlow, while his second in the early minutes of the second period finally slammed the door in Carlow faces. He also chipped in with four points, three from play and was unlucky to have a third goal ruled out for a square infringement. Others in the running were Eamon Reddin, Damian Diver, Paul McGonigle, Michael Hegarty, and Brian Roper.

Turning Point

While Donegal were never going to lose this tie they made sure that it was going to be as easy as possible with a brilliant start and were 2-3 to 0-0 up inside 18 minutes. So for the purpose of the above heading the opening quarter and in particular the two goal salvo from Devenney and Hegarty turned the game in Donegal's favour.

Ref Watch

Joe McQuillian from Cavan deputised for his county man Brian Crowe and while he would not have the experience of Crowe he did acquit himself well and rarely put a foot wrong. A little harsh in ruling out Brendan Devenney's third goal for a square infringement.

The Marksman

Paul Durcan: Another fine game from the Four Masters man who pulled off two fine saves and his kick-outs especially into the wind were excellent. 8

Eamon Reddin: Finally free of injury Eamon made another strong claim for the number two shirt with another solid performance. He was very strong in the tackle and showed great anticipation and had Johnny Nevin in his pocket before the Carlow man was substituted. 8

Raymond Sweeney: He had a right old tussle with Joe Byrne before the fullforward was moved out the field. While not playing with the confidence of last summer and without being outstanding rarely put a foot wrong. 7

Damian Diver: By far his best display to date, mopped up well at the back and that old Diver urge to drive forward at every opportunity was very evident. 8

Dessie McNamara: A late replacement for Barry Monaghan, Dessie slotted in well on the wing and showed some good touches early and was strong in the tackle. He struggled when Mark Carpenter Carlow's best player switched wings and was substituted in the second half. 7

Eamon McGee: Very cool under pressure and looked very much at home in the central position. He made a number of vital interceptions and had an overall sound game. 8

Kevin Cassidy: Always had the better of his opposite number and capped off a good performance with a trademark Cassidy point. 8

Brendan Boyle: Brendan got through a power of work and should be well pleased with his his first game in some time and worked well up and down the park until replaced in second half. 7

Paul McGonigle: He started well and won oceans of possession early on and made sure that the forwards enjoyed a liberal supply. Drifted out of the game in the second quarter but had a good second half. 8

Stephen McDermott: Stephen dropped back to help out around midfield with great effect, while still managing to get forward to help out in attack. He fluffed a great goal chance but did manage to get his name on the score sheet before coming off with an injury. 7

Michael Hegarty: He was on fire in the first quarter, kicked the game's opening score which could have easily being a goal. He did combine with Brian Roper for the second goal and ended up as his team's second highest scorers with 1 return of 1-3. 9

Brian Roper: Like Hegarty was really buzzing in the first half and while he did not get his name on the score sheet he did make a significant contribution to the win. 8

Donegal 0-10 Down 2-5

When Brendan Devenney lost possession inside two minutes, the ball was transferred to Brendan Coulter to point.

Within a minute Down were in front in somewhat fortuitous circumstances. An excellent tackle by Eamon McGee which dislodged the ball was whistled on the half-way line near the dugouts. The resultant free from McCartan broke behind the Donegal lines and Ronan Sexton found himself free and he gave Paul Durcan no chance with a low shot to the corner of the net.

A great forward run by Eamon McGee saw Michael Hegarty pull a point back on 43 minutes but worse to follow for Donegal. A great Donegal move saw Barry Monaghan put Brendan Devenney through. He got around his marker but his effort for goal was blocked by the feet of Michael McVeigh and the ball was transferred forward quickly through Ronan Sexton and finished with Liam Doyle putting the speedy Daniel Hughes through for a second Down goal.

Comeback

Donegal were back on terms by the 53rd minute with Brendan Boyle starting the comeback with a point. Brian Roper and Adrian Sweeney combined for Brendan Devenney to point and then Michael Hegarty was fouled on a direct run for Adrian Sweeney to point the free and level matters at 0-8 to 2-2.

A tug on the jersey of Brendan Coulter as he fired from midfield resulted in an easy free from 20m for Gregory McCartan but that was cancelled by Devenney at the other end after a foul on Colm McFadden.

Shane Ward struck a very good point from distance for Down on 61 minutes and after a mistake by Stephen McDermott, John Clarke punished to push Down two ahead with just four minutes of normal time left.

There was time, however and a great run by Michael Hegarty ended with Colm McFadden leaving just the minimum between the sides, but in the four remaining minutes played and continuous Donegal pressure the equalising score was not forthcoming.

Donegal: Paul Durcan; Eamon Reddin, Raymond Sweeney, Damien Diver; Eamon McGee, Barry Monaghan, Kevin Cassidy; Brendan Boyle (0-1), Paul McGonigle (0-1); Christy Toye, Michael Hegarty (0-1), Brian Roper; Colm McFadden (0-2), Adrian Sweeney (0-1,f), Brendan Devenney (0-4, 2f). Subs., Niall McCready for Diver (50 mins.); Stephen McDermott for Toye (52 mins.); Stephen Cassidy for A. Sweeney (59 mins.)

Down: Michael McVeigh; Michael Higgins, Alan Molloy, Adrian Scullion; Martin Cole, Sean Farrell, John Lavery; Sean Ward, Gregory McCartan (0-2, 2f); Liam Doyle, Brendan Coulter (0-1), Ronan Sexton (1-0); Daniel Hughes (1-0), Aidan O'Prey, Shane Ward (0-1). Subs., Owen McCartan for Doyle (55 mins.); John Clarke (0-1) for Lavery (62 mins); Colm McCrickard for O'Prey (65 mins.)

Referee: Michael Hughes (Tyrone).

Man of the match

Eamon McGee had his best outing in a Donegal jersey while Raymond Sweeney and Barry Monaghan also did well. Down had good displays from Brendan Coulter and the full-back line but the most impressive player on view was Daniel Hughes at corner forward and he gets the nod.

Turning Point

The Down goals were big blows to Donegal but on each occasion they were able to get back on terms. However, a magnificent lead point from Shane Ward on 61 minutes put Down in a lead they held to the end.

Ref watch

Tyrone official Michael Hughes was extremely fussy in the opening minutes, blowing for everything although he failed to produce a card for a nasty late tackle on Brian Roper and allowed a number of other Down players more latitude than the rules allowed.

Player Ratings

Paul Durcan: Couldn't be blamed for either goal and was very solid under the high ball. His kick-outs are also improving. 7

Eamon Reddin: His man got the first goal but it was the result of a fortuitous break and otherwise the Burt man was solid. 7

Raymond Sweeney: Was impressive in the opening half on two different full-forwards. Came under a little more pressure in the second half but had a good outing. 7

Damien Diver: Was under pressure in the opening quarter but then did very well driving forward but was called ashore after Hughes got Down's second goal. 5.5

Eamon McGee: A very good display from the Gaoth Dobhair man. He was an outlet for Paul Durcan's kick-outs and also the starting point for many Donegal attacks. 8

Barry Monaghan: A solid display by Monaghan who did trojan work in defence and in setting up attacks. 7

Kevin Cassidy: Didn't do much wrong but will need to impose himself more in games to come. 6

Brendan Boyle: A good display from Boyle who took a couple of heavy knocks in the opening half. 7

Paul McGonigle: As usual made himself available continuously and also competed well in the centre. 7

Christy Toye: It just didn't happen for Christy who again seemed to have lost his edge and that's understandable given his 2004 schedule. 4.5

Michael Hegarty: Gets a '7' rating, but 99% of that is for his second half display. Made a number of good runs but was not visible in the opening half. 7

Brian Roper: Was heavily involved in 50% of Donegal's scores and can be happy with his overall display. 7

Colm McFadden: Scored two but it could have been more. Probably the most industrious of the three inside players but will be a bigger threat when he combines with his teammates. 7

Adrian Sweeney: The captain hasn't sparkled this year and was tightly marked. Sweeney's fitness graph always need the longer evenings to improve and Donegal's chances could well be determined by the speed of the rise of that graph! 4.5

Brendan Devenney: Looked the most likely to give Donegal the win but the St. Eunan's man was a marked man. Made a couple of breaks but also lost possession too easily on a couple of occasions. 6.5

Niall McCready: Came in for Diver in the second half but also found Hughes a handful although he kept him away from goal. 5.5

Stephen McDermott: In for Toye the Glenfin man did not make any impact. Gave one very poor pass to Eamon McGee and also kicked away at a time when Donegal needed composure. 4.5

Stephen Cassidy: In for the last ten minutes plus added time, he didn't get to the pitch of the game and could not be rated.