

2006

Team Manager: Brian McIver

Dr. Mc Kenna Cup.

1	8 Jan.	Fr. Tierney Park	Donegal	0-13	St. Mary's	1-08
2	15 Jan	Burren	Donegal	0-11	Down	1-07
3	22 Jan	MacCumhaill Park	Donegal	0-09	Tyrone	0-11

Winners: Tyrone

Ulster Senior Football Championship

4	4 th June	MacCumhaill Park	Donegal	1-12	Down	1-11
5	18 th June	Clones	Donegal	1-13	Derry	0-11
6	9 th July Final	Clones	Donegal	0-09	Armagh	1-09

All Ireland Qualifiers 2006.

7	30 th July	Brewester Park	Donegal	0-11	Fermanagh	0-08
8	6 th Aug	Croke Park	Donegal	1-10	Cork	1-11
	20 th Aug	Semi final Croke Park	Kerry	0-16	Cork	0-10
	27 th Aug	Semi Final Croke Park	Mayo	1-16	Dublin	2-12
	17 th Sept.	Final Croke Park	Kerry	4-15	Mayo	3-05

National Football League. - 2006 Allianz NFL Division 2A

9	5 th Feb	Fr. Tierney Park	Donegal	0-11	Leitrim	1-08
10	12 th Feb	Carlow	Donegal	1-21	Carlow	0-08
11	4 th March	Fr. Tierney Park	Donegal	3-16	Longford	0-09
12	12 th March	Ruislip	Donegal	1-21	London	0-04
13	19 th March	Ennis	Donegal	0-11	Clare	0-04
14	26 th March	MacCumhaill Park	Donegal	1-09	Limerick	0-05
15	9 th April	Hyde Park	Donegal	0-14	Roscommon	1-09
16	16 th April	Cavan	Donegal	0-14	Westmeath	1-09
17	23 rd April	Breffni	Donegal	0-17	Louth	3-08
18	30 th April	Final Breffni	Donegal	1-09	Louth	1-12

National Football League Div 1 Final Kerry 2-11 Galway 0-11

DR MCKENNA CUP

Ciaran Bonner, Adrian Sweeney, Gavin Maguire, Brendan McDyer, Christy Toye, Colm McFadden and substitute Karl Lacey were the pick for home side

DONEGAL.....0-13
ST MARY'S (BELFAST)....1-8

REPORT BY C.J. MCGINLEY

PICTURES BY DECLAN DOHERTY

NEW Donegal team manager Brian McIver got off to winning ways after an intense battle with students St Mary's of Belfast in the opening round of the Dr McKenna Cup at Fr Tierney Park, Ballyshannon on Sunday.

The home side just about deserved their hard earned win on the basis of a stranger second half display but they were made to fight all the way against a spirited St Mary's side. McIver has stressed the McKenna Cup is being used to unearth new blood and he will have been pleased with the displays of at least two of the four players he handed debuts.

Young Ciaran Bonner from Glenswilly put in an impressive display at centre half forward while 18 years-old Brendan McDyer from county champions Naomh Chonaill (Glenties) showed some fine touches.

However, it was a couple of experienced heads such as Adrian Sweeney, the impressive Christy Toye, Colm McFadden and second half substitute Karl Lacey who steered Donegal to a vital but unconvincing win.

However, will need to step up considerably ahead of their next match against Down on Sunday and the following weekend when the face All-Ireland champions, Tyrone in Ballybofey.

Two late points from Christy Toye and Gavin Maguire secured Donegal's hard earned win after a struggle over the 70 minutes during which the sides were level six times.

St Mary's and their coach Paddy Tally will be disappointed they didn't at least get a share of the spoils but Donegal deserved their win for their strong second half display.

The home side squandered three glorious goal chances in the second period. Adrian Sweeney, substitute Conal

Dunne(2) failing to find the target with the goal at their mercy. Sweeney hit the upright while to be fair St Mary's keeper, Mickey O'Kane saved from Dunne.

For the winners Ciaran Bonner, Adrian Sweeney, Gavin Maguire, Brendan McDyer, Christy Toye, Colm McFadden and substitute Karl Lacey were the pick while St Mary's were best served by Michael Melver (who had to leave the pitch after 61 minutes with an ankle injury), Barry McGoldrick, Martin Donnelly and Joe Ball.

"We're delighted to get off to a winning start. We had three goal chances in the second half. I hit the post but I should have flicked it over to Ciaran Bonner while Conal Dunne had two chances saved by the keeper. We had a nice variety in our play and that's something that Brian is working on," Adrian Sweeney said afterwards.

"With the new manager in now we're all fighting for places. Names mean nothing in or set-up. We are all fighting for places. It was good to get the win after a bad start," he added.

The new Donegal boss handed four players their debuts- Frank McGlynn (Glenfin), Paddy Kelly (Malin), Ciaran Bonner (Glenswilly) and Brendan McDyer (Glenties) while St Mary's were short several regulars including Armagh star, Ronan Clarke, Antrim's Terry O'Neill and Ryan Keenan of Fermanagh.

Impressive corner back, Michael Melver almost spoiled his father's first competitive game in charge Donegal when he grabbed a first minute goal for St Mary's.

His side dominated the early exchanges and led 1-2 to no score by the 10th minute against an indifferent and hesitant Donegal side. Typically for the time of year the skills were rusty and more often than not vital possession was lost or the wrong option taken but it all made for an unpredictable finale and kept the 1,500-2,000 crowd on their toes on a bitterly cold after-

McIver's new look Donegal get off to a winning start



noon.

Man of the Match Ciaran Bonner got Donegal's opening score in the 13th minute and the point settled the home side. They went on to score five points without reply in a blistering six minute spell to draw level (0-5 to 1-2) by the 18th minute as Christy Toye, debutant Brendan McDyer, Adrian Sweeney, Colm McFadden and attacking wing back Gavin Maguire found the target.

Tyrone's Leo Meenan ended a barren twenty-minute period without a score for St Mary's when he tapped over a close range free and another from Mark Donnelly left the sides locked at 0-7 to 1-4 at the break.

Donegal enjoyed much more of the play in the second half but found it difficult to shake off their persistent challenge of the spirited university side. The introduction of Karl Lacey

strengthened the Donegal rearguard while Toye, McFadden and Sweeney got more into their stride as the game wore as did debutant Frank McGlynn in the wing back berth.

Midway through the second period the sides were level at 0-10 to 1-7 and with five minutes to go they were locked for the sixth time when Leo Meenan scored his fourth point of the day for St Mary's. This left the score 0-11 to 1-8 but in the dying five minutes Gavin Maguire popped up to be the unlikely hero with a superb point for Donegal and captain for the day Christy Toye sealed Donegal's win on the stroke of full time with a fisted point.

Donegal: Paul Duran, Eamon Doherty, Raymond Sweeney, Eamon Reddin, Frank McGlynn, Shane Carr, Gavin Maguire (0-2), Paddy Kelly, Neil Gallagher, Christy Toye (captain, 0-2),

Ciaran Bonner (0-1), Rory Kavanagh, Brendan McDyer (0-1), Adrian Sweeney (0-3), and Colm McFadden (0-4).

Subs used: Karl Lacey for Doherty (24 mins), Eamon McGee for Reddin (Half time), Conal Dunne for Kavanagh (42 mins) and Brendan Boyle for Kelly (45 mins)

St Mary's: Michael O'Kane, Michael Melver (1-0), Mark McCullagh, Thomas Hackett, Joe Ball, Dan Gordon (captain, 0-1), Martin Murray, Conal Martin, James Lavery, Leo Meenan (0-4), Barry McGoldrick (0-2), John McCormack, Mark Donnelly (0-1), Gareth O'Neill and Ryan Hamill.

Subs used: John Cunningham for Hamill (28 mins), Joe McMahon for McCormack (43 mins), Damian Mulholland for Melver (injured, 61 mins)

Referee: Martin Sludden (Tyrone).

Dr. McKenna Cup - Section C

Donegal 0-13 St. Marys 1-8

Donegal left it late before finishing with a flourish to see off the challenge of St. Mary's College, Belfast in their opening Dr. McKenna Cup clash in Fr. Tierney Park, Ballyshannon.

Tom Comack reports

It took two late points from Gavin Maguire and Christy Toye to finally shake off the Students and give an experimental Donegal a winning start to the new year, and a first competitive victory under new manager Brian McIver.

Donegal started with four new faces in Frank McGlynn, Paddy Kelly, Ciaran Bonner and Brendan McDyer while there were first time starts for some time for Eamon Doherty and Eamon Reddin.

The Students were minus Armagh All Ireland winner Ronan Clarke, and Tyrone ace Joe McMahon only came on in the second half.

Wing back Maguire struck for the lead point one minute from the end of normal time and Christy Toye clinched the victory with a fisted effort on the stroke of time. Up to that there was little between the sides after the visitors got off to a dream start with 1-2 without reply inside seven minutes.

Corner back Michael McIver, son of the new Donegal boss, hit the goal on 90 seconds. Tyrone panellist Leo Meenan and Derry man Barry McGoldrick, followed with two points before Donegal broke from the blocks.

But once once they rose to the challenge Donegal quickly reeled in the Students as they hit seven points in 11 minutes, to pull two points clear, 0-7 to 1-2.

New boy Ciaran Bonner, who put in an impressive showing on his debut, opened the scoring for Donegal on 13 minutes following good work from Paddy Kelly and Christy Toye. And another debutant Brendan McDyer struck for number two, one minute later, with Toye and Kelly once again the architects.

Gavin Maguire and Adrian Sweeney got in on the act, and all of a sudden on 19 minutes, Donegal were level, 0-5 to 1-2. And with the home team winning all the key duels and messers Bonner, Toye, and Sweeney looking sharp up front, Toye struck the lead point on 21 minutes after some quick thinking and good delivery from Bonner.

St. Marys, who did not score for 19 minutes, rallied with two points in the closing ten minutes to go in at the break all square 0-7 to 1-4. Meenan and Mark Donnelly, who asked serious questions off the Donegal defence right through the game, the scorers.

The second half was a much more evenly contested affair with the teams level on three occasions and never more than a point between the teams. Meenan drew first blood for the Students on the resumption with a pointed free, after minutes earlier Adrian Sweeney's goal bound effort came off the post. Sweeney was desperately unlucky following one of the best moves of the match with Ciaran Bonner (twice), Brendan McDyer and Colm McFadden all involved in the build up.

Quickfire points

However, two quick points from McFadden and Adrian Sweeney saw Donegal sneak back into the lead, 0-9 to 1-5. But Mary's were not going away and with Tyrone All Ireland winning full back Joe McMahon in the action, and Dan Gordon moving to midfield, McGoldrick and Gordon pointed to restore the Students advantage on 40 minutes, 0-9 to 1-7.

With the game on a knife edge Donegal pressed and were denied another two gilt edged goal opportunities with Mary's keeper Michael O'Kane denying both Ciaran Bonner and Conall Dunne in quick succession.

Kane got down well to stop Bonner's effort after the Glenswilly man found himself clear in front of the post. And 60 seconds later, Conall Dunne, who was possibly in a better position was not able to squeeze his low drive past the diving O'Kane.

And just when it looked as if a draw was going to be the best outcome Colm McFadden, who had a quiet game, struck twice in three minutes to edge his team back in front, 0-11 to 1-7.

Christy Toye was unlucky to be denied by the woodwork, before Meenan struck again from a free for the visitors to tie up the contest once more, 0-11 to 1-8.

With the clock ticking Gavin Maguire became the unlikely hero when he split the posts with his left footed effort from 35 metres and the St. Nauls man was only denied saviour status when Toye fisted over after Ciaran Bonner's shot came back off the post.

All and all this was a good workout with a number of positives and much to give the manager to mull over in the coming weeks as he contemplates his final panel of 30.

New boys Ciaran Bonner, Frank McGlynn along with Gavin Maguire, Raymonnd Sweeney, Christy Toye and Adrian Sweeney shone brightest for Donegal and there committment and effort should have impressed the new boss.

Donegal: Paul Durkan; Eamon Doherty, Raymond Sweeney, Eamon Reddin; Frank McGlynn, Shane Carr, Gavin Maguire (0-2); Paddy Kelly, Neil Gallagher; Christy Toye (0-2), Ciaran Bonner (0-1), Rory Kavanagh; Colm McFadden (0-4,1F), Adrian Sweeney(0-3), Brendan McDyer(0-1). Subs: Karl Lacey for E. Doherty; Eamon McGee for E. Reddin; Brendan Boyle for P. Kelly; Conal Dunne for R. Kavanagh.

St. Marys: Michael Kane; Michael McIver (1-0), Mark McCullagh, Thomas Hackett; Joe Ball, Dan Gordon (0-1), Martin Murray; Conal Martin, James Lavery; Leo Meenan (0-4, 3F), Barry McGoldrick (0-2), John McCormack; Mark Donnelly (0-1), Gareth O'Neill, Ryan Hamill. Subs: John Cunningham for R. Hamill; Joe McMahan for J. McCormack; Damian Mulholland for M. McIver inj. Ref: Martin Sludden (Tyrone).

DR MCKENNA CUP

Winning ways continue for McIver's new look team

Brendan Boyle is the hero with injury time winner

DONEGAL.....0-11
DOWN.....1-7

NEW look Donegal chalked up their second Dr McKenna Cup win on the trot after a late flourish against Down in Burren on Sunday.

Big midfielder, Brendan Boyle proved to be the hero with a match winning point in injury time and it was nothing less than Brian McIver's experimental look side after a strong second half display during which they outplayed and outscored the home side by seven points to one.

The sides were level three times during the contest but Donegal should have killed the game off as a contest a lot earlier as they worryingly shot ten wides in the second half against what has to be said was an indifferent Down side. Down's second defeat in the competition ended their hopes of qualification and their displays will be a source of concern for boss Paddy O'Rourke ahead of the league campaign next month.

In stark contrast the win will give Donegal further confidence as they now square up to All-Ireland champions, Tyrone in Ballybofey on Sunday with a semi-final place up for grabs. For the winners, Barry Dunnion, Barry Monaghan, Stephen McDermott, Brendan Boyle and Christy Toyne were the pick while the introduction of Adrian Sweeney and Ciaran Bonner at half time was a telling factor in the victory.

Donegal made thirteen changes from the team which got Brian McIver's reign off to a winning start against St Mary's in Ballyshannon a week earlier. His side included three debutants, Leon Thompson (Glenties), Stephen McHugh (Ardara) and Eddie Brennan (St Eunan's). Another player Anthony Thompson (a brother of Leon's from Glenties) who was due to make his debut was forced to withdraw from the starting line up due to a dead leg in jury picked-up in training.

The home side were without their

most influential player; Benny Coulter due to injury but team manager, Paddy O'Rourke was still able to call on the services of key players such as Ronan Sexton, Alan Molloy, Daniel Hughes, Liam Doyle and the return of Michael Walsh.

Down held a 1-6 to 0-3 lead at the break- the crucial score coming on the half hour when Michael Walsh pounced on a defensive mistake by Damien Diver and he set up Liam Doyle who finished to the net.

The score gave the Mourne men a 1-5 to 0-3 lead and a point from attacking defender Mark Doran gave them a six point cushion at the break. Donegal played well against the stiff breeze but failed to turn a lot of territorial advantage into scores.

Down led 0-3 to 0-1 by the 15th minute- Michael Walsh and two frees from Liam Doyle and Conor Gribben getting on the scoresheet for the home team. In all Down hit four points without reply midway through the first half and led 0-5 to 0-1 by the 24th minute. Na Rossa's Martin Caulfield opened Donegal's account from play in the 6th minute.

Unfortunately whistle happy referee Pauric Mulligan called over thirty first half frees which made any fluency in the game almost impossible although to be fair the heavy underfoot conditions made life difficult for everyone.

Two points without reply from the hardworking Stephen McDermott (27th minute) and a Martin Caulfield free two minutes earlier had hauled Donegal to within two before Doyle struck for the all important 30th minute goal.

Donegal boss Brian McIver rung the changes at half time bringing in the experienced Adrian Sweeney and Ciaran Bonner for Ryan Bradley and Leon Thompson. The changes reaped rich dividends for McIver's team as they struck four points without reply in the opening twelve minutes Christy Toyne

(2), Martin Caulfield and the nighly impressive Barry Dunnion getting on the scoresheet to leave just two between the teams (1-6 to 0-7).

Brian McIver's men continued to assert their ascendancy and two points without reply from Rory Kavanagh and substitute Sweeney (a 40 metre free) brought the sides level for the second time in the game (0-9 to 1-6). However Donegal should have been well ahead as they hit eight wides during a half hour period in the second half. Liam Doyle got Down back on the rails with a point from a free to restore their lead (1-7 to 0-9) but Christy Toyne equalised for Donegal with five minutes remaining with a fine long range point.

With the points in the pot it was Donegal who produced the goods in the dying seconds. Adrian Sweeney worked a '45' metre free short to Brendan Boyle and the big Ardara man drilled the ball between the posts to the delight of the travelling fans to win the match.

Donegal: Michael Boyle, Eddie Brennan, Niall McGee, Damien Diver, Stephen McHugh, Barry Monaghan, Barry Dunnion, (0-1) Stephen McDermott (0-1), Brendan Boyle (0-1), Christy Toyne (0-3 one free), Conal Dunne, Rory Kavanagh (0-1), Leon Thompson, Ryan Bradley and Martin Caulfield (0-3 one free).

Subs used: Adrian Sweeney (0-1, free) and Ciaran Bonner for Ryan Bradley and Leon Thompson (Half time), Karl Lacey and Eamon McGee for Eddie Brennan and Damien Diver (47 mins), Neil Gallagher for Rory Kavanagh (68 mins)

Down: Brendan McVeigh, Brendan Kearney, B Grant, Mark Doran (0-1), Paul Murphy, Aidan O'Prey, Ronan Sexton, Adrian Scullion, Ambrose Rodgers, Alan Molloy, Shane Ward, Daniel Hughes (0-1, free), Liam Doyle (1-3, three frees), Conor Gribben (0-1, frees) and Michael Walsh (0-1).

Conor Lavery for Scullion, Mark Poland for Shane Ward

Referee: P Mulligan (Antrim)

Bonner the bright light in Tyrone defeat

Tyrone0-11
Donegal0-9

Donegal suffered their first defeat of the season at the hands of All Ireland champions Tyrone, in a keenly contested Dr. McKenna Cup clash in Ballybofey, on Sunday afternoon.

Tom Comack reports

Photos by Conor McGonagle

Before a bumper attendance of 10,500, there was little between the sides throughout on the scoreboard, with Tyrone coming good in the second half to come from two points down at the break to win by two.

Footballer of the year Stephen O'Neill turned on the charm in the second period after a quiet enough opening 30 minutes for the All Ireland champions. O'Neill, Sean Kavanagh and Gerard Cavlan in the second half were the prime movers in this victory with Aidan McCarron and Ryan Mellon in attack also playing their part as did Cormac McGinley and Shane Sweeney in defence.

New boy, Ciaran Bonner, once again was the star of the show for Donegal, and he finished up as his side's top

scorer with five points and the game's joint top marksman with O'Neill. He was one of the big plusses to emerge from the game as he didn't look out of his depth in such high class company.

Adrian Sweeney, in the opening 20 minutes, and Martin Caulfield, until he picked up an injury, were the only other Donegal forwards to show, with Sweeney knocking over two points. Sweeney and second half substitute Michael Doherty were the only Donegal forwards to join Bonner on the score sheet.

Neil Gallagher and Brendan Boyle held the edge at midfield for most of the first half, but once Sean Kavanagh moved to that sector at the start of the second period the Donegal pair's influence waned.

Paddy Campbell, Karl Lacey and Eamon McGee were the pick of the home defence.

While both sides were in experimental mode Donegal started with more recognised first choice players with Kevin Cassidy, Eamon McGee, Neil Gallagher, Brendan Boyle, Stephen McDermott, Christy Toye, Colm McFadden and Adrian Sweeney all in the lineup.

The All Ireland champions and Dr. McKenna Cup holders only started four of the team - Pascal McConnell, Sean Kavanagh, Stephen O'Neill and Ryan Mellon - that started last September's All Ireland final, while Ryan McMenamin and Conor Gormley were introduced in the second half.

Four point lead

Donegal had the better of most of the first half and lead by four points, 0-5 to 0-1, going into the closing minutes with Ciaran Bonner (4) and Adrian Sweeney the marksman.

Bonner got the home team off the mark with the game's opening point on six minutes from a free and two minutes later Sweeney polished off a sweeping move involving Karl Lacey, Eamon McGee and Bonner with an excellent point

Sean Kavanagh with a pointed free on 13 minutes got the O'Neill county off the mark. With Gallagher and Boyle pulling the strings at midfield and picking up the lion's share of the breaks Donegal continued to press. With Bonner cropping up all over the place and prodding and probing at every opportunity the Glenswilly man extended his side's lead on 14 minutes after a good take in the middle of the park from his club colleague Neil Gallagher.

After their early promise Donegal became a little ragged up front and despite have a host of chances did not score again for 17 minutes, until Bonner broke the deadlock for his team's fourth point on 31 minutes. One minute later he struck again to give his team a four point advantage with the half-time whistle looming.

And given their possession a four point lead was no more than they deserved and indeed if they had taken all there chances they could have been ever further ahead. But in fairness to Tyrone, who did not dazzle in the first half in the scoring stakes, they too could have a few more scores as the dropped at least four good chances into Paul Durcan's arms.

However, O'Neill did redress this somewhat in the closing

minutes with two quick fire points in injury time to leave just two between the sides at the break 0-5 to 0-3.

Mickey Harte reshaped his format at half-time with the introduction of Ryan McMenamin and Conor Gormely, while Gerard Cavlan and Sean Kavanagh swapped positions.

This seemed to have the desired effect as Tyrone struck three point in eight minutes from Ryan Mellon, O'Neill and Colin Holmes to edge into a point lead.

They were two up on 50 minutes when Kavanagh converted a 35 metre free, before Bonner made it a one point game again on 46 minutes. Bonner's strike kept his side in the game and was their first score in 21 minutes.

In driving seat

But Tyrone, were soon back in the driving seat as they knocked over three points in eight minutes and a four point lead, 0-10 to 0-6, with ten minutes remaining. And but for a timely interception from Paddy Campbell, who took the ball of the toe of Aidan McCarron with a goal at his mercy, it could have been worse.

Donegal finished with a late flourish with points from Adrian Sweeney and two converted

freed from Michael Doherty, before Bonner almost stole it at the finish when his late strike on goal being blocked by Cormac McGinley.

Tyrone advance to a semi-final meeting with arch rivals Armagh, while Donegal now turn their thoughts on the Allianz League and their opening game with Leitrim, in Ballyshannon.

Donegal: Paul Durcan; Paddy Campbell, Neil McGee, Karl Lacey; Kevin Cassidy, Eamon McGee, Thomas Donoghue; Brendan Boyle, Neil Gallagher; Christy Toye, Ciaran Bonner (0-5,1F), Stephen McDermott; Colm McFadden, Adrian Sweeney (0-2), Martin Caulfield. Subs: Rory Kavanagh for M.Caulfield; Barry Monaghan for T. Donoghue; Conal Dunne for S. McDermott; Michael Doherty (0-2F) for C. McFadden:

Tyrone: Pascal McConnell; Dermot Carlin, Cormac McGinley, Shane Sweeney; Adrian Ball, Ciaran Gourley, Paul Quinn; Gerard Cavlan, Colin Holmes (0-1); Raymond Mulgrew, Sean Kavanagh (0-3,1F), Tommy McGuigan; Aidan McCarron, Stephen O'Neill (0-5,3F), Ryan Mellon (0-2). Subs: Ryan McMenamin for P. Quinn; Conor Gormely for A. Ball; Davy Harte for S. Sweeney.

Referee: Barry Toland (Derry).

ULSTER SENIOR FOOTBALL CHAMPIONSHIP SPECIAL

Super Donegal

McIver's men now meet Derry on June 18 in Clones

DONEGAL.....1-12
DOWN..... 1-11

HOW the pendulum can swing. Donegal are now just over an hour from a third Ulster final in five years!

A week ago they were tipped as rank outsiders for provincial glory- a team in transition was the order of the day. However, Sunday changed all that. Players who up to now had flattered to deceive really came of age and now Brian McIver's new look team face Derry in the penultimate stage at Clones on June 18.

A cracking 38th minute goal from wing forward and Man of the Match, Rory Kavanagh, proved to be the decisive score after an energy sapping quarter final contest in searing heat that had the crowd on the edge of their seats throughout.

Donegal boss Brian McIver was delighted with the victory from his new look side which also kept their unbeaten home record against Down in the provincial championship firmly intact.

"We had a young side out there today and they were unbelievable. That was as good a championship match as I have seen for a long time," he said.

"This Donegal team had taken a lot of stick in the media- undeservedly so- but they deserve great credit for that display today" he added.

Down sharpshooter Daniel Hughes had a chance to force a replay in the 76th minute from a free but he failed to find the target. The relief from the Donegal fans was palpable.

The sides were level seven times in all during a pulsating battle but it would have been a travesty of justice had Donegal lost. They were the better side throughout with the exception of a period midway through the first half.

The eventual one point winning margin was flattering to a disjointed Down side in the second half who couldn't match Donegal's character and greater desire to win. Mc Iver had planned this win meticulously.

Indeed, Donegal's win should have been much greater. Impressive wing forward Ciaran Bonner was desperately unlucky when he hit the post with the goal at his mercy in the 52nd minute.

Three minutes later attacking wing back Eamon McGee squandered a second glorious goal scoring chance. It could have been a second half rout. Throw in the fact that free taker Michael Doherty missed three simple frees before he was withdrawn and you get the picture.

For the home side this was a huge team effort but the performances of Rory Kavanagh, Barry Dunion, Barry Monaghan, Ciaran Bonner, Conal Dunne, Neil Gallagher and Michael Hegarty deserve special praise.

In defence Paddy Campbell and Karl Lacey put in a superb second half display to nullify the threat of Down's danger man Benny Coulter who was held to just a single score. Former All-Star Adrian Sweeney also came off the bench and landed a crucial point from a 45 metre free nine minutes from time.

After a preliminary round win over Cavan in early May Down flattered to deceive. They lost their game plan and shape completely in the second period and failed to match Donegal for work rate and skill. They were best served by Daniel

Hughes who bagged 1-2 and hard working midfielder Dan Gordon.

Donegal team manager, Brian McIver handed championship debuts to four players. Defender Niall McGee and three forwards Ciaran Bonner, his Glenswilly club mate, Colin Kelly and free taker, Michael Doherty all got the nod from the team, boss.

Down boss Paddy O'Rourke made two changes from the side which defeated Cavan in the preliminary round fixture in early May. Adrian Scullion and Ronan Murtagh forced their way into the team replacing the injured Dan McCartan and Damien Rafferty respectively.

After a pulsating first half the visitors led 1-6 to 0-6. The all important goal came in the 8th minute when danger man Benny Coulter skipped past his marker Paddy Campbell to set

up Daniel Hughes and he finished to the net from close range with some panache.

However, at the interval Donegal must have been kicking themselves because they enjoyed far more possession during the opening half yet found themselves three points in arrears at the half time break.

They were by far the better side in the opening 10 minutes and deservedly led 0-3 to 0-1 with Michael Doherty Eamon McGee and Doherty again from

a free kick finding the target for the home side and the reply from Down coming from their influential midfielder Dan Gordon in the 5th minute.

Donegal had appeals for a penalty turned down when the impressive Rory Kavanagh looked to have been tripped on route to goal but referee Gerry Kinneavy waved play on to the disgust of the home fans.

GOAL

The Down goal rocked Donegal back on their heels and the home side managed just a single point from the next ten minutes- Conal Dunne the scorer.

However, it was the Mourne men who seized the initiative midway through the half. With midfielders Dan Gordon and Ambrose Rodgers gaining more control the Mourne men took the lead for the second time in the game when Daniel Hughes tapped over a close range free to give them a 1-2 to 0-4 lead in the 17th minute.

Donegal hit back two minutes later with the best point of the first half. Rory Kavanagh finished with a sweeping four man move after a brilliant piece of high fetching from big Neil Gallagher.

Three points without reply in a blistering six minutes spell from the 24th to the 30th minute gave Down a 1-5 to 0-5 lead. Their scorers were Liam Doyle, Dan Gordon and Daniel Hughes who proved more than

a handful for debutant Neil McGee and the latter was switched soon afterwards.

The highly impressive Rory Kavanagh hauled Donegal back to within two scores with a superbly taken point from along the end-line in the 32nd minute but it was Paddy O'Rourke's men who had the final say when Doyle found the target for his second point to leave the score 1-6 to 0-6 at the break.

SECOND HALF

The second half belonged to Donegal. After Kavanagh's wonder goal strike in the 38th minute that hauled his side on level terms for the fourth time in the contest (1-7 apiece) they always looked as if they would go on to win.

Down were on the back foot from this point onwards and the penetrating runs at their defence from Kavanagh and team captain Christy Toyne caused endless problems for the right side of their defence.

After Michael Doherty missed a soft free Down hit the lead again against the run of play when defender Paul Murphy popped up to score a point to give Down a 1-8 to 1-7 lead in the 41st minute.

Conal Dunne and Michael Hegarty replied for Donegal before Down's Michael Walsh curled over a delightful point to haul the sides level for the sixth time in the game.

However it was Donegal who seized the initiative at this crucial juncture and Ciaran Bonner could have killed the game off as a contest but he rattled the post with the goal at his mercy from close range.

Team captain Christy Toye put Donegal 1-10 to 1-9 in front in the 54th minute before Eamon McGee wasted a second glorious goal chance for Donegal a minute later when he failed to hold onto the ball with just the Down keeper Brendan McVeigh to beat.

With Down struggling to retain vital possession at midfield it was Donegal who looked the stronger team but Ronan Murtagh kept Down's chances alive when he levelled the scoring for the seventh time in the 56th minute.

Playmaker, Michael Hegarty followed with a cracking point from play for Donegal and veteran Adrian Sweeney put two between the sides when he converted a 45 metre free to the delight of the home fans.

The impressive Liam Doyle hauled Down to within the minimum with a minute of normal time left. Donegal fans had to endure a tense six minute period of injury time to get their win and also survive that last ditch effort from Daniel Hughes that went agonisingly wide of the target before they could celebrate.

After this showing Donegal will fancy their chances against Derry in a fortnights time in Clones. For Down and team manager Paddy O'Rourke it is the scenic route of the 'back door' qualifiers for this year.

Donegal: P Durcan, N McGee, P Campbell, K Lacey, E McGee (0-1), M Hegarty (0-2), B Dunnion (0-1), N Gallagher, B Monaghan, C Toye (0-1), C Bonner, R Kavanagh (1-2), C Kelly, C Dunne (0-2) and M Doherty (0-2, frees).

Subs used: B Boyle for Kelly (43 mins), A Sweeney (0-1, free) for Doherty (53 mins), D Diver for N McGee (65 mins), Frank McGlynn for E McGee.

Down: B McVeigh, M Cole, B Grant, A Molloy, P Murphy (0-1), J Clarke, A Scullion, A Rodgers, D Gordon (0-2), E McCartan, L Doyle (0-3, one free), R Murtagh (0-1), D Hughes (1-2, one free), B Coulter (0-1) and M Walsh (0-1)

Subs used: M Doran for Murphy (43 mins), C Laverty for McCartan (44 mins), D Rafferty for Clarke (56 mins) and R Sexton for Murtagh (63 mins) and J Colgan for L Doyle.

Referee: Gerry Kinneavy



Captains. Donegal's Christy Toye and Down's Benny Coulter with referee Gerry Kinneavy before the match.

McIver's men march on to Ulster final

Donegal run riot in Clones

Donegal1-13
Derry0-11

Donegal were always in control against Derry and ran out comfortable winners at the end in the Ulster semi-final in Clones on Sunday.

Peter Campbell reports from St. Tiernach's Park
Photos by Michael O'Donnell

On a day that was not suited to Donegal's short passing game, they rarely made a mistake in possession and each of the twenty players used showed a great willingness for work and the necessary discipline to succeed.

It was a display that was controlled from start to finish. They never looked back after Michael Doherty struck the Derry net with a little more than seven minutes on the clock to give them a three point advantage (1-1 to 0-1). From there to the finish they never allowed the Oak Leaf boys within three points.

Even when Derry threatened at times in the second half the Donegal response was magnificent. When it was 1-7 to 0-7, Donegal hit two points and when Derry made it 1-9 to 0-9, Donegal were always able to pull out an extra score with Michael Doherty, Rory Kavanagh and

corner-back Karl Lacey scoring magnificent points in that final quarter.

It was not just in the scoring department that Donegal excelled. Their tackling, just as it was against Down, was very controlled and the number of times that the ball was turned over in the tackle was impressive. Ciaran Bonner, Neil Gallagher, Christy Toye, Barry Dunnion, Barry Monaghan and Karl Lacey all turned ball over in legal tackles and that was the critical difference between the sides.

The only downside from the victory was the serious injury picked up by sharpshooter, Michael Doherty, in the final minutes when he collided with Pat Carton and had to be stretchered from the field. Reports immediately afterwards were that there could be bones broken but happily that is not the

case and hopefully the Four Masters man will soon be on the road to full recovery.

Up to that point Doherty had excelled, putting behind him an off-day against Down and his total of 14 was a true reflection of the threat he poses. He took his goal clinically and so early that Derry 'keeper, Barry Gillis, hardly moved a muscle as the ball hit the back of his net. Conall Dunne played an important part in the goal with a very deft flick pass.

The half-time lead of 1-5 to 0-4 hardly reflected the Donegal dominance in the opening half as Ciaran Bonner also had a good goal chance which went just over the crossbar.

One of the notable statistics on the Donegal side of things was their accuracy, something which has let them down in the past. They had just four wides, two in each half and those efforts were not far off the target.

Interval advantage

With their interval advantage they came out in the second half knowing that Derry would throw everything at them and they dealt with it very capably. Barry Dunnion had been a revelation in the first half covering in front of the full-back line and despite picking up a very hefty challenge just before the break, he had a good opening to the second period until forced off.

But when Dunnion had to retire, there was a posse of Donegal players willing to take his place as the covering defender with Christy Toye and Rory Kavanagh doubling back also to help their defence, while Neil Gallagher also did a good covering job.

Derry were reduced to lobbing in high balls to Enda Muldoon and Paddy Bradley but Neil McGee and Paddy Campbell stood tall and Barry Monaghan was always on hand when needed.

And just when Derry thought they had dealt with the Donegal forwards, Karl Lacey came forward in the 53rd

and 68th minute to hit two identical points.

By that stage Derry were reduced to fourteen men with Enda Muldoon showing the frustration of a beaten side by punching Paddy Campbell after he had been dispossessed in front of goal.

There were so many good things about the Donegal display but none better than the five points from play from Rory Kavanagh, who matched his Down tally and was almost in for a goal just after the break and also got on the end of a Doherty free in the first half which hit the upright.

All but three points of the 1-13 came from play while Derry's first point from play in the opening half came in the 41st minute!

There were good performances all over the field with captain Christy Toye having his best game in a Donegal jersey since taking over the captaincy. He didn't score but every bit of work he undertook, he was assured and took responsibility when it mattered.

Donegal: Paul Durcan; Neil McGee, Paddy Campbell, Karl Lacey (0-2); Eamon McGee, Barry Monaghan, Barry Dunnion; Neil Gallagher, Brendan Boyle; Christy Toye, Michael Hegarty, Ciaran Bonner (0-2); Rory Kavanagh (0-5), Conall Dunne, Michael Doherty (1-4, 3F). Subs., Damien Diver for Dunnion (49); Adrian Sweeney for Dunne (51); Colin Kelly for Brendan Boyle (61); Stephen McDermott for Bonner (66); Frank McGlynn for Doherty (76).

Derry: Barry Gillis; Kevin McGuckin, Kevin McCloy, Francis McEldowney (0-1); Liam Hinchy, Paul McFlynn, Joe O'Kane; Johnny McBride, Joe Diver (0-2); Mark Lynch, Barry McGoldrick, Fergal Doherty; Enda Muldoon (0-4, 3F), Paddy Bradley (0-4, 1F), Eoin Bradley. Subs., Gavin Donaghy for McGoldrick; Paul Cartin for O'Kane; Dominic McIvar for McBride; Jim Kelly for Lynch; Brian Mullan for Cartin.

Referee: Michael Monaghan (Kildare).

Man of the match

It's a very tough decision this week with a big number of Donegal players at the top of their game. Paul Durcan, Barry Dunnion, Michael Doherty, Karl Lacey and Rory Kavanagh were the main contenders. Lacey's points and overall play was top drawer but the award goes to Rory Kavanagh. Five brilliant points from play and it could have been more.

Turning points

The ability of Donegal to respond when Derry threatened was the main reason for the win. When it was 1-7 to 0-7, Kavanagh and Lacey hit points. When it was 1-9 to 0-9, Michael Doherty hit a brilliant point from play and when it was 1-10 to 0-10, Lacey again came forward to put Donegal four up with two minutes of normal time remaining.



Donegal Democrat

incorporating the Donegal People's Press

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More Ulster Final heartbreak

Armagh1-9
Donegal0-9

Another disappointing outing at Croke Park and more Ulster final heartbreak, on Sunday as Armagh once again proved too strong for Donegal on the big day.

Tom Comack reports from Croke Park
Photos by Brian McDaid

The Orchard County men, who completed a three in a row and a sixth Ulster title in eight years, were the better side on the day and there should be no great argument about it.

But amazingly we could be preparing for a replay next weekend as Armagh keeper, Paul Hearty, pulled off a match winning save in the dying minutes of an absorbing contest, to deny Donegal another crack at ending their Armagh hoodoo. Hearty got down well to deny Stephen McDermott in the closing seconds.

While Armagh were the better side for most of the second half, Donegal were more than a match for them in the opening 35 minutes. And with a little more accuracy in front of the posts they could and possibly should have been in front at the break; instead they went in on level terms.

And the Armagh goal from Paul McGrane in the first minute of the second half was a hammer blow and a key moment in the contest.

Adrian Sweeney opened the

score for Donegal with a pointed 30 metre free inside five minutes. But the next two scores came to Armagh - Oisín McConville with his record breaking 219th point, and Ronan Clarke split the post to edge into a 0-2 to 0-1 lead with just six minutes on the clock.

All square

But it was all square again four minutes later when Adrian Sweeney sold a neat dummy to Francie Bellew to score. Rory Kavanagh and Ronan Clarke traded points in the middle of the half before Donegal enjoyed a good period of possession but kicked three balls into Armagh keeper Paul Hearty, and at least one wide in a ten minute spell. Adrian Sweeney from play and a free, Conall Dunne from a free dropped short and Rory Kavanagh was off target from play.

But Barry Dunnion broke the deadlock when he raced forward to show the forwards how it was done to pop over a brilliant point and the lead for the second time in the

game 0-4 to 0-3. And just when they looked like taking that advantage to the dressing room with them at the break, John McEntee tied up the game to send the sides level at 0-4 each. But the game turned Armagh's way in the first minute of the second period when Paul McGrane found himself in space in front of the Donegal posts to smash the ball to Paul Durcan's net.

All of a sudden the champions had opened up a three point lead 1-4 to 0-4. Conall Dunne made up for his first half miss with a sweetly struck free from 44 metres into the Hill 16 goals to reduce the margin to two. And it was back to a single point and hope again when Colin Kelly, with his his first touch, knocked over a brilliant long range effort on 44 minutes.

But in a six minute spell between the 47th and 53rd minutes Armagh had taken over again, with three points from Oisín McConville, Ronan Clarke and John McEntee and a 1-8 to 0-7 lead.

Three point game

And it was a three point game once again when Eamon McGee took a leaf out of Barry Dunnion's book when he got on the end of end of a sweeping move to score a fine point, with 13 minutes left on the clock.

But just when they seemed threatened Andy Mallon tore just inside the Donegal half, played a one two with Steven McDonnell, to propel his side back into a

four point lead.

To their credit Donegal refused to surrender in the closing minutes and, in particular Eamon McGee, who had a half chance of a goal when his effort was diverted out for a '45'. And they were still taking the fight to the Armagh men at the final whistle, and it took that top class save from Paul Hearty to deny second half substitute Stephen McDermott. McDermott coming from an acute angle did everything right, kept the ball low along the ground but Hearty did well to get in the match saving block.

Donegal: Paul Durcan; Karl Lacey, Paddy Campbell, Neil McGee; Eamon McGee (0-1), Barry Monaghan, Barry Dunnion (0-1); Neil Gallagher, Brendan Boyle; Christy Toye, Michael Hegarty (0-1F), Ciaran Bonner; Rory Kavanagh (0-1), Conall Dunne (0-1F), Adrian Sweeney (0-3, 2F). Subs: Colin Kelly (0-1) for C. Dunne; Damian Diver for B. Boyle; Stephen McDermott for A. Sweeney.

Armagh: Paul Hearty; Andy Mallon (0-1), Francie Bellew, Enda McNulty; Aaron Kernan, Ciaran McKeever, Paul Duffy; Kieran McGeeney, Paul McGrane (1-0); Martin O'Rourke, John McEntee (0-2), Malachy Mackin; Steven McDonnell (0-1), Ronan Clarke (0-3), Oisín McConville (0-2F). Subs: Paddy McKeever for M. Mackin; Aidan O'Rourke for P. Duffy.

Referee: Michael Monaghan (Kildare).

Fermanagh men hurdled . . . at last

Bank of the Ireland All-Ireland Qualifier, Round 4

FERMANAGH0-8
DONEGAL0-11

It was not pretty but Donegal qualified for the quarter-finals of the All-Ireland Championship with a little to spare over Fermanagh in Brewster Park on Sunday.

Peter Campbell reports from Brewster Park
Photos by Conor McGonagle

A much improved second half display was the reason for the success with Leon Thompson impressing up front while Neil Gallagher had another big game at midfield. These two along with the McGees at the back were excellent but there was improvement

almost everywhere in the second period. The half-time team talk must have been hot.

Afterwards Brian McIver was unusually fired up and admitted that the win was "for Paddy Campbell". The suspension of the Glenties full-

back hit a nerve with the manager and he will be happy that the 'hurt' was carried into the second half battle especially.

Overall, though, the game was of a very poor standard with ball being kicked away and turned over by both sides. The Donegal side that started was a closely guarded secret until just

before the game. It was much changed from the one 'selected' with the Thompson brothers, Anthony and Leon, in from the start, while Thomas Donoghue and James Gallagher filled the AN Other positions.

There was nothing to choose between the sides early on with the first six points shared - Sean Doherty and two from Eamon Maguire for Fermanagh while Christy Toye and James Gallagher (2) for Donegal.

Dominant

Fermanagh were the dominant side in the final fifteen minutes with Marty McGrath controlling midfield. Ciaran O'Reilly (free) and Mark Murphy had Fermanagh 0-5 to 0-3 ahead at the break, but Donegal missed one pointable free from James Gallagher.

The main talking point of the first

half was the clash between Ciaran Bonner and Eamon Maguire just before the break, when Bonner (who was receiving treatment on the sideline) returned to the action with a hefty shoulder on Maguire, which saw the Fermanagh man stretched off. Bonner got a yellow card, but after watching the incident later on the video, it was quite similar to the tackle which Barry Dunnion received in the Ulster semi-final.

The loss of Maguire was critical to Fermanagh, as he was their best forward in the opening half. Donegal resumed with Adrian Sweeney in for

James Gallagher and they were back on terms inside five minutes with Leon Thompson and Christy Toye pointing. In between Thompson put Rory Kavanagh through but his angle was narrow and Chris Breen made a good stop.

For the second time in the game Ryan McCluskey worked a soft free at the other end for Tom Brewster to level edge Fermanagh ahead but a great ball from Christy Toye saw Leon Thompson level once more.

From there Donegal took control with Rory Kavanagh and Adrian Sweeney (free) putting them two clear. Marty McGrath pulled a point back for Fermanagh but Michael Hegarty made it a two point game again almost immediately with eleven minutes left.

Increased lead

However, despite dominating there was just minutes left on the clock when Colin Kelly increased the lead to three, after good work by Brendan Boyle.

Again Fermanagh came back with Tom Brewster pointing a free but in added time Donegal substitute Stephen McHugh hit the final score for a well merited win.

Neil Gallagher was immense in the second half around the middle; Eamon McGee also had a very big game while Neil wasn't far behind. Barry Dunnion's role was a marking one on Sunday and he kept Mark Little scoreless, while Karl Lacey did little wrong. New boy Thomas Donoghue was a revelation and his tackling in the second half was very good.

Brendan Boyle will be happy with his contribution when introduced just before half-time. Christy Toye and Michael Hegarty both mixed the good with the poor; Ciaran Bonner's workrate

was good but he took the ball into contact unnecessary at times, while Rory Kavanagh found it difficult to get into the contest.

However, the performance of Leon Thompson was a huge plus and will be going forward. His ability to find space and win ball

Referee: Eugene Murtagh
(Longford)

was the reason Donegal were able to unlock the Fermanagh defence, while Colin Kelly also did well when introduced.

Donegal have just six days to prepare for Cork. The Rebels will be a different kettle of fish but every game is different and Brian McIver will be happy to get his young side back to Croke Park for the second time this summer.

Donegal: Paul Durcan; Karl Lacey, Eamon McGee, Neil McGee; Thomas Donoghue, Barry Monaghan, Barry Dunnion; Neil Gallagher, Anthony Thompson; Christy Toye (0-2), Michael Hegarty (0-1), Ciaran Bonner; Rory Kavanagh (0-1), Leon Thompson (0-2), James Gallagher (0-2,1f). Subs., Brendan Boyle for A. Thompson (28); Adrian Sweeney (0-1,f) for Gallagher (ht); Colin Kelly (0-1) for Kavanagh (61); Stephen McHugh (0-1) for Bonner (67); Brian Roper for Hegarty (71).

Fermanagh: Chris Breen; Ryan McCluskey, Barry Owens, Shane Goan; Shane McDermott, Hugh Brady, Raymond Johnston; Martin McGrath (0-1), Mark Murphy (0-1); Mark Little, Tom Brewster (0-2,2f), Eamon Maguire (0-2); Adrian Little, Sean Doherty (0-1), Ciaran O'Reilly (0-1,f). Subs., Ryan Keenan for Maguire (33); James Sherry for Doherty (37); Niall Bogue for Goan (48); Damien Kelly for A Little (52); Fergal Reilly for Murphv (61).

Bank Of Ireland All Ireland Senior Football Championship Quarter final

Donegal pipped

Cork1-11 Donegal1-10

by late Cork point

It was another case of missed chances and failing to put away the opposition when they had them on the rack for Donegal, as they went down by a single point to Cork, in the Saturday's All Ireland quarter final.

Tom Comack reports from Croke Park

Photos by Brian McDaid

After getting off to a dream start with a goal and a point inside four minutes - Rory Kavanagh with the point, and Christy Toye with a palmed goal - Brian McIver's men failed to capitalise on good first half possession.

And they were just two points up at the break, a scant reward, after being much the better side for most of the half, and having led by four points, 1-5 to 1-1, with just five minutes remaining in the first half.

Leon Thompson, and Michael Doherty with two points each the Donegal scorers. Thompson's first strike on 15 minutes should so easily have been a goal, the Naomh Conaill man who was winning his personnel

duel with Michael Prout, chipped the keeper from close range but instead of his effort dropping into the net, it dropped over the bar. A second Donegal at that stage would have really rattled Cork, who were struggling to get into the game. Because make no mistake about Cork were poor in the opening quarter hour and were only still in the game due to a dubious enough penalty call.

But that old failing came back to haunt and two late Rebel points from James Masters and Fintan Gould meant there was just two in it at the break, 1-5 to 1-3. And the Munster champions off the hook and within striking distance.

Harsh call

Earlier the Leesiders had got back into the game from a John Hayes penalty after Barry Monaghan was a little harshly judged to have impeded Nicholas Murphy in the area. It may have been a harsh call, but in fairness to the Munster champions Toye's goal was also questionable, as Kavanagh laid the ball back from inside the square.

The second half was a more evenly contested affair and as if inspired by the generous nature of their opponents Cork were a better out fit on the resumption. And with four quick points to a Michael Doherty free, the Munster men hit the front for the first

time in the game six minutes into the new half. The inspirational Ger Spillane getting the charge under way when he ran in along the endline, to punch over seconds after Doherty had hit the target at the other end.

But just when it seemed that Spillane and company had finally found the key, they were rattled once again as Donegal through Barry Monaghan, Michael Doherty and second half substitute Colin Kelly found the range, and a two point lead once more for Donegal, 1-9 to 1-7.

Game on, and Donegal in the drivers seat, but the men from the North West only found the target once more Ciaran Bonner splitting the Hill 16 posts on 57 minutes.

And despite the introduction of Adrian Sweeney and Stephen McHugh Donegal failed to

raise a flag in the closing 17 minutes.

By the 61 minute thanks to points from James Masters, the gift of a stray pass in defence, and Sean O'Brien after a patient build up meant the game was all square, 1-10 each going into the closing 12 minutes.

Stalemate

It was stalemate all the way in the closing stages and Donegal and Cork fans in the 51,169 attendance were contemplating a rematch when Cork centre back Ger Spillane popped over the winners two minutes into injury time.

Donegal probably deserved a draw and it looked as if Ciaran Bonner had earned his side a second chance when his late effort just dropped under Alan Quirke crossbar and Cork survived for a semi final meeting with arch rival Kerry in the All Ireland semi final.

It may have been heartbreak for Donegal at the finish, but the harsh reality is that they have no one to blame but themselves. Not for the first time those old shortcomings proved costly.

As they have been doing all year the Tirconnaill excelled in defence with Karl Lacey, Eamon McGee, Barry Dunnion and Barry Monaghan in top form, while

Paul Durcan was like an extra defender behind them. Neil Gallagher and Brendan Boyle struggled for long periods they got through some good work in the first half. Up front new boy Leon Thompson carried the biggest threat, with Michael Doherty fairly steady from frees even if the Four Masters man looked out on his feet in the closing ten minutes or so.

Donegal: Paul Durcan; Karl Lacey, Eamon McGee, Neil McGee; Thomas Donoghue, Barry Monaghan (0-1), Barry Dunnion (0-1); Neil Gallagher, Brendan Boyle; Christy Toye (1-0), Ciaran Bonner (0-1), Rory Kavanagh (0-1); Michael Hegarty, Michael Doherty (0-3F), Leon Thompson (0-2); Subs: Colin Kelly (0-1) for M. Hegarty; Stephen McHugh for R. Kavanagh; Stephen McDermott for B. Boyle; A. Sweeney for L.Thompson inj;

Cork: Alan Quirke; Michael Prout, Derek Kavanagh, Kieran O'Connor, Michael Shields, Ger Spillane (0-2), Anthony Lynch; Pearse O'Neill (0-1), Nicholas Murphy; Sean O'Brien (0-1), Fintan Gould (0-1), Kevin McMahon (0-1); James Masters (0-3,1F), Donnacha O'Connor (0-1F), John Hayes (1-1); Subs: Gary Murphy for M. Prout, Conor McCarty for F. Gould; Kevin O'Sullivan for J. Hayes; Daniel Goulding for K. McMahon;

Referee: Tomas Quigley (Dublin)

Unconvincing start for Melver's new look team

Sweeney saves Donegal with injury time equaliser after lack lustre opener in Ballyshannon against spirited Leitrim

DONEGAL.....0-11
LEITRIM.....1-8

REPORT BY C.J MCGINLEY

PICTURES DECLAN DOHERTY

NEW players and a new manager but after an indifferent league opener as lack lustre Donegal had to settle for a share of the spoils in a local derby against Leitrim at Fr Tierney Park, Ballyshannon on Sunday. The home side could never shake off a spirited Leitrim side in the second half and in the end were lucky to get a draw.

Wise old head Adrian Sweeney came to Donegal's rescue with an injury time equaliser that was met with a palpable sigh of relief from the home fans in the 3,500 crowd. However, based on this mediocre show new Donegal boss, Brian Melver, has a lot of work to do if his new panel are to haul the county back into the top flight after relegation last season.

Donegal, who had five debutants in their ranks, look to be dead and buried when underdogs Leitrim bagged a 61st minute goal from substitute Darren Duignan that gave his side a 1-8 to 0-8 advantage. However, the home team staged a late revival and scored three points without reply in the final seven minutes to snatch a share of the points. Donegal will need to improve significantly as they travel to Carlow on Sunday for their next game.

Spirited Leitrim, who had 12 of last year's championship team on show, must be kicking themselves they didn't hold onto their lead in the dying stages. Dessie Dolan's side worked their socks off and it would have been a travesty of justice had they not got something from the encounter.

While they improved in the second half disjointed Donegal were guilty of some woeful distribution errors and finishing while their persistence with a laboured short passing game played

into the hands of a spirited and workmanlike Leitrim side.

For the visitors free taker Ciaran Duignan was the top man scoring seven points, five from frees while others to catch the eye included playmaker, Colin Regan, midfielder Christopher Carroll and full back John McKeon. Indifferent Donegal were best served on the day by defenders Eamon McGee and Karl Lacey along with midfielder, Stephen McDermott. Melver was relieved afterwards to get a draw but admitted it was a game he'd earmarked for a winning start to the campaign.

"This was a game that we wanted to win at home but with three points to go and seven minutes left we'll settle for what we got. We could have snatched it at the end with a chance that fell to Michael Doherty. To be fair we battled well to come back when the chips were down," Melver said afterwards.

"We missed a lot of chances in the second half. I don't know if it was the breeze or whatever playing into the top goal but we dropped the ball a lot of times into their keeper's hands but at the end of the day I'm happy we came out of it at the end with a point. Leitrim had 12 of last year's championship team on show and they are physical side. We're hopefully as competitive as anybody and by the end of the league we hope to have a settled team," he added.

Molver handed league debuts to five players, Stephen McHugh (Ardara), Ciaran Bonner (Glenswilly), Michael Doherty (Four Masters), Leon Thompson (Glenties) and Neil McGee (Gaoh Dobhair) but three- Bonner, Thompson and McHugh did not finish the game.

"We have young fellas coming in and it is big challenge for them and the fact they were replaced is no reflection on them. Young Frank McGlynn came on as a late substitute and had a great last fifteen minutes. We've decided to freshen up the squad and we have a lot

of new faces and its is going to take time to rebuild. Obviously, we are keen to get promotion but we want to ensure that we have a settled team at the end of the league programme going into the championship," Melver said.

At half time the sides were level 0-5 apiece. Leitrim were by far the more impressive side in the opening stages and deservedly led 0-3 to 0-1 by the end of the first quarter. Donegal goalkeeper, Michael Boyle, who was withdrawn after eight minutes with concussion after he gifted the visitors two points with two mistakes.

What was deeply worrying at this point was the hesitancy and lack of decisive action in the Donegal rearguard. Leitrim led 0-4 to 0-2 by the 19th minute and their lead could have been greater had Duignan not opted for a point with the goal at his mercy after excellent approach work by Colin Regan who scythed through the Donegal defence in the 14th minute. Three points without reply from Michael Doherty gave the home side the lead for the first time (0-5 to 0-4) on the half hour before Duignan tied up the game ending a barren 18 minute spell without a score for Dessie Dolan's team.

Donegal made their first of five replacements at half time introducing Conal Dunne for Martin Caulfield. Michael Doherty, Adrian Sweeney and Ciaran Duignan (2) for Leitrim traded scores in the early minutes of the second half to leave the sides level for the second time (0-7 apiece). The sides were locked at 0-8 apiece when substitute Darren Duignan struck the Leitrim goal nine minutes from time. However, Donegal dug deep and scores from Doherty, substitute Frank McGlynn and Sweeney hauled them back from the brink.

Donegal: Michael Boyle, Neil McGee, Raymond Sweeney, Karl Lacey, Eamon McGee, Barry Monaghan, Stephen McHugh, Brendan Boyle, Stephen McDermott (67), Christy Toye (captain, 0-2), Ciaran Bonner, Martin Caulfield, Leon Thompson, Adrian Sweeney (0-2) and Michael Doherty (0-5, all frees).

Subs used: Paul Durcan for M Boyle (injured 8 mts), Conal Dunne for M Caulfield (Half-Time), Frank McGlynn (0-1) for Stephen McHugh (47 mins) Rory Kavanagh for L Thompson (50 mins) and Paddy McNulty for Ciaran Bonner (63 mins).

Leitrim: Cathal McGrann, Dermot Reynolds, John McKeon, Michael McGuinness, David McHugh, Barry McWheeney, Shane Foley, Gary McCloskey, Christopher Carroll, Johnny Goldrick, Colin Regan, Michael Foley, Barry Prior, Declan Maxwell (0-1) and Ciaran Duignan (0-7, five frees).

Subs used: Francis Holohan for McWheeney (34 mins), Emylin Mulligan for Regan (48 mins), Daniel Beck for Goldrick (57 mins), and Darren Duignan (1-0) for M Foley (60 mins).

Referee: Pat Fox (Westmeath).



Barry Monaghan

Allianz National Football League Division 2A

A stroll in Cullen Park for McIver's Donegal

Donegal1-21
Carlow0-8

Donegal got the two points they required to get their promotion hopes back on track with an easy victory over Carlow, in Dr. Cullen Park, Carlow on Sunday afternoon.

Tom Comack reports from Dr. Cullen Park
Photos by Thomas Gallagher

This was the one positive to emerge from the 16 point victory, and after that it is hard to judge, because opponents Carlow were so poor. But you can only beat what is before you, and Donegal did that in fine style on the wide open spaces of Dr. Cullen Park.

The victory and the manner of its execution won't have done confidence any harm, and

in particular, the forwards who got in some useful shooting practice. And this was especially so in the case of the front-line of the attack who scored 1-15 of the final tally, with the returning James Gallagher hitting 1-5, Michael Doherty and Adrian Sweeney, both who were replaced in the closing minutes, chipping in with 0-5 each. It was, in particular, a good comeback for Gweedore

man Gallagher, who was making his first start in the green and gold for a number of years.

Donegal bossed the game all over the park and in truth the writing was on the wall as early as five minutes as the visitors raced into a 0-4 to no score lead. The game, as a contest, was as good as over by the 12th minute with the advantage out to 0-7 with the home team still to raise their first flag. Conall Dunne, James Gallagher, Michael Doherty and Adrian Sweeney all got their names on the score sheet for a rampant Donegal.

Donegal were still seven up, 0-11 to 0-4, at the half-time changeover, with Sweeney, Doherty, joined in the scoring stakes by Christy Toye. Wing back James Ryan, half forward Brian Carberry, with one each and corner forward

Brian Kelly (2) were the Carlow marksmen.

Three of the four Carlow scores came from rather dubious frees, while five of Donegal's tally came from frees, with Michael Doherty's four first half strikes, and one of Adrian Sweeney's punishing indiscipline in the Carlow defence.

Cruise control

The second half was a stroll in the park for Donegal and McIver's men were in cruise control from the moment James Gallagher hammered home the game's only goal seven minutes into the second half.

Gallagher polished off a sweeping move started at the back with Frank McGlynn and worked up the park through Conall Dunne, Michael Doherty, before Christy Toye released the full forward

who made no mistake to hammer past former Donegal keeper Gerard McGill, between the Carlow posts.

McGill, from Glencolmcille, who now lives in Carlow and plays with the Eire Og club, replaced first choice John Brennan in the middle of the first half after Brennan picked up an injury getting down to save well from Conall Dunne.

Leading 1-13 to 0-5, Donegal hit cruise control and with the management using the full compliment of subs, Christy Toye, Adrian Sweeney, James Gallagher, Ciaran Bonner, Damian Diver and Anthony Thomsson all found the target. Four Brian Kelly pointed frees was all the home team had to show for their second half efforts.

Donegal were forced into one change before the game, Damian Diver

coming in for Karl Lacey who failed a late fitness test due to a thigh strain picked up at training on Thursday night. Carlow made three changes from the side that was defeated 1-11 to 0-8 by Clare the previous week, with Breffni Hannon, Patrick Hickey, and Joe Byrne replacing Peter Fitzgerald, Ciaran Pender and Ray Walker.

Business like

This was an overall very business like performance from Donegal with the visitors winning all the key battles all over the field though woppingly Carlow midfielder Thomas Walsh did win an amount of ball especially in the second half.

Donegal: Paul Durcan; Thomas Donoghue, Neil McGee, Damian Diver; Frank McGlynn, Eamon McGee, Kevin Cassidy; Brendan Boyle, Stephen

McDermott; Christy Toye, Ciaran Bonner, Conal Dunne; Adrian Sweeney, James Gallagher, Michael Doherty. Subs: Neil Gallagher for B. Boyle; Seimi Friel for M. Doherty; Gavin Maguire for K. Cassidy; Paddy McNulty for A. Sweeney; Anthony Thompson for S. McDermott.

Carlow: John Brennan; Cormac McCarthy, David Byrne, Trevor Smith; Breffni Hannon, John Keogh, James Ryan, Patrick Walsh, Thomas Walsh; Brian Carberry, Mark Brennan, John Fitzgerald; Patrick Hickey, Joe Byrne, Brian Kelly. Subs: Gerard McGill for J. Brennan; Alan O'Brien for J. Fitzgerald; Peter Fitzgerald for Breffni Hannon; Alan Kelly for J. Fitzgerald; Vinny Kavanagh for P. Hickey.

Referee: Brian Tyrell (Tipperary).

Allianz National Football League Division 2A

Stroll for Donegal in London

LONDON0-4
 DONEGAL1-21

There will be tougher days ahead for Donegal than this stroll in the park at Ruislip on Sunday.

Peter Campbell reports from Ruislip
 Photos by Brendan Vaughan

Division 2A Table

	P	W	D	L	Pts
Limerick	4	3	1	0	7
Roscommon	4	3	0	1	6
Leitrim	4	2	2	0	6
Donegal	3	2	1	0	5
Longford	3	1	2	0	4
Clare	4	1	0	3	2
Carlow	4	0	0	4	0
London	4	0	0	4	0

Man of match

Paddy McConigley was impressive throughout for London but all the candidates were wearing Donegal jerseys. Michael Doherty was prominent throughout, while Brendan Boyle, Rory Kavanagh and James Gallagher had solid games. Neil Gallagher was also to the fore around the middle while Barry Monaghan and Thomas Donoghue did well in defence. It was difficult to pick out any individual but James Gallagher rarely did anything wrong and gets the nod.

Turning point

It was probably the first point for London in the first minute, as it seemed to get Donegal going and they never looked in trouble.

Ref watch

Louth official McKenny was very generous to Donegal in the opening half and the free-count in favour of Donegal was 9-1 at one stage. However, he had a better game in the second period but it was an easy game to referee.

At one stage seven minutes into the second half Donegal led by 1-16 to 0-1, and it was a matter of playing out time from there to the end.

London put up only a token resistance. They got an early point in the first minute, winning the throw-in and John Paul Boyle was fouled and he pointed the free. They game had started so quickly that the people on the public address had to abandon playing the National Anthem, the strains of which began as the ball was thrown in.

After that opening London flurry, it was just shooting practice for Donegal and they were also getting most of the decisions from Louth referee, Gabriel McKenny.

By the half-time break the game was over as a contest with Donegal leading by 1-13 to 0-1. The goal came seconds before the half-time whistle with captain, Christy Toye, finishing to the net after it seemed his chance was gone as the ball broke away from him ten yards out.

London were only able to put up token resistance with captain, Patrick McConigley - a former Donegal player - the only London player who was up to the challenge. McConigley's tussle with Christy Toye in the first half was probably the best contest of the game.

After John Paul Boyle had London's first point Donegal took over with Michael Doherty getting the first three from placed balls, two frees and a '45'

Further points followed from Adrian Sweeney (free), Rory Kavanagh and Stephen McDermott, although the latter looked at least five yards wide, but was awarded by the umpire.

Substitute Brendan Boyle (who came in for the injured Stephen McDermott), James Gallagher and Rory Kavanagh added further points for Donegal to lead by 0-10 to 0-1 after 23 minutes. In the final six minutes Michael Doherty (free), Seamie Friel and Brendan Boyle added further points before Toye finished to the net after good work by James Gallagher.

The second half saw Michael Doherty hit the target inside

twenty seconds and the same player hit two more inside seven minutes. The game as a result became something of a non-contest. London substitute Chris Donnellan, a brother of Galway star, Michael, had London's second point a minute later but John Paul Boyle missed a 20m free on 49 minutes.

Just before that Donegal were able to bring in two players who have been out injured since before Christmas - Shane Carr and Brian Roper - at the expense of captain, Christy Toye and Damien Diver.

Inevitable

James Gallagher (2) and Michael Doherty added three points in a two minute spell before Colm Foody had London's third point on 56 minutes. As the game trundled to its inevitable conclusion Michael Doherty hit his ninth point and Rory Kavanagh had the final Donegal point while in added time Chris Donnellan pointed a free for the Londoners.

James Gallagher had another good outing for Donegal at full-forward while Brendan Boyle, Michael Doherty, Thomas Donoghue and Eamon McGee were also impressive, although this was not a good match to make any critical judgements.

For London Paddy McConigley was excellent throughout while Declan Meehan and Colm Foody also tried their best.

London: A McGrory; A McLernon, P Callaghan, P Earley; P McConigley, K Waldron, V O'Sullivan; E Brennan, D Meehan; P Quirke, A Dillane, J Niblock; C Foody (0-1), E Sweeney, J P Boyle (0-1,f). Subs., C Donnelly (0-2, 1f) for Quirke; D O'Connor for Dillane; F Cunningham for V O'Sullivan.

Donegal: P Durcan; T Donoghue, E McGee, K Lacey; B Dunnion, B Monaghan, D Diver; N Gallagher, S McDermott (0-1); C Toye (1-0), S Friel (0-1), R Kavanagh (0-4); A Sweeney (0-1,f), J Gallagher (0-3), M Doherty (0-9, 6f, 45). Subs., B Boyle (0-2) for McDermott; B Roper for Toye; S Carr for Diver; P McNulty for Sweeney; G Maguire for Dunnion.

Referee: G McKenny (Louth).

Allianz NFL, Division 2A

CLARE0-4
 DONEGAL0-11

The margin of victory may look good but this was a poor Donegal display against Clare in Cusack Park, Ennis on Sunday.

Peter Campbell reports from Cusack Park, Ennis

Photos by Brian McDaid

It's hard to find an excuse for Donegal who stuttered through the game and but for some indiscipline and poor shooting on Clare's part, could have been punished severely.

The clash of jersey colours didn't help, while a very fussy referee also added to the general mayhem, but in truth Donegal lacked cohesion from the first whistle to the last. They tried the long-ball in the first half with the breeze but got nowhere, while in the second some of the running with the ball was aimless and they ended up

going back in the half-back line.

Again, there were changes prior to the throw-in, with Eamon McGee an absentee and Ciaran Bonner not in the starting line-up, although he did make an entrance before half-time and was one of the better players.

The referee, Peter Daly of Westmeath, was like a Sergeant Major, blowing eleven times in the first nine minutes and issuing yellow cards like confetti at a wedding.

After Clare had opened with an Alan Clohessy free on four minutes, Donegal

raced into a 0-4 to 0-1 lead by the 14th minute. Clare had three good chances before the finally got that first point, while Donegal had a couple of half-goal chances with James Gallagher having an effort well blocked. Adrian Sweeney had two of their points, one from a free, while Barry Monaghan and Conall Dunne had the others.

Clare hit back, though, and Rory Donnelly almost had a Clare goal when he found space behind Paddy Campbell but his shot went just over the crossbar.

On the half-hour mark Donnelly again found space to take a ball from David Russell to reduce the margin to the minimum. Just afterwards the Donegal management brought in Colm McFadden and Ciaran Bonner for Adrian Sweeney and Conall Dunne. The substitute of Sweeney seemed harsh as he looked the most likely of the front three, despite receiving a very wayward supply

Michael Doherty pointed a free on 35 minutes while two minutes into added time Clare hit back with another point from Michael O'Shea.

Half-time: Donegal 0-5, Clare 0-4.

Even though the Donegal supporters were far from happy at the break with the display it was felt that the Donegal style would be better suited to playing against the wind and so it proved.

They were helped by indiscipline by Clare which saw centre-half Ronan Slattery receive a second yellow with only four minutes of the half gone.

Donegal slowly added points with Rory Kavanagh getting the first on 40 minutes after good work by Thomas Donoghue. James Gallagher won a fortunate free for Michael Doherty to convert while the best point of the game came on 47 minutes when good Donegal play was finished by Ciaran Bonner from an awkward angle.

Christy Toye had a couple of good

chances but opted to take them with his left and he was off target before Colm McFadden converted a free on 54 minutes and two minutes later Ciaran Bonner did well under a high ball on the edge of the square to win possession and hook over the tenth point.

Donegal didn't score again until added time when Brian Roper put Neil Gallagher through to fist a point. Clare had chances at the other end, missing a 20m free and Rory Donnelly made Paul Durcan go full length to tip around the post with nine minutes left.

It was difficult to pick a Donegal player who played well. Many had good moments, but too many made basic errors. Clare are now bottom of the table with London and again we didn't create any real goalscoring chances.

The next couple of weeks will be important for Donegal and the need to get a settled team on the park should

now be the priority.

Clare: Dermot O'Brien; Pdraig Gallagher, Conor Whelan, Ger Tubridy; Gordon Kelly, Ronan Slattery, Dara Blake; Peter O'Dwyer; Ger Quinlan; Frank O'Dea, Alan Clohessy (0-1.f), Niall Considine; Rory Donnelly (0-2), David Russell, Michael O'Shea (0-1), Subs., Laurence Healy for O'Dwyer 53, David Hedigan for Considine 55 Conor Malone for Blake 64.

Donegal: Paul Durcan; Thomas Donoghue, Paddy Campbell, Karl Lacey; Barry Dunning, Barry Monaghan (0-1), Kevin Cassidy; Brendan Boyle, Neil Gallagher (0-1); Christy Toye, Conall Dunne (0-1), Rory Kavanagh (0-1); Adrian Sweeney (0-2, 1f), James Gallagher, Michael Doherty (0-2, 2f), Subs., Ciaran Bonner (0-2) for Dunne; Colm McFadden (0-1.f) for Sweeney, both 31; Frank McGlynn for Lacey; Brian Roper for Doherty, both 65.

Ref: Peter Daly (Westmeath).

■ Turning point

The red carding of Ronan Slattery didn't help their cause but it was probably the half-time break which turned the game. Donegal's game is suited to the short-passing against the wind and even though far from impressive they have better footballers than the Banner men.

■ Ref watch

I don't like criticising referees but Peter Daly seemed in a world of his own, stopping the game at every opportunity. He was just too fussy in a game where there was hardly a bad tackle.

■ Man of the match

Not an easy task. Paul Durcan did nothing wrong for Donegal. Kevin Cassidy, Thomas Donoghue, Barry Dunning, Rory Kavanagh and Ciaran Bonner had their moments but the best player on view was Clare corner-forward Rory Donnelly, who caused much problems for the Donegal defence.

NATIONAL FOOTBALL LEAGUE, DIVISION 2A, ROUND 6

Brian McIver's men now need just one win from final two matches to ensure return to top flight

BY CRONAN SCANLON

DONEGAL 1-09
LIMERICK 0-5

A FINE scoring exhibition from Michael Doherty was the highlight of Donegal's victory over a disappointing Limerick in a sparse MacCumhaill Park on Sunday.

Surprisingly, Limerick were league leaders prior to this game but put up a tame challenge against Brian McIver's charges. Now Donegal head into their final two games knowing one win will secure promotion. While the fiasco concerning the cancelled league clash with Longford has yet to be finalised, Roscommon await on April 9 in the Hyde park. They currently top the group following a narrow one point win over a Leitrim side that had only 13 players for almost the entire second half.

John Maughan is in charge of the Roscommon side this year and while they have failed to overly impress they will be well up for a visit of Donegal to their home turf. However, Roscommon have managed to get two points out of games they haven't necessarily deserved to win, edging out both Leitrim and Longford by a solitary point despite both teams finishing without their full compliment of players. The opportunity to inflict the first league defeat on Donegal will have Maughan's men highly motivated.

Little more than 2,000 spectators turned up to MacCumhaill Park and conditions were perfect on the day, however, the game was only played at a pedestrian pace. Both sides could only muster three scores from play in a lacklustre first half. While Donegal's

victory was not an emphatic one, they did show a high work rate and some tenacious tackling.

POSITIVES

Not surprisingly, Michael Doherty's impressive tally of 1-05 was the main taking point after this game. The Four Masters man scored two fine points from play, three placed kicks and a wonder goal just before half time. Doherty certainly looks a promising prospect and his free taking, from the ground, should be an example to all young players.

Others to impress were Michael Boyle, who is growing in confidence in goals, midfielders Gallagher and Boyle, Ciaran Bonner, Rory Kavanagh and subs Brian Roper and Michael Hegarty. The later two made a welcome return though Roper was taken back off again in the 63rd minute.

DISAPPOINTING

On the other hand there somewhat poor performances from Colm McFadden and his half time replacement Adrian Sweeney. Sweeney looks far from match fit and his ball handling skills left a lot to be desired.

Limerick were first on the score sheet when a mix up in the Donegal defence let Jason Stokes regain possession and the midfielder fired over a fine score from 45m.

Donegal responded with three Doherty frees and a John Galvin point left the home side with a 0-3 to 0-2 lead after 18 minutes of play. Donegal's authority on the game was increasing as the half was drawing to a close and Michael Doherty set the game alight with a wonder goal in the 28th minute.

The hard working James Gallagher found Doherty with a cross field pass

and the Four Masters man turned his marker and fired an unstoppable shot from just outside the 21' over Sean Kiely's head to the roof of the net. Half time Donegal 1-03, Limerick 0-2

HALF TIME CHANGES

Brian McIver made two changes during the half-time interval bringing on Adrian Sweeney for Colm McFadden and Brian Roper for James Gallagher.

Roper, who was returning from injury, made an immediate impact with his tigerish tackling and foraging runs while Sweeney was having difficulty holding on to the ball.

Doherty tagged on another point, this time from play, and Donegal could have had another goal but Bonner forced a great save from Kiely who tipped the ball over for a point.

And minutes later Kiely was again forced to make two more great saves,

the first after Sweeney put Neil Magee through on goal and in the 62nd minute he forced a Neil Gallagher shot over.

Fittingly, Doherty had the last say when he scored a fine point from play to bring his tally to 1-05.

Overall, it was a comfortable victory for Donegal in the end with good displays in defence and midfield but the side has still to gel in the forward line.

St Michael's duo Toye and McFadden failed to make an impact with the former intent to running in to dead end situations when a lay off to a colleague would have been a better option.

However, a seven point win was a fair reflection of the team's superiority and a solid win was all that could have been asked of them on the day.

DONEGAL: Michael Boyle, Thomas Donaghue, Paddy Campbell, Karl Lacy,

Barry Dunnion, Barry Monaghan, Kevin Cassidy, Brendan Boyle (0-1), Neil Gallagher (0-1), Christy Toye, Ciaran Bonner, Rory Kavanagh (0-1), James Gallagher, Colm McFadden and Michael Doherty (1-05, 3f).

Subs used: Adrian Sweeney for Colm McFadden, Brian Roper for James Gallagher, Michael Hegarty for Roper and Neil McGee (0-1) for Donoghue.

LIMERICK: Sean Kiely, Shane Gallagher, Johnny McCarthy, Padraig Browne, Conor Mullane, Stephen Lavin, Andrew Lane; John Galvin (0-1), Jason Stokes (0-1); Pat Ahearn, Damian Reidy, Scanie Buckley; Jason O'Brien, Michael Crowley, Micheal Reidy (0-1).

Subs used: D Horan for Stokes; M Gavin (0-2f) for O'Brien; J Cooke for M Reidy.

REFEREE: Pat Fox (Longford)

Donegal stroll back to the top flight

DONEGAL 3-16
LONGFORD 0-9

Donegal regained their Division One status with a facile victory over Longford at a sunny Fr. Tierney Park, on Tuesday evening in their delayed Division 2A Allianz NFL clash.

Tom Comack reports from Fr. Tierney Park
 Photos by Thomas Gallagher

In reality this was a stroll in the park for the Donegal men before a surprisingly large crowd of close on 2,500, on a crisp but sunny evening in Ballyshannon.

Donegal led 1-2 to 0-1 after seven minutes, 2-3 to 0-3 after 21 minutes, and were 2-5 to 0-4 up at half-time, before racing 14 points clear, 3-9 to 0-4, fifteen minutes into the second half.

Michael Doherty, with a return of 2-6, which included two penalties early in each half was Donegal's top scorer, on an evening that all Tirconaill forwards with the exception of Rory Kavanagh got their names on the scoresheet.

Paul Barden, with 0-7, six of them coming from placed balls, was Longford's scorer in chief, in a game that was originally fixed for Sunday March 5, but was postponed when a dispute arose over whether it was a home game for Donegal or Longford

The results means that Donegal now top their section on 11 points, with Roscommon on ten and Limerick on nine, with one round of games to go. And given the Tirconaill men's superior score difference they cannot be caught regardless of how their final game with Roscommon goes next Sunday in Hyde Park.

Two changes

Donegal showed two changes from their victory over Limerick, with Kevin McGlynn and Brian Roper replacing Thomas Donoghue and Colm McFadden. Longford fielded five of the U21 team - Barry Gilleran, Shane Mulligan, Bernard McElvaney, Kevin Smith and Pdraigh Berry - that lost to Laois in Sunday's Leinster final.

Donegal led by seven points at half time, 2-5 to 0-4, thanks to goals from Michael Doherty - from the penalty spot - and Brian Roper. Doherty's spot kick came on two minutes after Ciaran Bonner was pulled down. And while Paul Barden opened Longford's account two and a half minutes later, Donegal enjoyed the better of the exchanges and were 1-2 to 0-1 up by the seven minute mark, with additional points coming from Brian Roper and James Gallagher.

The Shannonsiders recovered with Barden and James Martin converting from placed balls to make it a two point game. But that was as good as it got for Luke Dempsey's men, who were short a number of regulars through injury suspensions and exam commitments.

Doherty added another point before Brian Roper struck for Donegal second goal to open up a six point lead. Roper, making his first start of the campaign, took the ball on the run from James Gallagher, on 21 minutes to hit the roof of Damian Sheridan's net.

Doherty added two more frees before the break with Barden knocking over one for the visitors.

The second half was only academic as Donegal tagged on four points without reply from Christy Toye, Doherty, Ciaran Bonner, in the early minutes. And the home team were in the driving seat when Doherty cracked home his and his team's second penalty on 39 minutes to race into a 14 point lead.

The game was already over as a contest, as Christy Toye came good in the second half to run the Longford defence ragged.

The St. Michaels man along with second half substitutes, Michael Hegarty and Conall Dunne, adding to the visitors' misery with a string of late scores.

Toye, and Hegarty posted a point a piece with Doherty and Dunne scoring two each as the game fizzled out as a contest in the closing 20 minutes. Paul Barden with four late points and Kevin Mulligan who scored the Midlanders first point from play on 48 minutes, struck for a number of late scores to add a degree of respectability to the final scoreline.

The ease at which Donegal won the game gave manager Brian McIver an opportunity to use the full compliment of subs with Damian Diver, Eamon McGee and Raymond Sweeney along with Hegarty and Dunne getting a run out.

Donegal: Michael Boyle; Frank McGlynn, Paddy Campbell, Karl

Lacey; Barry Dunnion, Barry Monaghan, Kevin Cassidy; Neil Gallagher, Brendan Boyle; Christy Toye (0-4), Ciaran Bonner (0-1), Rory Kavanagh; Brian Roper (1-1), James Gallagher (0-1), Michael Doherty (2-6, 2penaltys, 6F). Subs: Michael Hegarty (0-1), for B. Roper; Eamon McGee for B. Monaghan; Damian Diver for B. Dunnion; Conall Dunne (0-2) for James Gallagher; R. Sweeney for P. Campbell.

Longford: D. Sheridan; P. Murtagh, B. Gilleran, C. Conferey; D. Brady, Michael Kelly, ; B. McElvaney, A. O'Connor; K. Smith, P. Barden (0-7,6F), P. Berry; J. Martin (0-1), K. Mulligan (0-1), W. Murray. Subs: P. Foy for S. Mulligan; E. Ledwith for M. Kelly; S. Shortt for B. McElvaney; F.

McGee for W. Murray.

Referee: Michael Daly (Mayo).

Man of match

Donegal ran riot and there were plenty of contenders with Kevin Cassidy, Neil Gallagher, Brian Roper, Christy Toye and Ciaran Bonner showing up particularly well. But with 2-6 Michael Doherty gets the vote.

Turning Point

Michael Doherty's first penalty two and a half minutes into the game got Donegal off to a dream start and his second fifteen minutes into the second half finally put Longford out of their misery. But Brian Roper's brilliant strike on 21 minutes that propelled his team into a six point lead and the road to victory was the key moment in this game.

Donegal finish top after first half exhibition

Allianz National Football

League Division 2A

Donegal.... 0-14

Roscommon...1-9

WITH THEIR best half of football to date Donegal remained unbeaten in Division 2A but almost blew it in the final minutes.

Peter Campbell reports from Dr. Hyde Park

Photos by Michael O'Donnell

They were at their best in the first half with the wind and rain at their backs but a mixture of careless and sometimes downright stupid football in the second half almost allowed Roscommon back into the contest.

The side showed five changes from the team that overwhelmed Longford on Tuesday night last with Barry Dunnion, Barry Monaghan, James Gallagher and Rory Kavanagh replaced by Damien Diver, Eamon McGee, Michael Hegarty and Connell Dunne, while a freak accident on Saturday evening saw Ciaran Bonner cry off with ankle damage to be replaced by Adrian Sweeney.

Bonner's ankle will be x-rayed this week to find out the damage with fingers crossed that it is only ligament

damage. He will take no further part in the league but the management are hopeful that he will be back in contention for the championship on the first Sunday in June, which is eight weeks away.

Before that Donegal will have a league semi-final on Sunday next (against Westmeath) and, hopefully, a Division Two league final the following Sunday in Croke Park

In Dr. Hyde Park they put a smile on the supporters in the opening half as they tore Roscommon to shreds with some wonderful direct football and well-taken scores.

Brendan Boyle was really on top of his game at midfield. Paddy Campbell was extremely sharp at full-back. Only

25 seconds had elapsed when Campbell stopped the first Roscommon attack to find Boyle and he in turn found Michael Doherty. The ball was transferred back to Brendan Boyle to point.

There was just 65 seconds on the clock when Boyle won the kick-out and transferred to Kevin Cassidy to loft a second point from 50m.

The pattern was set and even though Ger Heneghan had a good point at the other end Donegal went on the rampage with points from Michael Doherty (two frees and a big effort from 50m from play). Brendan Boyle was involved in nearly all the action.

By the 25th minute the Donegal lead was extended to 0-9 to 0-1 with Christy Toye, Adrian Sweeney and Doherty (frees) and Michael Hegarty finding the range. They almost had a goal a minute later when a long ball from

Michael Hegarty over the top saw Michael Doherty get a touch but it went just wide of the post.

The final three Donegal points of the half came from Michael Hegarty, who had a great second quarter, while Ger Heneghan had Roscommon's only other point from a free which was moved on for dissent.

The points spree left Donegal well in control at the break, ahead by 0-12 to 0-2 and on their way back to Division One as champions.

That view was cemented 26 seconds into the second period when Christy Toye ran at the Roscommon defence and lofted another point to increase the lead to eleven.

The strong wind was always going to help Roscommon in the second period and they had tagged on four points after fourteen minutes through Brian Higgins, two from the inspirational Seamus O'Neill and another from a free from Ger Heneghan after O'Neill was fouled.

However, the Connacht side were dealt a big blow minutes later when wing-forward Brian Higgins received a second yellow card and they had to play with fourteen for the final quarter.

Barry Dunnion came in for Donegal to play the 'free man' role as Roscommon continued to threaten and Karol Mannion reduced the leeway to six on 58 minutes.

Donegal had a goal chance four minutes later when Damien Diver went on a forward run and his effort across the goal was missed by both Michael Hegarty and Michael Doherty, the latter's flick just going past the post.

Donegal had plenty of possession but were guilty of giving away frees and losing possession easily. Heneghan added two more points, one from a free, to reduce the margin to four in the 66th minute.

Barry Dunnion lifted the siege for Donegal with a good point as the game entered added time, but they were then left to sweat for two minutes when John Rogers fired to the Donegal net. The goal came from a Donegal attack with Damien Diver failing to put the ball dead, his effort landing in the goalkeeper's hands.

The goal had come just a little too late. Had it come five minutes earlier then this could have been a very embarrassing result for Donegal. As it was Donegal survived but they will reflect on a game that saw the best and the worst.

Roscommon: Geoffrey Claffey; John Nolan, David Casey, Sean McDermott; Stuart Daly, John Whyte, Paddy O'Connor; Seamus O'Neill (0-2), Michael Finneran; Paul Moran, Karol Mannion (0-1), Brian Higgins (0-1); Enda Kenny, Martin Connolly, Ger Heneghan (0-5, 3f). Subs., Niall Moran for Finneran; Gerry Lohan for Moran (both 39); Sean Fahy for Connolly (55); John Rogers (1-0) for Kenny (64).

Ref Watch

Louth official Finnegan had a reasonably good game. He seemed to be sharp on Roscommon in the first half and then on Donegal in the second but he missed little and that's a good guide for any referee.

Donegal: Michael Boyle; Frank McGlynn, Paddy Campbell, Karl Lacey; Damien Diver, Eamon McGee, Kevin Cassidy (0-1); Brendan Boyle (0-1), Neil Gallagher; Christy Toye (0-2), Michael Hegarty (0-4), Connell Dunne; Brian Roper, Adrian Sweeney (0-1,f), Michael Doherty (0-4, 3f). Subs., Barry Dunnion (0-1) for Sweeney (55); Seamie Friel for Roper (64).

Referee: Paul Finnegan (Louth).

Man of the match

If you were to base the award on the first half then nearly every Donegal player would be in contention, but in the second half the forwards would have ruled themselves out. As usual the defence was solid, one of the reasons why Donegal are unbeaten in this Division. Paddy Campbell, Kevin McGlynn and Kevin Cassidy were outstanding.

However, my man of the match was Brendan Boyle who was at his best in the opening half and still worked very hard throughout the second.

Division 2A Table

	P	W	D	L	Pts Diff	Pts
Donegal	7	6	1	0	68	13
Limerick	7	5	1	1	21	11
Roscommon	7	5	1	1	28	10
Leitrim	7	2	2	3	6	6
Longford	7	2	2	3	-5	6
Clare	7	3	0	4	-8	6
Carlow	7	2	0	5	-14	4
London	7	0	0	7	-96	0

Allianz NFL Division Two semi-final

Donegal0 -14
Westmeath1-9

For only the second time this season Donegal displayed their real metal as they came from behind to see off the challenge Westmeath in the Division 2 Allianz National League semi-final in Cavan.

Tom Comack reports from Breffni Park
Photos by Thomas Gallagher

Rocked by a Westmeath goal 15 minutes into the second half that saw them trail for the first time in the contest, Donegal played their best football when it was put up to them in the closing ten minutes. Man of the match Kevin Cassidy, Christy Toye and scored in chief Michael Doherty all stepped up to the mark to hit the crucial match winning scores.

This was far from a vintage performance from Brian Melver's charges, but the manner in which they responded to P. J. Ward's goal towards the end of the third quarter was most encouraging, and was a source of great consolation to the large Donegal following in the 5000 approximate attendance. Kevin Cassidy, Eamon McGee

and Karl Lacey in defence were the real heroes in this victory. And this trio along with Michael Doherty who scored six points all from frees, and Westmeath's inability to translate territorial possession into scores is the reason why Donegal are now looking forward a Division 2 final showdown with Louth next Sunday.

The Lakesiders shot nine wides - many from very scoreable positions in the first half - to Donegal's four in the first half. Even the mercurial Dessie Dolan who along with Denis Glennon ran the Donegal defence ragged for most of the half shooting more than his quota of blanks

In fairness to Brendan Boyle, he battled hard throughout, and his midfield partner Neil Gallagher

upped his game in the second period to break the early dominance of David Shaughnessey in midfield.

Pretty even

The early exchanges were pretty even with Michael Doherty and Dessie Dolan and Doherty and James Nugent, trading scores to leave it all square on 0-2 each after nine minutes.

While Westmeath were creating all the chances, it was Donegal who had stolen into a two point lead by the twelve minute mark with Kevin Cassidy, and Adrian Sweeney doing the scoring. But the sides were on level terms again on 24 minutes with Dolan twice hitting the target.

But Donegal finished the half with a flourish and outscored the Midlanders by five points to one. Sweeney, from a free, Brendan Boyle, Michael Hegarty, - the score of the half - and Michael Doherty the scorers to send their side in, three up, at the break 0-8 to 0-5. Dessie Dolan posted the Westmeath point.

Donegal started the second period with a great flurry and Adrian Sweeney missed a glorious opportunity for a point. The Dungloe man who had opened up the defence instead of going for the

minor score tried to engineer a goal and his effort to find James Gallagher with delicate foot pass was intercepted by John Keane.

Kevin Cassidy followed a minute later with a bad wide, before Westmeath took over with Dolan twice in quick succession finding the target to narrow the margin to the minimum eleven minutes into the new half.

Stephen McDermott restored a two point advantage with a trade mark run and score on 47 minutes, with literally his first touch. But three minutes later Westmeath were in front for the first time in the game, when Denis Glennon and Alan Mangan combined to release Ward for the games only goal, 1-7 to 0-9.

Michael Doherty, levelled with a superb 40 metre strike from out on the right hand side on 55 minutes. Dolan once again edged Westmeath back in front, before Doherty again tied up matters on 53 minutes. This was the first of four unanswered points from Donegal as the boys from the North West upped the anti and they were and had pulled three clear 0-14 to 1-8 before Dolan brought down the curtain on the scoring with his eight point of the afternoon deep in injury time.

Donegal now play Louth in the final and going on Sunday's display and they fact that the men from the Wee county had a convincing 2-13 to 0-11 victory over Limerick in the other semi-final.



Donegal: Michael Boyle; Neil McGee, Paddy Campbell, Karl Lacey; Barry Dunnion, Eamon McGee, Kevin Cassidy (0-2); Brendan Boyle (0-1), Neil Gallagher; Christy Toye (0-1), Michael Hegarty (0-1), Brian Roper; Adrian Sweeney (0-2F), James Gallagher, Michael Doherty (0-6F); Subs: Stephen McDermott (0-1) for A. Sweeney; Damian Diver for B. Dunnion; Paddy McNulty for J. Gallagher; Seimi Friel for B. Roper;

Westmeath: Gary Connaghan; Cormac Davey, Donal Donoghue, John Keane; Michael Egan, Damian Healy, Gary Glennon; David Duff, David Shaughnessey; James Nugent (0-1), Gary Dolan, Alan Mangan; P.J. Ward (1-0), Denis Glennon; Dessie Dolan (0-8,4F); Subs: James Davitt for C. Davey; Joe Fallon for J. Nugent;

Referee: Marty Duffy (Sligo)

Donegal show their mettle to book final spot

Donegal storm back to earn second bite at cherry

Donegal0-17
Louth3-8

Donegal proved in the second half of the Division Two Allianz National Football league with Louth on Sunday, in Kingspan Breffni Park, that when the going gets tough, the tough get going.

Tom Comack reports from Kingspan Breffni Park
Photos by Thomas Gallagher

The Tirconail men in a marvellous display of guts and determination combined with no shortage of skill and football class came from seven points down at the break to earn a well deserved draw with the WEE county.

And in fact they were a little unlucky not to emerge victorious as they swept aside the Louth challenge in the closing quarter. Michael Doherty had a great chance to wrap it up but was denied from close range by a diving save from Louth keeper Stuart Reynolds.

This was a great result given the build up to the game with the loss of Kevin Cassidy and Eamon McGee,

both dropped by manager Brian McIver for a breach of the code of discipline.

Trailling 2-6 to 0-5, at the end a forgettable first half, and with Adrian Sweeney, spearheading the attack, and Neil Gallagher emerging a new man at midfield, Donegal were transformed after the changeover.

Rocked

And even when they were rocked by a third Louth goal followed quickly by a point, after the had reduced the Leinster county's half-time advantage to a single point they refused to surrender. With Sweeney, Ciaran Bonner, Doherty, and Barry Monaghan knocking over

points, it was Louth who were gasping for oxygen at the finish and Donegal supporters baying for a few more minutes.

The introduction of Sweeney at the break had a big bearing on the outcome. Not alone did the Dungleo man post four point - one a massive score from the sidle line and just outside the 20 metre line -, but the forward unit as a whole seemed to work better as a unit from the moment he appeared. This was especially so, in the case of Michael Doherty who was rejuvenated in the second 35 minutes, after a poor first half.

Neil Gallagher, too, stepped up his game and broke the stranglehold Louth had for most of the opening period. The Glenswilly man raked the skies around Cavan with a number of big fetches, and with Barry Dunning and Damian Diver attacking down the flanks and Christy Toye and Brendan Boyle carrying from deep Donegal attacked in waves in the early minutes of the half.

Rory Kavanagh, got the

cavalary challenge underway ten minutes into the new half after Sweeney and Darren Clarke traded early scores.

And with Donegal rampant Michael Doherty with two rapid fire points one from a free and one from play before Sweeney on the 50 minutes from the sideline made it a three point game. And Donegal very much back in the contest 2-7 to 0-10.

By the 55 minute mark, Sweeney again this time from a close in free, and Ciaran Bonner with a brilliant point had reduced the margin to the minimum 2-7 to 0-12.

But just when Donegal supporters were beginning to harbour notions of a first league title they were rocked on 51 minutes when Farrelly struck for Louth's third goal, after J.P. Rooney was given to much freedom and space in front of the Donegal posts. Barry Duinnon hinted with a great point on the run that Donegal were not for rolling over, but when this was cancelled out by Martin Farrelly on 60 minutes things did not look good as Louth led by four again 3-8 to 0-13.

But it was all Donegal in the closing ten minutes, as they hit four points

without reply from Sweeney, Bonner, Barry Monaghan, and Doherty.

This was some turnaround from the first half, in which Donegal were ran ragged at the back particularly in the second quarter, and the Louth men were full value for 2-6 to 0-5 half-time advantage.

The opening changes were even enough, and in fact Donegal led 0-5 to 0-4 after 20 minutes, thanks to points from Rory Kavanagh, Ciaran Bonner, Damian Diver, Brian Roper, and Christy Toye.

Flourish

Martin Farrelly, and Darren Clarke, one each and Martin Farrelly two were the early Louth marksmen. But Louth finished the half with a flourish Aaron Clarke squeezing home Louth's first goal on 21 minutes following a good move involving Mark Brennan and Mark Stanfield to propel his team into a 1-4 to 0-5 lead.

And they were four point up 1-6 to 0-5 when Peter McGinnity was fouled in the penalty area as he bore down on goals, and Mark Stanfield converted from the spot to send his side in at the break 2-6 to 0-5 up at the break, and looking good.

But the second half was a different story and there was no question about it Donegal were a class apart in the second half, adn now go into Sunday's replay with the momentum very much with them.

Donegal: Michael Boyle; Neil McGee, Paddy Campbell, Barry Dunning (0-1); Damian Diver (0-1), Barry Monaghan (0-1), Frank McGlynn; Brendan Boyle, Neil Gallagher; Christy Toye (0-1), Michael Hegarty, Rory Kavanagh (0-2); Brian Roper (0-1), Ciaran Bonner (0-3), Michael Doherty (0-3,2F); Subs Adrian Sweeney (0-4, 2F) for B Roper h/t; Stephen McDermott for M. Hegarty; Raymond Sweeney for N. McGee;

Louth: Stuart Reynolds; David Brennan, Colin Goss, Jamie Carr; John O'Brien, Peter McGinnity, John Neary; Martin Farrelly (1-2), Paddy Keenan (0-1); Christy Grimes (0-2, 1F), Mark Brennan, Mark Stanfield (1-0); J.P.Rooney, Aaron Hoey (1-0), Darren Clarke(0-3,1F); Subs: John Kermath for M. Stanfield; Trevor O'Brien for J.P. Rooney; Mark Brennan for M. Farrelly.

Referee: Pat McGovern (Galway).

Man of the match

Neil Gallagher for his second half display get the vote. After a quiet opening 35 minutes the big Glenswilly man rose to the challenge in the second half and more or less took over at midfield giving his team the edge in this vital sector.

Turning Point

Where do I start, but in the end I have come down in favour of Barry Dunning's point just after Louth's third goal. Donegal had just clawed their way back from seven down to a single point when they were rocked by midfielder Farrelly's goal, and all of a sudden Louth were four points up again. But from the kick out Dunning raced up the field an pointed to say in no uncertain terms we are not going away in no uncertain terms.

Ref Watch

Galway official Pat McGovern was I thought a little harsh on Donegal early on but seemed turn slightly towards Donegal in the second.

Allianz National Football League Division Two Final

Allianz National Football League Division 2 final

Donegal once again fail crucial replay test

Louth 1-12
Donegal 1-9

Donegal's replay jink came back to haunt them once again on Sunday, when they failed at the second attempt in their bid to claim the Allianz National League Division Two title.

Tom Comack reports from Kingspan Breffni Park

Photos by Michael O'Donnell

Opponents Louth on the day were simply too good for the Tirconall boys, as they emerged three points winners at the end of a hard fought and at times very physical contest. And yet, in a strange way a spluttering Donegal could so easily have taken it at the end. In the closing ten minutes and despite being down to 14 men - after full back Paddy Campbell harshly

picked up a straight red card they kicked three wides from scoreable positions, Michael Doherty with missing two and Stephen McDermott one while Adrian Sweeney went for a goal from a 14 metre free in the dying seconds.

Referee Marty Duffy, from Sligo played a part too, as he turned down claims for a foot block by goal keeper Stuart Reynolds, on Adrian Sweeney,

as the Dúngloe man went for goal ten minutes from the end.

This and the second half sending off of Paddy Campbell, had a major bearing on the outcome. Campbell apparently swung back an elbow as he was taken out of it with a high arm challenge as he came out of his own defence.

But in truth this was a game Donegal scarily deserved, though Louth who were very negative, especially in the second half did not set Kingspan Breffni Park alight either. In fairness to the Leinster men what every good football was played, they played it.

After last week's second half heroics, this was a disappointing performance from the Tirconall men, with Barry Dunnion, Paddy Campbell, and Raymond

Sweeney, measuring up. Otherwise, it was a no show do for the rest of the side, though in fairness to Stephen McDermott he did curve the influence of Martin Farrelly, in midfield when introduced after 16 minutes. Michael Hegarty also made a difference when introduced early in the second half, the Kilcar man had a hand in three of his teams four second half points.

The signs looked ominous from a very early stage, as Louth raced into a three point lead in the opening 13 minutes with points from John O'Brien, Martin Farrelly and Darren Clarke.

While Donegal at the other end were either wide or kicked into the keepers arms with their first four strikes on goal.

Barry Dunnion opened

Donegal's account on 14 minutes, and Michael Doherty struck for number two with a sweetly struck 45, three minutes later to reduce the margin to the minimum 0-3 - 0-2.

And while Aaron Hoey restored the Wee county's two point advantage, Donegal were in front on 20 minutes, when Doherty drilled home from the penalty spot after James Gallagher was taken down in the area.

Ebbed and flowed

A high ball into the goal mouth was broken down by Adrian Sweeney to Gallagher, and as the Gweedore man bore down on goal he was fouled by Colin Goss, and referee Duffy had no hesitation signalling the penalty.

The Donegal lead was short lived as Christy Grimes one minute later pointed a 14 metre free to tie up the game. 1-2 to 0-5 each. The game ebbed and flowed over the next ten minutes with Donegal twice taking the lead with points from Christy Toye and Barry Monaghan. And Donegal had gone two up courtesy of an Adrian Sweeney, 20 metre free four minutes from the break as they enjoyed their best spell in the game.

But it was all undone on 33 minutes when Mark Stanfield got a fist to a Mark Brennan centre to flick it to the net, over the advancing Paul Durcan, and a one point lead once again for the Leinster men as they went in at the break 1-6 to 1-5, in front.

And while Stanfield's goals was without question a turning point in the game, Louth really turned the screw in the opening minutes of the second period, as they hit three points in five minutes to race into a four point lead, 1-9 to 1-5.

Prompted by the introduction of Michael Hegarty, Michael Doherty, polished of a good move with Donegal's opening point of the second period, on 43 minutes. And when Doherty again from a free on 46 minutes and Adrian Sweeney on 47 minutes reduced the margin to a single point, 1-9 to 1-8, the revival looked on.

But two quick points from Aaron Hoey and Clarke and the sending off of Campbell changed all that as Louth led 1-11 to 1-8.

With the game descending into a stop start affair due in the main to Louth players slowing down the game and going down from the slightest knock.

Despite this Donegal battled to the end and if they had taken all there chances they could so easily be celebrating this week. But an Adrian Sweeney point from a free was all the had to show for their closing 25 minutes of toil and effort. Winners Louth, were only marginally better they scored once in the last 20 minutes.

Donegal: Paul Durkan; Raymond Sweeney, Paddy Campbell, Karl Lacey; Damian Diver, Barry Monaghan (0-1), Barry Dunnion (0-1); Brendan Boyle, Neil Gallagher; Christy Toye (0-1), Ciaran Bonner, Rory Kavanagh; Adrian Sweeney (0-3, 2F), James Gallagher, Michael Doherty (1-3, 1-2F); Subs: Stephen McDermott for B. Boyle; Michael Hegarty for J. Gallagher; Frank McGlynn for B. Monaghan; Conal Dunne for Ciaran Bonner.

Louth: Stuart Reynolds; David Brennan, Colin Goss, Jamie Carr; John O'Brien (0-1), Peter McGinnity, John Neary; Martin Farrelly (0-1), Paddy Keenan (0-1); Christy Grimes (0-1F), Mark Brennan, Mark Stanfield (1-2, 1F); J.P. Rooney, Aaron Hoey (0-2), Darren