

FOOTBALL > PETER MCNULTY UNDER 21 TOURNAMENT ROUND 3

Clare shoot down the Slaneysiders



At Ferns Centre of Excellence, Wexford

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AFTER disappointing in their opening round tie when slumping to a home defeat to Limerick two weeks back few would entertained hopes that Clare might make the business end of this tournament.

But how they have turned it around, with back-to-back victories on the road over Kildare and Wexford changing completely Clare's relationship with this provincial championship preparatory competition.

And all the while Neil Hawes' side are gathering momentum, with this nine-point win being hugely impressive as they consigned the Slaneysiders to their third successive defeat in the competition and book a semi-final spot against Galway.

It was a dominant display by Clare with their half-time lead owing much to Conor Finucane's 17th minute goal that put real daylight between the sides for the first time – a gap that Banner more than built on in the closing stages of the second half when a grandstand finish yielded 2-2 inside the last 12 minutes as they pummelled their poor hosts.

The pattern of the game was set from the throw-in when Clare's live-wire midfielder Cian O'Dea won the ball and soloed all the way to the 20-metre line before a foul presented Conor Finucane with an easy chance to open their account.

Still, Wexford managed to hang on to their rivals' coat-tails for a long stretch without ever looking like eventual winners, but at the same time it was only in the closing quarter that Clare finally shook off the dogged resistance of the home side when goals by Cian O'Dea and Ryan Griffin embellished their already impressive performance considerably.

Clare's first big move came with Finucane's goal, with the two-goal hero from the defeat of Kildare the previous Saturday Alan Sweeney turning provider with a handpass across the square by full-forward Alan Sweeney guided to the net by a swing of the Lissycasey's man's left boot.

Clare did lose wing-forward Aidan Davidson to a black card after just nine minutes but with Eimhin Courtney showing very well in attack and Cathal Downes and Davie Egan also prominent they were full value for a 1-7 to 0-8 interval lead.

Wexford did improve in the lead-up to half-time and managed to narrow the deficit to just two points thanks in the main to the finishing ability of Mikie Dwyer and the accuracy of free-taker Mark Rossiter.

But try as they might in a second half that was full of lively, open football the home side just couldn't reel Clare win – indeed any time they managed to kick a point Clare had the facility to go down the other end and respond, with free-taker Finucane bringing his tally to 1-6 by the end and Conal Ó hAiniféin and Darragh Bohannon kicking good points.



It meant that Clare were still armed with a two-point lead of 1-13 to 0-14 entering the last 15 minutes despite a strong put by Wexford that yielded points from Rossiter (3) and Dwyer. The clinching Clare goal arrived after a move featuring substitute Jonah Culligan twice on the right flank which was finished by flying midfielder Cian O'Dea.

Although substitute Aaron Murphy moved forward from corner-back to pull back a point, Wexford didn't score again in the last ten minutes.

This is when Clare really hammered home their advantage, as they looked fitter and sharper as the embellished a fine performance at the death when Alan Sweeney again teed up a goal chance, this time for wing-back Ryan Griffin who latched onto a pass at pace and drove to the net in the 59th minute.

Clare

Killian Roche (Cooraclare), Tom Hannon (St Joseph's Doora-Barefield), Darren Nagle (Liscannor) (Capt), Colm Pyne (Killimer), Ryan Griffin (Lissycasey) (1-0), Rory McMahon, Conall Ó hAiniféin (Éire Óg) (0-1), Cian O'Dea (Kilfenora) (1-0), Darragh Bohannon (Shannon Gaels) (0-3), Aidan Davidson (St Breckan's), Cathal Downes (O'Curry's) (0-2), David Egan (Kilmihill) (0-1); Conor Finucane (Lissycasey) (1-6, 5f), Alan Sweeney (Kilfenora), Eimhin Courtney (Éire Óg) (0-2). **Subs**

Cillian Brennan (Clondegad) for Davidson, Jonah Culligan (Ballyvaughan) for Hannon, Liam Tierney (St Breckan's) for Courtney, Liam Madigan (Kilrush Shamrocks) for Griffin, Joe McGann (St Breckan's) for Egan, Davy Foran (Killimer) for Ó hAiniféin.

Wexford

Nicky Greene (St. Martin's); Dillon Redmond (Starlights), Naomhan Rossiter (St. Mary's, Rosslare), Ronan Devereux (Crossabeg-Ballymurn); Daire Bolger (Rathgarogue-Cushinstown), Daire Barden (Fethard), Martin O'Connor (HWH-Bunclody); Paddy Devereux (Crossabeg-Ballymurn), Niall Hughes (Kilanerin, 0-2); Ross Bealin (Castletown), Ian Carty (Taghmon-Camross), James Stafford (Glynn-Barntown, capt.); Darragh Pepper (Starlights), Mikie Dwyer (Fethard, 0-5), Mark Rossiter (Gusserane, 0-7, 6 frees). **Subs** Aaron Murphy (Shelmaliars, 0-1) for Bealin, Tim Bowler (Duffry Rovers) for Pepper, Bob Whitty (Cloughbawn) for Bolger, Joe Sutton (Fethard) for Redmond, Glen Malone (Shelmaliars) for P. Devereux, Stephen O'Gorman (Taghmon-Camross) for Barden, Joe Gardiner (Castletown) for Hughes, Stephen Lyne (Glynn-Barntown) for O'Connor.

Man of the Match Cian O'Dea (Clare)

Referee Brian Deering (Carlow)

Above: Action from Saturday's Under 21 game in Ferns; **Left:** Selector Dónal Ó hAiniféin and manager Neil Hawes on the line.