

FOOTBALL ▶ PETER MCNULTY UNDER 21 TOURNAMENT ROUND 1

# Clare outgunned in Kilmihil opener

Limerick 4-11 Clare 2-13

At St Michael's Park, Kilmihil

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IT WASN'T simply the fog that restricted the Clare's Under 21's opening tie of 2017 as four timely goals effectively allowed Limerick to leave Kilmihil with the derby spoils on Friday evening.

Clare, who are using this competition to evaluate their entire squad ahead of their championship deadline against three-in-a-row All-Ireland Minor winners Kerry on March 8, more than played their part in a tie that defied the tricky conditions but were ultimately undone by those repeated sucker-punch goals that left the Banner with just too much to do in a strong finish.

Limerick senior Hughie Bourke, who made his championship debut against Clare last May, proved the difference between the sides with a first half hat-trick showing his full array of skills as the visitors turned around a four point deficit to lead by three at the break. And Clare's opening mission became much more improbable after a fourth goal on the restart through Josh Ryan left the hosts trailing by eight entering the final quarter.

To their credit, they did rally sufficiently and backed by a fresh impetus from the bench, had ample chances to leapfrog their neighbours but despite raiding for an unanswered 1-3, a further brace of goal opportunities went begging before Limerick finally shored up victory thanks inevitably to Bourke.

It was all so different early on as a rampant home side eased to a three point advantage through David Egan,



Alan Sweeney and Keelan Sexton by the sixth minute.

However, once Limerick finally breached the halfway line, they clearly signalled their intent for goals as a move involving Bourke and Brian Donovan ended with a stinging effort from Killian Ryan that had to be tipped away by goalkeeper Killian Roche.

The ease at which they carved open Clare's rearguard was a clear warning sign but while Limerick's opening goal would arrive before the end of the opening quarter, it was more a fortuitous long range effort from

Bourke that between the crossbar and Roche would agonisingly cross the line to give the visitors the lead for the first time at 1-2 to 0-3.

Clare's woes mounted as midfielder Sean O'Donoghue had to succumb to injury but it inadvertently sparked the hosts into life once more as Keelan Sexton was moved out to centre-forward and began to cause Limerick real problems in the increased space. A brace of points sandwiched Clare's breakthrough goal when a quick free from halfway put Sexton through to dummy his marker and see his shot deflect off another defender to the net while Clare made it 1-6 to 1-2 by the 22nd minute after a second Egan point.

It should have provided the platform to consolidate that advantage into the break but in such an unpredictable seesaw tie, Limerick's slick attack would create four goal chances, with a 50 per cent success rate proving enough to snatch the initiative once more, particularly through spinal attackers Bourke and Josh Ryan.

In the 24th minute, Kieran Daly was hauled down for Bourke to expertly convert the resulting penalty while after a Killian Ryan shot cannoned

off the crossbar and wide, the Adare star would gather from the kick-out to outpace the home back-line from 45 metres before billowing the top right corner of the net and ensure a 3-4 to 1-7 half-time turnaround.

While Keelan Sexton twice matched Limerick points on the resumption, the visitors were duly back for a decisive fourth goal only six minutes into the new half as they broke down the Clare defence once more for Ryan to finish at the back post.

Keelan Sexton answered with another free but three further Limerick points, two from Bourke, pushed the visitors eight points clear by the turn of the final quarter at 4-09 to 1-11.

Clare craved a response and by emptying the bench, they did dominate the next ten minutes albeit that two glorious goal opportunities, both set up by substitute Joseph McGann, were passed up. Points from Darragh Bohannon and substitute Jonah Culligan were offset when a Conor Finnucane shot deflected off both goalkeeper and post for a '45 while in the 50th minute, Egan fired a shot across the goal-line that just drifted beyond the back post. Just

when manager Neil Hawes thought that a goal would never come, Clare ensured a grandstand finish when a move involving Sexton and Conall Ó hAiniféin ended with a David Foran shot which was parried by goalkeeper Aaron Murphy, only for McGann to flick the rebound to the net and halve the arrears to just three by the 52nd minute.

Limerick's attempts to regain control were frustrated while up the other end, Finnucane made it a two point game at 4-09 to 2-13 as tensions heightened. However, some poor decision-making under pressure ensured that this was as close as Clare would get as Limerick switched play to the other end. And while a Ryan goal effort was denied by goalkeeper Roche, Limerick would fire insurance points through Ryan and Bourke to complete the derby honours.

This Saturday sees the Banner travel to holders Kildare for Round 2, with further experimentation expected. And while Neil Hawes will be genuinely excited by the attacking talent at his disposal, a more hardened, miserly defence will be required if Clare are to avoid successive defeats.

**Limerick**

Aaron Murphy (Fr Casey's); Ross Kennedy (Murroe Boher); David Connolly (Adare); Edward Sheehy (Granagh-Ballingarry); Brian Fanning (Pallasgreen); Sean Murphy (Newcastlewest); Robert Childs (Galtee Gaels); Tommie Childs (Galtee Gaels); Adam Kearns (St Senan's); Eoin Ryan (Adare); Josh Ryan (Oola) (1-3 '45); Brian Donovan (Monaleen); Killian Ryan (Mungret St Pauls) (0-3 2f); Hughie Bourke (Adare) (3-5, 1-0 Pen, 3f); Kieran Daly (Na Piarasigh) Subs Fiachra O'Grady (Oola) for Kennedy (36 mins); Steven Brosnan (Newcastlewest) for E. Ryan (39 mins); Sean O'Sullivan (Dromcollogher/Broadford) for R. Childs (48 mins); Eoin Mahony (Ballylanders) for Daly (57 mins); Adam Storan (Mungret St Pauls) for K. Ryan (63 mins)

**Clare**

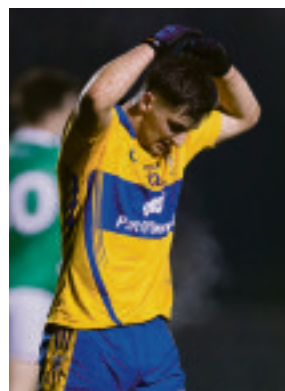
Killian Roche (Cooraclare); Peter Collins (St Joseph's Doora/Barefield); Ryan Griffin (Lissycasey); Colm Pyne (Killimer); Conall Ó hAiniféin (Eire Og); Cian O'Dea (Kilfenora); Oisín Hanrahan (Lissycasey); Sean O'Donoghue (Cooraclare); Darragh Bohannon (Shannon Gaels) (0-1); Cillian Brennan (Clondegad); Cathal Downes (Kilmihil); David Egan (Kilmihil) (0-2); Keelan Sexton (Kilmurry Ibrickane) (1-6 5f); Alan Sweeney (St Breckan's) (0-2); David Foran (Killimer) Subs Conor Finnucane (Lissycasey) (0-1) for O'Donoghue (13 mins, inj); Jonah Culligan (Ballyvaughan) (0-1) for Hanrahan (41 mins); Joseph McGann (St Breckan's) (1-0) for Brennan (41 mins); Aiden Davidson (St Breckan's) for Bohannon (46 mins); Shay Malone (Corofin) for Foran (57 mins)

**Man of the Match**  
**Hughie Bourke (Limerick)**

**Referee** Shane Hehir (Galway)

**Above:** Clare's Keelan Sexton drives forward with the ball;  
**Far left:** Clare manager Neil Hawes;  
**Left:** Clare's David Egan is frustrated after missing a chance at goal.

Natasha Barton



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(Top two teams from each group advance to the Cup Semi-Finals while the remaining two sides in each group contest the last four of the Shield competition)

**Round 1**  
**Group A**  
Laois 2-13 Carlow 1-12  
Galway 3-12 Tipperary 1-07

**Group B**  
Limerick 4-11 Clare 2-13  
Kildare 1-10 Wexford 1-07

**Round 2 (Saturday @ 2pm)**  
**Group A**  
Laois v Tipperary @ Crettyard  
Carlow v Galway @ Cullen Park

**Group B**  
Kildare v Clare @ Hawkfield Centre of Excellence (Seamus Mulhare, Laois)  
Limerick v Wexford

**Round 3 (Saturday, January 21 @ 2pm)**  
**Group A**  
Tipperary v Carlow  
Galway v Laois

**Group B**  
Wexford v Clare @ Ferns Centre of Excellence  
Kildare v Limerick

Cup and Shield Semi-Finals (Wednesday, January 25)

Cup and Shield Finals (Sunday, January 29)