

## League ¼ Final Match Report vs Tullaroan NS

Urlingford exorcised the ghosts of previous defeats and booked their place in the league semi-final after a dramatic extra-time victory over old rivals Tullaroan in Freshford on Thursday evening. Having suffered heartbreak against the same opposition in last year's league and Tommy O'Brien Cup campaigns, there was a steely determination about this Urlingford side from the throw-in.

Freshford provided the perfect stage for knockout hurling, with the immaculate pitch setting the tone for a contest played at a fierce intensity throughout. Referee Gay Rafter got proceedings underway and there was a noticeable edge in the air compared to the earlier group encounter between the sides. This time, there was no second chance.

Urlingford settled quickest. Eoin Gibbons reacted sharply to a breaking ball before delivering cleverly into Paudie Power, who popped one over his shoulder and over the bar to ignite the crowd. Despite dominating large spells of the opening half, Urlingford were left frustrated by a number of missed frees that ultimately kept Tullaroan within touching distance.

At the back, Pdraig Bourke, David Maev, Robbie Quinlan and Dara Hickey laid down a serious platform with a series of vital interceptions and hooks, while Darragh Joyce, Eoin Gibbons and Hickey himself kept the scoreboard ticking over. Yet Tullaroan gradually found their rhythm. Dan Doheny began to command proceedings in defence and his deliveries into the dangerous Tom Hogan caused increasing problems. Hogan clipped over frees before Shane Power burst through and won a penalty which Hogan calmly converted past the excellent Alex Cashin, giving Tullaroan a 1-3 to 0-5 lead at the break.

The second half initially followed a similar pattern as Urlingford's wides tally continued to grow. However, a tactical reshuffle proved pivotal. Dara Hickey moved to centre-forward and completely transformed the game. He dominated aerial ball, won countless breaking balls and drove directly at the Tullaroan defence, earning frees and creating scores for Gibbons and Paudie Power, who stepped up confidently from placed balls.

Aoibhinn Manton's introduction with less than ten minutes remaining injected further energy into the attack. She showed immense composure, winning possession repeatedly and adding a crucial score. Tom Hogan edged Tullaroan ahead once more from a free, but Power responded in kind to send the contest to extra time level at 1-7 to 0-10.

Extra time belonged to leaders. Pdraig Bourke and Dara Hickey continued to drive Urlingford forward with immense grit, while Eoin Gibbons' tireless running helped Urlingford nose ahead at the interval. Tullaroan again battled back through the flawless free-taking of Hogan, but the defining moment soon arrived.

A loose ball broke kindly to Aoibhinn Manton, who brilliantly took on her marker before delivering into substitute Laura Minogue. Minogue reacted instantly and rifled an unstoppable shot to the net, sparking scenes of pure jubilation among the Urlingford supporters. Much praise was deservedly given to Kilkenny camogie star Aoife Prendergast at the weekend in Kilkenny senior camogie win, but on this occasion it was the duo of Manton and Minogue who produced the magic that separated the sides.

There was still time for late drama as Tullaroan launched one final attack, but Pádraig Bourke rose highest to claim the dropping free and finally end the contest. Relief and joy poured from the Urlingford players at the final whistle after a gripping encounter that showcased everything great about knockout hurling. The final score was 1-13 to 1-11.

Special credit must also go to the tireless work of Will Bergin and Conal Lyng, who may not have troubled the scoreboard but were instrumental in the victory through their relentless work-rate and determination. Urlingford showed immense grit, character and resilience throughout and will take enormous confidence from a famous victory over their old rivals.