

GAA GALWAY INTERMEDIATE FOOTBALL CHAMPIONSHIP FINAL

Tierney holds his nerve to force replay

• Oughterard and Micheál Breathnach produce epic final

Micheál Breathnach 0-14

Oughterard 0-14

By Billy Coss
At Pearse Stadium

SUBLIME score-taking, brilliant saves, fantastic individual displays, near misses, thrills, spills and injury-time controversy: Sunday's Intermediate Football Championship final between Oughterard and Micheál Breathnach had a little bit of everything.

Amid the mounting tension, Oughterard starlet Matthew Tierney showed nerves of steel, taking on responsibility in the fifth minute of added time to nail a 43-metre free under the most intense pressure and peg back Micheál Breathnach.

To an extent, the Inverin men also got lucky. Prior to Tierney's intervention, their 'keeper Rónán Ó Beoláin was stripped of possession on the 20-metre line and Oughterard worked the ball to Patrick Walsh who appeared to be dragged down inside the square. Micheál Breathnach could have legitimate claims that Ó Beoláin was fouled initially, but an Oughterard penalty appeared the most likely outcome when referee Martin Flaherty went to consult with his umpires. The upshot of it all, however, was a hop-ball on the 20-metre line that Fiontán Ó Curraoin claimed.

Micheál Breathnach had one hand on the cup when their towering midfielder won that pressure-relieving free but they turned it over soon after, however. Oughterard piled forward one last time and a surging run from Eric Lee was ended illegally just inside the 45. Last chance saloon and it was left to Tierney to step into the limelight, making the purest of strikes off the deck to send the ball sailing high and true over the crossbar.

It was a fitting finale to as good a 30 minutes of club football as you could wish for.

The first half, in sharp contrast, was a slow burner that Micheál Breathnach ended with a well-deserved 0-5 to 0-3 advantage.

Maidhc Ó Conghaile opened their account and two points apiece followed from the Mac Donnachas, Rónán and Liam. Paul Walsh, Enda Tierney (45) and Niall Lee were on target for Oughterard who struggled to reproduce the fluent form of their quarter and semi-final hammerings of Caltra and Dunmore.

While nowhere near the drama that followed in the second half, the opening 30 minutes produced plenty of talking points. Oughterard were indebted to the sharp reflexes of 'keeper Jordan Waller when a terrific double-save denied Caoimhín Ó Maoileoin and Liam Mac Donnacha. Micheál Breathnach's Ruadhán Ó Curraoin, owner of a siege-gun boot, also saw his long-distance free clear the crossbar only for it to be chalked off for a square-ball infringement.

Matthew Tierney was picked up by the impressive Dinny Ó hÉallaithe in one of the duels of the day and Oughterard tried to isolate him at the edge of the square. After one spectacular fetch, Tierney was closed down and blocked by Micheál Breathnach's Caoimhín Ó Maoileoin and Ó hÉallaithe. Late in the half, Maidhc Ó Conghaile got a last-ditch tackle in to prevent another chance for this year's Galway U-20 star.

It had yet to truly catch fire. Were the stakes somewhat diluted by the fact that both clubs were guaranteed Senior Championship status regardless of the outcome? A sledgehammer was taken to that particular theory as both teams upped the tempo and tore into it after half-time.

Of the 35 players on view, none shone brighter than Sean Denvir. Four points, assists and scorable frees won: Oughterard were simply unable to pin down the former Galway panelist in the second half.

Denvir extended the margin out to three soon after the restart, but Oughterard had it all wiped out by the 34th minute thanks to points from Mat-

thew Tierney (free), Paul Walsh and Ronan Molloy, who turned in a barnstorming second half. Last year's Galway minor Ryan Monaghan was another prominent figure as Tommy Finnerty's men started to pour forward.

Momentum was changing hands at a rapid pace and two more from Denvir coupled with a Ruadhán Ó Curraoin free re-established Micheál Breathnach's three-point advantage. That was almost wiped out in one fell swoop at the other end when Niall Lee played in Enda Tierney, but Ó Beoláin was equal to his strike, diverting the ball out for a 45 that Matthew Tierney converted.

It was Waller's turn then to take centre-stage when a Rónán Mac Donnacha point attempt dipped wickedly but the Oughterard 'keeper adjusted his feet and did well to avert the danger. The goal-mouth action didn't stop there as Oughterard's Patrick Walsh went for power over placement and was thwarted by Ó Beoláin soon after.

A green flag may well have swung matters decisively, but the second half didn't let up and points from Brian Lambert and Ryan Monaghan drew Oughterard level, 0-9 apiece, after 43 minutes. It was anyone's game and from there to the finish it was blow from Micheál Breathnach, followed by counter-blow from Oughterard.

Ruadhán Ó Curraoin's effort for Micheál Breathnach was cancelled out by Paul Walsh. Then Ó Curraoin registered with a raking 55-metre free that Oughterard's Ryan Monaghan answered. Denvir was never far from the thick of the action, landing his fourth of the half, before Enda Tierney hit back and Oughterard tied it up at 0-12 apiece. Denvir then drew a foul that Ruadhán Ó Curraoin converted before Ronan Molloy, a real driving force for Oughterard, made it 0-13 each.

It was enthralling stuff and Oughterard threatened to take the lead for only the second time when Enda Tierney pulled a distance free wide, before Denvir teed up



OUGHTERARD star Matthew Tierney climbs highest to win possession ahead of Caoimhín Ó Maoileoin (4) and Dinny Ó hÉallaithe of Micheál Breathnach during Sunday's drawn Intermediate Football Championship final at Pearse Stadium. PHOTOS: RAY RYAN



MIDFIELD DUEL: Oughterard's Enda Tierney (8) and PJ McGauley (9) in action against Micheál Breathnach duo Fiontán Ó Curraoin (8) and Tommy Ó Conghaile.

Ruadhán Ó Curraoin for the lead score.

Micheál Breathnach were in pole position and looked set fair to atone for their final replay defeat to An Spidéal of 12 months ago. That was until the drama reached a crescendo and Tierney exhibited what a very special talent he is with a nerveless kick at the death.

Both sets of players deserve immense praise for what was an enthralling second half. An Intermediate final replay it is then for the second successive year. They'll go again at Pearse Stadium on Saturday week, October 19.

MICHEÁL BREATHNACH: R. Ó Beoláin; C. Ó Maoileoin, D. Mac Dubhghaill, K. Ó Donnachadha; M. Ó Conghaile (0-1), D. Ó hÉallaithe, G.W. Ó Fátharta (joint-captain); F. Ó Curraoin, T. Ó Conghaile; D. Ó Maoileoin, S. Denvir (joint-captain, 0-4), F. Ó Bearra; R. Ó Curraoin (0-5, 0-3 frees), R. Mac Donnacha (0-2, 0-1 free), L. Mac Donnacha (0-2). Subs: C. Mac Dubhghaill, for Ó Fátharta, 44 mins; C. Ó Gríofa, for D. Mac Dubhghaill, 55 mins; S. Ó Conaire, for Ó Bearra, 57 mins.

OUGHTERARD: J. Waller; C. Hanley, E. O'Sullivan (captain), L. Moran; C. Monaghan, R. Monaghan (0-2), R. Molloy (0-2); E. Tierney (0-2, 0-1 free, 0-1 45), P.J. McGauley; B. Lambert (0-1), M. Tierney (0-3, 0-2 frees, 0-1 45), Paul Walsh (0-3); N. Lee (0-1), Patrick Walsh, E. Lee. Subs: Philip Gibbons, for Hanley, 53 mins; C. Harte, for Lambert, 53 mins.

REFEREE: Martin Flaherty.

HERALD SPORT MAN OF THE MATCH: Seán Denvir (Micheál Breathnach).