

CONNACHT SENIOR FOOTBALL FINAL

Tierney hits new heights as classy Galway canter home

■ Oughterard clubman stands out from the crowd in running riot against Sligo

IVAN SMYTH

MATTHEW Tierney showed his class with an impressive tally of 2-7 - 2-5 from play - in his side's facile Connacht SFC final triumph over Sligo at MacHale Park on Sunday.

The Oughterard man was the toast of the town as Galway eased to a 2-20 to 0-12 win over a Sligo side that showed commendable spirit but lacked the necessary quality to truly trouble the pre-game favourites.

Tierney showed a poacher's instinct with both goals as the industrious Damien Comer teed up the wing forward on each occasion. The Man of the Match shot 2-7 from nine attempts in a flawless display. With Shane Walsh, Damien Comer and Rob Finnerty all failing to score from play, Galway's final tally becomes even more impressive.

If Galway are to go one better than last year, then they will need Walsh and Comer to both produce top class performances in the same game. Last year, they did this against Roscommon in the Connacht final but with Comer leading the charge in the wins of Armagh and Derry while Walsh grabbed 0-9 in the All Ireland decider, the pair need to produce the goods at the same time. If they do, Galway will be hard beat.

Of course, the quality of the opposition must be factored in but Galway were able to kick 2-20 with the aforementioned trio all enjoying quiet afternoons. Ian Burke and Peter Cooke's returns to the fold have helped increase depth in the scoring zone. Galway kicked only shot two wides, with Pádraic Joyce's men grabbing 22 scores from 27 attempts on goal. Galway's shot conversion rate was regularly over 70 per cent last year and even though they experienced a dip against Roscommon last time out, this shooting display saw them reach the standards they have set for themselves.

Out of their winning tally, 2-7 came from turnovers as Galway showed an admirable professionalism and maturity in overcoming a slow start to take the sting out of the contest. Ten different players found the target as they now appear to possess players coming off the bench who can make an impact. This was a feature missing for Gal-

way in last year's All Ireland final with Kerry gaining a noticeable bigger lift from their replacements.

On Sunday, all of Galway's substitutions made their presence felt. Cathal Sweeney replaced Shane Walsh, who was suffering from a bug, and kicked two points. Cian Hernon produced an important intervention to deny Sligo a sniff at goal after Sean Carrabine had tried to deflect the ball in to his own path from a long aerial delivery. Tomo Culhane slotted over while Dessie Conneely and Paul Kelly got their hands on ball upon their introductions.

Pádraic Joyce alluded to the fact that his side were placed in a lose-lose situation. A close, nervy win would lead to criticism over the performance while a facile victory would garner little praise from the outside. Galway went about their business with the minimum of fuss on a day when their attack looked potent and their defence rock solid.

Goalkeeper Connor Gleeson looked assured with his kick-outs and dealt with any long balls over the top. Galway employed the kickout tactic initially adopted by Jim Gavin's Dublin as their defenders congregated together before darting in different directions towards the sideline. Gleeson showed nice variety to his kick-outs on a stress free afternoon for the recalled 'keeper although he could do with being slightly quicker in terms of making a decision on where to send his restart when the ball is on the tee.



CULHANE BROUGHT GALWAY'S SCORERS TO DOUBLE DIGITS AS JOYCE'S MEN ROMPED HOME

Sligo were hoping to conjure up memories of their 2007 final triumph over Galway as they needed to generate a buzz with in the crowd on Sunday. A small attendance of 11,867 saw them start well before they became architects of their own downfall. Tony McEntee's men were always facing an uphill task but both goals were avoidable from



Galway players John Maher, Owen Gallagher, Matthew Tierney and team captain Seán Kelly with the Nestor Cup after their convincing victory over Sligo in Sunday's Connacht Senior Football Final at MacHale Park. PHOTO: JOE O'SHAUGHNESSY.

their perspective. Galway showed their efficiency in front of the posts as their ability to quickly move possession from one side of the field to the other caused Sligo to become weary as space began to appear.

With Sligo needing to get the crowd involved, they started at a blistering pace, surging 0-3 to 0-1 in front with Pat Spillane, Sean Carrabine (free) and Daragh Cummins all finding the target for the Division Four champions. Dylan McHugh fistfisted over amid that spell but after the opening five minutes, Galway as expected exerted their influence upon proceedings. Ian Burke arrowed over after being set up by Seán Kelly before Galway moved clear.

John Daly plays in the quarter back role for Galway as he is often tasked with changing the direction of the Galway attack. In the ninth minute, Sligo stood off him as he pinged a gorgeous ball over the top to Damien Comer with Sligo full back Eddie McGuinness caught out by the Annaghdown man's movement. From there it was

elementary as Comer squared to Tierney to fire home.

Cillian McDaid, Shane Walsh (free) and Tierney all found the target as Galway continuously moved over and back across the field with Sligo unable to cope with the powerful running of the Tribesmen. Even though Niall Murphy stopped the rot from a Sligo perspective, they didn't help themselves as Galway broke through again. Comer dispossessed Sligo's Cian Lally who will be disappointed not to control Finnian Cawley's pass although the cross field ball needed to be executed better, especially with the ball skidding off the greasy surface.

Comer broke through and fed Tierney who rounded Daniel Lyons in the Sligo goal before burying to the net. Walsh slotted his second and final free of the game before Galway showed the variety they possess in attack. Dylan McHugh's long diagonal ball was fetched by Tierney who had momentarily moved to full forward before he offloaded to Burke who slotted

a classy point. Galway's ability to go direct with either Tierney or Comer at the edge of the square is a useful weapon in their arsenal. Even though Daragh Cummins hit back with Burke black carded in first half injury time, Galway had done the heavy lifting as they led 2-7 to 0-5 with the wind to come.

They were never in danger as Tierney continued his rich vein of form when kicking off the final period with a quality score. Carrabine slotted over a brace before a long Gleeson kickout broke through to Shane Walsh as he and Rob Finnerty combined to set Heaney up for a score. That proved to be Walsh's final action of the game. His replacement Cathal Sweeney made a quick impact as he slotted over after Seán Kelly won a turnover off Carrabine.

Cooke's industry helped Galway reclaim possession again as Seán Kelly set up Tierney to convert. Moments later, John Maher won the dirty ball in Galway's territory as Finnian Cawley and Lally tried to engineer a

way through. Galway countered quickly against a tiring Sligo outfit as Cooke grabbed his score. Galway's appetite for hard work and determination to keep the clean sheet were positive signs although they will face more potent attacks going forward. Carrabine (two), Daragh Cummins and Niall Murphy all helped Sligo respond but with Jack Glynn doing a fine marking job on the latter, this contest was moving along to its inevitable conclusion.

Tierney slotted over three more points with Tomo Culhane winning a turnover for the third score as the Oughterard man punched over instead of going for the hat trick of goals. Kelly, Heaney and Sweeney all found the target before Paul Kilcoyne responded for Sligo. Tierney notched his first free of the game before Culhane brought Galway's scorers to double digits as Joyce's men romped home.

An impressive display from Galway but much tougher tests lie ahead.