

allowing for the Yeats men's nine-match winning run coming into the fixture.

Goal number one was a thing of beauty. Exactly eight minutes were on the clock when Luke Towey overcooked a delivery to Niall Murphy as Sligo chased an early three-pointer of their own. Connor Gleeson collected and set in train a sustained spell of possession that ended with John Daly's perfectly flighted pass finding Damien Comer inside the Sligo defensive cover. One swift handpass later and Tierney was roofing a close-range finish past Daniel Lyons.

The move involved 14 different Galway players - Murphy's marker Jack Glynn the sole exception - and a total of 26 passes as they probed patiently and eventually had the net bulging 85 seconds later.

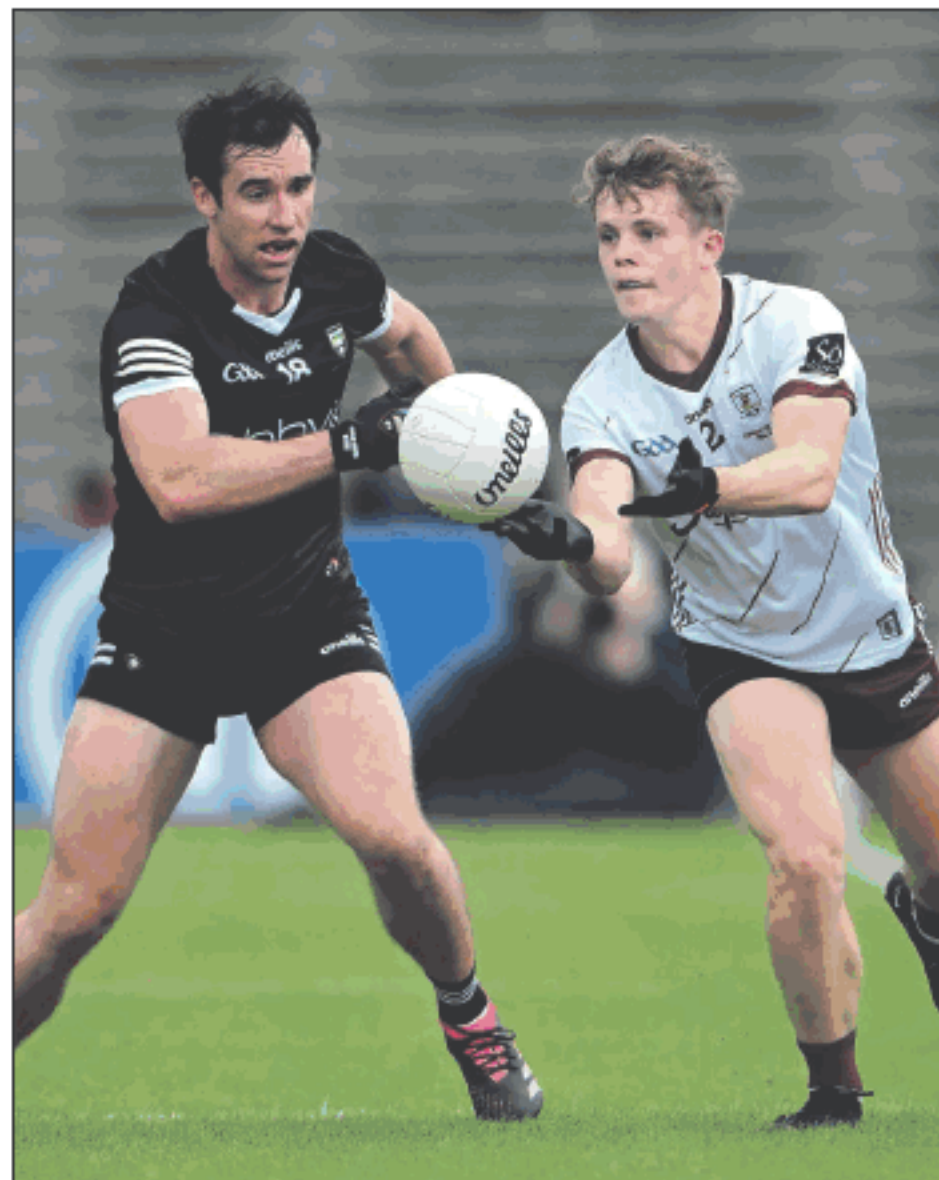
If that score was born out of Galway's creativity, the second has its' origins in an unforced error from Sligo. Finian Cawley's slightly overhit crossfield pass had Cian Lally struggling to gather and Comer nipped in to steal possession before racing 50 metres and drawing the cover to leave Tierney with the task of side-stepping the Sligo 'keeper.

That made it 2-5 to 0-4 in Galway's favour after just 23 minutes and given that Sligo were backed by a more than decent wind into the old bacon factory end, it was game over to all intents and purposes.

Tierney added a point to his first half return, Walsh curled over a couple of frees and Dylan McHugh, Cillian McDaid and Ian Burke (two) were all on target from play in building a 2-7 to 0-5 interval advantage.

Not even Burke's black card, justified for a late challenge on Towey, prior to the break could discommode Galway and they was never in any danger of losing such a position of strength.

With Carrabine, Murphy



TWO of the stars of Connacht final 2023 — Galway's Johnny McGrath and Sligo's Darragh Cummins.

and Cummins topping up their tallies, Sligo did match them point for point from the restart up to the hour mark and the gap stood at a respectable 2-13 to 0-11.

Padraic Joyce's side would accelerate clear down the home stretch with the outstanding Tierney increasing his tally to six second half points. Johnny Heaney and Cathal Sweeney both kicked their second scores and the influential Peter Cooke, Seán Kelly and Tomo Culhane adding their names to the score-sheet on day when Galway kicked two wides and converted 22 of their 27 shots.

Kelly lifted the JJ Nestor Cup at the end of a relatively stress-free afternoon. Tougher tests lie ahead, starting next Saturday week against Tyrone.

RIGHT: DYLAN MCHUGH, Galway wing-back, closes in on Sligo's Mikey Gordon.



CILLIAN MCDAID poses for a selfie after his side's Connacht Senior Football Championship final win over Sligo.

GALWAY manager Padraic Joyce with coaches-selectors John Concannon and Cian O'Neill.



GALWAY: C. Gleeson; J. McGrath, S. Kelly (captain, 0-1), J. Glynn; D. McHugh (0-1), J. Daly, C. McDaid (0-1); P. Cooke (0-1), J. Maher; M. Tierney (2-7, 0-1 free, 0-1 45), S. Walsh (0-2, 0-2 frees), J. Heaney (0-2); R. Finnerty, I. Burke (0-2), D. Comer. Subs: C. Sweeney (0-2), for Walsh, 41 mins; D. Conneely, for Finnerty, 46 mins; C. Hernon, for McDaid, 48 mins; T. Culhane (0-1), for Comer, 60 mins; P. Kelly, for Maher, 62 mins.

SLIGO: D. Lyons; E. McGuinness, N. Mullen, E. Lyons; P. McNamara, B. Cox, D. Cummins (0-3); C. Lally, P. Kilcoyne (0-1); F. Cawley, P. Spillane (0-1), L. Towey; K. Cawley, S. Carrabine (0-4, 0-2 frees), N. Murphy (0-3, 0-1 free, 0-1 45). Subs: M. Gordon, for K. Cawley, 41 mins; G. O'Kelly Lynch, for Lally, 49 mins; P. O'Connor, for Spillane, 49 mins; M. Walsh, for Cummins, 53 mins; A. Reilly, for F. Cawley, 65 mins.

REFEREE: Brendan Cawley (Kildare).

GAME AT A GLANCE

KEY MOMENT

Eight points separated the sides at the break, 14 at the finish. Sunday's Connacht final went along expected lines with Galway holding far too much craft and experience for Sligo. The Yeats County started like a train with Pat Spillane, Seán Carrabine and Darragh Cummins shooting three of the game's opening four points. Ian Burke followed Dylan McHugh's opener before the key score arrived on 10 minutes. Almost 90 seconds of unbroken possession ended with John Daly's left-footed pass, Damien Comer's catch, turn and awareness to feed Matthew Tierney who blasted the game's opening goal. The Tribesmen never looked back.

TALKING POINT

11,867 showed up at MacHale Park and 12,499 at the TUS Gaelic Grounds for Kerry's 5-14 to 0-15 demolition of Clare. It was a day when the viability of provincial championships came into sharp focus. With three Division 1 counties - Galway, Mayo and Roscommon - on one side of the Connacht draw, and four of Division 4 standard - Sligo, Leitrim, London and New York - on the other, a blowout final was always a possibility. Galway didn't go hell-bent after the goals that could have made it so. The Yeats County battled valiantly too but there was an air of inevitability about it all from an early stage.

STAR TURN

The 2023 Connacht final will be

recalled as the 'Matthew Tierney final' in years to come. Man of the match in the first half with 2-1, man of the match in the second with another six points. It was a day of days for the Oughterard clubman who was in unmarkable form.

MAN IN THE MIDDLE

Galway have played 10 competitive matches so far in 2023 and Brendan Cawley has been the man in the middle for three of them. It was clear as early as the opening minute that frees were going to be hard come by. In all, the winners were awarded 11 and Sligo 14. Two yellows were dished out - Rob Finnerty in the first half, Eddie McGuinness in the second - and the most contentious moment came

when Ian Burke was sent to the sin-bin in first half injury-time for a late challenge on Luke Towey.

SIDELINE WATCH

From winning a solitary championship match and losing successive Connacht finals to Mayo in his opening two seasons as Galway manager, Padraic Joyce has now tasted defeat just once in the last eight and put Connacht titles back-to-back either side of an All-Ireland final appearance. Galway made one late alteration to their starting XV. Paul Conroy was ruled out through injury, Rob Finnerty coming into the attack with Peter Cooke relocating to midfield. Match-up wise, Jack Glynn excelled on Sligo's best forward Niall Murphy and Joyce ran his bench with

Cathal Sweeney, Dessie Conneely and Cian Hernon introduced in the third quarter with Tomo Culhane and Paul Kelly seeing action after the hour mark.

WHAT'S NEXT

Galway move on to the All-Ireland series and enter Group 2 as top seeds where they join Tyrone, Westmeath and the runners-up from Sunday's Ulster final between Derry and Armagh. The Red Hands will be the visitors to Pearse Stadium on Saturday week, May 20 with a 5.15pm throw-in. The match will be live on the GAA and RTÉ's streaming service, GAAGO. A trip to Westmeath follows before finishing the group phase at a neutral venue against Derry or Armagh. — Billy Coss